

Student Feature - Theory in Action: Feminism and Peacekeeping

Written by Sarah Smith

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SARAH SMITH, JUN 22 2019

This is adapted from *International Relations Theory* (2017). Get your free copy of the textbook here.

Building peace after conflict is an increasingly central concern of IR scholars – especially as conflicts become broader and more complex. There are also questions regarding how post-conflict societies are to be rebuilt and how best to prevent relapses into conflict. Peacekeeping missions are one way that the international community seeks to institute sustainable peace after conflict and the United Nations' traditional peacekeeping role (understood as acting as an impartial interlocutor or monitor) has broadened considerably. Missions now frequently include a laundry list of state-building roles, including re-establishing police and military forces and building political institutions. Feminist theorists have demonstrated the ways that peacekeeping, as security-seeking behaviour, is shaped by masculine notions of militarised security. Post-conflict situations are generally characterised as the formal cessation of violence between armed combatants, ideally transitioning to a situation where the state has a monopoly on the use of force. It is this shift that peacekeeping missions seek to facilitate, conducting a wide range of tasks such as disarming combatants, facilitating peace deals between various state and non-state groups, monitoring elections and building rule of law capacity in state institutions such as police forces and the military.

Introducing Feminist IR Theory

However, as feminist IR scholars have shown, violence against women often continues in the post-conflict period at rates commensurate to or even greater than during the conflict period. This includes rape and sexual assault, domestic violence and forced prostitution, as well as those selling sex to alleviate financial insecurity. The dominant approach to keeping peace often obscures these kinds of violence. Issues like gender equality and domestic violence (and human rights) are considered 'soft' issues as opposed to the 'hard' or real issues of military security. This understanding of peace, then, is one in which women's security is not central.

Militarized Masculinity in Peacekeeping Operations

<https://peacebuild.org/Lopes%20website%20ready.pdf>

Cynthia Enloe on Militarism and Gender

In terms of structural and indirect violence, women are generally excluded from positions of power and decision-making in reconstruction efforts and have limited access to economic resources. Donna Pankhurst (2008) has theorised what she terms a post-conflict backlash against women, one that is chiefly characterised by high rates of violence and restrictions on women's access to political, economic and social resources post-conflict. The restriction of women's access to such resources – such as basic food, housing and education – makes them more susceptible to gendered violence. This often begins with women's exclusion from peace negotiations and deals, which instead focus on elite actors who are predominantly men, often militarised men. In peacekeeping missions, women are also

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under-represented. In 1993, women made up only 1% of deployed personnel. That figure had only risen to 3% for military and 10% for police personnel by 2014. As gender inequality has become increasingly acknowledged, those involved in peacekeeping have paid more attention to the causes and consequences of women's insecurity in post-conflict settings.

Peacekeepers Accused of Rape

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/rights-groups-failing-prosecute-peacekeepers-accused-rape-car-171024174502894.html>

In October 2000 the UN Security Council devoted an entire session to Women, Peace and Security – adopting Resolution 1325 as a result. This resolution called for a gender perspective to be 'mainstreamed' throughout peace operations and for women to be included in peace agreements and post-conflict decision-making – in addition to the protection of women and girls during conflict. Resolution 1325 calls on all actors to recognise the 'special needs' of women and girls in post-conflict societies, to support local women's peace initiatives, and advocates for the protection of women's human rights in electoral, judiciary and police systems. However, consistent with the construction of a gendered understanding of peace discussed above, there remain limitations to the full implementation of Resolution 1325.

Resolution 1325

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

Three feminist scholars on the need for the UN Secretary-General to commit to gender equality to ensure that peacekeeping lives up to its promise.

Women and Peacekeeping: Time for the UN to Commit to Gender Equality

A United Nations study by Radhika Coomaraswamy (2015) found that gender in peacekeeping continues to be under-resourced politically and financially, and the gendered elements of post-conflict reconstruction are still marginalised in missions. Women still experience high rates of violence post-conflict, are still excluded from peace processes and still ignored in peace-building policy. This is demonstrated, for example, in national and international attempts to disarm former combatants after conflict and reintegrate them into post-conflict society. This is a post-conflict policy area that feminist scholars have routinely exposed as being highly gendered and exclusionary of women who are former combatants. Megan Mackenzie (2010) has attributed this to constructed gender identities that minimise the idea that women are agents in conflict or involved in war-making, instead constructing them as victims with limited agency. In other words, they are subject to war rather than war's actors.

António Guterres: Remarks to Security Council on Women in Peacekeeping

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-04-11/remarks-security-council-women-peacekeeping>

This means not only that women are excluded from disarmament programmes because of socially produced gender norms but also that they are unable to access the material and economic benefits that may flow from such programmes – or the political and social gains they could make from being recognised as legitimate veterans in post-conflict societies. This example demonstrates the power invested in gendered identities, the ways they can shape policy and how gender inequality is perpetuated via such policy.

Finally, international interventions such as peacekeeping missions also contribute to the continuation of violence post-conflict and are a site in which gendered identities are produced. There have been numerous reports of peacekeepers perpetrating sexual violence against women, girls and boys while on mission. This issue gained much attention in 2015 and into 2016, when a United Nations whistleblower exposed not only reports of sexual abuse of

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children in the Central African Republic by French peacekeepers but also the United Nation's inaction in the face of these reports. From a feminist perspective, the impunity that peacekeepers enjoy – despite rhetorical commitments to zero tolerance – is a result of gendered security imperatives in which militarised security and the coherence of the institution (whether that be an international organisation or a state) is prioritised over the welfare of the individual.

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Index

<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>

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