Women, Peace and… Continued Militarism? Revisiting UNSCR 1325 and Its African Roots

https://www.e-ir.info/2021/01/12/women-peace-and-continued-militarism-revisiting-unscr-1325-and-its-african-roots/

NICO EDWARDS, JAN 12 2021

Women's mobilisation for peace rests on a long and engaging history – however, it is a history most often told through the example of the creation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) during a meeting at the Hague in 1915. Lost in such representations are the wide-ranging women-led struggles for peace emanating from the African continent, where gender activists have long emphasised the amplified effects of conflict and war on women and children, and demanded the advancement of women as integral to the promotion of peace and security (Badri and Tripp 2017; Hendricks 2017). Such feminist civil society mobilisation paved the way for the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (Hendricks 2017; Olonisakin, Hendricks and Okech 2015), for the first time recognising the connections between women's rights, gender inequality and the promotion of sustainable peace and security within the headquarters of international policymaking.

After first outlining Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda, I then explore these normative policy frameworks in relation to the insights gained by feminist peace advocates and critical commentators from Africa and beyond. What is being said about the agenda two decades after its conception? Has it brought the international struggle for peace closer to the very women it was intended to serve – or, paradoxically, alienated them even further?

After almost twenty years of implementation it stands clear that the WPS agenda, in more than one instance, faces the risk of being harnessed for the promotion of its reverse objectives, giving women a role within militarist processes instead of challenging their origins. As the following rumination will show, such examples contain invaluable lessons for the continued implementation of Resolution 1325 and the struggles to make Women, Peace and Security a mandate to be reckoned with in practice.

Women, Peace and Security as a normative framework

Resolution 1325 relies upon two fundamental propositions: that social justice and women's rights are "unobtainable in a militaristic world" (Vellacott 1993, 23), and that peace "is inextricably linked with the advancement of women" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016b, 251). The latter statement comes from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, outlining the themes that would later be developed in the WPS agenda. Highlighting the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective in all international work related to peace and security, the document furthermore draws heavily on the agendas raised in the Namibia Plan of Action and the Windhoek Declaration. Emerging earlier the same year through a workshop led by the Lessons Learned Unit of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and accommodated by the Namibian government, these platforms for action focused on the inclusion of women and gender-responsive frameworks in peacekeeping operations, an issue of particular significance for African societies (Hudson 2017, 4).

Since the reinvention of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian intervention at the close of the Cold-War, an overwhelming majority of peace operations – and conflicts – have taken place on the African continent. Current missions include the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Darfur, South Sudan and Mali. Furthermore, they have largely been constituted by African troops (Campbell 2018). In conjunction with the structural legacies of colonial

Women, Peace and... Continued Militarism? Revisiting UNSCR 1325 and Its African Roots
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rule, expedited economic development and turbulent nation-state building projects, a large number of people across the continent continue to face everyday forms of insecurity, violence and volatility pertaining to economic hardship, the stirring of political violence, and lacking state institutions and accountability; this, in addition to situations of active, and often protracted, armed conflict. The use of sexual violence as a weapon in conflict in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, and South Sudan, is another extensively reported issue, which provided impetus for the creation of a UN Resolution specifically addressing the gendered character of war and violence. As the WPS was, and still is, strongly rooted in African experiences, it is no surprise that its design and implementation has unique implications for the continent. Further representative of this are the number of National Action Plans (NAPs) – constituting the main strategy for WPS realisation and execution – developed among African states, amounting to 41% of the total number of NAPs from the Global South (Hudson 2017, 2).

Adopted by the Council in October 2000, Resolution 1325 puts forward four key pillars around which the wider WPS agenda is organised: women's participation in decision-making, peace processes, conflict management and resolution; protecting women from sexual and gender-based violence and protecting women's rights during and outside of conflict; including a gender perspective in all conflict prevention work; and special relief and recovery for women, with an emphasis on survivors of sexual violence, during and after conflict (Hudson 2017, 4). A set of normative assumptions underline these pillars, to which numerous feminist critics have responded (see Ní Aoláin 2016; Kirby and Shepherd 2016a).

Two issues in particular have received the most attention. Firstly, running throughout the agenda is a tendency to embrace an essentializing view of gender. Without further explication, gender is used interchangeably with women, conflating what would otherwise refer to a complex arrangement of gendered relations with the fixed subject-position of woman (Otto 2006, 141), and, by extension, the compounded category of "womenandchildren" (Hudson 2017, 4). In turn, women are taken as a "homogenous group whose interests are *essentially* peaceful and socially beneficial" (Shepherd 2008, 162), and who possess innate "capacities for consensual problem-solving" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016a, 375). In contrast, men – rather than the dynamics and structures of *masculinist* ideals – are intrinsically militaristic, undiplomatic and conflict-prone.

Within this cyclical logic, simply increasing the number of women in peace negotiations, peacekeeping and decision-making positions is expected to bring about sustainable peace. But, as has been repeatedly noted, "focusing only on participation targets without addressing the concrete dynamics of gendered power" (Kirby and Shepherd 2016a, 376) might even have adverse effects. The 2015 report on the achievements and challenges of Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda, prepared by former UN Under-Secretary General Radhika Coomaraswamy and colleagues, confirms this narrowness in the scope of the resolution's implementation this far. Coomaraswamy (et al. 2015, 40) concludes that "present programmes put forward by the international community tend to … [stop at bringing] a female body to the table." Similarly, when interrogating the process of effecting NAPs in Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda and Kenya, in relation to women's inclusion in the military and as peacekeeping personnel, Hudson (2017, 18) notes how the same "liberal-feminist" tropes of equal inclusion are again recycled without further elaboration. As such, "participation becomes elevated to an end in itself" (Hudson 2017, 19). Resulting from this, Hendricks (2015, 367) tells us, is "the severing of the discourse and implementation of UNSCR 1325 from the broader feminist scholarship and activism on gender, peace and security that birthed it."

Challenges from African contexts

The proliferation of peace operations in Africa over the past 30 years makes a critical engagement with the normative assumptions underlining the WPS necessary. Before exploring the implications of these assumptions for African peace processes however, we will linger a bit on the major insights feminist conceptions of peace and security have contributed to international frameworks such as UNSCR 1325. Undergirding for instance the Beijing Platform for Action, is the core understanding that any work for peace and security, from the local to the global, has to address *root causes* behind conflict. Patriarchy is one such fundamental root source of insecurity, including its variation of expressions, from "militarist masculinities" (see Langa and Eagle 2008; Ratele 2012) to an acceptance and normalisation of the use of military and armed force as conflict prevention mechanisms, alongside the distinctly gendered dynamics of endemic/structural poverty. For feminist peace activists, the ultimate answer to how to

Women, Peace and... Continued Militarism? Revisiting UNSCR 1325 and Its African Roots
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approach the issue of sustainable peace is thus to allow such a focus on structure to permeate all forms of peace promotion. Understanding the perpetuation of armed conflict and other forms of violence and insecurity that contributes to the destabilisation and impediment of peace as the result of a combination of structural and systematic factors, expands the frames within which peace and conflict, prevention, management and reconstruction, is thought about.

Coomaraswamy (2015, 194) reaches the conclusion that after fifteen years of attempted implementation of the WPS agenda, international resources are still being unequally distributed to prioritise the quality of "peace operations *during* and *after* armed conflict." This illuminates a clear loss of vital feminist insights on how to enable sustainable peace. What is lost is the acknowledgement that "Women, peace and security is about *preventing* war, not about making war safer for women" (Coomaraswamy et. al. 2015, 191). When such an emphasis on prevention is increasingly marginalised within international policymaking circles, where resource allocation is determined and operations structured, the meaning of peace and security and their safeguarding, is further regulated by the immediate interests of market dynamics and militarist approaches. In short, by patriarchal concerns. "Over the years, international actors have increasingly shifted their attention and resources toward militarized approaches to security, resolution of disputes, and the hurried and ad hoc protection of civilians in conflict" Coomaraswamy (2015, 194) notes, remarking that "this is not the 'prevention' envisioned 15 years ago" in the initial drafting of the WPS.

The necessity of addressing root causes, and the structural conditions enabling the continuation of conflict and insecurity, is particularly evident across the African continent, partly due to the spread of precarity, armed conflict and active peace missions. This becomes especially important in light of African conflicts still facing international discourses that dismiss them as a consequence of endogenous characteristics. As Nduwimana (2008, 22) notes, "there have been widely disseminated, barely-veiled stereotypes of Africans as a people whose identity destines them to self-destruction." Instead of recognising insecurity in the region as the result of *societal* conflicts, official discourse (with clear linkages to former colonial mentalities), represents violence on the continent in terms of "clichés such as 'tribal warfare', 'ethnic conflict', 'religious wars'." Such labels serve to fragment any full understanding of either the causes behind, or dynamics of, conflict, while "[contributing] to a perception wherein political cleavages are transformed into innate, visceral and atavistic hatreds." Ultimately, this entails that "conflict analysis relating to Africa has therefore been reduced to the consequences and manifestations of conflicts, rather than their causes" (Nduwimana 2008, 22) – in complete contradistinction to the measures called for by the feminist activist voices informing the initial WPS rhetoric.

In said discursive climate, the ultimate objective behind the WPS agenda to prevent conflict through a thorough understanding of the structural and other circumstances causing it, is lost again. The continued lack of incentive to challenge reductionist representations of an African innate propensity for violence and so seek out root sources behind conflict, coincide with the parallel tendency within international strategies for the implementation and maintenance of peace, to *de*prioritise policies of prevention. All this serves to reaffirm the need for returning to the feminist imperative to place prevention, alongside management and retroactive reconstruction, front and centre in the implementation of Resolution 1325 on the continent.

As a caveat to this however, it is important to note that while some, like Coomaraswamy et. al. (2015), argue this emphasis on attacking underlying structures was once visible in the policy language of the resolution, other critics caution that "the gendered nature of norms, culture and security practices are seldom under scrutiny: UNSCR 1325 was never intended to engage that debate" (Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech 2015, 386). If the latter concern holds true there might be reason to begin with a rethinking of the WPS discourse writ large, before interrogating its successes and failures in the field.

Women, peace, security and counterterrorism

Though few scenarios of conflict and precarity are entirely separated in today's world – where a long history of global interconnections have forged structural 'marketised and militarist', and by extension patriarchal, relations across the globe – visions of peace, conceptions of security, and notions of emancipation take critically different forms depending on time and context. This supposition calls for a grounding of the normative frameworks of the WPS

Women, Peace and... Continued Militarism? Revisiting UNSCR 1325 and Its African Roots
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agenda in context-specific circumstances. An example of such a circumstance, central to many situations from the African continent, is the tension arising between the utilisation of National Action Plans as the main medium through which resolution 1325 is supposed to be realised, and the fact that in many African societies the state rather than offering protection, constitutes a central source of anxiety and insecurity in and of itself (Hendricks 2011). Highlighting the state-centrism of the WPS agenda, a range of commentators have noted how the emphasis on NAPs has resulted in a marginalisation of civil society and grassroots involvement in the work to implement the WPS agenda, centralising too much responsibility with state institutions and so distancing the efforts from the non-state actors who initially made the resolution possible (see Kirby and Shepherd 2016b). Realising the ways in which experiences of security and citizen-relations to the state vary from society to society, those working with the agenda's implementation and monitoring should take care to incorporate non-governmental avenues for WPS action. Doing so would allow for the agenda's objectives to meet the needs of communities at the grassroots level, rather than force communities to meet the needs of the agenda.

The world in which the resolution was first adopted looks very different from today. As pointed out in the UN Women (2015, 13) study, locating gaps and challenges after 15 years of 1325 implementation, "the content of what we mean by 'peace' and 'security' is evolving." This gives reason to consistently update the conceptual relevancy of the resolution according to contemporary experiences. Feminist scholars and activists from across the African continent are central in taking stock of these circumstances. One key example of such changes can be found in the contemporary challenges presented by rising violent extremism and terrorism, predicaments of a distinctly gendered nature and with specific gendered consequences. The issue was addressed in the most recent WPS Resolution 2242 (2015), which draws on the recommendations by Coomaraswamy and colleagues in the 2015 report, regarding the decision to anchor the WPS in larger agendas for combatting terrorism and violent extremism.

Although the opinions gathered when writing the 2015 report emphasised the need for the UN to recognise and act upon the way in which the globalisation of counterterrorist measures in the name of the War on Terror has equally contributed to increasing states of insecurity (due in part to further normalising processes of militarization), as potentially having made the world safer, this warning was left out of the subsequent Resolution (2242). Consequently, though terrorism and violent extremism constitute critical sources of insecurity and harm for women and men across the African continent, and the inclusion of such situations within the WPS agenda is warranted, this expansion of the agenda's scope simultaneously expose a range of obstacles. As demonstrated by Ní Aoláin below, rather than enhancing the 2015 calls from women worldwide to utilise the WPS as a means to combatting increasing global militarism, Resolution 2242 might have the opposite effect.

Engaging with the normative assumptions of the WPS, where gender is essentialized – noting how "the language of 2242 [essentialize] women as either wicked purveyors of extremist violence or virtuous saviours of sons, husbands and communities" (Ní Aoláin 2016, 282) – and too much weight is put on the mere *numerical* increase in women's participation and representation, Ní Aoláin highlights the potential dangers with expanding the already somewhat indefinite situations to which the agenda applies. Just as the inclusion of women in peace negotiations does not guarantee their participation in, or opportunity to reframe, overarching masculinist structures that make societies more conflict-prone in the first place, "the expansion of WPS to include women in the counterterrorism domain does not mean that women will be included in defining what constitutes terrorism and what counterterrorism strategies are compliant with human rights and equality" (Ní Aoláin 2016, 276). If the linking of WPS with combatting extremism has allowed women access to male-dominated security institutions, but without ensuring enough space for their deconstruction of the masculinist and militarist mentalities and strategies informing most counterterrorist frameworks in the post-9/11 era, the agenda will again fall short on its transformative potential. For a state to partake in the world of counterterrorism today means to be granted the sovereign right to the use of force and the declaration of states of emergency which legitimise a diverse range of securitising and militarising measures.

In many cases these processes serve to decrease rather than enhance the general security of its populations, as seen in Uganda (Branch 2007; Fisher and Anderson 2015; OHCHR 2007) or Nigeria (Elden 2014; Oyewole 2013). Injecting the WPS agenda within this wider structure thus risks "the potential negative effect on the WPS agenda of its becoming harnessed to the pursuit of broader military and ideological goals" (Ní Aoláin 2016, 278). What is again made apparent with the example of Resolution 2242 and Ní Aoláin's warning, is the need for resituating the tokens of

Women, Peace and... Continued Militarism? Revisiting UNSCR 1325 and Its African Roots
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critical feminist approaches to peace and security at the fore of any WPS related work: structural change and all-encompassing conflict prevention. While various UN mandates central to international counter-terrorism efforts do recognise the need for gender-responsive measures, Ní Aoláin (2016, 291) reminds us that "the invocation of women is not a success in its own right."

Feminist critiques and the African Union

Confirming the loss of deeper transformative potential in various areas of WPS implementation on the African continent, Hendricks (2017) finds that the African Union's (AU) work with the agenda has greatly suffered from the limitations of the liberal-feminist emphasis "on the inclusion of women into peace and security institutions and processes, without a deeper reflection of what their participation may mean." There are a number of insights to be gained here, drawing for instance on African women's distinct experiences with militarised masculinity as one of society's "backbones" and the consequent loss of any clear break from the insecurity of conflict situations and the "post"-conflict (Langa and Eagle 2008; Ratele 2012). As noted by Sheila Meintjies, Anu Pillay, and Meredeth Turshen (2002) when editing a volume on women's work with gender justice and community cohesion during and after conflict, from cases such as Eritrea, Namibia, and Nigeria: there is no "aftermath" in direct contradistinction to circumstances of conflict and war, to speak of for women. This is a fundamental insight to which WPS strategies must respond.

Without incorporating such feminist analysis of the meanings of security and peace, conflict and post-conflict, within regional frameworks where Resolution 1325 is invoked, there is no guarantee that for instance women's inclusion in security sector positions, or at the negotiation table, will automatically countervail "post-conflict patriarchal and militarized orders" (Hendricks 2017, 73). This dilemma underscores Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech (2015) argument that, in order to ever make UNSCR 1325 workable as an instrument of long-term societal change in relation to gender equality and peace, there has to be a convergence between three key pillars of influence: feminist security analysis, civil society activism and policy decision-making.

This discrepancy between professed intentions and actual outcomes, where a lack of convergence between said pillars are particularly visible, can be found in the African Union's attempts to implement the WPS agenda. This is especially relevant with regards to dominant approaches to peace negotiations and peace operations. Hendricks (2017; 2015) finds that although policy frameworks are in place which advocate for the inclusion of women in peace processes, dominating ways of approaching peace, such as at the negotiation tables, remain insensitive to frequently updated feminist insights into the nature of contemporary conflicts and the continuities between conflict dynamics and everyday norms. Lacking is a sincere eye to sustainable peace efforts, employing tactics that reach beyond prevailing "cowboy" approaches to mediation, which focus on stern men who bring about cease-fire agreements (Hendricks 2015, 370). As such, the increase in women's participation, stemming from the invocation of UNSCR 1325 in AU peace and security policy documents, simply serve to legitimise the perpetuation of deeply flawed versions of peace. This signals a continued unwillingness to raise feminist contributions to long-term peace and security as well as civil society knowledges, within policy-making, further impeding concrete societal change.

A recent initiative to keep an eye on however, is FemWise-Africa endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council in 2017. The network aims to enhance women's roles in conflict prevention and mediation across the continent, in part through working to make peace processes conducive for women's participation and leadership while providing a platform for strategic advocacy and capacity building to mobilise women mediators and peace activists at regional, national and community levels. It will be interesting to see whether FemWise has succeeded in breaking new ground in the convergence of Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech's (2015) three pillars of influence.

Conclusion

Feminist peace advocacy emanating from the African continent offer critical substance to Coomaraswamy et al's (2015) emphasis on the 1325 pillar of *prevention*, where transforming underlying socio-cultural and political-economic structures and dynamics is recognised as necessary pathways in the realisation of sustainable forms of peace and security. Underscored throughout, is the feminist imperative that in order to promote actual peace the

focus has to lie on upending systematic gendered norms through which the everyday subjugation of women and the normalisation of armed violence equally by state and non-state actors, are legitimised. The mere increasing of women's participation in peace processes or the inclusion of a misleading gender lens in conflict resolution, which confirm rather than challenge dominant male/female stereotypes, is not enough. Without bridging Olonisakin, Hendricks, and Okech's (2015) three pillars of influence – feminist security analysis, civil society activism and policy decision-making – the liberal-feminist promotion of non-problematised forms of representation, participation, and universalisation, will have little impact on long-term experiences of insecurity.

Ní Aoláin (2016) confirms this through showing how attempts to respond to the changing nature of peace and security in the 21st century by anchoring the WPS in global counter-terrorism efforts, has this far resulted in further entrenching the agenda's complicity with militarism. Highlighting the lack of critical feminist rethinking of the very spaces wherein peace processes on the continent occur, Hendricks (2017; 2015) reveals the spread of this failure across AU peace and security policy initiatives. Feminist interrogations of the sources and nature of conflict and "post"-conflict on the continent, signal the need for rooting both the language and practice of the WPS agenda in *lived* experiences of need and insecurity, where an uncritical recycling of liberal-feminist tropes fall short of the full transformative objectives the resolution set out to achieve.

Without an uncompromising eye to the objective of uprooting the relational and material patterns enabling the normalisation of militarism and hegemonic masculinities within the everyday social fabric of many African societies (Hendricks 2011, 17; Mama 1998, Lewis 2006), the WPS agenda is bound to forever chase its own tale. The question of how to avoid the fact that the agenda has become a bystander to, rather than challenger of, patriarchy, is thus more relevant than ever.

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