
Summary

The study analyses demilitarized notions of masculinity offered by three, civil society peace initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia a decade after the Dayton peace agreement. The empirical study contributes to the question of peace development from the perspective of gender and conflict studies. According to a gender sensitive definition, peace is understood as a process towards the absence of direct as well as structural violence not only in the public but also in the private realm, encompassing gender sensitive conditions such as equal life chances for all, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation (Harders and Clasen 2011, p. 331 f.). The study draws mainly on research into gendered symbolisms referring to hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality as central concepts. The term, militarized masculinity, is used to refer to notions of masculinity tied to context specific military attributes, which became hegemonic in a specific violent conflict.

The study also aims to employ the insights of academic research on masculinity and violent conflict in practical debates on peace building. It thus contributes to the field of gender sensitive peace work, which traditionally has a strong focus on the material and political participation of *women* in peace processes. In this study, criteria of masculinity-reflected peace work are extracted from gender and conflict studies. They consist of a conceptual framework as well as further process and content orientated criteria. They are applied to the work of the peace initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia analysed in the first step. The study also contributes to the debate on evaluating peace work by introducing a concept of theory-based evaluation using quality criteria. Instead of aiming to prove the effects of peace efforts on peace writ large, the peace potential of the projects is assessed using quality criteria.

Methods

A constructivist notion of Grounded Theory Methodology is applied. The theoretical sample consists of 57 interviews and focus groups, numerous documents, visual material, participant observation as well as field notes based on three study visits conducted

over several weeks in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Prior to the main analysis, the initiatives are described using evaluation criteria. Based thereon, an assessment of whether the genuine goals of the projects were reached follows. The validity of the research is documented using quality criteria of constructivist qualitative research (Steinke 2000; Strübing 2008).

Results

From 2001 to 2005, a campaign for the right to conscientious objection in Bosnia-Herzegovina was waged by local activists, including many young men who were being drafted to the military forces which were then still separated along ethnicised lines. Their main goal was to raise awareness and achieve the acceptance of conscientious objection. Activists recounted that in both entities of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the completion of military service was regarded as achieving full masculinity. During their campaign, activists presented a range of alternative notions of masculinity to different audiences. One argument was that helping the weak rather than the powerful was a better way of serving the country. This argument constructed military service as a subjugate masculinity, while helping was depicted as an upright way of being a man. The idea of compulsory military service was maintained in this argument, though not as a service to the nation but to the (multi-ethnic) country. This is in contrast to a different argument according to which activists dismissed entirely the discourse of obligation. They maintained that objectors simply had more fun, better parties, more contact with women and better sex. They suggested that military servants should instead spend their time in army barracks doing hard masculinized work or underrated feminized work such as cleaning toilets, far away from women, alone with pornographic magazines. Activists deployed irony and humour to question the military's ability to confer full masculinity on young men. They claimed that all attributes of masculinity the military seemed to promise could be just as easily attained in civil life. While presenting quite a range of demilitarized notions of masculinity, activists consciously did not question heterosexual norms. They said it was not possible to do so at that time in addition to questioning nationalism and military service.

The initiative for peace building and cooperation in Croatia (IZMIR – Inicijativa izgradnje mira i suradnje) is a network of members of opposing civil society affiliations in Croatia: peace and human rights groups on the one side contrasted by Croatian veterans' and victims' organizations on the other. The analysis focuses on the members' accounts of a series of founding workshops from 2004 to 2007. At that time, veterans' groups in many parts of Croatia led demonstrations against the indictment of Ante Gotovina and other Croatian generals at the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, instead celebrating them as heroes and martyrs (Schäuble 2014). Peace and human rights groups, on the other hand, had criticized the role of Croatian politics and armed forces in terms of their practices towards the Serb

minority in Croatia since the beginning of the war. The main aim of the dialogue initiative was to ease the opposition of civil society groups in Croatia and jointly foster the peace process within the country and the region. During the dialogue, the group of veterans were anxious to disassociate themselves from a “killer” image. They did not want to be seen as people who were at one stage eager to do battle and kill. During the dialogue, veterans were able to find a position beyond the polarized images of the immaculate hero on the one hand and the war criminal on the other. They positioned themselves as war-experienced people with an obligation to peace. This position was also open to women. However, at the same time, the experience of fighting on the front line as a marker of military masculinity stabilized their masculinity but more importantly military affiliation. Most veterans largely maintained the discourse of the war in Croatia as a defence of the homeland against the external Serb aggressor. Participating in a dialogue with peace and human rights’ activists, already implicated that they accepted the existence of more diverse views on the war. Veterans needed to retain their discourse on the nation, in order to maintain the support in their own rows.

“Male Embroidery” (Muški vez) is an action art project by the Belgrade artists’ group Škart held in 2007 and 2008. The young men involved did not see this specific activity as a peace initiative, but rather as an art performance, while most of them were involved in peace groups in Serbia. They performed classic embroidery in public places such as cafes, streets and public places or at bus stops. The performances were unannounced and uncommented. Activists readily explained to bystanders what they were stitching. When interviewed, the activists said “Male Embroidery” was a provocation, holding that needlework is an inherently female task in Serbia. Audience reactions (limited to serendipitous passers-by) were non-violent. This was in strong contrast to threats and violent reactions by nationalist groups towards peace and LGBTI-demonstrations at that time – groups that were displaying alternative masculinities as well. Feminist research on the history of European embroidery holds that stitching has played a central role in constructing femininity as well as notions of nation. By performing a female task in public places, activists calmly and even blithely did without the claim to hegemonic masculinity over women and other men. This claim had been violently enforced in times of crisis. By performing a traditional craft, they could not be delegitimized as foreign, a discourse which was used to counter any criticism of nationalist politics. From a gender theoretical point of view, this art performance can be regarded as peace activism challenging militarized notions of masculinity by offering alternatives that could not easily be delegitimized.

The analysis of the three cases shows how non-violent, peace-orientated notions of masculinity were constructed in the post-war contexts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. The study shows how demilitarized notions of masculinity were constructed vis-à-vis local discourses marked by militarized hegemonic claims. One of the central results is that offering demilitarized notions of masculinity went hand in hand with confirming aspects of hegemonic gender norms in order to stabilize masculinity. Heterosexuality and notions of the nation played a central role.

Concerning the second research question, the criteria were applied to the results of the analysis. Even though the peace projects had very different scopes, all of them were rated as highly relevant to peace building from a masculinity theoretical perspective.

Conclusions

The study confirms that the hegemonic gender order is flexible, adaptable and durable. It has been the spine of the militarization of societies as feminist research has shown in the case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. My study suggests that the hegemonic gender order was an important, post-war reference point that peace activists could not simply ignore.

The analysis shows that peace activists constructed less militarized and less nationalistic notions of masculinity. These notions though, borrowed much from the hegemonic gender order, so as to be recognized as masculinity in public discourse. Challenging militarized masculinities and nationalist divisions was already such a strong deviance from hegemonic discourse that activists felt the need to stabilize masculinity by using elements of the hegemonic order. All peace groups analysed here, kept heterosexuality stable in their discourse. The group of veterans in the second case study also confirmed their hegemonic discourse along the lines of the victimized (Croat) nation, while condemning violence and indicating their acceptance of other views. Male Embroidery subverted gender norms and appropriated tradition. Activists of all groups transformed militarized, nationalist notions of masculinity by reconstructing selected elements of hegemonic discourse in a less violent, more dialogue-orientated way.

From a normative point of view, there is a tension between challenging militarized masculinity and nationalist discourse on the one hand, and the aim of a gendered peace on the other. The study shows that peace activists were able to offer demilitarized notions of masculinity, but were not in a position to transform the hegemonic gender order. They had to refer to it, and by doing so promoted a peace-time version of the hegemonic order, not completely in line with the ideal of a gendered peace. At this point, it can be discussed whether this can be seen as a step in the process towards a gendered peace or rather as confirming gendered hierarchies barring the way towards gender justice. More pragmatic is the conclusion that it is possible to offer demilitarized notions of masculinity in post-war contexts, but that further efforts towards gender justice are needed in less violent episodes as well.

Applying the criteria of masculinity-reflected peace work proved the conceptual framework a useful tool for assessing the peace potential of the projects from a masculinity theoretical perspective. The other criteria turned out to be more diverse, as they are based on numerous research results. They therefore have to be adapted to each context and amended by new research results. More studies are necessary concerning

the interconnectedness of the criteria as well as between masculinity and the development of peace in general leading towards a gender orientated theory of peace development. The model of theory-based evaluation using quality criteria is a useful tool for assessing project activities in terms of the qualities of peace building in a comprehensible way.

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