
Barbie in the War Zone

Jennifer Turpin

The two-story house has pale yellow walls, checkerboard floors and charming, wood-framed windows. But something's wrong— its glass panes are cracked, and bullet holes decorate the walls. On the balcony stands a soldier in battle fatigues clutching an assault rifle. The scene is not the West Bank, or Kuwait, or Iraq. It's the "Forward Command Post," a new toy for children as young as age 5. It's a bombed out version of Barbie's Dream House.

Complete with U.S. flag, the 10-pound "fully outfitted battle zone" sells for \$45 at an American department store. Another version, the "Elite Operations Forward Command Post" for children is by "Toys R Us" and sells for \$30 on the internet. "This bombed-out version of Barbie's Dream House is sure to excite bloodthirsty passions in even the most passive of preschoolers," writes a customer from Minneapolis who reviewed the toy on Amazon.com's website. While Congress prepared for war last Christmas, toy companies sought profits from war toys such as "Clay Ramsey, U.S. Counter-Terrorism Advisor," "American Freedom Fighters Live From Afghanistan," "Command Headquarters Tunnel Combo," and the "Osama Bin Laden Head," offered by Protect and Serve Toys "to allow enthusiasts to enact what it may be like when we finally catch him" (Asimov, 2002).

We need to ask what these toys tell us about our broader culture and about the roles of women and men in wartime. We need to ask why, during war, gender differences become further reified and enforced, and male aggression and violence are celebrated.

The past century has witnessed the killing of about 105 million people in wars – more than three quarters of all war dead recorded since the year 1550 (Hauchler and Kennedy, 1994, p. 183). Most people killed in wars are civilians. With the use of high-altitude bombing, more powerful bombs, and a strategy of "total war" (or trying to wipe out the enemy's homeland, not just its soldiers), it is impossible to distinguish combatants from civilians when the killing takes place. While in WWII, 50% of the casualties were civilians, in the 1980s this figure rose to 80%. Currently, 90% of those killed in war are civil-

ians. Women and their children constitute the vast majority of these civilian deaths (Hauchler and Kennedy, 1994; Vickers, 1993).

We need to pay attention not only to civilians, but also to the unique ways in which women and girls suffer during war. I argue this not to underestimate the suffering that men and boys experience – suffering that is also gendered – but because paying attention to the experiences of women and girls will reveal some of the underlying causes and features of war and violence that must be addressed. Asking ourselves the question "where are the women and girls" draws our attention to some very disturbing aspects of war and militarism that also help to explain its causes and remedies.

Horrifying reports of mass rape, aimed at "ethnic cleansing" attracted widespread public attention when the war in former Yugoslavia took place, but wartime rape is not unique to that war. Soviet soldiers raped approximately 2 million women in eastern Germany in 1945. In 1971 Pakistani soldiers raped more than 200,000 Bengali women in the Bangladesh war of independence (Hauchler and Kennedy, 1994). One estimate claims that during the war against Kuwait, Iraqi troops raped as many as 3,200 women between August 1990 and February 1991 (Enloe, 1993, p. 186). The link between rape and war has been ignored by many policymakers, and we certainly don't hear much about it in our news coverage, but feminists have identified wartime rape as a symptom of the gendered nature of war (cf. Enloe, 1993; Stiglmayer, 1994; Brownmiller, 1994; MacKinnon, 1994; Reardon, 1985). Even the United Nations peacekeepers – the forces sent to protect human rights in war-torn areas – have committed rape and sexual abuse against women and girls. Cases have been documented in Mozambique, Somalia, Cambodia, and other regions.

Attitudes of military personnel often support the sexual abuse of women and girls. When the head of the U.N. Commission in Cambodia was questioned about the sexual abuse of women and girls by U.N. troops, he responded that he was "not a puritan: 18-year-old, hot-blooded soldiers had a right to drink a few beers and

chase after young beautiful things of the opposite sex” (Fetherston, 1995, p. 22). And in 1995, when three U.S. Marines were charged with assaulting and raping a 12-year-old girl on the Japanese Island of Okinawa, the United States Pacific Commander told reporters: “I think it was absolutely stupid, as I’ve said several times. For the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had a girl.” (e.g., a prostitute) (Enloe, 1996, p. 15). In addition to implicitly accepting rape as a part of military life, militaries around the world also support and may even enforce prostitution attached to their military bases.

Not only do women and girls suffer from wartime rape, they are also most likely to be war’s refugees. There are at least 46 million people worldwide who have lost their homes to war. More than 4/5 of war refugees are women and young girls, who also experience additional and sexualized violence during their flight. Refugee women often are the sole caretakers of their children, and are separated from their spouses and extended family in exile.

Wartime sexual violence against women and children takes place not only during the war, but also when they are in flight. The UN High Commissioner on Refugees cites attacks on women and girls by refugee camp guards as a major problem. These girls and women frequently suffer sexual abuse, abduction, and forced prostitution. Going back to Barbie’s bombed-out dream house, we see that this toy in some important ways does signify our conceptions and enactments of wartime violence. Barbie is a gendered victim, requiring protection from men, but vulnerable precisely because of her idealized feminine beauty. Her dream house has been shattered by war instigated by enemies outside the U.S.

As an academic enterprise, Peace and Conflict Studies must challenge from both a scientific and a moral perspective, this view of gender and of violence. Universities have a critical role to play in doing so. Most universities claim to aim to prepare students for global citizenship, so they can make the world better. Yet as Robert Perzig pointed out in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, there are really two universities: the bureaucratic University of buildings and departments, and the community of thought that makes up the “University of the Mind”. The bureaucratic university faces numerous obstacles in promoting critical thought and

action. Its ties to the state, to the military, and to corporations hardly promote freethinking and expression. Rather, they trap the University in a web of silence. As part of the university, we must resist this trap and ensure that the University be a site for debate, for serious con-

templation and analysis; one that promotes critical thinking and new theories and methods. Although the university has always functioned as a central site for such radical thinking, paradoxically, it may also silence particular perspectives and privilege others.

It is therefore essential to institutionalize the study of peace, conflict, and justice required to guarantee its permanence. This is one of the major aims of the Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA),

the national association of peace and conflict studies programs in the U.S. The recent founding of this new Peace Studies Centers at the University of Queensland and at the University of Texas are important steps forward, particularly at a time when we need to challenge the idea that war is an inevitable way to solve our global human problems. Integrating the study of gender with the study of war will help us to provide real alternatives to war and violence.

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DOWN ON THE GROUND

It didn't hit me straight off
only later when I was thinking about
what the old Digger had been trying to say
well, not trying, he'd been saying it all right
if I can just get the words sorted out.
I was doing something at the time
can't even remember what it was
now, but he said he'd had a good life
he had a good wife, a good marriage &
he'd never been short of a bob or a job
but eighty-five years later (& this
is what got him=== eighty-five years later)
he'd been standing there with those left of
those left of his mates & it wasn't as if
he didn't know what was coming but
with the very first one of the
twenty-one gun salute, he
was down on the ground.
TV or radio=== I can't remember
but I couldn't get it out of my mind.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS
HYDE PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

