The Production of Gendered Knowledge of War

Women and Epistemic Power

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We know that knowledge production of war often ignores and marginalizes women's experiences and gendered ways of knowing. In response, feminist scholars' knowledge production has worked to ensure the visibility and voice of silenced, marginalized and unheard women, leading to a wave of new expertise and knowledge, often congregated within the so-called Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The agency of women with experience of war and insecurity has been paramount for producing a broader and deeper knowledge of war. Many women have broken silences around gendered suffering and death and by so doing troubled macro-narratives of war and war crimes, revealed gender gaps in transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts and brought forward new perspectives on what a gender-just peace must entail. Nevertheless, knowledge production about the gendered nature of war remains a contingent terrain with ongoing contestations around who is heard and who is silenced, what knowledge is made visible and actionable and what knowledge is ignored or misused. In this regard, the WPS agenda is a site for politics and constructions of particular ways of knowing, emerging from frictional encounters between various actors and interests. This edited volume seeks to critically investigate how women's claims to knowledge are made valuable. In various ways the contributions address the following broad questions: how is knowledge of the gendered nature of war and security produced and circulated? What role does women's epistemic agency play in this knowledge production?

The WPS agenda is in this book understood as a site for gendered knowledge production that seeks to promote women's rights and is "a knowledgeable policy agenda in world politics" (Shepherd 2021, p. 22). As several feminist studies show, there are a number of ways in which gendered knowledge is produced and circulated, constructing the WPS knowledge system (Krook & True 2012). We draw upon these insights to refocus on the role of women in and of conflict as "knowers" (Hutchings 2023) through the concept of epistemic agency. We understand knowledge systems as well as knowledge production from the point of view of an intersubjective epistemology and we study the WPS agenda as a system of knowledge constructed by women rights advocates, gender experts, civil society, women's movements, scholars, policy-makers, feminists etc. We see that

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the WPS agenda challenges the dominant understanding of war, yet in itself it is a system of knowledge with its own constraints, providing space for some women's voices while marginalizing others.

The starting point for the development of the WPS agenda is often said to be The Fourth International Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. This conference focused world attention on sexual violence in war and the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls, and the importance of women's rights for development and peace. Ever since then, the WPS agenda has been quite remarkably forged through exchanges, practices and dialogues between practitioners, policy-makers, academics and 'ordinary' women (e.g. Cohn 2004; Shepherd 2020a, 2020b). Women organizations and women activists in local, national and transnational spaces increasingly have taken part in knowledge production through, for example, testimonies and practical work (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2019). Individual testimonies by women with embodied experiences of war were instrumental in the development of international law concerning gender-based violence that took some huge leaps in the 1990s. Nevertheless, as the WPS agenda has developed over time, it has become increasingly clear that it constrains the complexities of voices, experiences and narratives. While giving recognition to women with direct experiences of conflict, and often including them in processes, institutional structures and modes of communicating knowledge, the WPS agenda scripts their participation, which in turn hinders transformation (cf. Hutchings 2023). A woman who shares her expertise may encounter a number of constraints when her knowledge is remediated through various intermediates and at different sites (Schaffer & Smith 2004). We know little about what happens when experiences and expertise are transmitted. There is thus a concern that when embedded in this knowledge system, complexity will be sacrificed, and knowledge interpreted and reproduced in ways difficult to predict. Far from women's expertise being smoothly inserted into the WPS agenda spurring global transformation processes towards gender equality and a gender-just peace, the hearing and acting upon women's knowledge is a frictional undertaking in which some voices will be heard and not others, some marginalized and threatened and others empowered. Indeed, just because knowledge is produced by women, it does not necessarily mean that all women's experiences are accounted for. Therefore, it is of key importance to pay close attention to the processes whereby women's narratives are framed, scripted, understood, circulated and acted/not acted upon, as the knower may see her power over her own story slip away.

The production of knowledge within the frames of the WPS agenda has been criticized for cementing an image of women as fragile, passive and in need of protection, while locating the responsibility for protecting in the hands of elite political actors (e.g. Shepherd 2011, 2017). Furthermore, the existence of knowledge hierarchies within the WPS is restricting. Knowledge produced in the Global North is automatically given authority, while knowledge produced in the Global South and the Global East has to be validated and verified in the Global North, reproducing academic legitimacy criteria of knowledge production. Research, expertise and knowledge with regards to the WPS agenda are seen to be transferred from the

Global North to the Global South (Martín de Almagro 2021) and the WPS agenda has not yet sufficiently demonstrated how to centre knowledge from the margins (Causevic et al. 2020; Parashar 2019). The feminist critique of WPS knowledge production thus unveils how it reproduces relationships of domination and marginalization by silencing voices from the Global South and Global East. Furthermore, there is a glaring omission of women's voices from Indigenous communities whose knowledge of the gendered nature of colonial violence as well as of conflict resolution practices has not been validated by the WPS agenda (Palmiano Federer, Dedyukina and Walker in this volume). The lack of an intersectional perspective may thus come with serious implications for the construction of gender-just peace.

In practical terms, the construction of transnational gendered knowledge through gender monitoring in post-conflict settings has been criticized as a form of (disciplinary) governing of local actors (Kunz 2020). Studies have also shown how the WPS agenda has been co-opted by neoliberal and neocolonial agendas, and that it works in tandem with post-9/11 security discourses, including normalizing violence of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency and instrumentalization of women through the UN resolution on preventing and combating violent extremism (Aharoni 2014; Pratt 2013).

Overall, knowledge production in the broad agenda of WPS to a large degree consists of what Cox (1981) refers to as producing problem-solving knowledge, meaning that knowledge, theories and methods are developed to solve problems within the existing system of knowledge, hoping to fine tune it but never to challenge it. We see that the WPS agenda is part of such a paradigm, and to no small degree concerned with developing certain technical knowledge that can be used in improving and fine-tuning peacebuilding interventions (Julian et al. 2019; Kunz 2020; Martín de Almagro 2021). So, while the WPS agenda over time has challenged sexist, racist, colonial patterns and practices of international politics and thought (Hutchings 2023; True 2016), the agenda has also constituted its own omissions and silences. This makes this edited volume an important undertaking, seeking to challenge these constraints and advance the WPS agenda. Writing at a time of growing misogyny, aggressive backlash against women's rights and a patriarchal pushback against gendered knowledge, taking "epistemic responsibility" (Hutchings 2023) is urgent, important and needed.

Situating (gendered) knowledge production in the study of war and peace

Gendered knowledge production is particularly needed within the fields of International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies and War Studies, fields that have been dominated by state-centric perspectives, as well as strategic and tactical knowledge of fighting wars and negotiating peace. Peace research has a strong normative agenda and has often been attuned to producing politically relevant and useful knowledge that serves the aim of ending conflict and building peace (Bush & Duggan 2014). Recent studies regarding the production of knowledge of peace reveal that much such knowledge is produced with the explicit aim to improve practices and inform

policy-making in the fields of conflict transformation, mediation, peacebuilding and transitional justice (Hellmüller, Goetschel & Lidén 2023; Jones & Lühe 2023). Yet, the processes of knowledge production do not make explicit what knowledge is prioritized and adopted into policy and practice. What is commonly referred to as "international knowledge of peace" is a collaborative effort that involves both scholars and practitioners from the Global North, the Global South and the Global East. However, it is often the case that the contributions from beyond the Global North go unrecognized, pointing to what Kagoro calls "knowledge imperialism" (Kagoro cited in Jones & Lühe 2023, p. 5). Haastrup and Hagen (2021, p. 29) argue that it is through its "attendant professionalisation" that "racialised hierarchies of knowledge" is perpetuated, while Martin de Almagro (2018, p. 395) has shown that the WPS agenda acts in "racialised, sexualised and classed" ways. In this volume, Luna K C unpacks how low-caste women ex-combatants face intersectional epistemic violence when struggling to reintegrate in Nepalese society.

The marginalization of knowers from the Global South, the Global East and importantly also from Indigenous communities in the Global North has thus caused a fallacy in both peace theory and practice. While the decolonial turn has opened up for more attention to the structural violence of colonization, there is little research on peace and conflict research that investigates the often highly securitized direct conflict situations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous settler institutions (Palmiano Federer, Dedyukina and Walker in this volume). An overview of the literature shows that International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies have long reproduced the social realities of gendered and racialized hierarchies as well as binaries such as men versus women, white versus black and reason versus belief (Halistoprak 2021; Behera 2023). Hence, such knowledge often upholds rather than challenges power asymmetries.

Intersecting with the above hierarchies of knowing is gender. Across different times and spaces, much of the existing knowledge of war and peace builds on centuries of collected and collective histories where men's perceptions, experiences and memories have dominated knowledge production. Yet, we know that men and women experience war and peace differently, and thus contribute different knowledge to our understanding of war and peace. Previous and contemporary scholarship on knowledge production on war and peace has so far paid limited attention to women's experiential, embodied and historical knowledge and rendered women and gender largely invisible. In general, gendering knowledge production has been regarded as a matter for the discipline of gender studies (cf. Bouilly et al. 2022) or as part of colonial epistemology (Pereira 2022; Berenstain et al. 2022) thereby effectively keeping gendered knowledge in the margins.

Clearly, epistemological and ontological assumptions and reflections influence knowledge production. Ontology concerns how the world is constituted and what we can gain knowledge about, and epistemology concerns how we can know what we know about the world, i.e. what guides the construction of knowledge. Both ontology and epistemology inform knowledge production. Adding a feminist perspective helps decolonize modes of thinking and decentre dominant modes of knowing (Wibben et al. 2019; Lewis & Mills 2003), as feminist scholarship on peace and war has always been driven by the impetus to challenge knowledge production and

has unveiled how this production has universalized particular versions of worlds and people's experiences, calling for an intersectional perspective (cf. Halistoprak 2021, p. 27). Feminists such as Betty Reardon have pointed at the sexism within the "war system" (Reardon 1985); Jean Elshtain has explored the attraction of war through the discursive frames of the feminine "beautiful soul" and the masculine "just warrior" (Elshtain 1987) and Cynthia Enloe has emphasized women's experiences of war and the militarization of women's lives (Enloe 2010). Feminist peace research has further taken an interest in the particular and in the diversity of experiences, writing from and within such experiences. By paying attention to personal positionalities, this research has enriched and deepened our understanding of what it means to live violence. Experiential knowledge has become an invaluable source of knowledge in the long tradition of feminist peace research (Boulding 2000; Nordstrom 1997; Sylvester 2012; Tickner 1992; Väyrynen 2019). In addition, this research has verified the experiential and embodied dimension of knowledge as legitimate knowledge, as well as acknowledging that affect, in the sense of collective emotions, is productive of power and ways of knowing (Åhäll 2023).

Knowledge is furthermore always situated because it is produced in specific circumstances and from specific positionalities that inevitably have an influence on it (Rose 1997). By gendering knowledge production, we are "able to tune in to stories, experiences, and representations of peoples/individuals/bodies rather than those of states or political elites" (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2021, p. 41). Thus, the feminist slogan that 'the personal is the political,' also means that the personal, the subjective, the experiential are ways of knowing and that by narrating and sharing such experiences, new knowledge is produced. The "messy politics of feminist knowledge production" (Kunz 2020) will contribute to making feminist sense of war and peace in our time.

In the following, we will first bring forth conceptualizations of epistemic power, epistemic violence and epistemic (in)justice that guide this volume's critical readings of gendered knowledge production in light of the WPS agenda. We then discuss epistemic agency as a key theoretical perspective and propose that it broadly encompasses two dimensions – embodied epistemic agency and narrative epistemic agency. Both have to do with a subject's capacity and will to act in the world and achieve transformation through the production of knowledge. We then turn our attention to some of the key questions for knowledge production that the various chapters address – what knowledge is produced, how is it produced, by whom, where and when and for whom? We end with some reflections on positionality, privilege and methodology, before introducing the different contributions to the volume.

The episteme: conceptualizing epistemic power, epistemic violence and epistemic (in)justice

Knowledge creates worlds and the production of knowledge is key for politics to emerge, for norms to form and for the making of political subjects. Inspired by Foucault, we use the term episteme to mean a system of knowledge that defines the "conditions of possibility of all knowledge." Different epistemes may interact

and coexist as parts of different "power-knowledge" systems (Foucault 1980, 1970, p. 197). A system of knowledge is thus the nexus of power and knowledge. Who gets to define what counts as knowledge and whose voices are privileged or marginalized in the process? What is legitimate, acceptable knowledge, and who verifies and validates that knowledge? In the analyses in concomitant chapters, we notice frictions between individual women's narratives and practices and the institutionalized discursive knowledge system. The structural entrenchment of knowledge claims is here in friction with individual agential interventions. Epistemes are thus value systems functioning as common points of meaning from which we derive our sense of right and wrong, and our notion of reality (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 284). We understand an episteme as produced through various actors that form an epistemic community. The epistemic community holds power, interacts and co-constitutes the episteme. As the content of an episteme is not stable or clearly demarcated, but changes over time and differs between contexts, there is always a possibility of creating a new system of knowledge and epistemic communities (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 285).

From the discussion above we conclude that there are many ways to create an episteme and to acquire knowledge. We build on the taxonomy introduced by Catala (2020) to shed light on the diverse ways individuals acquire knowledge. This taxonomy helps to understand different ways of knowing, which is crucial also within the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. First, *tacit knowing* corresponds to what goes without saying; it involves unarticulated assumptions within context. *Practice-based knowing* is situated in the system of ongoing practices of action, as relational, mediated by artefacts, and always rooted in a context of interaction. Such knowledge is thus acquired through some form of participation, and it is continually reproduced and negotiated. Indigenous knowledge is one example of practice-based ways of knowing. *Experiential/embodied knowing* is acquired through experiences, stemming "from the body as socially positioned." For example, "one's experience of a gendered … body corresponds to an embodied kind of knowing" (Catala 2020, p. 760). *Affective knowing* "arises from emotions and affects" (Catala 2020, p. 760) and emotions shape our perceptions and understanding of the world around us. As such it acknowledges the subjective nature of human experience. It is important to point out that the description of knowing above is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather aims to capture different types of knowing that (non-exhaustively) make up the epistemic realm of what we know. What we know is always dynamic and provisional. An openness to various ways of knowing may facilitate knowledge production and circulation, and overcome structural obstacles related to competing ways of knowing and the hegemonic system of knowledge.

We understand epistemic power as the ability to produce what we know and how we get to know it. To hold epistemic power also means having the ability to transmit knowledge, making it gain traction and recognition. It is about having the power to construct what is understood as legitimate, acceptable knowledge that feeds into the episteme. Moreover, epistemic power gets to verify and validate certain knowledge as facts, as truths, as scientific etc. It is also about making certain ways of knowing more valid and legitimate than others, and therefore more

authoritative. Yet, notions of authoritative knowledge, uniformity of thinking and universal knowledge are frequently negotiated. Such negotiations can encompass conflicting and frictional epistemes. Authoritative knowledge is under constant production, and it can exert epistemic power as well as epistemic violence.

Thus, epistemic power always comes with forms of epistemic violence. This violence can be enacted in various ways, and we agree with Perez that "violence is exercised in relation to the production, circulation and recognition of knowledge." Also "the denial of epistemic agency for certain subjects, the unacknowledged exploitation of their epistemic resources, their objectification, among many others" are ways of exercising epistemic violence (Perez 2019, cited in Pereira 2022, p. 48). For example, how does the subaltern woman as a knower not only speak but also get heard (cf. Spivak 2010)? Moreover, epistemic violence can be exerted through a multitude of tactics – erasure, by-passing or appropriation of certain knowledge. Further, expressions of skepticism, disbelief, ignoring, misrepresenting and stereotyping are all examples of how epistemic violence is exerted. Epistemic violence is also about the silencing of other voices, omissions of other perspectives and the absences of certain experiences. It can involve the erasure and denial of lived experiences that somehow fall outside the dominant systems of knowledge. It is a violence directed against the knower and ways of knowing, as well as against the audience who is denied access to certain knowledge. What we know, becomes fractured and biased, reproducing violence and injustice. Epistemic violence underpins and reinforces epistemic injustice.

Epistemic justice is usually thought of as restorative action that addresses epistemic injustice, for example, including previously excluded historic voices and narratives in hegemonic discourses and opening up existing discourse to those excluded in the present through inclusive action (see e.g. Fricker 2007). In addition, Hutchings argues that epistemic justice must also be transformative as the "perspectives of the marginalized and oppressed become sources of epistemic authority and knowledge" (Hutchings 2023, p. 1). Building women's knowledge of war can have deeply transformative effects on processes from war and peace, contributing to the making of a peace that is not only just, but also gender just (Björkdahl 2012; Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2014). The notion of epistemic justice further underscores the need for more inclusive approaches to knowledge production, dissemination and engagement.

Sometimes these sites can be surprising. For example, Luna K C in this volume discusses how reintegration processes can offer women ex-combatants an opportunity to share their political and feminist knowledge gained during war and transfer it into transformative peacetime practices.

Epistemic agency: conceptualizing the knower

Epistemic agency does not exist in a vacuum, but as mentioned above in a socially, culturally and historically contingent system of knowledge (cf. Giddens 1984; Cleaver 2007; Dahl 2009, p. 398). Hutchings points out that "knowers, worlds and audiences are mutually constitutive" (Hutchings 2023, p. 15). This constitutive

relationship is deeply gendered, affecting agents' possibilities to produce knowledge that is authoritative, legitimate, validated and verified (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic 2015). We thus develop a broad, pluralist notion of epistemic agency, which relies on a conception of knowledge that accounts not only for conventional ways of knowing, but also for other types of knowing that have been largely neglected. Epistemic agency has to do with a subject's capacity and will to act in the world and achieve transformation through the production of knowledge. Such agency is relational as it develops in intersubjective relations. Epistemic agents – the knowers – are holders of epistemic power and produce and transmit knowledge. We argue that this pluralist account of epistemic agency pushes us to revisit the current conception of knowledge production, ways of knowing and to expand the understanding of the knower (cf. Catala 2020).

Women with experiences of war and conflict are knowing subjects and assert themselves as such when constructing and sharing their knowledge (Gunzenhauser 2013). The concept of epistemic agency makes visible women's experiences of conflict, including tacit, practice-based, affective and experienced knowledge. We propose two main expressions of epistemic agency: embodied epistemic agency and narrative epistemic agency. By explicating *embodied epistemic agency* we can take into account implicit and tacit ways of knowing that may be verbally unarticulated, yet hold an affective dimension that drives agency. Embodied epistemic agency can be expressed through, for example, performative rituals, theatre, dance, weaving, art or social media images. We see *narrative epistemic agency* as the means through which women can narrate and transmit, in writing or in speech, their gendered knowledge about war and insecurity. Many of these expressions of narrative epistemic agency are more easily accepted into established knowledge production as they follow an already accepted format, such as report writing, or testimonies given in a judicial setting (although gendered hierarchies may still make them 'impossible' to hear and consider). Other forms of narrative epistemic agency are less accepted as authoritative modes of knowledge, such as memoirs, films or accounts published on social media platforms.

Thus, epistemic agency can be expressed in various spaces and in various modes, as demonstrated by the chapters in this volume. What unites these expressions is that the agents produce meaning, articulate intentions and legitimize actions and taken together, this book brings forth manifold ways that epistemic agency plays out at the intersection of epistemic power and epistemic violence.

Gendered knowledge production

In this book we search for knowledge produced by and about women in conflict. Grounded in empirical investigations in various conflict-affected contexts in the world, the different chapters explore the history of women in war and peace and provide examples to gender our knowledge about war. Adding depth and complexity to our knowledge of the experience of war, insecurity and processes towards peace, the chapters provide answers to some key questions – what knowledge is produced, how is it produced, by whom, where, when and for whom?

Expanding and deepening: what knowledge is produced?

What can we learn about women's experiences of war and what knowledge women share in the (post)war time and space? The diversity of experiences of women in conflict-affected societies includes everyday experiences as well as combat experiences, women's fight for survival as well as for peace. The chapters access women's experiences from different positionalities, for example as combatants and (ex-) combatants, enslaved rape victims, peace activists, witnesses of violence and members of civil society organizations, and give insights into the multifaceted and complex variety of lived experiences. They also showcase how violence is manifested in conflict societies and reveal patriarchal structures in communities, in rebel organizations, in peacebuilding and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration processes and in encounters with global institutions such as the UN and donor organizations. The different contributions tell of violence and insecurity over the *longue durée* and access knowledge about what is needed for transformation. The knowledge produced can be universal or particular, common or hidden knowledge; it can be new, or once authoritative but now forgotten. Thus, the chapters contribute important new knowledge and also reactivate old and forgotten knowledge of living in times of war.

Ways of knowing: how is knowledge produced?

How do we know what we know? There are many ways of knowing, and practices of knowledge production in transitions towards peace can take embodied or narrative forms. For example, in Myanmar, women organizations engaged in long-term documentation of human rights abuses have been key in the production of knowledge-supporting processes towards democracy and international advocacy campaigns in pursuit of political change. Their reports are based on women's embodied experiences and narratives, portraying their situation and the overall political context. While they have been – at times – successful at making an impact and bringing forth a more granular understanding of human rights crimes, report writing has often been bureaucratized to produce standardized data and thus becoming part of an international auditing culture relying on technologies of accountability. Such reports can be regarded as a knowledge institutionalization mechanism, as Hedström and Olivius discuss (in this volume).

To testify is another important way of producing knowledge about war in narrative form. Testimonies can be understood as "claims to knowledge made by a specific identifiable author" (Hutchings 2023, p. 5). For example, Yazidi women's testimonies are an important source of knowledge about women's suffering during the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) reign in Northern Iraq and Syria, but also about the genocide against the Yazidi people. Some epistemic agents have found social media to be a powerful platform for narrative epistemic agency, as a way to avoid intermediaries (Björkdahl and Mannergren in this volume). Nepali women ex-combatants share their diverse war stories and contribute new gendered knowledge of war. By acknowledging the vast and various experiences of these ex-combatants in terms of caste, class, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, sexuality and

other points of social location, the WPS agenda as well as the National Action Plan (NAP) for Nepal has become more diversified (Luna K C in this volume). Women presently at the front lines in Ukraine fight both against Russia and against ingrained, historical silences about women's military activities, and their emerging narratives change the story of war as well as the WPS agenda (Chupis in this volume). At the same time, women's narratives can be instrumentalized by outside actors. In Mali, women have been regarded as 'key assets' in the struggle against violent extremism by external actors. They have been expected to prevent relatives and children from joining militant groups by sharing their everyday knowledge and informing authorities about local developments in their communities (Lorentzen in this volume). Likewise in Liberia, women peace activists have had their epistemic agency hijacked by international and local authorities (Martín de Almagro in this volume).

Knowledge is also produced through relational practices in contexts of interaction. Indigenous ways of knowing are explored in the chapter on Turtle Island (an Indigenous term for North America). Native women scholars have insistently collected data regarding missing Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people to provide evidence of the atrocities committed against the Indigenous populations. Through collectivist approaches to conflict transformation, they pursue different ways of knowing and ways of redress. These ways of knowing and knowledge may partly fall outside of more conventional modes of knowledge production and has thus been largely marginalized, and consequently, voices of Indigenous women are rarely included in the global WPS agenda (Palmiano Federer, Dedyukina and Walker in this volume).

Other knowers may have been silenced through violence, yet sometimes traces of their embodied experiences may remain in archives, waiting there to be activated. This is the case of those Palestinian women murdered during the First Intifada. Fragments of their experience can be excavated from Israeli archive and activated to produce new knowledge about Palestinian women's experiences of violence within the Palestinian society and under the Occupation (Aharoni in this volume).

Sites of knowing: where is knowledge produced?

Which spaces and sites are open to women epistemic agents for gendered knowledge production and for validation of the knower and the knowledge? We recognize that the WPS knowledge is produced at several trans-scalar sites ranging from local to global. The sites can be more or less restrictive, more or less enabling and more or less empowering and they can hold both epistemic power and violence. Some spaces are more gender sensitive than others, some are highly masculinized, some do not acknowledge gender-based violence and some offer very little room for women's complex stories of war.

We see the importance of international tribunals and other official institutions as sites for knowledge production about past atrocities that give a high validity to the knowledge produced. Yet, many formal institutions have failed in addressing the concerns of women victims of war and women's organizations have sought to

rectify this lack by creating their own sites. One such site discussed in this book is the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women of Burma in 2010. The tribunal was organized by civil society actors to map and make visible gender-specific abuses perpetrated by the Myanmar military against ethnic minority women, women human rights defenders and politicians from Myanmar. This chapter on Myanmar brings forth the possibilities of such a civil society initiative when other institutions have failed to fully include women's experiences in the narrative about past atrocities (Hedström and Olivius in this volume). The archive is a well-recognized site for knowledge production. It can hold silenced stories as the Israeli state archive for example, which may be an unexpected site to study the otherwise undocumented Palestinian women's histories of intra-communal violence. The archive may also be silencing stories through various systems of management and control, censorship and limitations of access (Aharoni in this volume). Other sites of interest that emerge in the chapters include social media and art. The social media activism by Yazidi activist, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and genocide survivor Nadia Murad, has reached a multimillion audience and produced knowledge that is regarded as authoritative (Björkdahl and Mannergren in this volume).

Art as a site for knowledge production is not often recognized as such and yet can be of great importance. Art as a collective undertaking in response to traumas of war and violence can be transformative for participants who get to more deeply know, recognize and acknowledge their own traumas, and in fact, art is increasingly taking on a role in advocacy. Indigenous women in Turtle Island (North America) are engaging in, for example, art and poetry as a means to both bear witness to, and weave together, transformative processes with the many forms of violence experienced by Native people. In so doing they seek to restore a collectivist approach to conflict transformation (Palmiano Federer, Dedyukina and Walker in this volume). Social media can also function as a site for advocacy, which is true for the Yazidi women diaspora, but it can also function as an archive. In the chapter on *Farianas* in Colombia, they use WhatsApp groups as a site to archive scattered images and fragmented knowledge from their times as rebel fighters, and collectively memorialize their experiences in the face of societal prejudices and erasure from the nation-making narrative (Anctil Avoine in this volume). The knowledge produced through various ways of knowing travels between sites in processes of sharing, interaction and circulation.

The Knower: who produces knowledge?

The knower in this book is the individual woman, groups of women sharing similar and different experiences, women speaking on behalf of other women and women speaking and acting from different positionalities, geographical locations and points in time. We recognize that there is a tendency to regard women experiencing war as (only) victims of gender-based violence, as powerless war-widows or as silent or silenced survivors of ethnic cleansing or genocide. These women are often regarded as representatives of a particular experience and their experiences are then 'harvested' by researchers, advocacy organizations and historians – a form of

epistemic violence (cf. Björkdahl, Höglund & Mannergren 2026; Richmond et al. 2015). The underlying assumption of this book is that on the contrary, women are epistemic agents and hold epistemic power notwithstanding patriarchal structures and practices that severely circumscribe, attack and undermine their agency and devalue their knowledge.

Women witnesses, coming forward to tell their story, are knowers. To bear witness is often seen as a principal practice in global justice and it can be a means to access material and symbolic currency in the field of humanitarian activism (Burchardt 2016; Schaffer & Smith 2004). For example, Nadia Murad grounds her activism in her own experience of violence during the ISIS reign. The strength of her embodied epistemic agency relies on her own first-hand experience of sexual enslavement, and she uses it to achieve justice and transform patriarchal values (Björkdahl and Mannergren in this volume). Likewise, women organizations in Myanmar are knowers producing situated knowledge. They have a long track record of documenting human rights abuses and function as guardians of archives that hold knowledge about the political violence in Myanmar (Hedström and Olivius in this volume). Sometimes local experts are put under the gaze of international interveners who may romanticize their knowledge as 'authentic,' appropriate it and find slots for it in the global episteme, as discussed regarding Liberian rural women (Martín de Almagro in this volume). Nepali and Colombian women ex-combatants are unconventional female knowers in the WPS knowledge system, and they challenge the dominant view of women within this system as they strive to bring their experiential knowledge of combat, armed struggle and reintegration into society to the WPS episteme (Anctil Avoine in this volume and Luna K C in this volume). Activists in Indigenous social movements, such as Idle No More and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA, are knowers reclaiming epistemic power despite their erasure within the WPS agenda (Palmiano Federer, Dedyukina and Walker in this volume). In her chapter on women at war in Ukraine, Anastasiia Chupis engages in an autoethnographic account in which she emerges as an individual knower, writing not only about her own experience of the war and the experience of her friends on the front line, but also about her grandmother's and great-grandmothers' experiences of World War II (Chupis in this volume).

Times of knowing: when is knowledge produced?

The production of knowledge is seldom a linear and accumulative process, but rather a process fraught with tensions, omissions and forgetting. We know that there are enabling and disabling times for women to share their experiences. By situating the knower in time, we can trace how women who have experienced war manifest themselves several years later as epistemic agents when there is a window of opportunity to share their experiences. Time, and timing, is in fact key for epistemic agency to be transformative.

Epistemic agency is activated at different moments in time, which affects the production of knowledge. Sometimes knowers use their epistemic agency in the

midst of war and sometimes long after. The reasons why someone tells a story during war are different compared to someone looking back on experiences that are then refigured and read against a present that presents a different normative universe. For example, the stories told by women in the Ukrainian military are recounted at times of high personal danger and a collective existential threat, producing hegemonic discourses of militarization and heroization. The war has at the same time brought windows of opportunities for change, and the demands of women in the military for gender justice are making some impact (Chupis in this volume). In contrast, the *Farianas* – ex-guerilla combatants in Colombia – recollect memories and recreate 'forgotten' experiences from a position of marginalization, answering to criticism against them being an 'anomaly' in peacetime (Anctil Avoine in this volume).

In an ever-increasing information flow, can some knowledge retain its epistemic power over time? How do we accumulate knowledge that has been produced through embodied and narrative epistemic agency? The chapter on knowledge production in Liberia shows that the perception of who is 'local' and knowledgeable in the local context can rapidly shift. This chapter demonstrates how key women and women's movements who have been instrumental in the peace process are ignored in the present as the institutional memory of outsiders is weak and the knowledge not retained (Martín de Almagro in this volume). From a different perspective, the analysis of the shifting narrative spaces for human rights advocacy in Myanmar over time gives a longitudinal understanding of the dynamics of how windows of opportunity open and close for women's epistemic agency (Hedström and Olivius in this volume).

Furthermore, time affects the control over knowledge and how it is interpreted and used. While a knower makes an agential decision to share her knowledge through embodied or narrative epistemic agency, she may lose control over her story as it circulates and is (mis)interpreted. What was at one time considered important, may at another time lose its epistemic power, and may be even disregarded or denied in more hostile and misogynist times. There is also another important dimension to take into consideration when it comes to knowledge production in volatile and insecure contexts, which concerns the potential future danger that producers of knowledge may face. Personal testimonies may at a later point in time become a problem, even a danger, for the narrator when it is circulated anew. In situations and times of increasing aggressive misogyny, and backlashes against gender knowledge, women who at one time in the past made their stories public may experience negative consequences in the present.

Hence, an engagement with temporality in relation to gendered knowledge production is important as time both reflects and shapes the context of transitions from war to peace. It can destabilize a "dichotomous and sequential conceptualisation of war and peace" (Söderström & Olivius 2022, p. 412). The contributions of this book demonstrate what Mueller-Hirth and Rios Oyola (2018, p. 354) call "temporal conflicts" that may occur between "local, or lived, temporalities and institutional, or official temporalities."

The gatekeepers and the audience: how does women's knowledge circulate?

The knowledge produced by women about gendered experiences of war and insecurity transects local and global contexts in several interlinked ways. The WPS agenda has been created through such ongoing circulation and it is through the multitude of epistemic agents and ways of knowing in different space and times that the WPS agenda has been able to make a global impact and become part of the "knowledgeable policy agenda in world politics" (Shepherd 2021, p. 22). The knowledge is often circulated through intermediates, for example civil society organizations, international organizations or governments. Here, the 'gender expert' located in various expert bodies and institutions can play a particular role as they often rely on women's local knowledge in order to bring about policy change (Kunz 2020).

In this process, embodied experiential knowledge expressed through the epistemic agency of individuals is in many senses lost in translation as it goes through the process of being transmitted by intermediates with their own purposes, and then is selectively heard and understood by various audiences (cf. Schaffer & Smith 2004, p. 5). They no longer control how their own knowledge will be used and possibly distorted within the knowledge system that the WPS agenda entails. We thus see a need to critically ask questions that can help us understand the interplay between epistemic power and epistemic violence when it comes to the circulation of knowledge produced through women's epistemic agency. Who is the gatekeeper that selects what knowledge is valuable and for what purposes? Who validates and verifies knowledge? And linked to that question – what knowledge is marginalized and silenced? Overall, what do the intended audiences want to hear, and how can we understand why certain knowledge and certain subject positions move from invisibility to hypervisibility in popular culture and media discourses?

While some of these processes are upheld by strong social structures and modes of knowing, we also observe that women knowers use new spaces that make it possible for them to engage directly with an audience and by-pass gatekeepers. Interestingly, a knower such as Nadia Murad who is very active on social media chooses to not frame her knowledge production and advocacy as part of the episteme of the WPS agenda, for example refraining from tagging her message with the hashtag #WPS, although a lot of her work would fall under this umbrella.

Finally, we caution that at certain volatile times and in insecure spaces, it might be pertinent to ask whether some knowledge should be kept secret. Many women may make an informed decision not to speak because of dangerous circumstances. Anti-gender politics and anti-feminist sentiments add to the insecurities of individuals, in practice functioning as a form of gatekeeping by making it difficult for women to be present in public spheres. While hate-speech is rife on social media, it may nevertheless be a safer space.

Reflexive methodologies: being 'curious feminists'

In this introduction, we have tried to show the tension inherent in the WPS agenda as both a site for epistemic power and epistemic violence. As researchers with an

interest in the WPS agenda, we are members of this broad community and take part in the knowledge production that we seek to critically interrogate, which raises difficult and important questions around our own positionality. Our objective is to be ‘curious feminists’ (Enloe 2004), and our endeavour here is critical, in the sense of adapting a perspective that challenges the prevailing order and seeks to open up new theoretical imaginations and practices (Cox 1981). A critical stance also means to recognize epistemic responsibility, as Hutchings stresses (2023, p. 3). This responsibility is collective (2023, p. 3). A researcher takes epistemic responsibility when she “…actively and reflexively recognizes and engages with power-laden relations between knowers, worlds and audiences in international thinking” (Hutchings 2023, p. 3). In a sense, we are both knowers and audiences in this undertaking. In this book we thus engage with women’s experiences of war, learning from their knowledge, acting as amplifiers for their voices, verifying their epistemic agency and validating their experiential, embodied knowledge.

As in so much research and policy, there is a deep imbalance in that typically the Global South and Global East are harvested for information through fieldwork and collection of data, while the Global North is the space for policy formulation, norm making and theory. While the contributors to this volume represent a range of positionalities regarding e.g. geographical, cultural and linguistic background as well as age and professional seniority, we are mostly professionally based in the Global North. We recognize this as a privilege and that it is important to examine precisely how this privilege deploys itself and affects knowledge production processes at various levels.

Methodology is particularly productive of power relations. There is an increasing awareness that in the field of gender expertise some methodologies technicalize and depoliticize (Kunz & Prügl 2019), whereas others may be ethically dubious (Björkdahl & Mannergren 2021). Running through all contributions in this edited volume is an interest in methodological aspects of the production of epistemic power and violence. The authors make use of various forms of reflexive methodology that on the contrary seek to expose relations of power between research participants and researchers and pay attention to the positionality of the researcher. This positionality is important to reflect upon as it has deep consequences for the co-production of knowledge, as we always must be cognizant to how and whether power relationships between researchers and their interlocutors indeed can be negotiated and untangled. Employing reflexivity thus means to understand and benefit from how the relationship between researcher and the interlocutors shape the production of knowledge.

Outline of the book

This introductory chapter has introduced the overarching aim of the book and raised critical questions about gendered knowledge production in relation to the WPS agenda that is understood as a site for gendered knowledge production. We have brought to the fore tensions around who is heard and who is silenced, what knowledge is made visible and actionable and what knowledge is ignored or misused. We have theorized gendered knowledge production and proposed conceptualizations of epistemic agency, epistemic power, epistemic violence and epistemic (in)justice

that guide this volume's critical readings of gendered knowledge production in light of the WPS agenda. These theoretical advancements are grounded in the findings from the following empirical chapters spanning various conflicts across different spaces and times, including Colombia, Turtle Island (North America), Israel and Palestine, Liberia, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. While all of the cases to some extent work within the frame of the state, they are also related to certain regions, local contexts and global frameworks, making connections between micro and macro realms of politics. Through these collective insights, we seek to contribute a nuanced understanding of gendered knowledge production within the WPS agenda.

Chapter 1 by María Martín de Almagro is concerned with international attempts to universalize complex, multifaceted accounts by local women to formats that resonate with the expectations of international audiences. She analyses reports from two UN Peacebuilding Fund projects in Liberia on gender equality, security and land rights that incorporate 'success stories' about individual women, and contrasts the reports with the experiential/embodied knowing expressed by women participants in focus groups that she has conducted. She argues that through the attempt to add and unify 'authentic' experiences of the local in the reports, an apolitical and ahistorical 'rural woman' is produced. This provokes epistemic violence and epistemic injustice, as this 'rural woman's' experiential knowledge is constrained to only be knowledgeable in certain times, spaces and affective registers. This chapter shows how the framing and reception of the UN Peacebuilding Fund reports as authoritative knowledge reflect (gender) knowledge hierarchies that persist within the WPS agenda.

In Chapter 2 Sarai B. Aharoni brings the archive and archival practices and theory into the discussion about knowledge production and provides a close reading of one original document titled "Killings of Women During the Uprising" recently found in a file from 1990 to 1991, deposited by the Prime Minister's Advisor on the Status of Women's office in the Israel State Archives. This study shows how diplomatic records that were left unregulated by state memory laws may contain valuable information pertaining to the lives of silent subjects. By following the archival logic, other systems of power are revealed and the praxis of silence (or silencing) of violence is questioned. This chapter implies that using archival methods to untangle the past and to follow various logics of contemporary international governance and diplomatic encounters requires more critical attention.

In Chapter 3 Jenny Hedström and Elisabeth Olivius describe how women in and from Myanmar have engaged in documenting human rights abuses by the Myanmar military, report writing and international advocacy as key strategies in pursuit of political change. Approaching these practices of knowledge production as expressions of epistemic agency, this chapter examines how bearing witness has allowed women from conflict-affected, ethnic minority communities to gain visibility and influence. The authors trace the evolution of human rights documentation from the late 1990s and explore the politics of how narratives about violence and human rights abuses are produced, circulated, silenced and heard. They note that narratives emphasizing conflict-related sexual violence are heard and amplified at the

expense of more complex narratives of structural gendered violence and insecurity. Further, after the onset of a political reform period in Myanmar in 2011, the interest of international actors shifted towards collaboration with the Myanmar government, which made them less receptive to oppositional narratives, demonstrating the sensitivity of women's narrative epistemic agency to geopolitical shifts and changes in the international politics of aid.

In Chapter 4, Julia Palmiano Federer, Lena Dedyukina and Polly O. Walker focus on the narrative and embodied epistemic agency of Indigenous women producing knowledge on peace and conflict resolution in Turtle Island (North America). From a deeply reflective stance, they examine debates on gendered Indigenous and Western perspectives of conflict and peace, and ask: who decides what contexts are deemed 'peaceful' and which ones are not? By extension, what role do Indigenous women play in the gendered production of knowledge in this regard? They problematize the concept of 'inclusive peace,' a normative imperative promoted by the WPS agenda, primarily in armed conflicts located in the Global South. First, this chapter argues that this is not an oversight or an accident, but a by-product of the knowledge production about what contexts count as conflict and where inclusive peace is promoted (and where it is not). They name Turtle Island as a settler-colonial context and a site of conflict rather than a so-called peaceful society. Second, this chapter argues that Indigenous women are reclaiming epistemic power through their roles in social movements such as Idle No More and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA.

In Chapter 5, Luna K C investigates Nepali women ex-combatants' contribution to knowledge production of war through an intersectional lens. Examining Nepal is theoretically important, given that Nepal's civil war (1996–2006) – often called the Maoist war – highly relied on women's knowledge and labour. However, even though women played a crucial role in the war, women's knowledge and experiences were not taken seriously in Nepal's peace agreement nor in the NAP for implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. In particular, this chapter looks at the reintegration process of women ex-combatants and argues that their diverse backgrounds regarding caste and ethnicity produced diverse challenges and resistance against their knowledge of war, instead offering multi-layered stigmatization, stereotyping, discrimination and ultimately rejection. In particular, Dalit and low-caste women ex-combatants experience intersectional epistemic violence as their knowledge of war is silenced and, in some cases, even erased. This chapter thus urges that intersectional reintegration programmes and an inclusive WPS agenda are vital to advancing women's rights and security in postwar Nepal.

Chapter 6 by Jenny Lorentzen explores what we know and what we do not know about Malian women's testimonies in the context of the emerging episteme of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). Research increasingly asserts that global discourse about women's roles in preventing violent extremism tends to represent women in highly gender-stereotypical and limited ways, and the voices of women who have experienced extremist violence are often missing from

these accounts. Starting from an understanding of the omissions and silences in the global discourse as forms of epistemic violence, this chapter discusses the ways in which knowledge about women's experiences with violent extremism is produced and circulated and the possibilities and limitations for this knowledge to inform the global discourse. Epistemic agency is explored in an analysis of the ways that women's own testimonies align and/or contrast with ideas about women's potential roles and contributions found in the global discourse on gender and P/CVE.

Chapter 7 by Priscyll Anctil Avoine is about the production of war knowledge through the narrative and embodied epistemic agency of the 'insurgent woman,' i.e. the ex-*guerrillera* fighters and ex-clandestine militants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc-ep), here referred to as the *farianas*. First, this chapter reflects on the epistemic silences and absences that surround the category of insurgent women through the WPS agenda and feminist praxis, and in the Colombian context. Second, this chapter delves into the epistemic embodied agency of insurgent women by exposing three ways in which the *farianas*' war knowledge contests typical understandings of reincorporation and peace, reclaiming both narrative and embodied forms of epistemic agency: by recovering their posture as insurgent women, by proposing their own feminist views in reincorporation and by narrating their insurgent memories.

Chapter 8 by Anastasiia Chupis analyses the dynamic role of women in both military and humanitarian capacities within the armed forces of Ukraine. She does so from her positionality as a 'living witness' to the war waged in her country by Russia. In an autoethnographic account she merges the passed-on memories of her own grandmother and great-grandmother who experienced World War II as Soviet citizens, with her own experiences of living through the current war. She has chosen not to join the army, but many of her women friends have found themselves on the front line. In dialogue with them she writes forth her research findings on how they gain new knowledge about the gendered challenges of military life and how they seek to implement gender equality in the army and beyond. In so doing, Anastasiia Chupis emerges as a 'knower' that through her research exercises narrative epistemic agency.

Chapter 9 by Annika Björkdahl and Johanna Mannergren focuses on the production of gendered knowledge in digital spaces, particularly through the activism of Nadia Murad, a Yazidi genocide survivor. By analysing her use of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), this chapter explores how Murad transforms her embodied experience of violence under ISIS into powerful advocacy. On X she champions justice, recognition and reparation for survivors of the Yazidi genocide while also challenging patriarchal norms. Using a netnographic approach, this chapter reveals how Murad gains epistemic power, producing and sharing knowledge online, while destabilizing traditional gendered views on who can hold and exercise authoritative knowledge.

Concluding reflections

The conceptual framework of epistemic power, epistemic violence and epistemic (in)justice presented in this Introduction serves as the foundation for this volume's

critical examination of gendered knowledge production within the context of the WPS agenda. We propose epistemic agency as a central theoretical lens, and have explored its two primary dimensions: embodied epistemic agency and narrative epistemic agency. Both dimensions relate to an individual's capacity and intent to act within the world and effect change through knowledge production. Epistemic power entails the capacity not only to produce and disseminate knowledge, but also to ensure its acceptance and influence within broader intellectual and social frameworks. It involves the authority to determine what is recognized as legitimate and credible knowledge, thereby shaping the episteme. However, the exercise of epistemic power is inherently accompanied by forms of epistemic violence. This violence manifests through the marginalization and silencing of some knowers, the exclusion of diverse knowledges and the erasure or denial of certain lived experiences that do not align with dominant knowledge systems.

The theoretical advancements in this volume are anchored in empirical investigations regarding the gendered knowledge production around some seminal conflicts spanning different spaces and times. Several critical questions related to knowledge production, including what knowledge is produced, how it is produced, by whom, in what contexts, and for whom will be addressed in the following chapters.

The authors bring to the fore the epistemic agency of women that individually and collectively produces knowledge, and gives credit to them, and the actual epistemic power they have exerted in deepening and gendering our knowledge about war, its gendered implications, complexities, intersections and positionalities. At the same time, by reading how the outcomes of embodied experiential knowledge are constrained by epistemic violence, we deepen understandings of global, gendered hierarchies that impact knowledge of war and insecurities. The chapters show that the production of knowledge is a fundamentally human process, always ongoing, always dynamic and frictional, with a potential for transformation, as the evolution of the WPS agenda demonstrates. There is also a recognition that there is a tension between epistemic power through epistemic agency on the one hand and epistemic violence through by-passing, omissions and silences of knowledge on the other hand.

The following chapters access the gendered predicaments of war through women's epistemic agency, bringing women's experiences to light – knowledge often obscured in broader analyses of war. Despite the emotional weight of anxiety, antagonism, sorrow and suffering embedded in their knowledge of war, sharing these experiences can – under conducive circumstances – gender the knowledge of war. Yet, when women's embodied experiences become part of the formal knowledge system, there is a concern that the complexity of their experiences may be lost, and the knowledge may be interpreted or reproduced in unpredictable ways. The multifaceted and complex experiences of women during war confront the oversimplified frameworks that prevail in Peace and Conflict Studies, Transitional Justice research and even within the WPS agenda, revealing their inadequacies in capturing the complexities and gendered dimensions of war. The following analyses reveal how women's knowledge from contemporary conflicts could speak into the existing episteme of the WPS agenda and transform it.

Through this collection of cases and through a connective reading across the cases we find that women's knowledge production in conflict-affected societies,

such as Ukraine, Israel/Palestine, Nepal, Myanmar, Colombia, North America, Iraq, Liberia and Mali, plays a transformative role in reshaping how we understand war. As epistemic agents, women offer distinct perspectives, grounded in their lived experiences of conflict, survival, transitional justice and peacebuilding. Their knowledge often challenges dominant knowledge paradigms, revealing the complex interplay of violence and gender, and the gendered impacts of war. However, women knowers frequently suffer from epistemic injustice where their experiences and insights are discredited or undervalued due to gendered biases, and where their experiences are underrepresented in the frameworks through which we understand war and peace. Despite these challenges, women's knowledge has had a significant impact on the global epistemology of war and peace, most notably within the WPS agenda. Women's knowledge from these conflict-affected societies has expanded the global understanding of war, linking gender justice with peace and demonstrating the necessity of integrating gendered perspectives in the episteme of war and peace.

Taken together, the contributors to this volume collectively produce new insights into the crucial link between knowers and the hegemonic discourses of war and peace. By connecting the epistemic agency at the micro-level to the global production of knowledge at the macro-level, light is shed on the power dynamics of the production of gendered knowledge of war.

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