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The Women, Peace and Security Agenda 25 years After Beijing:
What Difference Could a Feminist Political Economy Perspective Make?

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**Abstract**: The transformative potential of Women, Peace and Security, as promoted in UNSCR 1325, has yet to be realized. WPS has centered on enhancing protection from sexual and gender- based violence and increasing women's participation, especially in the security sector and during peace processes. However, WPS has neglected to address the political economy of gender inequality in fragile and conflict-affected societies, which exacerbates conflict and undermines efforts to "build back better."

## Introduction

The 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing is the most significant women's rights agenda-setting event in world history. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) called for the integration of a gender perspective into all programs and policies. Twelve areas of critical concern were prioritized in the PFA: women and armed conflict was the eleventh area of critical concern focused on conflict-affected societies and engaging women in all aspects of negotiations, peacebuilding and reconstruction to build inclusive societies. Subsequently, in October 2000, the adoption of UN Security Council 1325 led to emergence of the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS) as a cross-cutting thematic agenda on the Council. 1325 connected the gender mainstreaming agenda set at Beijing to the remit of security policies within the UN and its member states. WPS has evolved to become a significant international normative framework addressing the gender-specific impacts of conflict on women and girls including *protection* against sexual and gender-based violence, women's *participation* in the security sector and during peace processes, and support for women's roles in *peacebuilding and recovery* importantly, toward the *prevention* of conflict.

Two decades after its adoption many implementation gaps and failures have been identified — most significantly in the UN's Global Study on the Implementation of 1325 (UN Women 2015). The transformative potential of the WPS agenda has yet to be realized in practice. A paradox lies in the reality that as gender has become more *de rigeur* in international peace and security policymaking it has been less able to challenge prevailing political or economic power structures, such as the build-up of militaries as the primary way to resolve conflicts and the arms-trade which foments war and conflict. In this short paper, I examine some of the limitations of — and challenges for — WPS from a feminist political economy perspective. Unequal political economies underpin peace and security institutions so it is not surprising that they also affect the development and implementation of WPS. For instance, WPS has been relatively silent about the underlying gender roles that celebrate masculine aggression and the gendered socioeconomic inequalities that make women more vulnerable during conflict and post-conflict situations. The question for the next decade should be how we can address these structural gendered inequalities which are both root causes of violence and conflict and, at the same time, barriers to sustainable and positive peace?

This structural dimension is relevant across the whole WPS agenda, but it is especially core to the "relief and recovery" WPS pillar (or 'peacebuilding and recovery' in the Global Study), which involves inter alia, "building back better." (True and Hewitt 2019: 178).

## WPS and 'Relief and Recovery'i

The WPS 'relief and recovery' pillar is narrowly focused on short term post-conflict efforts in UNSCR 1325 and is often forgotten. \*\*Compared with the international attention to conflict-related sexual violence

protection and women's meaningful participation in peace processes, it is relatively underdeveloped and emphasized. The Global Study, for instance, found that the "most urgent interventions to assist women and girls in crisis situations are focused on their protection rather than their empowerment" (UN Women 2015: 86). Yet relief and recovery after conflict or humanitarian disaster that is responsive to the needs of women and girls and that enables their participation is crucial to establishing the structural foundations of peace. As ActionAid humanitarians recognize, "even crisis responses to protect women and girls should put in place some enabling mechanisms and be coherent with long-term peace-building efforts to empower women and girls" (Barclay et al 2016). Women's groups are frequently the groups on the frontline of crisis response, and committed to remaining in-country for recovery and reconstruction despite resource-based constraints limiting the use of funds for long-term empowerment and prevention (Davies and True 2019: 7).

Within the "relief and recovery" pillar of WPS there is the potential to connect WPS to the achievement of women's social and economic rights, to economic recovery that promotes gender equality, and to transformative reparations that redress gender injustices after conflict, disaster, or humanitarian crisis. There is also an opportunity to bridge the divide between "relief" or short-term humanitarian assistance that responds to women's needs, and "recovery" or the long-term development frameworks and initiatives that address the strategic interests of Resolution 1325 in gender equality, conflict-prevention, and sustainable peace. Four issues are critical to address: (1) securing women's social and economic rights; (2) bringing a gender perspective and women's participation into economic recovery (reforms and reconstruction projects); (3) integrating gender budgeting within post-conflict financing; and (4) transforming reparations and transitional justice (including responsiveness to conflict-related sexual violence survivors and to victims of conflict-related violations of socioeconomic or 'subsistence' rights, Lai forthcoming) to empower women economically. (True and Hewitt 2019: 181). "

Transitions from conflict, Madeleine Rees and Christine Chinkin (2016: 1225) argue, should be opportunities for fundamentally challenging and targeting structural disadvantage through the realization of socio-economics rights. If key economic and social rights are not secured early enough after conflict, then women will not be able to fully or meaningfully participate in the recover and rebuilding of their societies. (These rights include those to land and housing, to transact in one's own legal name, equality in marriage, freedom of mobility, access to education, employment and healthcare including sexual and reproductive health care such as pregnancy care, abortion services, post-SGBV psycho-social care, and HIV-related care). Equally, without women's meaningful input into the design of post-conflict economic reform and reconstruction programs, vital resources, assistance and investments won't reflect their needs and concerns. For example, for women conflict-related sexual violence survivors, recovery, protection, and prevention of future violence, "is often tied to their ability to move on and generate incomes for themselves and children" (Anderlini 2010: xiv; True 2012: 151). Despite this, most resources are directed toward legal justice remedies for violence in post-conflict contexts, which do not create economic security and may inadvertently marginalize women's basic needs.

Similarly, while there is increasing attention to the gendered dynamics of radicalization to violence in the UN WPS and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agendas, and to the economic grievances and incentives that lead men and boys to join violent extremist groups, there is little attention to the gendered political economy drivers of women and girl's radicalization to violence – as they relate to the political economy of gender inequality and gendered violence.<sup>iv</sup>

UNSCR 1889 (2009: para. 10) stresses the need to support women's socioeconomic rights in post-conflict settings, but it does not provide specific mechanisms or a plan of action for realizing these rights through state or other institutions. The 2010 UN Secretary-General's Seven-Point Plan for gender-responsive economic recovery seeks to promote women's economic participation though it neglects to recognize the structural oppression of women prior to and during conflict. Post-conflict conditions tend to exacerbate women's already unequal economic and social status relative to men, and thus add-on measures do little to change this situation. Increases in female heads of households, gender discrimination in employment, exploitation in incipient sex industries and trafficking networks, female displacement and resettlement in urban slums, and gender bias in DDR processes make up a pattern of gendered marginalization after conflict. The preference for employing men is widespread in post-conflict countries.

In often dire economic situations after conflict that foster corruption and criminality, marginalized groups of women experience extreme income inequality, working in the informal economy and in the most precarious labor market employment. As well, they suffer from pre-conflict legacies of poor investment in gender-equal economic and social development with respect to education, health, housing, food security, water, property, and land rights. Women's meaningful participation in peace and security, in particular in peace implementation and post-conflict recovery, will not be possible unless these structural gender inequalities are more systematically addressed. At present, socioeconomic rights are not at all operationalized in peacebuilding processes to create economic opportunities for women. In many post-conflict countries' there is a lack of information to assess the status of women's economic and social rights, and their loss of access to resources during conflict. Legislation to ensure gender-equal economic protection, compensation, social protection and labor rights is also often not in place after conflict.

Despite the promise of women's participation in elite peace processes, this participation will only bring lasting peace and stability if there is a plan for achieving gender-equality, as well as greater socioeconomic rights and development for all groups (Substantive representation matters as much as descriptive representation of women cf. Goetz and Jenkins 2016).

# **WPS and Social Reproduction**

Integral to the achievement of women's social and economic rights in post-conflict relief and recovery is the recognition of the work of social reproduction in conflict-affected societies. Social reproduction includes unpaid care labor and ranges from providing food for families, provisioning soldiers with food and shelter, providing care including health care for injured or displaced persons and contributing to community services, which may have been destroyed, discontinued or dislocated, and voluntary collective action. Care is needed by victims of violence as well as by armed combatants; it is required to sustain households in displacement as much as the reintegration of insurgent households. Increased caring and reproductive responsibilities after conflict, however, tends to come with greater participation in productive economies in order to generate sufficient income which generally doubles if not triples women's work. The deterioration in physical infrastructure and public services due to conflict, and reduced social expenditures due to austerity or lack of investment heighten the pressures on those who perform social reproductive roles. As women largely care for the injured and traumatized family members, and provision soldiers and displaced communities, they are the ones most adversely affected without adequate social infrastructure to support them. What Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas (2014) have called

'depletion through social reproduction' (DSR) results. Without adjustments to public provisioning and social protection in such conflict and austerity-affected situations, women's individual health and wellbeing can be expected to decline with further negative effects on household and community wellbeing.

This decline may also have an impact on conflict resolution given that women's labor is integral to the recovery from conflict, especially in displaced communities, and that women's organizing is known to be one of the societal contributors to sustainable peace (Krause, Krause and Branfors 2018; True and Riveros-Morales 2019). If women's lives are depleted, so too will be the capabilities of women to contribute to recovery and to peace processes beyond the household, at community and national levels. (Maxine Molyneux's (1988) very useful distinction between women's practical needs and strategic interests is relevant here).

This situation could be redressed by supporting investment in both physical infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, water, and sanitation, electricity and telecommunication systems, as well as social infrastructure that improves living standards and quality of life and develops people's capabilities in areas like education, health, and community engagement (Seguino 2016: 7). Spending on social infrastructure has been shown to have a positive effect on addressing inequalities between groups, including between women and men, with economy-wide benefits (Seguino 2016: 8).

Further, recognizing the important role of social reproduction, however, could pave the way for the peaceful transformation of post-conflict societies. Economic analysis has shown that "improved access to public infrastructure affects women's time allocation decisions and, in turn, changes in these decisions affect the process of growth and economic development" in low and medium income countries (Agénor 2017, 25). This is also applicable to fragile and conflict-affected countries. Peace can be sustainable only when the work of all those contributing to the rebuilding of life after conflict is recognized and supported.

At present, however, the non-recognition and under-valuing of social reproduction and care labor by state and international financial institutions (IFIs), affects the policy and development strategies that could reverse both the depletion of lives and the risks of the recurrence of conflict. In particular, the state provisioning of social infrastructure via transitional macroeconomic and social reform policies does not take into account the negative gender impacts of these policies on women.

## WPS and IFIsvi

Women's vulnerability in transitions from conflict and violence is heightened by loan and austerity measures, imposed by international financial institutions and development banks, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, that reduce the resources available to support social infrastructure, and indirectly, social reproduction and its contribution to peacebuilding and recovery from conflict (True et al. 2017). CEDAW General Recommendation 30 calls on states and other actors to consider how agencies and organizations within the UN (aside from UN Women) can carry out their responsibility to WPS. Here I draw attention to the IFIs as important institutions for the advancement of the WPS agenda in the next decade.

IFIs have institutional mandates and commitment to global development and gender-inclusive

development agendas. They are significant actors in post-war recovery, and most recently to addressing and preventing situations of "fragility, conflict and violence" (FCV) (UN and World Bank 2018), but WPS not central to their mandate. Yet there is an opportunity here. IFIs could provide sustainable financing for gender-inclusive peace, while WPS, particularly women's peacebuilding, contributes to societal stability enabling development. Commitments to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by both IFIs and governments should cement the relevance of WPS.

IFIs combination of support to governance and infrastructure-building has a major bearing on the distribution and re-distribution of power in post-conflict societies, affecting the achievement of gender-equal participation and protection (see for instance, the recent multibillion dollar programs in Iraq and Afghanistan for institutional restructuring, infrastructure, and physical reconstruction). These institutions also have disproportionate negotiating power in post-conflict transitions, relative to typically weak governments with limited state capacity. Three entry-points for WPS in IFIs are possible.

First, development and financial commitments to FCV states by IFIs, including IMF Article 4 consultations on macroeconomic reforms, vii the World Bank's Systematic Country Diagnostics (SCD), prepared by Bank staff in consultation with national authorities and other stakeholders, and Country Partnership Frameworks (CPF), could be evaluated in terms of the human rights-focused commitments of WPS. Second, because these processes are not currently at all inclusive, they could be made more open and transparent to allow women's civil society organizations to effectively participate. IFI's understanding of WPS would increase the likelihood of more accurate and gender-sensitive macroeconomic analysis. The inclusion of country-level women's organizations in co-designing, reporting, and supervision of IDA 18 and all SCDs, investments, and opportunities including Trust Fund financing mechanisms, could increase their effectiveness especially where they are for job creation and GBV prevention. Third, WPS should be integrated within the World Bank's Gender Strategy 2016–2022 which seeks to address gender gaps in FCV.

The Bank strategy recognizes that addressing gender gaps is critical to the consolidation of peace and security in conflict-affected contexts. Closing gender gaps, however, is a limited approach in that it focuses our attention on the male-as-norm standard of economic and political participation, and does not recognize social reproduction. Consultations with women's organizations on the Gender Strategy in Colombia and Afghanistan could be built upon and continued in IDA consultations also.

## Financing for WPS

As well as IFIs, the UN has committed to increasing the financing for gender equality and for women and girl's empowerment in post-conflict situations (UNSG 2010a: para. 35, 36). Yet gender analysis of post-conflict budgets shows that up until 2010 only meager resources were committed to these goals. The lack of financing and funding for the implementation of the WPS agenda and targeted action for women and girls in post-conflict and humanitarian settings was highlighted in the Global Study (UN Women 2015). Only 1.7 percent of peace and security projects in 2016 using the IASC Gender Marker included targeted action for women and girls (UN Women 2017: 7). The target of 15 percent of funds directed toward gender equality programming and policy across the UN system is a positive step. Although many UN agencies have failed to achieve this, the Peacebuilding Fund surpassed this target and has directed 20 percent of funding to gender responsive programming since 2016. But much more needs to be done. Few states, for

instance, have committed to the target of fifteen per cent of peacebuilding funding to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected states. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF, formerly the Global Acceleration Instrument) addresses financing gaps and under-resourcing of women's humanitarian and peace-building efforts across the peace and security and development continuum, but it is still far too meager to resource women's peacebuilding in all conflict-affected situations globally. Currently 12 out of 24 eligible countries receive WPHF support. The WPHF aims to secure USD \$40 million in funding to support community-based, grassroots women's peacebuilding organizations by the end of 2020. VIII The WPHF's theory of change aims to "advance women's leadership in economic recovery". However, other, more systematic interventions and reforms are also needed to ensure women's participation in economic recovery decision-making forums targeting all post-conflict financing mechanisms and their governance as well as IFI approaches and mechanisms in order to achieve structural transformations toward gender equality in post-conflict countries.

For example, the WPHF has invested in women's active engagement in economic recovery efforts in Colombia, benefitting 976 women and 204 men in local economic empowerment initiatives. In the context of the implementation of the Colombian-FARC peace agreement this is an important but relatively minor intervention. In Colombia 170 municipalities are most affected by violence, poverty and inequality and have 'Development Plans with a Territorial Approach' (PDET) potentially benefitting 6,842,859 people and 3,489,858 women (2017 figures). In these 170 municipalities, according to the Colombian Territory Renewal Agency, about 24,000 women participated in the construction of the PDETs. The 976 women benefitting from the WPHF represents just 4 per cent of this group.

#### Toward Regenerative Politicsix

Post-conflict transitions provide us with a moment of openness that can be harnessed to establish both new institutional norms to redress inequalities and contribute to sustainable and inclusive peace. The idea of a regenerative state that could reverse depletion and reduce the chances for the recurrence of conflict is worth considering. Such a state would involve the collaboration of many actors and institutions including civil society and international actors in dialogue with and involved in the redesign of gender-responsive institutions in post-conflict transitions. It would promote gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction by recognizing women's social reproductive work, facilitating women's political agency through equal access to decision-making power, as well as recognizing and redressing conflict-related harms such as gender-based violence. It would support not only women engaged in social reproductive work, but all those who care and are cared for, by providing social infrastructure to support a good quality care regime.

There are three core elements of such a regenerative state. The first would aim to recognize the value of social reproductive work and support the rebuilding of *social infrastructure* as well as gender-responsive infrastructure related to the physical, built and resources environment; the second would facilitate *deliberative and participatory politics* across conflict lines, involving inclusive processes and all stakeholders; and the third would aim to incorporate *accountability mechanisms* through a democratic framework for post-conflict rebuilding focused on a bottom-up approach to regeneration involving civil society groups, social movement actors and epistemic communities. A gender-sensitive, human rights impact assessment of economic reforms before any strategy or reform program is approved would be one

such accountability mechanism to ensure post-conflict development interventions and investments to uphold economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights (True et al 2017: 43). At the international level, an internal human rights compliance and gender monitoring and accountability process would also need to be established within IFIs.

Regenerative policies could be supported rather than obstructed by international actors and policy frameworks. As well as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework that can be used to develop gender sensitive policies by the regenerative state. For example, regeneration could involve gender-responsive and inclusive reform by providing social infrastructure to support gender equality (SDG 5) and participation (SDG 16), and decent work (SDG 8) opportunities for women as an integral part of post-conflict transitions. Women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding could be explicitly targeted as a marker of stability and peace (for loans, investors etc), and women's realization of economic and social rights could become an end in itself, enabling broader prosperity and lasting peace.

#### Conclusion

Feminist political economy analysis plays a vital role in identifying and addressing the structural barriers to women's participation and rights in post-conflict environments in order to realize the transformative potential of WPS. Political economy analysis should inform more gender-sensitive and inclusive reforms and aim to formalize unpaid labor by providing social infrastructure to support gender equality and decent work opportunities for women as an integral part of the transition to peace.

Four aspects are important: First, we need to revision the gender divisions of labor in societies recovering from conflict that keep women from participating in peace processes and that reinforce the structural gender inequalities causing or exacerbating gender-based violence, and enabling militarized masculinities and the normalization of violence. Second, we need to recognize women's social reproductive activities in the household and community during conflict and how they respond to individual and community humanitarian needs, and support the transition of women's agency to shape and rebuild social infrastructure and services after conflict. Third, we need to analyze the gendered impact of peace implementation and post-conflict economic reforms, and promote the obligations of state and external actors to ensure the social and economic rights of post-conflict citizens. Finally, by holding the state and the international governance regime (IFIs) to account we can address the depletion of women's lives in post-conflict contexts and their vulnerability to violence. Such a four-fold transformation requires the development of WPS frameworks that recognize the value of social reproduction and establish the physical and social infrastructures to sustain it as an integral part of securing peace and re-building economies.

#### Recommendations

- OECD DAC 100% of all aid to FCV countries promotes gender equality and women's empowerment
  as a primary or secondary goal. Regular audits of post-conflict financing to hold donor and
  recipient governments accountable
- Actual resource commitments and specific targets within WPS NAPs to enable humanitarian

- assistance to carry over into assistance for long-term structural gender equality issues.
- WPS provisions embedded into all UN Security Council resolutions on post-conflict country financing, strategy and planning.
- WPS supports the rebuilding of *social infrastructure* as well as gender-responsive physical infrastructure in post-conflict countries
- WPS support gender audits of all investments in the reconstruction of physical, built and resources environment.
- Women's civil society organizations are meaningful included and able to influence all IFI consultations on loans and development grants.
- Legal recognition of care work and the need to reduce and redistribute this work in post-conflict transitions, reversing depletion for conflict-affected women and communities (UN Economic and Social Council 2019).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The argument in this section is elaborated in J. True and S. Hewitt (2019).

<sup>&</sup>quot;The UN Strategic Results Framework (2011) mentions specific implementation outputs, targets, and indicators under the WPS 'relief and recovery' pillar include the financing and funding of gender equality programming and planning, addressing and responding to the needs of vulnerable groups, especially internally displaced persons, SGBV and war crime victims, disabled, female heads of households, female ex-combatants, refugees, returnees and women living with and affected by HIV. Transitional justice mechanisms, reparations, and DDR programs are required to be gender-responsive and inclusive with equitable access to economic recovery, employment, and

livelihood services for women and girls.

- iii Collective reparations programs for gendered harms through transitional justice mechanisms should be designed in order to develop the future economic and political capacities and livelihoods of women and girls in post-conflict societies rather than only being oriented to retributive justice.
- There is not space to fully develop the argument here in this paper. However, the analysis is more fully developed in Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre, Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya. UN Women Arab Region, forthcoming and Melissa Johnston and Jacqui True, Misogyny and Violent Extremism. Policy Brief, Monash Gender Peace & Security Centre and UN Women, 2019, https://arts.monash.edu/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0007/2003389/Policy-Brief VE and VAW V7t.pdf.
- <sup>v</sup> It should be emphasised that within the productive sectors of post-conflict economies, women are still largely segregated in unskilled, low-wage, and informal jobs, and potentially risky and unprotected work, such as survival sex in peacekeeping economies (UN Women 2015: 42).
- vi This section draws on the more extensive analysis in True and Svedberg (2019).
- vii IMF gender assessment of the macroeconomic impact of loans is presently being piloted in Egypt, Rwanda, and Uganda, but it is not yet rolled out to all loan recipient countries. This analysis is non-mandatory, practically volunteer work carried out by research staff in IFIs with an interest in gender issues.
- viii Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund: A United Nations & Civil Society Partnership, see <a href="http://wphfund.org">http://wphfund.org</a>, accessed 14 October, 2019.
- ix This section draws substantially from Rai, True and Tanyag (2019).