editorial

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Conflict (*noun*): a prolonged armed struggle; a state of mind in which a person experiences a clash of opposing feelings or needs; a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests.

Oxford English Dictionary

When we undertook the preparation of this issue, we were keen to ensure that the articles published within it encompassed the breadth of meaning presented in common usage definitions of the concept of conflict. We hoped to avoid premature closure on what 'gender and conflict' might mean through encouraging the authors with whom we worked to operationalise as many different versions and visions of conflict as necessary to provide a nuanced perspective on this complex issue.

At the time of writing, there are sites of conflict emergent and ongoing across the world. The United Nations (UN) Security Council, the organisation that bears primary responsibility under the Charter of the UN for the 'maintenance of international peace and security', failed to reach consensus regarding Security Council support for an Arab League plan to resolve the crisis in Syria on 4 February 2012. The death toll in Syria is estimated at more than 8,000 since March 2011 and the Secretary-General of the UN expressed his deep regret about the Council's failure to protect those threatened by the regime.

There is conflict in Egypt, where violent confrontations at the Port Said football stadium have been linked to ongoing political unrest, further complicating the precarious transfer of governing authority from the ruling military council to civilian rule. There is conflict in Mali, where 19,500 people have been displaced in one month following renewed violence between the Malian government and a group calling itself the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad that seeks self-determination for the north of the country. And there is conflict in Nigeria, where the country's president recently admitted that members of the government and ranking security officials support the agenda of a group known as *Boko Haram*, which has claimed responsibility for multiple acts of violence including bombings in Kano, northern Nigeria, which killed 186 people on 20 January 2012.

There is also conflict, not yet manifest in physical violence, over the decision of the US-based Komen Foundation to cease funding grants to Planned Parenthood (a decision that was later reversed) in early 2012. There is

conflict in the UK over public spending, with the coalition government pledging £123 billion in 'austerity measures' to be rolled out in a series of cuts over a number of years—in real terms this translates to a commitment, among other things, to reducing departmental budgets by an average of 19 per cent over four years; to cutting funding to the police force by 4 per cent; and to raising the retirement age for men from 65 to 66 by 2020. There is conflict in China, where the government cut off mobile phone coverage and internet service in the province of Sichuan in February 2012 following the deaths of at least three Tibetan protesters in January. And there is conflict in Finland, a state that has recently voted into office its first Conservative president in forty years.

Each of these sites matters when we ask, what does conflict mean? Each requires thoughtful and multidisciplinary analysis and, alongside the contributors to this volume, we argue each requires that we ask: What work is gender doing in the creation and perpetuation of this conflict? The authors in this special issue do not recount micro-narratives of human hope and misery, of struggles for power and of resistance, to only illustrate the variety of conflict and its forms. We recount them here to show how our understandings of conflict can change when we first accept that gender matters in times and zones of struggle, clash and incompatibility.

We know gender matters because ideas and ideals about bodies, behaviours and belonging both affect and create forms of legitimacy, authority, agency and access to resources, both material and discursive. The gendered dynamics of the Security Council, such that gender was not debated at a formal Council session until the year 2000, require critical attention if we are to fully comprehend how and under what circumstances some forms of violence and intervention are seen as legitimate while others are proscribed. Gender matters in Egypt and Nigeria, where a feminist impulse prompts questions about how gender is informing protest and the corollary disciplining of the population, and questions about who is granted power when it is 'transferred'. Gender matters in Mali, as research has shown that 'gender roles and relations, in concert with other relations of power, help drive processes of forced displacement and return' (Baines, 2004: 2). Even when gender equality is an expressed aim of humanitarian workers providing aid in protected spaces such as camps that house refugees and internally displaced persons, they do not always take into account the complex realities of family negotiations, sexual assault, differential education and other forms of oppression and inequality that have gender difference at their roots (c.f. Grabska, 2011: 91).

Gender matters in decisions about funding healthcare and welfare in the USA and the UK. In the latter, violence prevention services and refuges are already experiencing the effects of 31 per cent cuts to funding: Women's Aid, for example, was forced to turn away 320 women seeking refuge on a typical day in 2011; meanwhile, 78 per cent of services funded by RESPECT, a London-based

1 Walby S. and Towers J. (2012) *Measuring the Impact of Cuts in Public Expenditure on the Provision of Services to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls*. Report for Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London, www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications-research/gender/professor-sylvia-walby-reports-on-the-impact-of-cuts-on-violence-against-women-services-2.html, last accessed 27 March 2012.

charity working with adult men on violence prevention, were forced to reduce provision in 2011 as a result of the public sector cuts.¹ Again, a feminist investigation of these changes in policy and resource cuts pursues questions about who is affected, and how, by the so-called 'global economic crisis'. Who has rights over the bodies of those most directly affected, and why have decisions about their bodies been made by someone else? Where, and how, do these social, political and economic struggles—these *conflicts*—play out?

In this issue, the contributors all speak to these questions, recognising the multiple ways in which conflict manifests and the corollary multiplicity of gendered logics, imaginings and dynamics that are simultaneously produced by and productive of conflict. Adam Jones offers literal imag(in)ings in his Open Space essay, in which he comments on a number of photographs taken during world travels. Mallarika Sinha Roy offers an argument about the politics of memory that occurs through narrative, with specific reference to the representation of various political subjects, such as Virangana in Bengal.

Laura Shepherd and Laura Sjoberg interrogate the gendered logics and dynamics of contemporary security strategies, arguing that the 'ontology of security, even of gendered security theory, has conventionally relied on gender/sex certainty and gender/sex hierarchy'. Their analysis suggests that we think seriously about the exclusionary practices that inform even politics of resistance, as these too are necessarily sites of conflict.

The other articles analyse gender and conflict from a range of disciplinary perspectives and in a variety of geographical settings: Indonesia; Palestine; Nigeria; Sierra Leone; Liberia; Cambodia; and Israel. Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey offer a nuanced account of women's activism in West Africa, while Katie Natanel problematises feminist activism in the organised Israeli refusal movement. Katrina Lee-Koo focuses on the effects of the international humanitarian aid regime on men and women's agency and opportunities in post-tsunami Aceh, Indonesia. She asks how shifts in priorities regulated—and were regulated by—ideas about and claims to gender justice.

Both Mona Lilja and Nadia Latif draw our attention to the everyday practices of gender and conflict that inform our lives. Lilja explores the ways in which violence intersects with masculinity both conceptually and in practice, through ethnographic study of violence prevention programmes in Cambodia. Latif conducted her research in the Bourj al-Barajneh camp for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon between 2003 and 2006, concluding that the violences of everyday life in that setting function not only to reproduce gender identities, but also to reproduce conflict.

Ultimately, gender and conflict are inextricably intertwined at every level, from the routine to the remarkable: logics of gender govern our understanding of conflict and our proposals for its resolution, for gender is the 'founding

interpellation' that is re-enforced and contested throughout the life of an individual (Butler, 1993: 8). Infants are made recognisable as humans through the marking of gender identity; gender is produced by and productive of an individual's encounters with and recounting of their social worlds, even—or perhaps especially—when those worlds are sites of conflict.

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authors' biographies

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doi:10.1057/fr.2012.1