

Canadian  
Forces  
College

Collège  
des  
Forces  
Canadiennes



# UNITED NATIONS WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA: ESSENTIALISM, WELL-INTENTIONED FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY, AND THE GENDER BLIND SPOTS THEY CREATE

Major Natasha Skidmore

**JCSP 45**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

**Disclaimer**

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2019.

**PCEMI 45**

***Exercice Solo Flight***

**Avertissement**

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2019.

## CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 45 – PCEMI 45  
MAY 2019 – MAI 2019EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT***UNITED NATIONS WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA: ESSENTIALISM,  
WELL-INTENTIONED FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY, AND  
THE GENDER BLIND SPOTS THEY CREATE**

Major Natasha Skidmore

*“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions, which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”*

*« La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale. »*

## **UNITED NATIONS WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA: ESSENTIALISM, WELL-INTENTIONED FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY, AND THE GENDER BLIND SPOTS THEY CREATE**

*...we have seen the equation of women with peace is not one based on fact but on powerful discourses...*

— Caroline Kennedy and Sophia Dingli, “Gender and Security”<sup>1</sup>

### **INTRODUCTION**

The foundational document in the UN Women Peace and Security Agenda (WPS), United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, was passed in 2000. It marks an on-going and dynamic evolution in the international norms surrounding gender. The UN has made considerable strides tackling structural inequalities that affect women and girls marginalized through conflict – like female genital mutilation, girl’s education, reproductive health, and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).<sup>2</sup> However, as an institution of global governance with singular normative influence, adoption and implementation of the WPS Agenda has thus far failed to empower, much less ensure the personal security, of some of the most vulnerable women in conflict zones. The rates of women marginalized by conflict continue to rise, and with eight gender-related UNSCRs in effect, one must ask hard questions. Despite the recognition and substantial body of evidence that women’s issues matter, the practices to resolve threats to and

---

<sup>1</sup>Caroline Kennedy and Sophia Dingli, “Gender and Security” Chapter 11 in *Contemporary Security Studies*. 4th ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 161.

<sup>2</sup>Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, "Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nations and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 103-127; UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on Women, peace and security, (New York: UN, 2015), 29.; UN, UNSCR 2242, (New York: UN, 2015), 2; Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, "The New United Nations “Gender Architecture”: A Room with a View?" *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 17, no. 1 (2013): 39; Caroline Sweetman, “Women leading in the peace,” last accessed 20 April 2019, [HTTPS://VIEWS-VOICES.OXFAM.ORG.UK/GENDER/2016/11/WOMEN-LEADING-IN-THE-PEACE-2](https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/gender/2016/11/women-leading-in-the-peace-2); UNPF, “FGM FAQ,” last accessed 20 April 2019, [https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#who\\_performs](https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#who_performs)

violence toward women, and the need to involve them in actively constructing security, has proven exceptionally challenging to both states and the international community.<sup>3</sup>

Across cultures women predominate in domestic roles as victims, wives, mothers, daughters, and sexual objects—but less often in the political or military arena as leaders, combatants, commanders, perpetrators, and power brokers. Instead, women lack agency, often relegated to assigned roles, which are constructed in reference to, and usually lesser than the roles, in which men predominate. The key argument of this paper is that these practices both undermine and threaten the WPS Agenda. Various essentialisms of women, as either objects or subjects requiring securitization, as well as the stereotyping of women as biologically superior peacekeepers undermine broader WPS efforts to mainstream gender. Thus substantive and fulsome equality, either of women in conflict zones, or of women sent to serve in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), is not furthered, despite the overall goals of women’s empowerment, equality, and gender mainstreaming. Moreover, by assuming characteristics in advance—women as specialized “victims” or as ultra-peaceful “peacekeepers”—women in both categories are misunderstood, reduced to simplistic binaries, and robbed of their agency.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>“The number of people in need of international humanitarian assistance has tripled over the past decade, with 80 per cent of them affected by armed conflict. Worldwide displacement in 2014 was at the highest level ever recorded, with 59.5 million people forcibly displaced, compared with 51.2 million in 2013 and 37.5 million a decade ago. Conflict and persecution forced an average of 42,500 individuals per day to leave their homes and seek protection within or beyond the borders of their country.” UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on Women, peace and security, (New York: UN, 2015), 3; “Women and girls have become particularly vulnerable, becoming the majority of the dispossessed, displaced and desecrated.” Susan Willett, “Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325: Assessing the Impact on Women, Peace and Security,” *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2, (2010a): 146; See UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242. See the following for a recent summary of studies: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute Oslo, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2017/18: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women,” (Washington, DC: GIWPS and PRIO, 2017), 11.

<sup>4</sup>Miranda Alison, “Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004a): 460. Soldier vs female soldier; Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, “A Normative Agenda for UN Women” in Chapter 6 The United Nations “Gender Architecture,” 56 – 57: Substantive equality is not equal opportunity or lack of discrimination. For example, equality of opportunity is more concerned with allowing women entry to public spheres of activity than with how they fare once they have gained entry. This concept refers to addressing the disadvantages that exist structurally within society; the focus of this paper will be on women and lacks sufficient scope for larger questions of intersectionality.

Methodologically, this paper begins by addressing concepts, followed by an exploration of why the WPS Agenda has failed to be the transformational vehicle to widespread gender equality that it was anticipated to become. The scope of this paper permits the explorations of but two of the possible reasons why: (1) pervasive essentialist beliefs and (2) topical gender balance provisions disguised as gender mainstreaming. WPS Agenda language and some feminist IR scholars and activists reinforce gender essentialisms regarding women in conflict and women peacekeepers; a practice that directly detracts from attainment of gender equality and one that reinforces existing marginalization for both parties. The UN's emphasis on increased participation of women instead of increased gender mainstreaming, referred to derisively here and elsewhere as the 'add women and stir' approach, is but one example that has unintended and potentially harmful consequences for women, both those who live in zones of conflict, as well as those deployed as peacekeepers. Finally, the conclusion considers some areas of future research and recommendations from a military practitioner's perspective, to which so many feminist IR pundits are opposed. The purpose of this paper is not to negate the UN's considerable efforts to address gender and structural inequality for women, but rather to highlight how aspects of the UN's strategy to empower women and feminist essentialisms in conflict-ridden and failing states can also jeopardize the empowerment, equality and career advancement of women in militaries from troop-contributing states.

## **ADDRESSING CONCEPTS**

### **Gender as a Power Construct**

Gender is a social construct, which is evidenced by the permutations of femininities and masculinities through time and by culture. Canadian feminine norms today would not reflect acceptable feminine behaviour in 1960. Since men that embrace commonly accepted masculine

behaviour within society relationally occupy positions of power over women, own more wealth and enjoy more privilege within societies around the globe, IR feminists refer to state and world orders as patriarchal. Within patriarchies, masculinities and femininities are relational social constructs that form structural power models. Predominantly male decision makers make decisions in their own interests, which reinforce male privileges for those men that conform to societal norms; thus, structural inequality becomes commonplace, normative, and rooted in societies' psyches.<sup>5</sup>

A gender hierarchy is established that “reinforces itself through an elaborate system of rules and punishments enforced in all aspects of life.” Although gender roles change over time and are culturally dependent, gender is used as a benchmark to determine access and power, and is the rubric under which inequality is justified and maintained. Indeed, “Gender power is seen to shape the dynamics of every site of human interaction, from the household to the international arena.” This interaction includes economic, political, and social dynamics. The intrusion of gender inequality throughout all aspects of human interaction thus creates the foundation for structural inequality.<sup>6</sup>

Not only does a gender hierarchy exist within the state, it operates at the political and international level. For example, many states use gendered discourse to legitimize authority. President Putin's ‘remasculinization’ of Russia successfully employs hyper-masculine statements, symbols and actions to bolster Russia's political authority in the international and domestic spheres. Meanwhile, the state denounces homosexuality as a state security threat, because homosexuality violates accepted gender norms and the power construct that grants authority. Libya has also claimed to the UN Human Rights Council that trans sexualities are a global security threat. Gender permeates the lives of men and women, who are subconsciously attuned to societal norms for fear of ostracization or violence.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ..., 144.

<sup>6</sup>M. Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2005): 165.

<sup>7</sup>Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova, "The Remasculinization of Russia?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 61, no. 2 (2014): 24 -25; Laura Sjoberg, "Seeing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in International Security," *International*

The remarkable correlation between gender equality and state security magnifies gender as a form of substantial structural power. According to a multitude of studies, levels of gender inequality increase the likelihood of violent intrastate conflict: factors include son bias, high-fertility rates, highly patriarchal societies, widespread female insecurity (domestic violence, rape, and femicide were statistically significant when grouped), or even social, economic, political or labour force exclusion of women.<sup>8</sup> Structural power distribution, in the form of gender inequality, can spell state fragility. Increasing international levels of gender equality could produce a more stable, and equitable, world; thus, the WPS Agenda, along with feminist domestic and foreign policy practices, are relevant state security, and conflict prevention tools.

### **Essentialism**

Essentialism is the view that specific groups of people, for example boys or women, have intrinsic natures associated with their group. Informally, essentialism is referred to as a trope. Essentialist narratives are frequently used to portray women in conflict where women are treated as “victims of violence rather than as active agents of peace and development.”<sup>9</sup> The view that women are inherently vulnerable due to their intrinsic natures is common across many cultures; thus, prevalent female insecurity becomes accepted as an invisible, and harmful, norm.<sup>10</sup>

Essentialisms about men and women create a binary association between the sexes: for example, men are powerful, authoritative, and capable of violence, while women are physically weak, passive, and nurturing. This binary association drives power relations between the sexes

---

*Journal* 70, no. 3 (2015): 440. Libya’s claims of sexuality posing a global security threat; Lori Hanrahan, "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction," *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004): 440: There are repercussions for rejecting group identity.

<sup>8</sup>Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute Oslo. Women, Peace and Security Index 2017/18 ..., ..., 11. A recent summary of studies; M. Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict," ..., 167. Best for research methodologies.

<sup>9</sup>Rebecca Tiessen, "Gender Essentialism in Canadian Foreign Aid Commitments to Women, Peace, and Security," *International Journal* 70, no. 1 (2015a): abstract, 98.

<sup>10</sup>Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security," ..., 448; Hanrahan, "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction," ..., 430.

within society. These entrenched beliefs create inequality, and "... inform society's gender assumptions about war and peace. The same essentialist representation that defined women as the victims of war has elevated men to the role of protector/ warrior/ policymaker."<sup>11</sup> Women cannot join police forces or act as authority figures in some cultures because prevalent essentialisms are used as a basis to bar entry to individuals within the essentialized group. Essentialist beliefs are often used to justify structural inequalities.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

Essentialist beliefs about men and women's natures have barred women from decision-making roles in public life and still do in many cultures; therefore, societal structures evolved without consideration for women's holistic needs. The UN promotes gender mainstreaming as a counterbalance to marginalization in present structures, and as a vehicle for gender equality.<sup>12</sup> A commonly agreed on definition of gender mainstreaming follows:

[a] process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.<sup>13</sup>

To practice gender mainstreaming over the spectrum of political, societal and security decision-making, means to change the essentialist narratives that marginalize women's and men's voices.

However improbably, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), supported by an irrefutable

---

<sup>11</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ..., 145.

<sup>12</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ..., 145, 157; For examples of WPS documents that promote or direct the use of gender mainstreaming, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS). *Policy Directive on Gender Equality in Peacekeeping Operations*, (New York: UN, November 2006) and UNSCR 1325....

<sup>13</sup>UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview* (New York: United Nations, 2001), 1; Sarah Smith, "'When 'gender' Started': The United Nations in Post-Occupation Timor-Leste," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 55; UN Women, "A Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women," last accessed 17 April 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/a-short-history-of-the-csw-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1153>"



body of research that equal societies are more peaceful societies has made traditional anti-militarist feminist IR policy<sup>14</sup> inextricable from the UN's security apparatuses.

### **‘Add Women and Stir’**

Despite the UNSC's unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1325, which incorporates gender mainstreaming in PKOs, and member-states' National Action Plans to implement UNSCR1325, gender mainstreaming has faltered in ushering in widespread gender equality. Sahana Dharmapuri, a feminist IR pundit, posits that this is because policy makers possess a rudimentary understanding of gender, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, and thus "the promotion of women's empowerment is confused with using a gender perspective."<sup>15</sup> Another pundit aptly argues that existing power structures and essentialist beliefs remain firmly in place:

Attempts to mainstream gender within the UN have failed to go to the heart of the institutional inequities and power relations that structure gender relations within the organization. Rather attempts have been made to graft gender mainstreaming onto existing power structures so that mainstreaming in UN peace operations has become circumscribed by the essentialist nature of binary opposites in which gender has been interpreted as woman, and women remain differentiated from men.<sup>16</sup>

Many articles assert that the integration of gender mainstreaming is unsuccessful or incomplete in UN security apparatuses. The scope of this paper permits the explorations of but two of the possible reasons why gender mainstreaming is incomplete: (1) pervasive essentialist beliefs and (2) topical gender balance provisions disguised as gender mainstreaming, and how they temper gender mainstreaming from achieving true gender equality.

---

<sup>14</sup>"The 'second wave' of the feminist movement in particular adhered to peace activism and anti-militarism." Johanna Valenius, "A Few Kind Women: Gender Essentialism and Nordic Peacekeeping Operations," *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 4 (2007): 520; Cynthia Cockburn, "Snagged On The Contradiction: NATO, UNSC Resolution 1325, and Feminist Responses," Unpublished (2011), 1. <http://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/snagged-contradiction-nato-uns-c-resolution-1325-and-feminist-responses>; Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, "Regendering the Military: Theorizing women's Military Participation," *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2016): 4.

<sup>15</sup>Sahana Dharmapuri, "Just Add Women and Stir?" *Parameters* 41, no. 1 (2011): 58.

<sup>16</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ...,150.

Discouragingly, women often perpetuate patriarchal social constructs. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is one example of this, as it is usually, although not exclusively, performed by women. The practice poses serious health risks for girls and their future children. Intact women and their families, however, risk condemnation, harassment, and ostracization in deeply patriarchal communities. FGM is performed even when parents know the risks, as the perceived benefits outweigh the disadvantages.<sup>17</sup>

The practice of FGM is an indisputable example that increased female participation does not guarantee a gendered perspective or gender equity. Female participation could in fact serve to reinforce unequal structural power hierarchies. Female participation is frequently confused with gender mainstreaming. Hence the IR feminist critique of increased female participation in the UN guised as gender mainstreaming. This phenomenon is aptly named ‘add women and stir.’<sup>18</sup>

## **WOMEN AS VICTIMS: ESSENTIALISM IN WPS AGENDA DISCOURSE**

Particularly before 2009 the WPS Agenda literature essentialized women as victims and in association with children more often than as independent agents; thus, making it extremely difficult to empower women requiring securitization as intended once inserted into “a chain of protection” by UN discourse.<sup>19</sup> For example, the conjunction of women with children, signified by the phrases “women and children” or “women and girls,” pervades WPS UNSCRs prior to

---

<sup>17</sup>UN. “International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation,” last accessed 20 April 2019 <https://www.un.org/en/events/femalegenitalmutilationday/>; UNPF. “FGM FAQ,” last accessed 20 April 2019, [https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#who\\_performs](https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#who_performs)

<sup>18</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ..., 155; Sjoberg, "Seeing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in International Security," ..., 434-453; Jacqui Ala, "Enriching the Critical Discourse of Feminist Studies in International Relations: New Discussions of the Roles of Women in Conflict, Peace Making and Government," *Politikon* 33, no. 2 (2006): 249. There is a myth that increasing the number of women in politics serves a gender perspective and increases women's empowerment on a large scale.

<sup>19</sup>Maria, Jansson and Maud Eduards, "The Politics of Gender in the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 4 (2016a): 600; Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325..." ..., 150; Marsha Henry, "Peaceexploitation? Interrogating Labor Hierarchies and Global Sisterhood among Indian and Uruguayan Female Peacekeepers," *Globalizations* 9, no. 1 (2012): 28. Refers to this as associating women with peace and men with war.

2009.<sup>20</sup> In fact, UNSCR 1325, passed in 2000, refers to women jointly alongside children and girls 15 times – more often than independently as just ‘women.’ UNSCR 1820 (passed in 2008) refers to women in conjunction with children 18 times and independent from children just 12. The overwhelming references to women in WPS UNSCRs are in conjunction with children and/or as victims. UNSCR discourse is consistent with essentialist beliefs that women are peaceful, domestic caregivers, nurturers and victims, and not perpetrators of violence or politicized decision makers imbued with agency. Robbing women, especially those most marginalized by conflict, of agency, even in discourse, is counter to the empowerment aims of the WPS Agenda and can impact how security forces and international actors view and interact with women.<sup>21</sup>

Although later resolutions, like UNSCR 2242, passed in 2015, does not use the phrase “women and children,” it employs the combination of “women and girls” only four times. The two contexts with “women and girls” phrasing include references to the violation of their human rights or the need to empower them equally. This discursive shift, although subtle, frames women in discourse as more powerful: women and girls are entitled to human rights and the resolutions call for their empowerment. Women are no longer victims grouped with children; women and girls have rights and should be empowered. In WPS Agenda discourse, the essentialist conjunction of women with children and as victims has evolved recently to one of greater empowerment.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, "The New United Nations "Gender Architecture": A Room with a View?" ..., 42, 46.

<sup>21</sup>Ala, "Enriching the Critical Discourse of Feminist Studies in International Relations...", ..., 246. Some women's organizations and IR feminists believe in relying on essentialisms to achieving one's aim of greater equality; however, their aims are often co-opted by government.

<sup>22</sup>This discursive shift away from essentialisms also came with greater discursive inclusion of who can be classified, and therefore formally acknowledged, as victims of sexual violence. UNSCR 2242 condemns sexual violence against “civilian populations” instead of solely “women and girls” in earlier documents. Gender is not a requirement to be classified as a victim of SEA.

The study of discourse may seem an impractical way to address structural inequality. However, essentialism in discourse often reflects deeper beliefs. For example, the female war victim belief, mentioned above, limited the ways in which significant numbers of female combatants were treated in the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) programmes in Sierra Leone following the end of intra-state conflict in 2005:

the international humanitarian response to Sierra Leone's conflict has also tended to concentrate on female victims. There are numerous examples of internationally supported programs directed at female victims of conflict; however, there are a few programs (in fact almost none) that are directed at the former female combatants....

Of the 6,845 child soldiers disarmed, only 8 percent were girls. The number of girls that went through the DDR, and its accompanying social programmes, was abysmal. UNICEF admitted: "DDR programmes have failed consistently to attract female combatants...Sierra Leone was no exception." Female child soldiers and female combatants made up to 10 to 50% of the combatant population, but due to essentialist beliefs about women and a failure to conduct gender mainstreaming, they were excluded from programmes and robbed of the authority they possessed during the conflict as skilled combatants and combatant commanders.<sup>23</sup>

Sierra Leoneans and the international community reduced women's agency post-conflict rather than bolstering it. Frequently female combatants were reduced to tropes surrounding their sexual roles, like that of 'bush wife' or sexual slave. This happened even though many women were both combatant and sexual violence survivor. In this example and others, women that did not fit neatly into essentialized versions of women post-conflict were othered and largely

---

<sup>23</sup>Megan MacKenzie, "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 245; UNICEF. *The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF*, February 2005, accessed at [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact\\_final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact_final.pdf)

ignored.<sup>24</sup> Due to a lack of gender mainstreaming by the international community and the state, women's holistic needs were not met. The agency they possessed during conflict was lost in the post-conflict reordering orchestrated, in part, by the international community.

The example of female combatant's in Sierra Leone is but one example that highlights the fragility and impermanence of women's authority during the arc of conflict, and how the international community can inadvertently undermine women's empowerment. The Sierra Leone DDR coincided with UN WPS Agenda discourse that essentialized women as victims; unsurprisingly, actions in country perpetuated those very essentialisms. Essentialist discourse leads to essentialist actions that do not reflect reality. The UN, who influences international norms and regulates state responses, must avoid essentialisms. Gender mainstreaming is only a successful vehicle to empowerment when the perspectives and needs of women from all strata in society are incorporated, not just the perspectives of women that neatly fit the UN's essentialist definitions.

## **WOMEN AS PEACEFUL: ESSENTIALIZING FEMALE PEACEKEEPERS**

### **Essentialism in WPS Agenda and Feminist Discourse**

Despite some improvements in how women are framed in UNSCR discourse, the UN continues to essentialize female peacekeepers to the detriment of its stated goal: women's empowerment. Women peacekeepers have been widely deemed to have special innate qualities based on their sex. They are portrayed in discourse as more approachable, compassionate, sexually conformist, and passive than male peacekeepers.<sup>25</sup> The mere construction of the

---

<sup>24</sup>Megan MacKenzie, "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 244.

<sup>25</sup>"women's gentle nature, conciliatory attitude, ability to control aggression." Gerard J. DeGroot, "A Few Good Women: Gender Stereotypes, the Military and Peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping* 8, no. 2 (2001): 34.

previous phrase indicates a binary association between women and men, which is the hallmark of essentialist beliefs.

Increased gender balance in peacekeeping is viewed as a cure-all by many within the UN and by some IR feminists. This collective opines that better gender balance on peace keeping operations will alleviate Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), improve the lives of SGBV victims, increase reporting of SGBV, increase meaningful contact with locals and women's advocacy groups, lead to greater repercussions for perpetrators, and will reduce violent conflict due to the intrinsic natures of women.<sup>26</sup> Below a UN Secretary General report relies on essentialist views to propagate essentialist beliefs without citing research:

The fifth basic requirement is an increase in the percentage of female peacekeeping personnel. That would *facilitate* the mission's task of *making meaningful contact* with vulnerable groups and non-governmental organizations in the local community *in its effort to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse*. Victims and their spokespersons tend to be female and *the presence of female interlocutors, especially in senior positions, would facilitate efforts to encourage the reporting of abuse*, which is the first step in eliminating it. Finally, *the presence of more women in a mission, especially at senior levels, will help to promote an environment that discourages sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly of the local population [emphasis added].*<sup>27</sup>

In this reading, it appears as though men peacekeepers fail to make “meaningful contact,” cannot “eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse” or “facilitate efforts to encourage the reporting of abuse” without the facilitation of women peacekeepers. The prose lends itself to essentialist associations that differentiate women from men. It also devalues men peacekeepers' contributions compared to women peacekeepers'. Additionally, it does not

---

<sup>26</sup>Pablo Castillo Díaz, "Where are the Women? the Missing Question in the UN's Response to Sexual Abuse in Peacekeeping Operations," *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 1-2 (2016): 28-44. Gender balance should be a “central priority” to reduce Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by blue helmets; Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security," ..., 480. Challenging that women are passive by nature using female combatant Tamil nationalists and Irish republicans as examples.

<sup>27</sup>United Nations, *Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects*, United Nations, 2005; Georgina Holmes, "The Commonwealth, Gender and Peacekeeping," *The Round Table* 106, no. 4 (2017): 403-419. Dissection of the commonplace essentialisms in the Commonwealth Secretariat publications.

mention known mechanisms that reduce sexual violence in civilian society;<sup>28</sup> thus, it implies that merely by increasing “the percentage of female peacekeeping personnel” the charmed presence of women will improve PKO outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

Not only is essentialism towards women peacekeepers evident in UN documentation, but it is perpetuated by essentialist IR feminists and activists. See two examples below, the first of which acknowledges the essentialist nature of PKO documentation that advocates for female peacekeepers based on the perceived benefits of their “gender difference:”

Considering women in peacekeeping operations, the UN advocates not only gender equality based on liberal equal rights arguments but also the need to include women based on *gender difference*. This resonates more with the ideology advocated by radical and standpoint feminists.<sup>30</sup>

In the second example, located below, Gerard Degroot, considered an *expert* by the UN on women in the military,<sup>31</sup> reinforces essentialist beliefs about women and the positive contributions they can make based solely on the intrinsic attributes commonly associated with women by essentialist thinkers:

*The attributes commonly associated with women, namely a gentle nature, conciliatory attitude and the ability to control aggression might make them effective peacekeepers — possibly even more effective than men.* This means that those who have consistently argued against female participation in the military are suddenly finding that the logic of their argument in fact points toward greater gender integration. On the other hand, those who have struggled hard to attack the stereotypes which have prevented female participation, suddenly find that those stereotypes point to an important contribution which women can make. It is quite possible that, in future, the military will want more women for the very simple reason that they are women.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. “Preventing Sexual Violence,” 2019, last accessed 1 May 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/prevention.html>

<sup>29</sup>United Nations, *Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects*, United Nations, 2005.

<sup>30</sup>Angela Alchin, Amanda Gouws, and Lindy Heinecken, "Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations: Voices of South African Women Peacekeepers," *African Security Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 10.

<sup>31</sup>NATO, International Military Staff Introduction, last accessed 28 April 2019, <https://www.nato.int/ims/2002/cwinf2002/cwinf-01.htm>

<sup>32</sup>Gerard J. DeGroot, "A Few Good Women: Gender Stereotypes, the Military and Peacekeeping," ..., 24.

Unfortunately, the essentialist binary created above implies men are excluded from making the same “*important contribution*” as peacekeepers because they inherently lack the desired attributions and skills.

Thus, the very argument limits and devalues male peacekeepers’ contributions in the past and in the future, and implies that men, in general and even with training and a strong desire to participate, are unsuitable as peacekeepers. Using Degroot’s essentialist logic, when value is assigned to women peacekeepers there is a direct devaluation of men peacekeepers. Degroot highlights the conundrum of anti-essentialist feminists; if essentialisms prove useful in achieving a contested goal, should essentialist beliefs be used to justify the presence of women in militaries and PKOs? Asked another way, should men be devalued so women can assume greater roles? Thus, essentialism does not reinforce substantive equality amongst men and women peacekeepers, and should be avoided.

Further strengthening the essentialist arguments for greater female participation, is anecdotal evidence from state contexts. Taken at face value, it appears as though women peacekeepers improve outreach, SGVB reporting, and reduce the use of force,<sup>33</sup> thus, reinforcing beliefs about women’s inherent communication, compassion, and passivity. On the other hand, there exists contrary anecdotal evidence from national contexts that refutes the positive effects of women peacekeepers for operational effectiveness. For example, women peacekeepers are not always compassionate towards rape victims, and can be viewed with suspicion, or as spies, by local women.<sup>34</sup> Unsurprisingly, the study of gender remains a hotly contested arena.

---

<sup>33</sup>United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security, UN document S/2017/861, 16 October 2017, para. 28.

<sup>34</sup>Olivera Simić, "Does the Presence of Women really Matter? Towards Combating Male Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations." *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (2010): 195. Indian female peacekeepers were not more compassionate towards rape victims in Liberia; “[Locals] viewed women soldiers with suspicion, and often regarded them as spies,” Alchin, Gouws, and Heinecken, "Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations...." ..., 9: Marie Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed



A holistic view of the evidence suggests that the correlation of women with improved outcomes is inflated and requires further research. Women serve in marginal proportions. The application of “Critical Mass Theory” suggests that their impact would be insignificant on the operation as a whole. Furthermore, practices of leaving roles related to SGVB vacant unless filled by women; sending women to the safest theatres and roles; and training women police to receive SGVB complaints more than their male peers impact the statistical significance of these correlations. Training, employment and leadership attitudes may reap greater improvements to operations than improved gender balance. In the interim, a comprehensive approach may best serve operational aims until definitive research is completed.<sup>35</sup> As well, anecdotally supported essentialist perspectives and practices should be explored further and acknowledged as detrimental to substantive equality.

### **When Women Peacekeeper Essentialisms Thwart Gender Mainstreaming**

Statements that herald the transformational outcomes of improving peacekeeper gender balance should be closely scrutinized. It is naive to believe that a minority group of women (averaging just 4% military and 10% police peacekeepers in PKOs),<sup>36</sup> with largely similar training to their male peers, will be able to transform post-conflict cultures for local women simply due to their intrinsic natures. Below are two reasons why essentialist arguments are questionable from a military practitioner’s perspective: (1) military institutionalization of female soldiers, and (2) how essentialisms about female peacekeepers become limiting stereotypes.

---

Forces,” (Ottawa: DND/ External Review Authority Canada, 27 March 2015), Executive Summary, iii. Canadians do not report abuse inside their own military. As well senior female leaders were found to be desensitized to the highly sexualized environment within which they worked; thus, challenging the notion that women will hold men accountable for SEA.

<sup>35</sup>Canada, “The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations,” *MENA Report*, 2018, 15 -17. The touted benefits of women in theatre overwhelmingly relate to police and not military peacekeepers; thus, raising the uncomfortable question if women police peacekeepers are the most operationally effective in the peacekeeping gender hierarchy. Essentialism proves problematic yet again.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

## (1) Female Soldiers

Anti-essentialist feminists believe gender is learned. Many acknowledge that femininity is learned. However, soldiering is also learned.<sup>37</sup> In a professional fighting force that particular type of socialization is referred to as institutionalization. Professional militaries are extremely effective at institutionalizing wide-ranging and particular values and behaviours throughout their forces: dress codes, strict ethos, and standard operating procedures are enforced by formal power hierarchies and a military judiciary system that regulate behaviours when soldiers are both on and off duty. Military socialization is meant to prepare soldiers for conflict, so that they are capable of killing enemy soldiers. Expecting professional soldiers, regardless of their sex, to exhibit traits during their missions for which they are not socialized, nor trained, and will not benefit them in their primary function as security actors, is misguided. Female soldiers are unique as women who have undergone and *succeeded* in military socialization. From a gender mainstreaming perspective, female soldiers have unique perspectives, needs and vulnerabilities that are often overlooked within the peacekeeping framework due to the buzz surrounding their intended effect and assumptions about their ‘innate femininity.’<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

<sup>38</sup>This fact is not completely disregarded by feminist scholars, but rarely enters the dialogue. Although Jacqui Ala admits that further study of female combatants and female soldiers is necessary in Ala, "Enriching the Critical Discourse of Feminist Studies in International Relations...", ..., 244: Valenius, "A Few Kind Women: ..." .... explores this idea partly as well. Few other IR feminists in the works cited either understood military socialization or considered female soldiers' perspectives as required for successful gender mainstreaming. The debates appear to be a conceptual one about whether IR feminists should support their presence or not.

## (2) Limiting Stereotypes: The Paradox of Female Soldiers as Empowered to Stop Sexual Violence, But Vulnerable to Sexual Violence

As a military professional reading feminist IR works, the lack of holistic consideration for women working in all aspects of the peacekeeping framework comes as a surprise.<sup>39</sup> In particular, the inherent and well-documented vulnerability of militarized women is largely absent from the discourse on female peacekeepers. There is occasional acknowledgement that peacekeepers encounter abuse that makes them reluctant to volunteer;<sup>40</sup> also, that women peacekeepers are subject to hostility by their peers when they report them for inappropriate behaviour in the field.<sup>41</sup> However, for an example of female servicewomen's vulnerability, one needs only to research the widespread, systematic, and harmful, sexual behaviour in the Canadian military as evidenced in the Deschamps report. Not only did the report document a highly sexualized culture, it evidenced widespread under-reporting by women when they themselves were victims. Furthermore, the highly sexualized environment desensitized senior female leaders, so they were blind to the abuse.<sup>42</sup> The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) serves as an excellent case study as it has relatively high rates of female service women (15%), who have been permitted in almost all combat trades since 1990, and Canada scored 7<sup>th</sup> on the Women, Peace and Security Index 2017/18, indicating respectable measures of women's relative participation and empowerment in Canadian society at large. Yet the CAF suffers from a

---

<sup>39</sup>Henry, "Peaceexploitation? ...," ..., 28; Canada, "The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations," ..., 36; Some authors do explore women peacekeeper's vulnerability holistically; however, it appears exceedingly rare from IR feminists.

<sup>40</sup>Jane Lloyd, "Women Peacekeepers: Making a Difference," *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 43, No1 March – May 2006; Canada, "The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations," ..., 36. A collection of stories from UN women that showcases some of the challenges they encounter.

<sup>41</sup>Vandra Harris and Andrew Goldsmith, "Gendering Transnational Policing: Experiences of Australian Women in International Policing Operations," *International Peacekeeping* vol. 17, no. 2 (April 2010), 299-303.

<sup>42</sup>"...there is an underlying sexualized culture in the CAF that is hostile to women and LGTBQ members, and conducive to more serious incidents of sexual harassment and assault." Deschamps, "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces," ..., Executive Summary, i, iii; Canada, "Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces," *Statistics Canada Report*, 2016, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/161128/dq161128a-eng.htm>

typically masculinized military environment. Female soldiers are more likely to suffer sexual assault than women in the civilian workforce.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it would be unrealistic to assume women in militaries, who are subject to, desensitized to and unlikely to report harmful sexualized behaviour will champion other women that are victimized by their superiors or peers, who may well enjoy a certain level of existing impunity.

Further addressing assumptions stemming from essentialist beliefs, there is a legitimate aversion to military socialization and soldiers by many feminist IR pundits due to the highly masculinized cultures associated with most, if not all, militaries, and the inherently anti-military origins of feminist IR.<sup>44</sup> For example, Angela Alchin, an essentialist IR Feminist, bemoans female soldiers who must “abandon” or “dilute” their femininity” and therefore become less effective peace keepers— assuming female soldiers’ femininities were ‘feminine’ to begin with or that some soldiers celebrate their gender fluidity. However, many feminist critics negate the job satisfaction and empowerment that many women enjoy as highly militarized professional soldiers.<sup>45</sup> This is especially true in volunteer militaries in wealthy nations, like Canada. In these states, empowered women of great privilege aspire to serve in aggressive militarized environments in physically gruelling combat functions. Women in state militaries, like female

---

<sup>43</sup>Canada, Women in the Canadian Armed Forces, last accessed 25 April 2019 <http://forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/ildcias0>. 2016 numbers that incorporate Regular Force and Reserve women; Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute Oslo. *Women, Peace and Security Index 2017/18* ..., ..., 11; Andrea Lane, "Special Men: The Gendered Militarization of the Canadian Armed Forces," *International Journal* 72, no. 4 (2017): 464; “When measuring sexual assault in the general population, incidents are not limited to those that occur in the workplace or involve co-workers. That said, the prevalence of sexual assault is lower among the general working population than in the Regular Force and the Primary Reserve.” Canada, “Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces,” *Statistics Canada Report*, 2016, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/161128/dq161128a-eng.htm>

<sup>44</sup>See footnote 20.

<sup>45</sup>“abandon,” and “dilute.” Alchin, Gouws, and Heineken, "Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations..." ..., 9, 14; Valenius, "A Few Kind Women..."..., 520. Dedicates a few lines to military women that enjoy the military.; “Throughout its consultations, the ERA met with members who appeared genuinely happy with their choice of career, and who found great personal pride and satisfaction in their work for the military.” Deschamps, “External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces,” ..., Executive Summary, ii.

combatants, are both empowered and vulnerable; therefore, they cannot be reconciled by binary essentialist belief systems.

Female soldiers are contradictory characters for essentialist IR feminists, so they are categorized as empowered and their vulnerability is ignored. Perhaps because these women are tainted by a voluntary association with state militaries, which IR feminists frequently find hostile towards women. The essentialist view is that female peacekeepers are women with agency, and, therefore, are responsible for helping other women. They are framed this way because it suits the IR essentialist world view; however, it negates their nuanced reality. Women peacekeepers have varied experiences due in part to the level of integration within their state military, and there are further variances by trade, rank, qualification, and sub-unit culture. Therefore, consideration of peacekeeping practices like ‘add women and stir,’ and the potential exacerbation of existing women peacekeeper vulnerabilities are not considered sufficiently within the field of feminist IR. Thus, there is an exclusion of women’s perspectives at the core of the gender mainstreaming practices for which IR feminists and the UN WPS Agenda advocate.

#### The Uncomfortable Gulf Between Women’s Experiences and Privilege

Categorically, women’s experiences both during and post-conflict are horrendous.<sup>46</sup> Comparing the vulnerability of women peacekeepers and women who survive conflict and live in post-conflict states, even female combatants, is inherently problematic. Fortunately, a comparison is not the point of this endeavour. However, negating one group’s vulnerability because of its relative privilege or agency still creates unintended marginalization that could be exacerbated with continued essentialist practices. Furthermore, it is contrary to the practice of gender mainstreaming.

---

<sup>46</sup>Hanrahan, "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction," ..., 434.

## Two Ways in Which Essentialism Could Translate in Practice

### Increased Demands

Essentialism can be harmful to women experiencing conflict. As demonstrated above, it can rob them of agency and reduce them to one-dimensional tropes. Coincidentally, essentialisms about women peacekeepers are also harmful as they place greater responsibility on them, demand greater emotional investment into their work, and place higher job performance expectations based on their sex alone, and not by granting them greater training, resources or agency.

A prolific feminist IR scholar, Olivera Simic, who critiques UN commonwealth peacekeeping essentialisms, concludes one of her articles by perpetuating the belief that the average woman peacekeeper has greater responsibility than those of her male peers, despite positing the contrary at the beginning of her article:

Finally, this article suggests that the roles of women peacekeepers in PKOs should be rethought. It seems that they have been seen as ‘saviours’ of local women but also of the UN integrity and credibility, which has been jeopardized by an increasing number of SEA cases perpetrated by their male colleagues. Rather than accepting these responsibilities, *local women and women serving in PKOs should push TCCs to enforce the laws and remove impunity for their peacekeepers for sexual crimes they commit while serving in PKOs as well as reinforce accountability at all levels of the mission* [emphasis added].

Although in her abstract she specifically states:

While there is a need to combat sexual violence in PKOs, *the responsibility for prevention should be on troop-contributing countries*, which need to exercise accountability and prosecute sexual violence committed by their peacekeepers. *Diverting responsibility to women does not address the problem of sexual violence in PKOs*, or help eradicate its causes.<sup>47</sup>

Although harmful essentialisms are debunked in her work, she perpetuates the expectation that women, based on their sex alone, should enforce greater accountability of their male peers to rectify some of the very crimes that male soldiers perpetuate at a higher frequency than female

---

<sup>47</sup>Olivera Simić, "Does the Presence of Women really Matter? ...," ..., 197, abstract.

soldiers.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Simic fails to consider evidence that there can be reprisals for peacekeepers who report their comrades. Calling women to action may well exacerbate their vulnerability, and detract from efforts to hold men accountable for their actions.<sup>49</sup> It appears as though expectations and moral standards are much higher for women than men even in anti-essentialist feminist works.

Absent from feminist IR research studies is whether placing women in roles where they predominantly deal with victims of SEA, and are expected to report on their male peers, impacts female peacekeeper's performance and mental well-being. Women are filling roles that address sexual violence when they are employed within potentially harmful sexual environments. Again, women peacekeeper vulnerability persists as unexplored and obscured to many IR feminists.

#### Women Peacekeepers and Their Roles Are Devalued

In an essentialist value-based assessment of men and women, men are better warfighters and women are better peacekeepers; thus, in a highly masculinized military environment a devaluation of women's roles by male soldiers is likely.<sup>50</sup> Describing women peacekeepers as possessing intrinsic traits and superior peacekeeping skill implies that this unique asset should be employed in certain roles like any other military expert with unique skillsets. Carefully employing specialist skillsets is common practice in militaries in order to maximize the intended impact without squandering scarce resources. Essentializing female peacekeepers as having unique skills means (1) they will be employed in roles according to their perceived skills and not

---

<sup>48</sup>"It's true that women also assault men, but even when victims of all genders are combined, men perpetrate 78 percent of reported assaults." Liz Plank, "Most perpetrators of sexual violence are men, so why do we call it a women's issue?" *Divided States of Women*, 2 Nov 2017, <https://www.dividedstatesofwomen.com/2017/11/2/16597768/sexual-assault-men-himthough>

<sup>49</sup>Willett, "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325...", ..., 156.

<sup>50</sup>How roles women fulfill in militaries become devalued: "Now, because women can be soldiers and are often found in those logistical or support trades—whether by choice, or by formal exclusion from combat—the value of these trades as soldierly tasks has diminished, and become “women's work” once again.”: Lane, "Special Men...", ..., 473.

those valued traditionally, read for career advancement, nor based on individual interest; and, (2) male peacekeepers are no longer expected to achieve these unique or specialist outcomes because that is a job for the specialist women peacekeepers. Essentializing women peacekeepers negates the fact that some women who join militaries may prefer to fulfill traditional war-fighting or security roles regardless of how they are perceived by essentialist IR feminists. Furthermore, essentializing women peacekeepers undermines women's ambitions for promotion, both in the roles they will be assigned and the war-fighting roles that they will become increasingly viewed as ill-suited for. Any practice that jeopardizes an entire gender's ability to assume leadership roles that are valued for career advancement is a detriment to substantive equality. Overall, female job satisfaction and retention could suffer.

Moreover, by expecting women to prevent crimes and mandate violations largely perpetrated by men, the UN is foolishly treating the symptom, the act, vice the cause, male attitudes that objectify women. Violating UN regulations about SEA, considered criminal behavior in some states, is a grave violation of orders and points to an extremely unprofessional military culture. Reducing SEA, like any other military infraction with a criminal nexus, needs to be addressed through extreme accountability at the personal, organizational, and state levels. Greater independent reporting and tracking mechanisms, not additional token women, need to be institutionalized throughout the UN PKO framework.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gender is a power construct that permeates lived experiences both domestically and internationally. Increasingly, the study of gender equality, and the acknowledgement of its association with intrastate and interstate peace, continues to infiltrate mainstream IR study. Not all states recognize gender as an international power construct; oftentimes it is an invisible force.



One of the ways in which gender manifests as a structural power construct is how it influences individual and state behaviours to conform to accepted gender norms. Often these gender norms are based on binary associations between men and women. These associations are believed to be due to that particular gender's intrinsic nature and are termed essentialisms. Those individuals or groups that do not conform to gender rules are ostracized at best, and experience violence at worst. Essentialist beliefs are often used to justify structural inequalities.

The UN promotes gender mainstreaming as a counterbalance to marginalization in present structures, and as a vehicle for gender equality. Principally, a portion of traditionally anti-militarist feminist IR theory is now embedded into the UN's security apparatuses. Despite this evolution of thought, the subsequent accord amongst states, and the investment of considerable resources, gender mainstreaming has failed to usher in widespread gender equality as hoped. The scope of this paper permitted the explorations of but two of the ways in which gender mainstreaming has been sidetracked: (1) prevalent essentialist beliefs that reinforce existing structural inequalities, or create new forms of inequality, and (2) 'add women and stir:' a topical gender balance provision disguised as gender mainstreaming that actually detracts from gender equality.

Unfortunately, the UN is guilty of robbing women in post-conflict situations of the agency they gained during conflict. How groups are framed in discourse impacts how they are treated; therefore, if women and girls are continually framed as powerless victims or sexual objects the internationally community will fail to reinforce their existing authority. The UN and its partner states must vehemently root out the use of essentialist discourse and continue to encourage a gender mainstreaming approach that leverages the perspectives of a wide breadth of

society – especially those ostracized for their failure to adhere to gender norms, like sex workers, female combatants and political dissidents.

The requirement to continuously verify that gender mainstreaming practices meet the aims of female empowerment remains extant. “Add women and stir” is but one example where practice is not achieving the theoretical aim and a shift in thought, application and how effectiveness is measured is necessary. Essentialist beliefs applied to peacekeeping devalues men peacekeepers’ contributions, and elevates women peacekeepers’ contributions to unrealistic proportions that are only supported by anecdotal evidence during select PKOs. It also places the emphasis on female participation instead of forcing PKO masculinities to develop in ways that will foster mission success. Essentialism cannot be viewed as a vehicle to female empowerment if it detracts from substantive equality and maintains harmful masculine practices.

Furthermore, female soldiers are unique as women who have undergone and *succeeded* in military socialization. With gender mainstreaming in mind, female soldiers have unique perspectives, needs and vulnerabilities that are often overlooked within the peacekeeping framework due to the buzz surrounding their intended impact and assumptions about their ‘innate femininity.’ Female soldiers are excluded from the discourse by IR feminists, their nuance and vulnerability obscured by their perceived masculinization. ‘Othering’ female soldiers obstructs gender mainstreaming efforts. For example, women peacekeepers on operation, who are subject to, desensitized to and unlikely to report harmful sexualized behaviour are improbable SEA champions for those victimized by their superiors or peers. In conclusion, essentialisms about women peacekeepers lead to increased demands based on their sex and a failure to acknowledge or even explore the impact of those increased demands. The phenomenon

is furthered by IR feminists' aversion to militarized women, and IR feminist's failure to gender mainstream the military practitioner perspective.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation One: SEA Accountability is a State, Leadership and Perpetrator**

#### **Problem.**

Decreasing toxic masculine behaviours related to SEA should be paramount over all other measures. Sexual perpetrators, the individual's direct military Chain of Command (CoC), and the state need to be held accountable in extreme for acts of SEA. In order to support rigorous accountability the UN should employ separate (from the CoC) and anonymous reporting channels empowered with separate investigative teams.

### **Recommendation Two: Further Research**

A holistic view of the evidence suggests that the correlation of women peacekeepers with improved outcomes is inflated and requires further research. Training, employment and leadership attitudes may reap greater improvements to operations than improved gender balance. In the interim a comprehensive approach may best serve operational aims until definitive research is completed.<sup>51</sup> As well, anecdotally supported essentialist perspectives and practices should be actively rooted out of UN documents.

### **Recommendation Three: Better Metrics**

The UN's reporting focus should be on women's mission integration measures more than participation. How women are being employed is more important that how many are present. This would require the development of empowerment metrics, like how many women held decision-making positions and how many women were employed in front-line field work in

---

<sup>51</sup>Canada, "The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations," *MENA Report*, 2018, 15 -17.

leadership roles. The impact of exposure to SEA on servicewomen, including women police, deserves further study.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ala, Jacqui. "Enriching the Critical Discourse of Feminist Studies in International Relations: New Discussions of the Roles of Women in Conflict, Peace Making and Government." *Politikon* 33, no. 2 (2006): 239-249.
- Alchin, Angela. Amanda Gouws, and Lindy Heinecken. "Making a Difference in Peacekeeping Operations: Voices of South African Women Peacekeepers." *African Security Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 1-19.
- Alison, Miranda. "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security." *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004a): 447-463.
- Blanchard, Eric M. "Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory." *Signs* 28, no. 4 (2003a): 1289-1312.
- Bouvier, Virginia. "UN Women Background Paper: Gender and the Role of Women in Columbia's Peace Process." New York: UN Women, 7 Feb 2017.
- Bunch, Charlotte. "Women's Rights and Gender at the United Nations. Toward a New Gender Equality Architecture." *Vereinte Nationen* 57, no. 5 (2009): 195-203.
- Canada. "The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations." *MENA Report*, 2018.
- Canada. "Sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces." *Statistics Canada Report*, 2016. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/161128/dq161128a-eng.htm>
- Caprioli, M. "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2005): 161-178.
- Charlesworth, Hilary and Christine Chinkin. "A Normative Agenda for UN Women" in Chapter 6 *The United Nations "Gender Architecture."* 56 – 57.
- Charlesworth, Hilary and Christine Chinkin. "The New United Nations "Gender Architecture": A Room with a View?" *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 17, no. 1 (2013): 1-60.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War: A Feminist Standpoint." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, no. 2 (2010): 139-157.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. "Snagged On The Contradiction: NATO, UNSC Resolution 1325, and Feminist Responses." Unpublished (2011). <http://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/snagged-contradiction-nato-unscl-resolution-1325-and-feminist-responses>

- Cohn, Carol. "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals." *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987a): 687-718.
- Connell, R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.
- DeGroot, Gerard J. "A Few Good Women: Gender Stereotypes, the Military and Peacekeeping." *International Peacekeeping* 8, no. 2 (2001): 23-38.
- Deschamps, Marie. "External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces". Ottawa: DND/ External Review Authority Canada, 27 March 2015. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/sexual-misbehaviour/external-review-2015.html>
- Dharmapuri, Sahana. "Just Add Women and Stir?" *Parameters* 41, no. 1 (2011): 56-70.
- Díaz, Pablo Castillo. "Where are the Women? The Missing Question in the UN's Response to Sexual Abuse in Peacekeeping Operations." *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 1-2 (2016): 28-44.
- Dietrich Ortega, Luisa Maria. "Looking Beyond Violent Militarized Masculinities: Guerrilla Gender Regimes In Latin America." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 4 (2012): 489-507.
- Duncanson, Claire. "Forces for Good? Narratives of Military Masculinity in Peacekeeping Operations." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11, no. 1 (2009): 63-80.
- Duncanson, Claire and Rachel Woodward. "Regendering the Military: Theorizing women's Military Participation." *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2016): 3-21.
- Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo. "Women, Peace and Security Index 2017/18: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women." Washington, DC: GIWPS and PRIO, 2017. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WPS-Index-Report-2017-18.pdf>
- Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1995.
- Gulli, Cathy. "Peacekeeping: Canada's most Wanted: Women." *Maclean's* 123, no. 27 (2010).
- Hanrahan, Lori. "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction." *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004): 429-445.

- Harris, Vandra and Andrew Goldsmith. "Gendering Transnational Policing: Experiences of Australian Women in International Policing Operations." *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (April 2010): 292-306.
- Henry, Marsha. "Peacexploitation? Interrogating Labor Hierarchies and Global Sisterhood among Indian and Uruguayan Female Peacekeepers." *Globalizations* 9, no. 1 (2012): 15-33.
- Holmes, Georgina. "The Commonwealth, Gender and Peacekeeping." *The Round Table* 106, no. 4 (2017): 403-419.
- Jansson, Maria, and Maud Eduards. "The Politics of Gender in the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 4 (2016a): 590-604.
- Jennings, Kathleen M., "Women's Participation in UN peacekeeping operations: agents of change or stranded symbols?," *Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution Report*. September 2011. <https://noref.no/Publications/Themes/Gender-and-inclusivity/Women-s-participation-in-UN-peacekeeping-operations-agents-of-change-or-stranded-symbols>.
- Karim, Sabrina. "Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States." Posted by Cornell University, 19 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MuRuWs8Y2E>
- Karim, Sabrina, and Kyle Beardsley. "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries." *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 1 (January 2016): 100-115.
- Kennedy, Caroline and Sophia Dingli. "Gender and Security" Chapter 11 in *Contemporary Security Studies*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Kirby, Paul and Laura J. Shepherd. "The Futures Past of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." *International Affairs* 92, no. 2 (2016): 373-392.
- Kreutz, Joakim, and Magda Cardenas. "Women, Peace and Intervention: How the International Community Responds to Sexual Violence in Civil Conflict." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, no. 3 (2017): 260-276.
- Krook, Mona Lena and Jacqui True. "Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nations and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality." *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 103-127.
- Lane, Andrea. "Special Men: The Gendered Militarization of the Canadian Armed Forces." *International Journal* 72, no. 4 (2017): 463-483.

- Lloyd, Jane. "Women Peacekeepers: Making a Difference," *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 43, No1 March – May 2006.
- MacKenzie, Megan. "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone." *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 241-261.
- Matisek, Jahara W. and Northwestern University. "Shades of Gray Deterrence: Issues of Fighting in the Gray Zone." *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 3 (2017): 1-26.
- National Atlantic Treaty Organization. "Bi-Strategic Command Directive 040-001 (Public version) Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure." 17 October 2017.
- Popovic, Nicola, Minna Lyytikäinen, Corey Barr, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, and International Alert (Organization). *Planning for Action on Women and Peace and Security: National-Level Implementation of Resolution 1325* (2000). New York: United Nations, 2010.
- Renzulli, Isobel. "Women and Peace: A Human Rights Strategy for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 35, no. 4 (2017): 210-229.
- Riabov, Oleg and Tatiana Riabova. "The Remasculinization of Russia?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 61, no. 2 (2014): 23-35.
- Sharapov, Kiril. "Methodological Approaches to Assessing United Nations Gender Mainstreaming Policies in Kosovo." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 2, no. 2 (2005): 99-106.
- Shepherd, Laura J. "Making War Safe for Women? National Action Plans and the Militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 3 (2016): 324-335.
- Simić, Olivera. "Does the Presence of Women really Matter? Towards Combating Male Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations." *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (2010): 188-199.
- Simon, Rita James. *Women in the Military*. Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2018.
- Sjoberg, Laura. "Introduction to Security Studies: Feminist Contributions." *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009a): 183-213.
- Sjoberg, Laura. "Seeing Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in International Security." *International Journal* 70, no. 3 (2015): 434-453.



- Smith, Sarah. "‘When ‘gender’ Started’: The United Nations in Post-Occupation Timor-Leste." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 55-67.
- Stiehm, Judith Hicks. "Women, Peacekeeping and Peacemaking: Gender Balance and Mainstreaming." *International Peacekeeping* 8, no. 2 (2001): 39-48.
- The Global Women’s Institute. "Intersections of violence against women and girls with state-building and peace-building: Lessons from Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan." *The George Washington University*. Last accessed 1 May 2019 [https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Policybrief\\_ViolenceAndStatebuilding.pdf](https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Policybrief_ViolenceAndStatebuilding.pdf)
- Tiessen, Rebecca. "Gender Essentialism in Canadian Foreign Aid Commitments to Women, Peace, and Security." *International Journal* 70, no. 1 (2015a): 84-100.
- Tickner, J. Ann. "Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992." *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993a): 823-824.
- United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support (DFS). *Policy Directive on Gender Equality in Peacekeeping Operations*. New York: UN, 2006.
- UNICEF. "The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF, Response." New York: UNICEF, 2005. [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact\\_final.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact_final.pdf)
- United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. New York: United Nations, 2001.
- United Nations Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on Women and peace and security*. New York: UN, 28 September 2010.
- United Nations Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on Women, peace and security*. New York: UN, 16 September 2015.
- United Nations. *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Public Administration*. New York: United Nations, 2012.
- United Nations. *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. New York: United Nations, 2002.
- United Nations. *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia (September 2011-June 2016)*. New York: United Nations, 2016.
- United Nations. *Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects*. United Nations, 2005.

- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. New York: United Nations, 2000.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1889*. New York: United Nations, 2009.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820*. New York: United Nations, 2008.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888*. New York: United Nations, 2009.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960*. New York: United Nations, 2010.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106*. New York: United Nations, 2013.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122*. New York: United Nations, 2009.
- United Nations. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242*. New York: United Nations, 2015.
- United Nations Women. "A Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women." Last accessed 17 April 2019. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/a-short-history-of-the-csw-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1153>
- Valenius, Johanna. "A Few Kind Women: Gender Essentialism and Nordic Peacekeeping Operations." *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 4 (2007): 510-523.
- Vance, Jonathan H. *CDS Directive for Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions into CAF Planning and Operations*. Ottawa: DND Canada, 29 January 2016.
- Weiss, Cora. "We Must Not Make War Safe for Women." Transcript of a 50:50 Inclusive Democracy, 2011, last accessed 17 April 19 available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/we-must-not-make-war-safe-for-women/>
- Willett, Susan. "Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325: Assessing the Impact on Women, Peace and Security." *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (2010a): 142-158.