TRANSFORMING POWER TO PUT WOMEN AT THE HEART OF PEACEBUILDING

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Since the end of a 10-year armed conflict [in Bougainville Island, Papua New Guinea], more than 30 years ago, women walked into the jungles and brokered peace with armed combatants, in whose name peace was brokered, weapons collected, political agreements adopted. They have been sustaining peace, providing recommendations for a sustainable approach to development, and a shift from gender-based violence to gender justice.\textsuperscript{2} S. Bhagwan-Rolls and A. Evans. (2020). Feminist Peace and Security in the Pacific Islands [see p.52 below]

On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) – a landmark resolution on women’s role in peacebuilding – progress on women’s rights and leadership in peace and security decision making continues to fall short. Many legal and normative frameworks to secure the rights of women are being consistently undermined and the universality of human rights denied. An analysis of major peace processes between 1992 and 2018 shows that women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and 4% of signatories.\textsuperscript{2} OECD data showed that in 2016-2017, only 1% of all gender-focused funding went to women’s organizations.\textsuperscript{3} While many states claim to champion gender equality and women’s empowerment, and 84 UN member states\textsuperscript{4} have developed National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), their actions rarely match up to the rhetoric.

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

To build on the emerging discipline of Feminist Peace and Security, Oxfam commissioned a series of regionally focused essays from women’s rights activists and academics working in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific to reflect on the state of the WPS agenda. The authors were asked to consider the following questions:

1. Why, despite the stated commitment to the WPS agenda, has progress been so slow?

2. Why are women – who often suffer the brunt of violence, have experience as first responders in crises, and who commonly serve as grassroots mediators – so often excluded from formal peace talks and political processes?

3. If women are invited to the peace table, which women?

4. What needs to happen to ‘shift the power’ to women and communities most affected by crises and conflict so that they shape the decisions that affect their lives?

5. What would a Feminist Peace and Security agenda look like?

The resulting essays highlight both the specificities of each region and the common challenges of realizing the full implementation of the WPS Agenda. We held a series of webinars to reflect on and respond to the reports, and the learnings from those discussions have been incorporated into this introduction. This series of essays has been a collective endeavour, bringing together a wide range of expertise, knowledge and experience.

An analysis of major peace processes between 1992 and 2018 shows that women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and 4% of signatories.
The essays place the struggle to realize women’s rights in each region within their historical context. Despite the regions’ very different histories and traditions, the essays show remarkable similarities in terms of the key trends and problems faced by women around the world in some of the most challenging contexts. Using feminist analysis to critique the structures and institutions that constitute the WPS agenda, the authors expose how mainstream conceptions of war and peace block both women’s meaningful participation and sustainable peace. They explore the interplay between colonialism, militarism, displacement, poverty and patriarchy – power in its many guises – and how these have become institutionalized within the peacebuilding agenda. As a result, the very institutions and policies that are responsible for safeguarding and delivering the WPS agenda become barriers to meaningful progress, leading us to question whether any agenda which is safeguarded by inequitable institutions could ever be transformative. The essays challenge us to see beyond UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, and to focus our gaze on women’s action, agency and lived realities. In doing so they illuminate the original intent of the agenda; a feminist vision for peace and security.
Principles of Feminist Peace and Security

Feminist Peace and Security uses a post-colonial and anti-racist lens to recognize and seek to understand all power and how it is exercised. It should challenge social norms, practices and intersectional power relations as well as gender norms and binaries and acknowledge that toxic masculinity affects the whole of society and not just women. Feminist Peace and Security seeks to tackle and eliminate the root causes of the violence women experience before and during conflict and in so-called peacetime, because the most dangerous place for a woman is often in the home. It understands violence as spanning the public and the personal, the community and the home. While acting as leaders in their community, in addition to their ‘formal’ work, women usually shoulder the responsibilities of domestic and unpaid care work. The stress of dealing with the trauma of war and crises while being responsible for keeping their families and communities together puts unacceptable pressure on women. Feminist peace recognizes these multiple roles and creates appropriate support mechanisms – childcare, economic empowerment, psychosocial services and access to self-care – to ensure that women are supported and can share the burden with men.

Feminist Peace and Security recognizes that peacebuilding is intersectional and active and needs to put at its centre those who are most affected by the crisis. This means that women and marginalized groups from all sections of society, particularly at the grassroots, must be at the heart of decision making at all levels. To be truly inclusive and transformational, a Feminist Peace and Security agenda and its champions must facilitate local women’s peace and human rights organizations to generate their own conflict-resolution and peace-making initiatives and support these, rather than merely adding women into existing structures and processes.

Feminist peace recognizes that violence and insecurity take many forms, including economic violence, and are experienced differently by different groups. Poverty and inequality are forms of violence, as are the exploitation of natural resources, vested interests and failure to address climate change and natural hazards. Multi-dimensional security requires a proper systems analysis to understand intersecting dependencies and the interventions needed. For people in crisis and extreme poverty, acting on single issues is not enough. Insecurities must be tackled together, comprehensively. Where states pursue the goal of state security, a feminist peace and security agenda should not be co-opted to these ends. It must not be not be instrumentalized or depoliticized, because it is inherently political.

A FAILURE OF GLOBAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE WHEN IT’S NEEDED MOST

The United Nations Security Council is mandated by the UN charter to protect international peace and security. Yet too often it has failed to live up to its responsibilities. From Yemen to Syria to Myanmar, geopolitical interests are barriers to finding solutions to global crises. According to David Baldwin, state interest and security is associated with traditional conceptions of power, whether defined in material or normative terms. Emblematic of this consolidation of ‘hard power’ is the veto, which enables From Yemen to Syria to Myanmar, geopolitical interests are barriers to finding solutions to global crises.
any one of the UN Security Council’s five permanent members (the P5) to prevent the adoption of any ‘substantive’ draft Council resolution, regardless of its level of international support. As of December 2019, the veto had been wielded 293 times since 1947 to stop action on matters of international importance.12 As described by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, ‘Such a monopoly on authority is a core characteristic of traditional security that ignores the root cause analysis of violence and further traps conflict-affected people as prisoners of power competition.’13

A stark illustration of the system’s failure was the UN Security Council response to the UN Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire in March 2020 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNSC permanent members [China and the US] threatened to wield their veto, and three months of bickering, political point scoring and geopolitical posturing took place before the resolution was passed. This is a reflection of the ways conflict between two global powers can hijack an agenda that is of importance to the world. Without decisive action, the violence continued in places such as Yemen, Burkina Faso and Myanmar, people continued to suffer and die needlessly, and the virus continued to spread.

THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

For years, women’s rights and feminist organizations across the world have campaigned for recognition of women’s contributions to preventing conflict, building peace and delivering relief and recovery. Twenty years ago, UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000)14 called on member states and other key actors to do just that. Since UNSCR 1325 (2000), the UN Security Council has passed nine additional resolutions, developing and expanding the focus, creating what is now known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.15

Women’s participation in political processes is not only one of the main pillars of the WPS agenda but is one of the keys to building and sustaining peace. Evidence shows that women’s participation in peace processes leads to a higher chance of reaching an agreement, and that the resultant peace will last on average 15 years longer than if women are excluded16 and have influence over the process. As one commentator puts it, ‘Women at the negotiating table raise issues that are vital for sustainable peace, expanding peace process agendas. They also more often advocate for excluded groups and the need to address underlying causes of conflict, such as development and human rights issues.’17

Sadly, the promises of UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent resolutions have not managed to close the gap for women’s meaningful participation in peace and security decision making, nor have they led to greater investment in conflict prevention. Rather than directing energy, resources and political will to addressing the root causes of conflict and ensuring that women are at the heart of the agenda, building security apparatus for its own sake and ‘hard security’ remain the priority – with increased investment in arms, counter-terrorism initiatives and militarization.

In addition, security sector governance policies and mechanisms need to redefine processes of engagement that do not simply rely on women’s invitation “to the table” but instead take bold steps at the regional and

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Yemen – a failure to include women

Over the past five years, war in Yemen has killed thousands of civilians, devastated communities and infrastructure, and brought untold suffering. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected because of negative gender norms, a discriminatory legal system and economic inequality which has compounded their vulnerability to violence. For instance, exposure to sexual violence increased from 9% before the escalation of the conflict to 30% by 2018.

Despite these challenges, women in communities in Yemen have continued to show great leadership in their work to ‘counter radicalization, [and to] advocate for releasing detainees, humanitarian relief and early recovery, demilitarization of schools, reintegration of child combatants, and social cohesion’. Women are engaged in conflict resolution on multiple levels by promoting peace and providing security when possible. They have been organizing within Yemen and outside of the country, and have come up with clear recommendations for decision makers.

The creation of the UN-sponsored Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security and a stated commitment to include at least 30% of women in all peace negotiations should have secured women’s inclusion. However, women have been noticeably absent from many of the formal UN processes and events. At the Yemen peace talks in Stockholm in December 2018, only one woman was invited to participate out of either delegation. Such poor representation puts unacceptable pressure on the few women who are present to ‘represent all women’, as remarked by Rana Ghanem, the single woman delegate at the Stockholm talks.

In March 2019, over 100 Yemeni women gathered at a conference in Jordan to discuss the role that women can have in the formal consultations and in local groups to work towards peace in Yemen, and their inclusion in the peace negotiations in Yemen. Despite the topic being women’s inclusion, the conference itself had no women speakers on the first day. This was a disappointing outcome from the stated commitment to ensure women’s participation.
WHO IS AT THE TABLE?

One criticism which emerges in all the essays is that the existing WPS paradigm categorizes women as a homogeneous group. They are viewed as ‘peacemakers’ with similar needs, interests and agencies, simply because of their gender. This overlooks all the other intersecting factors that shape women’s needs and expectations such as class, religion, ethnic or racial background, political orientation or geographical place of residence. The system also often excludes the most marginalized women – displaced women, migrant domestic workers, women working in the informal economy, rural women, indigenous women, women living with disability – which in turn keeps their issues, their struggles and their solutions out of the discussion.

As Bhagwan-Rolls and Evans state in their essay, ‘there must be full awareness of power relations and disadvantages caused by unequal international structures and opportunities. A one-size-fits-all approach may create divisions and exclude certain groups and perspectives that do not fit in the WPS framing.’ In places such as the Pacific, the lack of infrastructure and transport makes it costly and challenging to travel, further disenfranchising certain groups. Kaya notes that in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the institutions developing the instruments to implement the WPS agenda, such as the National Action Plan (NAP), only include urban, professional and largely secular women, and have excluded women active in Islamist political parties and internally displaced women.

This exclusion of large groups of women on the ‘margins’, who are not seen as ‘qualified’ to engage in peace and security issues is a weakness of the current system because it means that its instruments and processes only capture the experience of women who have access to power and/or resources. This lack of diversity has meant that the narrative or ‘story’ of women, peace and security is only partially told.

COLONIALISM AND CORRUPTION AS ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

Helen Kezie-Nwoha uses a post-colonial and feminist lens to deconstruct why the African continent has continued to be a site for conflict in the 21st century. Long-running wars have had devastating impacts on populations, and particularly on women, young women and girls. She argues that most of the conflicts can be blamed on the nature of transitions from colonialism, and the absence of transparent democratic processes and corruption leading to lack of delivery of social services and huge spending on the military.

Her essay claims that states across the continent of Africa have never managed to detach themselves from the legacy of colonialism and connects the violent and militarized nature of these newly formed states to this legacy. Colonialism reinforced gender norms and marginalization, militarized masculinities and binaries, and endorsed a patriarchal hierarchy of knowledge. In addition, Kezie-Nwoha illustrates how the liberation movements that overthrew colonial powers ultimately reinforced the same norms that continue to impact nations to
this day. For example, the victorious movements generally excluded women from positions of authority; only those who led and fought were awarded posts in the new governments, ensuring that men occupied most of the seats of power. This trend continues in the institutions of nearly all African nations today.

Kezie-Nwoha’s essay also shows how colonial patriarchal structures have been replicated in the building of peace and security institutions such as the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities. These were created mainly by men, and men have dominated their leadership, ensuring that the male perspective of the world and of conflict resolution is the lens through which all peace and security interventions are mediated. Finally, she argues that the limited understanding of the WPS agenda on the part of foreign diplomats who are commissioned to lead peace processes in Africa has been detrimental to the agenda’s progress. From the United Nations Security Council to the African Union and Regional Economic Communities and States, the understanding of the WPS agenda is far from the transformative agenda that feminists conceived or hoped it to be. Kezie-Nwoha shows how in spite of the limitations, the African women’s peace movement has made efforts to ensure that the WPS agenda is pushing the boundaries for transformative peace.
The militarization of the WPS agenda in the Middle East and North Africa

In her essay, Zeynep Kaya observes the tensions within the WPS agenda in the Middle East and North Africa region. Given that the agenda emerged from UNSCR 1325, the framework and structures cannot help but replicate the ‘hard power’ and agendas of the member states:

“It is an agenda with one foot planted in traditional security conceptions and structures and the other in transnational and feminist peace activism. It is caught between an urge to reflect existing international power structures and normative frameworks and the desire to eliminate, or at least reduce, gender inequalities and include women in peacebuilding.”

Kaya identifies that the UN Security Council’s tendency to associate peace with ‘security’ has led WPS to also be framed within security and war frameworks and defined in terms of masculinities that emphasize militarism and power. As a result, the WPS agenda has moved away from an anti-war and rights-based agenda to one for making wars ‘safer’ for women and using military measures to protect women from sexual violence. In many contexts, the international community has too often substituted ‘peacebuilding’ for ‘peacekeeping’.

Her essay applies a critical perspective to the WPS agenda and focuses on issues in which ‘gender-sensitive’ international frameworks are inadvertently leading to contradictory outcomes for achieving Feminist Peace and Security. The politicization of donor’s channelling funding through the WPS funding streams but conflating it with the preventing or countering violent extremism agenda, leads to the risk of women’s rights...
organisations being instrumentalized and being forced to adopt this agenda if they want to access funding. In other contexts, depoliticization of the agenda by the adoption of a ‘resilience or development approach’ to peacebuilding or humanitarian funding also thwarts progress to realising real peace. International policy approaches such as ‘resilience’ put the onus on individuals and communities to find solutions instead of on the states and international politics that sustain existing inequalities and create conflict in the first place.

Finally, Kaya argues that adopting a feminist analysis can offer multiple advantages over the current securitized approach, including: a potentially genuinely transformative vision of peace and security; a gendered understanding of the root causes of conflict and the continuum of violence through peace and conflict; and a nuanced and context-sensitive approach that safeguards against future conflicts, with women peacebuilders at its heart.

‘SHIFTING THE POWER’ IN PEACEBUILDING IN THE PACIFIC

Women across the Pacific face many challenges: intercommunal violence, negative gender norms which exclude women from formal decision-making spaces, and very high rates of gender-based violence. Alisa Evans and Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls use a feminist analysis of Pacific regional WPS mechanisms to highlight Pacific feminist peacebuilders’ efforts to localize regional peace and security policies through gender-transformative peacebuilding practices.

Their essay shows how Pacific peacebuilding networks operate through traditional and customary systems and engage with faith leaders in efforts to prevent the resurgence of armed conflict. The authors illustrate the importance of understanding the different community structures that influence the status of women across the Pacific Islands, from traditional leaders to the police and security forces as well as local-level government. Engaging with the national government remains a challenge because of the islands’ distance from the national capital, and the fact that all government structures are male-dominated and difficult for women to access.

Finally, the essay highlights how feminist approaches such as working through and building coalitions and community-based women’s movements can genuinely ‘shift the power’ to create real and sustainable change. Since the late 1980s, women have led collaborative advocacy campaigns on peace and security, including responses to armed conflict, political crises and gun violence in Bougainville, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. This approach to organizing can bridge the existing gap in women’s leadership roles within formal mechanisms that are focused on responding to climate change and national disasters.
Lilly Kolts Be’Soer

Lilly Kolts Be’Soer is a women’s human rights defender and advocate for the political, economic and social empowerment of women in her native Papua New Guinea. She believes that the personal is political: ‘We experience all these inequalities [and] discrimination… We need to bring solidarity, build the network to collectively work together to make the change ourselves. We need to get into positions of decision making.’

Lilly believes that power can be transformed so that women’s voices matter in their families and communities as well as at local level and in national government. Working in solidarity with international campaigns such as #IMatter, she brings women together to collectively access power and decision-making and economic resources, and to develop communities without the risk of violence: ‘We have to get ourselves into those positions…. We have to work together.’
CONCLUSION

For the authors in this collection, peace and security for women and other marginalized groups cannot be achieved if it is defined exclusively within the frame of war and militarism. Feminist Peace and Security addresses insecurity before, during and after conflict and understands violence as something that spans from the home to international fora. These essays challenge us to see structural inequalities, including extreme inequality, racism, neo-colonialism and misogyny, as forms of violence. For all four authors, only ‘human security’ – a multidimensional view of security which acknowledges the whole system of inter-dependencies and intersections, and addresses the challenges to the safety, survival, livelihoods and dignity of people and the environment they live in – is real security.

The essays force us to acknowledge that transformative change rarely comes from within the system. Rather it often comes from outside: from the disruption by protest, and from women, youth, local and grassroots movements who are leveraging their power, even though formal channels appear to be closed to them. Women have been finding ways of organizing themselves in coalitions and collectives to make substantial and real change. It is their relentless, often invisible and undervalued work which makes peace and conflict transformation possible.

Feminist Peace and Security requires those with power to decolonize and to share that power. Institutions and elite women close to the centre of decision making must acknowledge their privilege and build bridges to women at the grassroots to enable them to shape the decisions which affect their lives. There must be recognition that access to resources is itself a form of power; that every vibrant society has an active, well-funded civil society; and that women’s rights organizations and LGBTQI+ activists are a critical piece of this civil society and need to be able to set their own agendas, with flexible and consistent funding going directly to grassroots organizations.

Finally, shifting the power in a permanent and meaningful way will require constant vigilance. Fights we thought we’d fought and won cannot be taken for granted. Control over our own bodies, acknowledgment and legislation to criminalize intimate partner violence, and access to opportunities outside the home can all be undone. Derogations from international conventions and legal frameworks are now widespread. The overused phrase ‘building back better’ cannot return us to business as usual but better, but needs a whole paradigm shift – starting with a fairer economic system and transforming our peace and security architecture so that it represents the world as it is, not as it was, such that its mission is to achieve real peace, not manage conflict. Feminist Peace and Security is that bridge to building a peaceful and sustainable future for all.

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# Definitions for Feminist Peace Paper

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<th>Term</th>
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<td><strong>(structural) violence</strong></td>
<td>‘Structural violence has four basic components: exploitation which is focused on the division of labor with the benefits being asymmetrically distributed, penetration which necessitates the control by the exploiters over the consciousness of the exploited thus resulting in the acquiescence of the oppressed, fragmentation which means that the exploited are separated from each other, and marginalization with the exploiters as a privileged class with their own rules and form of interaction’ (M. Caprioli. (2005). Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict. International Studies Quarterly (2005) 49, 161–178, here p. 164.) Structural violence = ‘the violence done to people when their basic needs are not met. This includes the effects of malnutrition, domestic violence, gender subordination, poor education, poor health care and so on.’ (T. Dunne, M. Kurki, S. Smith. (2013). Glossary. In: T. Dunne, M. Kurki, and S. Smith (eds.). (2013). <em>International Relations Theories – Discipline and Diversity</em>. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press)</td>
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<td><strong>(hard) power</strong></td>
<td>‘Feminist theorists have called for a reconceptualization of power from what has been labelled the traditional [sic] sense of ‘power over’ or ‘power as dominance’ (p.71-72) Feminist […] reconceptualizations of power move from the conception of power as a zero-sum game involving individuals where some are winners (the powerful) and others are losers (the powerless), to a variable-sum game involving individuals and collectivities where all can be winners (empowerment).’ (p.72).</td>
<td>Salla. (2001). <em>Women &amp; War, Men &amp; Pacifism</em>. In: I. Skjelsbæk &amp; D. Smith. (2001). <em>Gender, Peace and Conflict</em>. London: Sage Publications.</td>
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<td><strong>Women, Peace and Security</strong></td>
<td>Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR1325), was unanimously adopted by United Nations Security Council on 31 October 2000. SCR1325 marked the first time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; recognized the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. It also stressed the importance of women’s equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security. Since the original UNSC res. 1325 (2000) there have been 9 subsequent; 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2108 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019). These resolutions make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. They guide work to promote gender equality and strengthen women’s participation, protection and rights across the conflict cycle, from conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction</td>
<td><a href="http://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions">http://www.peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions/resolutions</a></td>
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NOTES


4 PeaceWomen. https://www.peacewomen.org/


6 https://www.thoughtco.com/structural-violence-417456


9 It should refrain from instrumentalizing women or women’s rights’ organizations, particularly to pursue state security goals. https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf


18 S. Bhagwan-Rolls and A. Evans. [2020]. pg VII


https://oursecurefuture.org/blog/yemeni-women-peace


30 Z. Kaya, *Feminist Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa* pg XI.


33 Ibid.


36 S. Bhagwan-Rolls and A. Evans. (2020) citing Lilly Koits Be’Soer, Voice for Change, PNG. Interview with authors for paper

37 S. Bhagwan-Rolls and A. Evans. (2020). citing Lilly Koits Be’Soer, Voice for Change, PNG. Interview with authors for paper
