Civil Society and Gender Mainstreaming: Empirical Evidence and Theory-Building from Twelve Post-Conflict Countries 2005–15

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Summary. — Using critical discourse analysis, this twelve-country study addresses a key lacuna by examining civil society perspectives on the implementation of the Participative Democratic Model (PDM) of gender mainstreaming in post-conflict states. The findings reveal specific data, transitional justice, and governance challenges in war-affected states as policy actors press for heightened attention to issues such as the effects on women of war-induced poverty, human rights violations, and women's empowerment in state reconstruction and peace-building. The analysis shows the aftermath of war accentuates frame misalignment between civil society and governing elites. In order to address this a Transformative Model (TM) of Participative Mainstreaming in Post-conflict States is proposed. Building on conflict theory it argues for the engendering of "transitional justice" in order to secure equality in public policy and law-making. In particular, it details how future attempts to apply the PDM need to be adapted across four Transformational Domains: actors, issues, rules, and structures. Each is populated by "post-conflict issues/actions". When CSOs successfully advance claims for modifying policy and practice "frame-alignment" occurs and the implementation of PDM may be adapted to the specificities of war-affected states.
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Key words — women, gender mainstreaming, civil society, post-conflict, discourse, theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Post-conflict states present a challenging yet under-theorized context for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, a pro-active and holistic approach to promoting gender equality in policy and law. In particular, insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to how mainstreaming interacts with transitional justice during state reconstruction. In social theory-terms the post-conflict phase can be viewed as a "policy window"—or what neo-institutionalism refers to as a "critical juncture". It is the point when the restoration of the rule of law ("transitional justice") presents an opportunity to redraft structures and processes of governance to embed gender equality in ways consistent with the mainstreaming ethos. Yet for this to be done effectively first requires understanding of the specific issues related to the implementation of the Participative Democratic Model of gender mainstreaming (PDM) in war-affected states.

Originally developed in work by Nott (2000), the PDM requires governments to engage with civil society and promote gender equality in all aspects of policymaking (see also Barnett Donaghy, 2003; Sen, 2000). It is an imperative originating from the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), a landmark conference on women's rights held in 1995 (Bunch & Fried, 1996).[1] The Beijing Declaration also requires civil society organisations' (CSO) perspectives to be taken into account in the UN's monitoring of the 180 signatory-states' progress in realizing the BDPfA's goals. Thus this study's original contribution is to use the rich dataset comprising CSO reports to the UN in order to advance understanding of the challenges of the PDM in post-conflict countries.

The findings show that in war-affected states the PDM has specific data, transitional justice, and governance requirements as policy actors press for heightened attention to issues such as the effects on women of war-induced poverty and human rights violations—as well as the need to promote women's empowerment in state reconstruction and peace-building. In addition, the ensuing discussion suggests that, in the twelve post-conflict states studied, the legacy of war impedes the PDM by disrupting and weakening civil society networks and engagement, thereby adding to a disjuncture between the discourse of CSOs and governing policy elites. In turn, the present empirical analysis forms the basis for a Transformative Model of Participative Mainstreaming in Post-Conflict States. It is a heuristic that draws on the transitional justice literature in order to build a conceptual analytical framework that captures the challenges of mainstreaming in post conflict environments. Rather than being a universal, unvarying schema, the Model is adaptive to the specificities of individual countries. Its purpose is to inform future practice and pave the way for further empirical investigation via single-country or comparative regional studies.

The overall focus of this study is apposite because, since its launch in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been applied to a global context in which there has been over 100 episodes of major armed conflict (Derouen, Heo, & Heo, 2007).[2] However, notwithstanding the ubiquity of war and the PDM's status as the leading international approach to gender equality, there has been a dearth of cross-national analysis of its implementation in post-conflict societies. Ni Aolain, Haynes, and Cahn's seminal work (2011, p. 11) concurs, noting: "further concrete research on the successes and shortcomings of gender mainstreaming in development and post-conflict settings is needed before a more thorough evaluation can emerge". Moreover, as Omona and Aduo (2013, p. 119) cogently note, "stakeholders need to effectively consider analysis of need by gender in their programmes

if sustainable post-conflict, peace, participation and prosperity is to be realised". Accordingly, 20-years on from Beijing Declaration, this paper addresses these lacunae. As noted, attention to civil society views is appropriate because the Participative Democratic Model of mainstreaming is predicated on Article 20 of the BDPfA. This asserts "civil society cooperation with Governments [is] important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action". Governments should secure, "the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy" (UN, 1995). Thus, far from being a top-down, imposed political "project"—progress depends upon effective engagement and co-working between the state and civil society.

The current use of critical discourse analysis is underpinned by diverse strands of social theory including the interpretive school of policy analysis (Yanow, 1999) and the literature on social constructivism (Kukla, 2000). Both place emphasis on language—specifically, policy discourse—in order to reveal policy actors' "cognitive maps". In other words, their beliefs, values, interpretations, and knowledge relevant to addressing a given policy issue (Eden & Ackermann, 2004). The analysis explores "issue salience" or the level of attention to areas or topics of concern. Reference to the literature on qualitative analysis using framing shows how this matters. As Snow et al. (1986, p. 464) note it "render[s] events or occurrences meaningful...[it] function[s] to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective" (emphasis added). Thus, the level of attention to a frame—or "issue areas of concern"—is central to understanding policy intervention. Particularly, as in the present case, it tells us whether implementation is attuned to the needs of a given social and political context—such as societies adapting from earlier episodes of conflict. "Issue-salience" here is a technique borrowed from electoral studies (cf. Volkens, 2001); it focuses on the level of attention to a given topic among competing issues and agendas in political discourse. The underlying rationale is grounded in the literature of political agenda setting (Cf. Cobb & Ross, 1997) and states that the greater the focus and prioritization of an issue, probabilistically, the greater likelihood it will ultimately translate into effective policy outcomes. Overall, framing and issue-salience come together in the underlying logic that policy actors with shared understandings, priorities for action are better placed to achieve strategic policy goals.

On definitional matters, for the present purposes "armed conflict" signifies "a contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths" (UCDP, 2014, p. 7). Whereas "civil society" refers to associational activities involving the family, non-governmental organizations, pressure groups, charities, community groups, social movements and campaigning organizations (Cohen & Arato, 1994; Keane, 1988).

The key data sources in this study are: 1. A stratified random sample of 120 reports submitted to the United Nations by women's CSO operating in post-conflict countries 2005–15 [3]; and 2. national Beijing +20 reports (circa 2014–15) from a dozen post-conflict UN member states, along with a second "control group" from 12 non-conflict countries. These datasets allow an assessment of the issues, progress, and challenges related to the implementation of mainstreaming as required by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The remainder of the paper is structured thus: following an overview of the literature on mainstreaming, civil society and conflict, the methodology is summarized. Next, analysis of state discourse is presented. It is followed by an exploration of civil society organisations' discourse on the implementation of mainstreaming in war-affected states. The empirical data are then used to build theory and a Transformative Model of Participative Mainstreaming in post-conflict states is outlined. The concluding section reflects on the way that PDM is affected by post-conflict contexts and the implications for future policy and practice.

2. PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRATIC MAINSTREAMING, CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONFLICT

The international spread of gender mainstreaming over the past quarter century has been promoted by the United Nations. Its uptake also owes much to its holistic and proactive nature (notably, through the application of key principles, tools, and techniques to all stages of the policy process, see Ghodsee, Stan, & Weiner, 2010)—as well as its democratic credentials (Luciak, 2001). A full discussion of its development is beyond the present purposes (for a discussion see for example Rees, 2005). The UN (2002, p. v) defines it as follows:

> the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Despite the rapid spread of mainstreaming this has not been a uniform process. Thus, Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002, p. 339, emphasis added) allude to the varied impact that mainstreaming has had in a global context: "we suggest, however, that the rhetorical acceptance of mainstreaming by various international organizations obscures considerable diversity in both the timing and the nature of mainstreaming processes within and among organizations. This variation, we argue, can be explained in terms of the categories of political opportunity, mobilizing structures and strategic framing put forward by social movement theorists". Accordingly, this study responds to the latter call and examines these aspects in post-conflict countries.

As a burgeoning literature reveals, gender mainstreaming is more successful if it is informed and advanced by women's movements as well as wider civil society engagement (see for example Carney, 2002; Chaney, 2013, 2016; Madsen, 2012; True, 2003). In contrast to technical and bureaucratic approaches, this has been dubbed the "participative democratic model" of mainstreaming, for it places emphasis on involving those targeted by mainstreaming initiatives in both the design and delivery of policy (Barnett Donaghy, 2003; Nott, 2000). As noted, it has wide international "reach". It has received particular attention in the UK, notably in the wake of devolution in 1998–99 (Beveridge, Nott, & Stephen, 2000; Chaney, 2012). Other prominent examples include Ireland, the United States, and Italy—where it has been used by governments and CSOs alike in order to boost the uptake and "ownership" of attempts to embed gender equality in policy making (see Mackay & Bilton, 2003, p. 6).

As Debusscher and Van der Vleuten (2012, p. 326) observe, participative "mainstreaming is constructed, articulated, and transformed through discourse. Policy-makers carry the