CHAPTER THREE

WPS AND R2P: THEORISING RESPONSIBILITY AND PROTECTION

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Being protected is an identity to be avoided as much as possible.¹

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the potential affinities and drawbacks of integrating Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS). We begin from the premise that gender matters in/to both the WPS agenda and R2P discourse, but demonstrate differences in the ways in which WPS and R2P articulate the key concepts of responsibility and protection. Our argument is developed in three stages. First, we trace the intellectual heritage of R2P and WPS, to provide context for our analysis. Second, we draw on feminist analyses that have theorised protection as inherently gendered² and offer our own analysis that uses the concept of gender as an analytical tool. Using gender as an analytical tool means theorising gender not only as a noun, an adjective and a verb but also as a logic that organises text and speech. Third, we conclude that while there may be significant drawbacks in co-articulating R2P and WPS, there is also the possibility that integrating the two sets of discourses may have a positive impact on the way responsibility and protection are thought of and worked with in contemporary global politics.

¹ Spike Peterson, Gendered States (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 54.
I. The Intellectual Heritage of R2P

The first part of this section provides a brief sketch of the intellectual heritage and development of R2P from its post-‘Cold War’ origins and traces the trajectory, strength and standing of R2P in global politics to date. While this is a short history, relatively speaking, the founding principle of R2P—the idea of a responsible sovereign capable of protecting its own citizens—can be traced back to the political thought of Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, the legitimacy of the authority embodied by Leviathan was conditional on the effective preservation of ‘the safety and well-being of the population’. The political moment at which R2P was first articulated was a moment of flux in the international sphere, a moment preceded by a decade of complex social and political changes and a moment in which many populations did not enjoy such ‘safety and well-being’. The 1990s saw not only the end of the so-called ‘Cold War’ and the various contestations over political authority that occurred in the territories formerly contained within the Soviet Union but also the emergence of ‘new wars’ and ‘failed states’, which blurred the distinctions between local, national and transnational actors while simultaneously problematizing the conventional concept of sovereign authority. Further, global reportage of these events was made possible through the rapid spread of new information and communication technologies and the increasing mediatisation of violence and bloodshed. R2P emerged in response to the widely documented ‘failings’ of the United Nations throughout the 1990s and the inability of the international community to prevent and respond to genocide and mass killings in Rwanda and Bosnia; Thomas Weiss makes this point in relation to the lack of Security Council reactions vis-à-vis Rwanda and Kosovo, describing the inaction as the ‘immediate stimuli’ prompting the convening of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).

Although the idea has long historical roots, the foundational conceptualisation of sovereignty in the ICISS report draws on the work of academics and practitioners engaged throughout the 1990s in developing a legal framework to respond to the growing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). ‘Sovereignty as responsibility’ was initially articulated as such by the then Special Representative

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3 “The obligation of subjects to the sovereign, is understood to last as long, and no longer than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them”: Hobbes, cited in Anne Orford, International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 122. See also Alex J. Bellamy and Ruben Reike, “The Responsibility to Protect and International Law,” Global Responsibility to Protect 2, no. 3 (2010): 271.

4 Cited in Orford (2011), International Authority and the Responsibility to Protect, 124.
