



Resilience, gender, and conflict: thinking about resilience in a multidimensional way

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Abstract

Resilience has become an oft-invoked concept in development and security policy circles and the subject of much debate in the literature. Yet, one aspect that needs to be further theorised is the complex relationship between resilience, conflict and gender. This introduction identifies the gradual congruence between the programmatic agendas of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and resilience-building approaches in peacebuilding and argues that this convergence needs to be further scrutinised. Our main argument is that it is time for the scholarship to go beyond the simple categorisation of resilience as being either the new paradigmatic solution to international interventions, conflicts and crises or a meaningless and useless governmental buzzword. Instead, the contributions found in this Special Issue see resilience in terms of multiplicity. Resilience, understood in terms of multiplicity and in a multidimensional way, appears a valuable analytical concept to study both the systemic nature of gendered power relations and their prevalence and adaptation over time, as well as the responses of individuals, communities and institutions to the gendered effects of conflict. To add empirical richness to the Special Issue, these conceptual connections are analysed in multiple geographical case studies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Liberia, Palestine and Rwanda.

Keywords Conflict · Gender · Multiplicity · Peacebuilding · Resilience

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Introduction

Resilience has become an oft-invoked concept in development and security policy circles. Even though resilience is not a new concept, a major shift is currently happening in how we understand and apply resilience in world politics. International organisations and governments alike have been drawn to the promise of resilience to build economies, societies, and even individuals that can withstand violent shocks and endemic uncertainty (DFID 2016; European Union 2016; World Bank 2013). In a more complex world, where crises and shocks are difficult to predict, international and national policy-makers have turned to resilience as a way to enhance preparedness and foster adaptive responses. This has also been the case when it comes to international responses to conflict where the liberal peace paradigm has failed to bring sustainable peace in societies ravaged by conflict.

Resilience is indeed increasingly theorised, rather than simply employed as a noun; it has left the realm of vocabulary and entered the terrain of concept (Bourbeau 2013, 2018). Resilience has gradually emerged as an intra-social sciences bridging concept. We define resilience as the process of patterned adjustments adopted in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks, to maintain, to marginally modify, or to transform a referent object (Bourbeau 2018). Resilience can also be understood as agential self-reliance; a set of qualities that an individual may possess, and upon which dedicated programs can build and which they can strengthen. Still, resilience sometimes induces a transformation of basic policy assumptions; thereby potentially remodeling social structures. Renewal does not take place in a social vacuum but builds on past social experiences, memories and collective history.

The literature has so far focused on the relationship between resilience and neoliberalism, with some arguing that resilience is an inescapable neoliberal strategy of governance (Joseph 2016), while others contending that this is an incomplete understanding of resilience as applied to world politics (Corry 2014). The question of whether resilience represents a new and convincing paradigm for international interventions has also attracted its share of academic scholarship (Chandler 2014; Hajir et al 2022; Juncos 2018; Korosteleva 2020). Yet, one aspect that needs to be further theorised is the relationship between resilience, conflict and gender. In this Special Issue, we argue that it is high time to explore the intersections between these three fields due to the strategic convergence between the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and resilience approaches in peacebuilding, in their quest for inclusive and sustainable peace. The authors in this collection take up this challenge by investigating the manifold relations between resilience and gender in conflict-related contexts, i.e. the gender-resilience nexus. In doing so, the Special Issue underscores the multiplicity of resilience discourses and the way it shapes lived experiences (both empowering and disempowering individuals); it also shows how these processes are mediated by gendered norms and structures.

While feminist scholarship has already shown that war and conflict are gendered in all their dimensions (Cohn 2013; Tickner 1992), and despite increasing



attention to the ‘local turn’ and resilience approaches in International Relations (IR) (Chandler 2014; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013), the link between resilience and gender remains under-researched. Drawing on feminist and critical scholarship, the contributions included in this Special Issue examine the complex relations between gender and resilience in conflict settings. On the one hand, some of the contributors to this volume capture how the systemic and structural qualities of gender relations (and its effects in terms of gender inequalities and women’s lived experiences) shape individual and community-led resilience initiatives. While gender inequality and gendered norms constrain the range of women’s responses to conflicts and crises, there is still room for agency in the form of adaptation or resistance as illustrated by some of the articles (see Gitau 2022; Berry 2022). On the other hand, the Special Issue offers a variety of feminist attempts to understand, in a contextualised and critical way, the way gender relations are shaped and re-shaped by the emergence and diffusion of international discourses of resilience (see Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren 2022) and the extent to which these discourses are adopted, adapted or resisted at the local level (Berry 2022; Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2022; Ryan 2022). In this way, the contributions to the Special Issue seek to capture the impact of resilience discourses at different levels (global, national, local) and responses to them from a gender perspective. In other cases, what is studied is the resilience of gender relations themselves; in other words, the way gender relations (understood in terms of gender regimes or patriarchy) adapt or intensify in the context of armed conflict (see Gitau 2022). Several of the articles also highlight how gender interacts with other forms of inequality and difference (class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age), and the intersectional effects of internationally-led resilience initiatives (for instance, Ryan 2022).

Rather than offering a unique paradigm upon which to conduct research on the gender-resilience nexus, the introduction identifies a number of threads that run through the Special Issue, with the aim of exploring the growing scholarly diversity in theoretical, empirical, and methodological terms. Our main argument is that it is time for the scholarship to go beyond the simple categorisation of resilience as being either the new paradigmatic solution to international interventions, conflicts and crises or a meaningless and useless governmental buzzword. Instead, the contributions found in this Special Issue see resilience in terms of multiplicity. The introductory article thus sets up the dynamic ‘story’ of a multidisciplinary take on the relationship between resilience, conflict and gender. Firstly, this article identifies the gradual congruence between the programmatic agendas of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and resilience-building approaches in peacebuilding. Secondly, drawing on the critical literature on resilience and the WPS agenda, we argue that this convergence is far from unproblematic. On the one hand, resilience-thinking draws attention to local agency and preventative approaches to conflict, which can work in tandem with gender-sensitive peacebuilding strategies. On the other hand, a focus on the nexus between resilience and gender highlights the tendency of resilience-building programmes to associate women with the language of vulnerability, which can lead to disempowerment and depoliticisation. In this regard, the contributions to this Special Issue allow us to gain a better insight into



the added value, but also the negative impacts, resulting from the coming together of resilience and gender approaches in countries affected by conflict. Finally, the article identifies a number of strategies that are available to local actors when navigating the gender-resilience nexus, from maintaining the status quo to adaptation to transformation. These different strategies are then examined in more depth in some of the contributions of this volume. For instance, some of the articles capture the stories of women and girls, who in the face of insecurity and violent conflict develop innovative practices to cope with or resist these conditions (see, for instance, Berry 2022; Bargaés-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2022; Gitau 2022). Moreover, the conceptualisation of resilience as resistance that underpins the contributions to this Special Issue also puts forward a radical and positive agenda that might unlock the promise of the gender-resilience nexus.

In sum, resilience, understood in terms of multiplicity and in a multidimensional way, appears a valuable analytical concept to study both the systemic nature of gendered power relations and their prevalence and adaptation over time, as well as the responses of individuals, communities and institutions to the gendered effects of conflict. In order to study these issues, the articles of this Special Issue have created platforms for comparison across multiple areas of study (peacebuilding, psychological trauma, international political economy, natural resource management) and geographical case studies (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kenya, Liberia, Palestine, Sierra Leone and Rwanda) which can illuminate the complex relations between gender, resilience and conflict in theory and practice.

The gradual convergence of the WPS and resilience agendas: the emergence of the gender-resilience nexus

The coming together of the WPS agenda and resilience perspectives, what we term here the gender-resilience nexus, has become an important trend in the field of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Driven by the failures of the liberal peace project and well-known deficiencies in peace processes, the inclusion of gender and resilience perspectives in peacebuilding has progressed unabated in contemporary policy discourses and practice solidifying the converging trajectories of these two approaches. It is worth pausing here to explore how the nexus has emerged over time and what explains such strong connection.

Over 20 years have passed since the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, which launched the WPS agenda. Resolution 1325 recognised the gendered impacts of conflict, calling for an increased participation of women and women's groups in processes of mediation, peacebuilding and reconstruction. Its ambition to achieve 'global gender equality' was hailed as a landmark moment by observers at the time (Kirby and Shepherd 2016: 373). There is no doubt that UNSCR 1325 and its follow-on resolutions have increased awareness of the need to develop gender-sensitive peace and security policies, not just those formulated and implemented by UN bodies, but also by its member states and other international organisations such as the EU (Guerrina et al 2018; Deiana and McDonagh 2018). Since its adoption in 2000, the WPS agenda has put in motion a wide range of initiatives



to support gender mainstreaming and women empowerment in relation to international peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding (Olsson and Gizelis 2015).

However, the general view among feminist critical scholarship is that the WPS has not fulfilled the ambitious objectives it set out to achieve. Among the various critiques, studies about the implementation of the WPS have found that, more often than not, initiatives have adopted a very narrow understanding of gender and gender mainstreaming as an ‘add women and stir’ approach (Steans 1998). Increasing the number of women, rather than the quality of representation has been one of the main objectives of the reforms in the cases of the UN or NATO, for instance (Kirby and Shepherd 2016; Wright 2016). Moreover, the addition of women has often followed utilitarian concerns, understood as a way to increase operational effectiveness (Wright 2016). Yet, these ‘smart peacekeeping strategies’ continue to rely on gender stereotyping and to maintain gender hierarchies (Biskupski-Mujanovic 2019).

The arrival of resilience-thinking to peacebuilding theory and practice is a more recent phenomenon, although its influence has been felt for much longer in other areas (see Bourbeau 2018 for an overview). Resilience has become a prominent idea among policy-makers and international organisation as they seek to redress some of the past failures and excesses of the liberal peace (DFID 2016; Joseph 2016). In a more complex, contested and uncertain world, the top-down statebuilding interventions of the 1990s and 2000s (see Paris and Sisk 2009) have given way to more bottom-up engagements (Chandler 2014). Since it is not possible to predict when or where the next crisis will take place in a context of deep uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity, international peacebuilders must invest in local, bottom-up adaptive capacities to cope with and adapt to external disturbances and shocks (Juncos 2018).

Peacebuilding interventions today have moved from the large-scale institution-building programmes focused on democratisation and good governance to more pragmatic undertakings (Wiuiff Moe and Stepputat 2018), underpinned by ideas of complexity, adaptation and learning (de Coning 2018). At the global level, this shift is symbolised by the new UN concept of ‘sustaining peace’ and its focus on identifying and strengthening the political and social capacities that sustain peace at the local level (UN 2016). Prevention is also at the center of this new peacebuilding paradigm. Rather than seeking to predict when the next crisis will start, individuals, communities and states should invest in learning, preparedness and prevention to cope with the unexpected. In the case of the EU, ‘principled pragmatism’ and resilience thinking have also been adopted in the context of its development, security and defence policies (European Union 2016; Juncos 2017).

Resonating with the scholarly shift towards the local dimensions of peace—the so-called ‘local turn’—resilience places the emphasis on the capacities at the local level (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). Embracing the lessons from the past and moving away from a focus on institution-building, a resilience approach to peacebuilding offers a more human-centred perspective by stressing the ability of individuals to adapt and learn from external shocks and crises. The other two contributions of resilience to peacebuilding—a focus on complexity and a systems approach—stem from this new conception of the world as a nonlinear, complex system (Juncos and Joseph 2020).



Understood as transformation, resilience thus resonates with the idea of gender mainstreaming whereby this process entails ‘the transformation of discriminatory social institutions such as laws, cultural norms and practices that limit women’s access to rights and opportunities’ (UNFCCC cited in Rothe 2017: 43). The emphasis on (conflict) transformation might explain why practitioners advocating for gender equality have increasingly adopted the discourse of resilience and why we have seen a gradual convergence between the programmatic agendas of UNSCR 1325 and resilience-building approaches in peacebuilding (see also Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren 2022).

There are other discursive parallels between the concept of resilience and gender-sensitive approaches to conflict and security. The fact that resilience draws on a ‘softer’ understanding of security and that it emphasises preparation and prevention rather than more masculine militarised endeavours are among them. Moreover, the focus on empowerment and agency also explains the coming together of these different agendas (Chandler 2014; Juncos and Joseph 2020; Rothe 2017). The resilience discourse would see women not just as vulnerable groups and victims, but as ‘agents of change’. In line with the WPS agenda, this places women at the center of peace processes such as mediation initiatives and socio-economic developmental projects. Rothe explains the confluence of these two discourses of gender mainstreaming and resilience in practice:

the empowerment of marginalized women and girls in many communities is seen as desirable not only from a gender equality perspective, but also from a strategic point of view. On the one hand, the argument is that women and girls are often the most vulnerable amongst the vulnerable—and thus empowering them would increase the resilience of the whole community. (Rothe 2017: 44)

The resilience agenda in peacebuilding has frequently acknowledged the importance of adopting gender-sensitive approaches. Women’s participation and meaningful inclusion is seen as a way to enhance communities’ resilience and facilitate peaceful outcomes to conflicts. For instance, the UNSC Resolution on sustaining peace, reaffirms

the important role of women in peacebuilding and noting the substantial link between women’s full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict and those efforts’ effectiveness and long-term sustainability, and stressing, in this regard, the importance of women’s equal participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase women’s role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding (UN 2016: 3).

Equally, the EU’s Strategic Approach to Resilience acknowledges women’s valuable contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding and refers to the differential impact of violent conflict on women and men. The document states that ‘[e]nsuring that women and girls are well informed and actively participate



in peace building and recovery efforts not only ensures that their specific needs and capacities are taken into consideration, but can also create a window of opportunity for social change, by challenging traditional gender roles and gender-based discrimination' (European Commission and High Representative 2017: 8). Seen in this light, the relationship between gender-sensitive approaches and resilience building appears to be a positive one. However, as critical scholars have noted, the strategic convergence between these two agendas is also sustained by discourses that constitute women and men as neoliberal subjects responsible for their own security and which tend to ignore broader structures of inequality (Muehlenhoff 2017; Joseph 2013). It is to these critiques of the gender-resilience nexus that the next section turns.

The critique of the gender-resilience nexus

The gender-resilience nexus has the potential to better address the gendered nature and consequences of conflict. As explained in the previous section, with its focus on local agency and preventative approaches to conflict, resilience-thinking might work in tandem with gender-sensitive peacebuilding strategies. However, to understand the value, but also the limitations of the gender-resilience nexus, it is important to take stock of what we know so far about the implementation of a gender sensitive approach to conflict and the extent to which the inclusion of a resilience perspective might overcome such problems or exacerbate them.

While acknowledging some of the practical contributions that the WPS agenda has made to supporting the role of women in conflict, the literature has generally noted its failure to challenge (and transform) the gendered construction of international peace and security. These problems are not simply related to policy failures, but as explained by Kirby and Shepherd (2016), they have to do with inherent tensions in the WPS agenda itself. The first of such tensions relates to the pillarisation of the agenda around the tasks of prevention; participation; protection; and relief and recover. The narrow operational focus on the 'protection' pillar, at the expense of other pillars such as participation and prevention, has undermined the promotion of global gender equality (Hudson 2012; Kirby and Shepherd 2016). The second problem goes to the heart of the WPS agenda and what it represents. The state-centrism and militarised logics embedded in UNSCR 1325 constrain the transformational potential of the document and follow-up initiatives (Shepherd 2020). For instance, the drafting of National Action Plans for the implementation of the WPS has been dominated by state actors, while marginalising women grassroots groups (Kirby and Shepherd 2016). Although the WPS recognises women and women groups' agency, their continuing portrayal as victims—due to its focus on sexual and gender-based violence—undermines its transformative promise. The predominant state-centred, masculinised and militarised logics have also marginalised the prevention pillar in the WPS agenda (Basu and Confortini 2016). According to Shepherd (2020: 316), 'prevention is constituted as something other than (military) security but it is governed by dominant logics of security and militarism'. Instead of working towards peace, the WPS agenda has prioritised 'making war safe for women' (Shepherd



2016). As mentioned in the previous section, with its focus on bottom up and preventative approaches, resilience can thus help address some of the limitations of the WPS agenda, especially if it can move beyond descriptive understandings of women's representation (mainly focused on quotas) towards more substantive ones (i.e. ensuring their distinctive concerns and interests are given consideration).

A more powerful critique argues that the WPS leaves intact many of the global economic and political structures that prevent the achievement of global gender equality and that has failed to transform the gender norms and global inequalities that are implicated in the occurrence and maintenance of violent conflicts (Basu and Confortini 2016; Pratt 2013). Instead, peacebuilding interventions continue to produce and reproduce gender, economic and racial hierarchies. For example, Ryan and Basini (2017) note that international interveners tend to 'feminise' local actors, diminishing their agency. They also concur with MacKenzie (2009) and McLeod (2015) that these interventions maintain the traditional gender roles of women (as victims) and men (as protectors), re-essentialising gender relations. In the same vein, Achilles-Sarll and Chilmeran (2020) problematise the use of the 'local' in the WPS and the way it determines who is the target of particular programmes or has the authority to speak. For their part, Martin de Almagro and Ryan (2019: 1059) have shown how the failure of UN peacebuilding initiatives to foster peace and security for women relates to its inability to engage with 'the materiality of women's lives' and the fact that the WPS agenda is still wedded to a neoliberal understanding of economic empowerment, which distinguishes between formal and informal activities and conceptualises agency in individualistic terms. The WPS agenda has also been condemned for prioritising women over other social identities, neglecting intersectional approaches to participation, as well as global racial hierarchies (Haastруп and Hagen 2020). As explained below, these critiques echo those that have been levelled against resilience, potentially undermining the added value of resilience approaches in peacebuilding.

Critical feminists have also argued that resilience is gendered. In fact, resilience-thinking might help sustain patriarchy and reproduce pre-existing stereotypes and 'gender myths' about women and violent gender orders. Some resilience discourses continue to (re)produce gendered discourses of 'vulnerable women and girls', often neglecting that boys and men can be in positions of vulnerability/victimhood and that women can also cause harm. What is more, resilience approaches can result in essentialist and unitary discourses of 'women of the Global South' (Rothe 2017: 45), which fail to contextualise these problems. For example, research into community resilience has pointed out significant differences in women groups' representation and participation in disaster risk reduction activities depending on whether women were living in rural or urban areas (Guarnacci 2016). Moreover, such discourse also dismisses the fact that problems of vulnerability and gender inequality affect the 'Global North' too. In sum, the potential of resilience-building programmes can be limited by the tendency to associate women with the language of vulnerability, which can lead to disempowerment and depoliticisation.

Moreover, some resilience discourses can get in the way of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. For instance, Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro (2020) have shown that, with its emphasis on sustaining peace and 'leaving



no one behind', resilience discourses have placed too much emphasis on the process rather than the outcome. In the case of Liberia and the Spotlight initiative, international interventions seem more concerned with prolonging intervention (and sustaining hope) in the long term than with improving women's material conditions and empowering women grassroots groups. That international peacebuilding interventions are now framed as long-term engagement, with no end in sight, can be linked to the ideas of uncertainty, complexity and partnership that animate resilience-thinking (Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020). In line with this thinking, 'building resilient communities, therefore, becomes a discourse of coping with whatever comes in the present to get ready for a brighter future that never arrives' (Bargués-Pedreny and Martin de Almagro 2020: 329).

Another inherently problematic aspect of some approaches to resilience is that by shifting the focus from external threats to immanent risks and vulnerabilities, the onus is placed on the targeted society/community. This shifts responsibility fully to those in need of intervention rather than on the external actors (Chandler 2014; Joseph 2016). It is for this reason that resilience has been portrayed as a form of neoliberal governmentality that leads to the depoliticisation of international interventions and the shifting of responsibility from external actors to local partners, whereby individuals and communities are now responsible for their own adaptation and coping strategies (Chandler 2014; Joseph 2013, 2016). As noted by Rothe (2017: 44), the neoliberal undertones of some resilience discourses risk 'placing responsibility on women, without providing them with the material means to actually meet these responsibilities'. Several governmental and non-governmental reports employing resilience also generate new discourses of entrepreneurial women as 'agents of change' (Rothe 2017: 44), disregarding other ways in which women might seek to cope with or resist particular changes. In this regard, resilience approaches might exacerbate the problems already noted in the case of the WPS agenda and its inability to transform broader structures of (gender) inequality (Muehlenhoff 2017). Given the contrasting perspectives on the potential, but also the perils of deploying resilience-thinking in international interventions, what kind of outcomes has the gender-resilience nexus led to in conflict-affected countries? This Special Issue provides some preliminary answers to this question.

The promise of the gender-resilience nexus and its limits

In this section, we re-evaluate the promises of the gender-resilience nexus, but also the manifold problems in realising them by drawing on the findings of the contributions to this Special Issue. Overall, they all affirm that resilience can indeed contribute to understanding and transforming gendered conflict, but make some radical suggestions for how we need to think of resilience differently.

Two of the contributions focus specifically on the emergence of the gender-resilience nexus in international discourses regarding peacebuilding (Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren 2022) and natural resource management (Ryan 2022). Both articles find that the adoption of a resilience perspective by international agencies and donors is potentially transformative but that this promise has failed to fully



materialise. For instance, Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren (2022) seek to evaluate the extent to which the gender-resilience nexus advances a transformative notion of peacebuilding. The authors argue that the confluence between the resilience turn and the WPS agenda at the international level has been made possible due to the affinities between the two discourses in relation to the *outcome* desired (sustainable peace); their focus on bottom-up, inclusive and adaptive *processes*; and their reliance on technocratic *practices* such as gender mainstreaming and capacity building. In their comprehensive study of international handbooks on peacebuilding produced by the UN, the EU, the African Union (AU) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren (2022) find some potentially transformative aspects associated with the gender-resilience nexus, for instance, in relation to the need to adopt a non-linear and systems-wide approach to conflict analysis and the need for inclusivity and locally-informed approaches to sustainable peace. Yet, some of these handbooks still maintain an essentialist understanding of women, a focus on descriptive representation of women, and an overtly technocratic understanding of what constitutes expertise on gender-sensitive peacebuilding. This risks the maintenance of the status quo, the reproduction of conservative gender stereotypes of women and the depoliticisation of peacebuilding processes. The handbooks also generally fail to adopt an intersectional approach to conflict and peace and to address wider gendered power dynamics. To redress some of these problems, Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren suggest three ways in which the gender-resilience nexus needs to be advanced at the international level, through: (1) the problematisation of the politics and contestation of peacebuilding; (2) a shift from conflict management to conflict transformation; and (3) a deeper engagement with the positionality of peacebuilding actors and local contexts.

Combining insights from IR and political ecology, Ryan (2022) comes to similar conclusions about the potential and pitfalls of the gender-resilience nexus. Her findings show how conflict prevention initiatives on natural resource management (NRM) have become shaped by the same resilience logic that has colonised other international agendas such as peacebuilding, disaster management, and climate change mitigation. Her study of how the Pathways for Peace agenda and the UN Environment Programme frame natural resource management finds that in their quest to facilitating 'resilience' to conflict, these programmes tend to reproduce gendered and racialised assumptions about whose capacity to build and whose knowledge counts. This also echoes findings of Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren (2022) regarding gender peace expertise and the way it is articulated in international peacebuilding handbooks. Discourses of resilience also introduce new challenges by localising both the problem (bad resource management, conflict, gender inequality, marginalisation) and the solutions imparted. As noted by other critical scholarship, the responsabilisation of women and local communities obscures the role of global capital in natural extraction. Overall, Ryan concludes that despite potentially opening up more spaces for the inclusion of local communities in NRM, resilience discourses of responsabilisation and its gendered and racialised assumptions about the 'local' continue to (re)produce global inequality structures.

The Special Issue also contributes to an already emergent literature which has applied some of the insights of resilience to explaining women's responses to



different short-term shocks, but also longer-term stresses (see Smyth and Sweetman 2015), including work on women's experiences in Myanmar (Faxon et al 2015), refugee single mothers in Australia (Lenette et al 2012) or Palestinian women and the sumud practice (Ryan 2015; Bourbeau and Ryan 2018). This literature has shown how resilience can be used as a heuristic framework for thinking about these issues. In particular, the Special Issue adds to the growing body of work that has sought to determine the factors that shape resilience in conflict contexts. Some of this research highlights how fostering women's leadership, advocacy support and network building and collective action were key in building resilience among women and the community (Faxon et al 2015; Jenkins and Rondón 2015; Smyth and Sweetman 2015). In her work on Ambon (Indonesia) and Jos (Nigeria), Krause (2018) has shown that civilian agency was one of the key factors that made some of those communities resilient to violent conflict. What is interesting for this discussion, however, is that civilian agency is gendered (Krause 2019). Krause finds a link between everyday gender relations and mobilisation for or against communal violence. For instance, the mobilisation of a violent masculinity was evident in the most violence-prone neighbourhoods of Jos, with men that refused to fight being mocked as 'women'. By contrast, in neighbourhoods where leaders and women groups supported norms of nonviolent masculinity, violence prevention efforts were more successful. In post-violence prevention initiatives, some former perpetrators turned 'peacemakers' were able to develop a form of 'restrained violent masculinity', which contributed to peace efforts and the prevention of further mobilisation.

Progressive accounts of resilience have also emphasised the importance of 'everyday resilience' as a strategy of resistance that while less noticeable than open resistance or adaptation allows women to cope with long term challenges (Jenkins and Rondón 2015; Lenette et al 2012; Ryan 2015). These accounts tend to portray resilience as a process rather than as an (static) outcome (Lenette et al 2012). This scholarship also warns against binaries (resilient/non-resilient; agent/victim). For instance, in their research on women antimining activists in the Andes, Jenkins and Rondón explain:

The concept of resilience enables us to recognise women's strengths in exercising agency in this context, and to move beyond framing women activists as simply vulnerable victims of powerful mining corporations. Nevertheless, despite this resilience, their vulnerabilities should also be recognised – they may be, at once, resilient and vulnerable. (Jenkins and Rondón 2015: 421)

Gitau's work on women survivors of trauma in conflict situations also unsettles these binaries and shows how survivors negotiate the gendered aspects of their experiences and, in doing so, they resist traditional gender norms (Gitau 2022). Gitau's article provides a novel contribution to our understanding of resilience in the context of conflict-related trauma by arguing for a multi-dimensional approach to resilience. A multidimensional approach needs us to appreciate the multiplicity and complexity of lived experiences in contexts of conflict and mass violence. She focuses on the lived experiences and amplifies the voices of survivors of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, more specifically, refugee women from the South Sudanese community living in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. In her research, Gitau (2022)



evidences the varied ways in which survivors navigate the challenges they face through different resistance strategies: (1) defying cultural and institutional practices and expectations; (2) relying on community support networks, and (3) taking little steps to sustain their wellbeing. Her qualitative analysis of women refugees' narratives shows how these responses are impacted by gender norms, but also the way women might resist these traditional structures as they seek to deal with the psychological consequences of post-conflict trauma.

The remaining two contributions by Berry (2022) and Bargués-Pedreny and Martín de Almagro (2022) both challenge understandings of resilience as forms of neoliberal governmentality and provide new openings for the (re)conceptualisation and practice of resilience and the gender-resilience nexus. Applying a relational and gendered lens, Berry argues that the process of 'becoming resilient' actually lays bare a series of embodied and relational experiences. Thus, to think about resilience we need to move beyond individualised outcomes and towards a focus on relations. A gender perspective allows us to do this and to radicalise resilience as a process that embodies resistance to domination through interdependent relationships rooted in care. According to Berry, the stories of women impacted by violence across different contexts such as Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nepal, and Israel and Palestine reveal how it is through embodied social relations that women 'become resilient'. These stories put solidarity, mothering, and interdependence at the centre of these processes and, in so doing, challenge individual and neoliberal accounts of resilience championed by governments and international agencies. As Berry (2022) argues, resilience 'organically emerges in the form of more transformative, relational processes that represent resistance to domination'. Thus, a more transformative approach to resilience requires a shift from individuals to relationships as a way to challenge violent and unjust (gendered) orders.

With their focus on affirmation and a feminist politics of difference Bargués-Pedreny and Martín de Almagro (2022) challenge forms of neoliberal governance that have reduced the gender-resilience nexus to an egalitarian project. They draw on the work of Elizabeth Grosz who puts forward a feminism of difference. The affirmation of autonomy and difference, they argue, can help advance debates on the gender-resilience nexus by shifting away from the current focus on critique and deconstruction towards the affirmation of more radical and imaginative feminist practices. In other words, rather than studying the gendered impact of national and international resilience initiatives, we should be looking for other alternative (and innovative) indigenous practices of resilience women engage with in conflict-affected contexts. In this regard, Bargués-Pedreny and Martín de Almagro (2022) show how the Liberian women in Peace Huts have chosen their own creative ways to exercise political agency and reimagine resilience as difference, without being coopted into hegemonic peacebuilding programmes and initiatives. As the authors conclude, the Women of the Peace Hut 'do not seek to transform gender relations, but rather to use their mobilisation capacities and the legitimacy acquired as women peace activists during the war in order to build a future for their communities that is untouched by the violent dynamics of post-conflict economies of scarcity' (Bargués-Pedreny and Martín de Almagro 2022).



Diversity and logics of resilience

Contributors to this Special Issue highlight the value of thinking about resilience in broad terms: in some cases, resilience can be seen as a way for actors to maintain the status quo, other times resilience can be understood as a strategy of resistance. What is clear from the different contributions to this Special Issue is that we need a multidimensional approach to resilience that enables us to grasp the complexity of lived experiences in multiple contexts and embedded in constantly changing relations. In this way, the Special Issue challenges existing conceptualisations of resilience—particularly in International Relations—that tend to present a totalising, deterministic account of resilience in which ‘the resilience perspective is no less rigorous in its selective function than Darwinian evolution’ (Walker and Cooper 2011: 156) or whereby resilience is ‘devastating’, ‘enslaving’ and puts chains ‘around all our necks’ (Evans and Reid 2015: 157, 154). We disagree with these accounts. The eclectic diversity of interpretations, applications, and approaches is what makes studying resilience stimulating and challenging. We believe research is best served by analysis that do not seek to present a single-angled deterministic conclusion. Instead, the findings of the articles suggest that it might be particularly useful to categorise resilience within three logics. Building on the work of Bourbeau (2018), the logic of persistence emphasises that resilience is about maintaining the status quo of a referent object in the face of a disturbance; the logic of agential self-reliance puts forward that resilience is about individuals managing alone their adjustment to a shock; finally, the logic of processual duality understands resilience as a dynamic process involving both persistence and transformation. Yet, accepting diversity does not mean turning a blind eye to the limits, dangers, and weaknesses of resilience when applied to world politics—as some of the contributions to the Special Issue highlight.

On some occasions, resilience is a strategy intended to maintain the status quo. The objective is to adopt a series of actions with the intention of keeping a society or a community as they are and as they were before the shock(s) took place. Ensuring the persistence of a society or a community in the face of disturbances is the fundamental aim of this type of resilience. For instance, while Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren (2022) identify some transformative aspects associated with the way the gender-resilience nexus is conceptualised in international discourses, essentialist and reductionist understandings of gender relations and technocratic approaches to peacebuilding work to maintain the status quo. Ryan (2022) also concurs with this assessment by showing how the gendered and racialised assumptions underpinning international discourses of gender fail to challenge global inequality structures, thus (re)producing existing power relations. Other articles have shown that women in conflict situations might both maintain the status quo (through re-enacting existing gendered norms) and challenge it via everyday adaptation and resistance. Thinking about resilience and its multiple logics thus helps make sense of these processes.

Resilience can also be understood as agential self-reliance. Resilience is here often believed to be a set of qualities that an individual may possess, and international and national programs will seek to build upon to improve and strengthen the resilience of individuals. This is a logic of resilience that several international



organisations have been eager to rely on (see Ryan 2022; Aggestam and Eitrem Holmgren 2022). Several scholars have criticised this application (or instrumentalisation) of resilience, notably underscoring the consequences of rendering the individual apolitical. Gitau (2022) takes issue with this line of argument. By focusing on South Sudanese women's responses to the ongoing conflict and how they resist traditional norms, she argues that resistance invariably marks these responses and that resistance is a form of resilience. Berry (2022) offers an innovative and promising twist to the argument: by focusing on the process of an individual becoming resilient, which she sees as an embodied process of resisting a politic of domination, she argues that this is a radical political process that needs deeper political theorising. While the literature often juxtaposes resilience and resistance (with resistance implying a push back against domination), she contends that it should also be possible to think of a radicalised conceptualisation of resilience.

Yet, resilience is more than just 'bouncing back' (Clark 2021). It is about both persistence and transformation (Bourbeau 2018). The logic of processual duality accepts that resilience is, on some occasions, about maintaining the status quo and, on some other occasions, about transforming and remodeling an individual, a community and a social structure. Ryan (2022) criticises the IR literature that focuses only on expressions of resilience as bouncing back to contend that further analysing the relations between the local and international in a particular issue, natural resource extraction, would give additional analytical value to how resilience is deployed in international interventions. Bargués-Pedreny and Martín de Almagro (2022) engage with the feminist writings of Elizabeth Grosz to contend that several critics have reduced resilience to an egalitarian project. In contrast, they put forward the idea that resilience thrives outside governance structures and the confines of neoliberal policy-making.

Conclusion

This Special Issue explores the growing empirical and theoretical diversity when analysing the triangular relationship among resilience, gender, and conflict. Even though some works have recently explored this dynamic and complex interrelation, this field of research is still in its infancy. It is thus even more timely to attempt to pull together this scholarship fragmented across a series of issues and regions and to suggest organising conceptual devices for future research. Mindful of this challenge, the articles in this Special Issue tackle a variety of issues and regions of relevance when thinking about the gender-resilience nexus. Some contributors focus their attention on women-lived experiences and structural gender relations, others emphasise the importance of international discourses of resilience in shaping gender relations in contexts of conflict, others highlight to what extent gender relations themselves can be viewed as being resilient, still others underscore the multifaceted relations of our triangular conceptual relations (resilience, gender, conflict) with other concepts including race, ethnicity, sexuality and intersectionality. To add empirical richness to the Special Issue, these conceptual connections are analysed in



multiple geographical case studies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal, Israel and Palestine, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda.

In this introduction to the Special Issue we argue that increasing strategic convergence between the resilience and WPS agendas justifies a closer look at how the gender-resilience nexus works both in practice—through the empirical analysis of a wide range of issues and contexts—and from a more theoretical perspective, by seeking to re-engage with critical literatures on gender, resilience and conflict. The contributions to this Special Issue show that the merging of resilience and gender suffers from some of the same problems that have been identified in the past regarding the narrow and conservative understanding of gender and gender relations advocated by international peacebuilding actors and the instrumentalisation of resilience agenda to maintain unequal, racialised and gendered power structures. However, a focus on the lived experiences of women in very diverse contexts shows that there is still some space for individuals and communities to challenge those power structures. To be sensitive to those experiences requires an understanding of resilience as a multidimensional concept; it necessitates a shift from individualistic perspectives of resilience towards a focus on relations; and it demands an affirmation of difference.

Going beyond simple categorisations of resilience (i.e. either as paradigmatic or as a buzzword), the contributions found in this Special Issue embrace the theoretical move of accepting the full complexity and multiplicity of the concept of resilience. They speak to the benefit of thinking about resilience in a multidimensional way, sometimes as a means to maintaining the status quo; other times to facilitate adjustment to a shock or crisis; in other cases, as a dynamic process involving both persistence and transformation. Articles assembled in the Special Issue demonstrate the added value of thinking about resilience along these lines, while at the same time identifying the limits and the downsides of resilience. In many ways, we believe that the contributions assembled here will move the literature forwards in better analysing the strengths and limits of resilience when applied to world politics.

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