

## The Dangerous Reproduction of Gender Inequalities Within the UN in the Politics and Institutions of Peace

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*The UN agenda for Women, Peace and Security, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 reaffirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and stresses the importance of their equal participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Despite this, the United Nations continues to ease the reproduction of gender inequality in post-conflict reconstruction due to a lack of commitment to the principles of 1325 and an unwillingness to restructure their own conflict mediation teams. Examples from Cyprus, Bosnia, and Herzegovina demonstrate that the underrepresentation of women at the negotiation table during conflict resolution results in women's underrepresentation in post-conflict institutions of government, and therefore fails to challenge ingrained gender inequalities in society more widely. The United Nations should adhere to the agenda for Women, Peace and Security and target their own institutionalized inequality to better lead by example.*

Historically constructed binaries of masculinity and femininity, and the gender roles that they prescribe, are prevalent in the United Nations, the formulation of the negotiating table or peace talks, and in the institution and politics of post-conflict peace. The inability of the UN to champion its own Security Council Resolution 1325 and produce conflict mediation teams which demonstrate gender equality has instead contributed to a reproduction of gender inequality in the negotiation process and institutions of peace. The UN's failure to overcome inherent obstacles to women's empowerment in conflict settlement models such as consociationalism and centripetalism, the way in which they structure and deploy their mediation teams, and their failure to reciprocate women's inclusion in grassroots initiatives from an institutional level, all contribute to the reproduction of institutionalized gender inequality. I argue that greater inclusion of women in the institutions of the UN would facilitate increased representation and participation of women in peacetime politics and by extension, would challenge socially ingrained conceptions of the role of women. The restructuring of the UN's mediation teams and the inclusion of a feminist perspective would precipitate increased equality of men and women across the political and civil spectrum in post-conflict zones.

Despite the enactment of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, which emphasizes the importance of women's representation, participation and the adoption of gender perspectives in peace building, fifteen years later, the UN remains a prominent culprit of

institutionalized gender inequality.<sup>1</sup> In addition to a lack of awareness within the UN of Resolution 1325, ‘Women made up less than 8 per cent of delegates to UN mediated peace processes’.<sup>2</sup> In the UN Stand-By Team, which I was asked to give recommendations for how it might more successfully mediate peace in conflict zones, only one-quarter of the members are women.<sup>3</sup> This means that the mediators who are advocating for women’s inclusion and empowerment in post-conflict states are representing male-dominated institutions which have themselves been unable to overcome problems of inherent gender inequality and historic conceptions of masculinity and femininity in international relations.

There are inherent obstacles to the inclusion of the women in peace settlement models which the UN must first overcome by working within the framework of Resolution 1325 in order to empower women to participate in post-conflict institutions and politics. Byrne and McCulloch assert that the exclusive nature of consociationalism, centripetalism and complex power sharing limits the ability of post-conflict governance to facilitate women’s representation and participation.<sup>4</sup> Such models of institutional design recommend macro-level structures- such as state construction, the institutions of government and the protection of rights in recognition of identity conflict- which provide incentive for micro-level accommodation of peace building in ethnicized conflict.<sup>5</sup> Power sharing primarily identifies conflict protagonists and national elites as the most important actors in settlements. Moreover, they argue that power sharing recommends constitutional designs which overlook the inclusion of women in state mechanisms in addition to gender quotas in elections because they are preoccupied with the accommodation of ethno-national groups.<sup>6</sup> This results in the reproduction of gendered social hierarchies in post-conflict institutions as the negotiators and political elites are predominantly male.<sup>7</sup> The institutionalized gender inequalities in the UN inadvertently endorse this proliferation of exclusivity.

By identifying common weaknesses between the UN mediating teams and the politics of peacebuilding, I argue that the shortcomings and limited perspectives of teams which fail to adhere to the principles of Resolution 1325 have been reproduced in the settlement of conflicts. In this context the UN mediators have made recommendations suffering from missing academic expertise, which results from the underrepresentation of women. The Stand-By Team for example, is rarely deployed as a unified force, decreasing the chances of a women being deployed even further. In order to champion the importance of the inclusion of women, there is a need to have women in positions that prove that women’s inclusion is beneficial in more ways than just to fulfil tokenistic requirements looking to appease gender equality protagonists fighting for representation.<sup>8</sup> This is demonstrated by the reflection of the underrepresentation of women within the UN in the consistent underrepresentation of

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<sup>1</sup> Siobhan Byrne and Allison McCulloch. “Gender, Representation and Power-Sharing in Post-Conflict Institutions.” *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 5 (2012): 565

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* 567

<sup>3</sup> “Standby Team of Mediation Experts 2015/16”, *United Nations. Department of Political Affairs*, accessed 20 October 2015, <http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SBT-2015-Oct.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Byrne and McCulloch. “Gender, Representation and Power-Sharing” 565

<sup>5</sup> Wolff, Stefan. “Consociationalism, Power Sharing, and Politics at the Center.” In *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, edited by Robert A. Denmark: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 1-2

<sup>6</sup> Byrne and McCulloch. “Gender, Representation and Power-Sharing” 566, 569

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* 566

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* 568

women in post-conflict politics. In Cyprus, until the UN Secretary General's intervention in his Good Offices Mission reports, Resolution 1325 never featured in any documents related to the Cyprus Problem.<sup>9</sup> Concurrently the negotiators and the UN failed to implement recommendations for the inclusion of women by the Gender Advisory Team (GAT), and women remain excluded from UN structures and politics. The GAT recommended framing gender equality within the constitution, introducing a quota system for government elections and a transformation of the gendered language used in state documents.<sup>10</sup> As demonstrated by the case in Cyprus, the neglected inclusion of women in the UN mediation team and in the team's recommendations was reciprocated in the Cypriot peacebuilding institutions and politics, resulting in sustained conceptions of masculinity, femininity and ingrained gender roles. There is a need to create spaces in conflict resolution in which women can be seen as effective leaders in a multitude of different areas. This will instigate a reconceptualization of ingrained gender roles within international relations. The institutions of the UN should be utilizing Resolution 1325 to be at the forefront of expanding women's participation and recognition in the realm of international security and relations.

In addition to the detrimental negligence of the UN's top-down institutional approach to reconstructing gender binaries, peacebuilding processes similarly suffer from the historic construction of gendered notions of citizenship. The UN's neglect to reconceptualize the role of women in politics and the international arena, reinforces ingrained gendered conceptions of citizenship within the conflicted society. Hadjipavlou's assessment of the constructed "ideal" citizen as a heterosexual, able-bodied male and the women as his accessory, and not a citizen in her right, is particularly salient in the hyper-masculinized and militarized zones of ethnic conflict.<sup>11</sup> Women's grassroots movements which challenge this conception of citizenship would greatly benefit from the reconfiguration of women's role in political institutions, as could be led by the UN which would abide to its commitment to Resolution 1325 by first reconceptualising its own membership ideals and thus restructuring its mediating teams such as the Stand-By Team.

The patriarchal and binary divisions of gender are maintained in post-conflict institutions and politics when international organizations such as the UN fail to encourage strongly, through the implementation of Resolution 1325, the inclusion of women in their recommendations for peace. In Cyprus, women remain confined to the private sphere and their civilian role as 'reproducers of the family and nation'.<sup>12</sup> Hadjipavlou contends, "Even when women took up other roles as wage earners, this perception of gender roles remained intact, shifting inequalities into the plane of feminized migration (Agathangelou, 2004). This legacy must be addressed on both the institutional and societal level."<sup>13</sup> Without UN leadership in the inclusion of women there has been a failure to challenge ingrained gender roles and hierarchies from above, thus the challenges to the patriarchy from

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<sup>9</sup> Cyprus 2015 'Gender Participation in the Peace Talks' *Cyprus 2015 Policy Brief*, (2012), accessed 20 October 2015, <http://www.interpeace.org/documents/publications/cyprus/338-gender-participation-in-the-peace-talksenglish/file>,

<sup>10</sup> Demetriou and Hadjipavlou. "A Feminist Position on Sharing Governmental Power and Forging Citizenship in Cyprus: Proposals for the Ongoing Peace Negotiations." *Feminist Review*, (2014): 99, 101

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 102-3

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 98-9, 103

<sup>13</sup> Demetriou and Hadjipavlou. "A Feminist Position on Sharing Governmental Power and Forging Citizenship in Cyprus" 103

grassroots women's movements such as the GAT have been unsuccessful. The situation in Cyprus is emblematic of a very real need to marry institutional and societal advances for the inclusion of women.

The acuteness of this problem is evident in the unfolding of the peace settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Where the impressive formal commitment to gender equality laid out in their post-conflict constitution failed to come through in the realities of unfulfilled election gender quotas, and the consequential absence of women's participation in post-conflict politics.<sup>14</sup> The UN sits in the perfect position to facilitate this marriage of top-down, bottom-up initiatives. Yet as it stands the gendered construction of groups such as the Stand-By Team inhibit the ability of the UN to achieve this.

The UN would make valuable advances in the transformation of the politics of peace so that they may better address women's inclusion, needs and concerns, if it restructured its mediation teams- such as the Stand-By Team- in a way that aligned with the mission of Resolution 1325. By including an equal number of women to men in its mediation teams, and by selecting women for positions which require expertise outside of the realms of gender inclusion- such as security experts- the UN would reassert the need to restructure political institutions to include women, highlighting the importance of reconceptualising ingrained patriarchal norms. Moreover, it would reduce the risk of including women in institutional designs for peace on an essentializing level. As Hadjipavlou asserts, "The point is not to prioritize women's needs over men's in an essentialist way, but to allow greater representation of a number of groups that have hitherto been marginalized."<sup>15</sup> The restructuring of the UN's mediation teams would change the politics of peace so that they challenge equality of men and women across the political and civil spectrum in post-conflict zones.

Moreover, the negotiations would better address women's concerns and needs through the incorporation, through the inclusion of women, of a feminist lens in the formulation of settlement institutions and in diverse post-conflict policies. The feminist lens recognizes and respects the importance of intersectionality in International Relations, security and conflict resolution. It is able to form bridges between human security and ordinary experience, the economy, the state, peacebuilding theories, differences between issues of civic and political importance, religious and cultural traditions and the inclusion of minorities.<sup>16</sup> This provides a de-centralization of the preoccupation with militarized nationalism, leading to the advice of better considered measurements which challenge stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Feminism's endorsement of women's grassroots conflict resolution movements reinforces this reconstruction of conflict and security. Movements such as GAT, the Women's Coalition in Northern Ireland and Jerusalem Link in Israel and Palestine emphasize the importance of dialogue between organizations like the UN and grassroots movements in post-conflict society.<sup>17</sup> Additionally they employ transversalism to avoid essentializing identity politics in ethnicized

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<sup>14</sup> Byrne and McCulloch. "Gender, Representation and Power-Sharing" 570-1

<sup>15</sup> Demetriou and Hadjipavlou. "A Feminist Position on Sharing Governmental Power and Forging Citizenship in Cyprus" 99

<sup>16</sup> Christine Sylvester. "Experiencing the End and Afterlives of International Relations/Theory." *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 619-620

<sup>17</sup> Siobhan Byrne. "Troubled Engagement in Ethnicized Conflict." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 1 (2014): 109-10

conflict and overcome inherent problems in power sharing models.<sup>18</sup> Feminism is able to transcend “camped” masculinized approaches to International Relations, drawing together elements from different International Relations theories.<sup>19</sup> It can use an understanding of pre war gender dynamics in order to look at how they might be reconstructed post-war.<sup>20</sup>

In order to effectively contribute to peacebuilding processes, the UN mediating teams must marry: recommendations for different forms of peacetime institutions which may follow a consociational or centripetal or power dividing model; recommendations for negotiating interest areas which are likely to be cause for escalated conflict- such as the inclusion, representation and protection of women, how security policy might unfold and the division or protection of natural resources; and need crucial interpersonal skill-set for the diffusion of tension and encouragement of moderated, reasonable and effective negotiation. The UN’s neglect of Resolution 1325 has facilitated the continued exclusion of women from peace building. As a result of this there has been a reproduction of institutionalized gender inequality and a failure to challenge historic conceptions of gender roles in post-conflict societies. Greater inclusion of women in the UN would ultimately precipitate the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict states.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 106

<sup>19</sup> Sylvester condones what she calls a “camped” mentality towards International Relations which stipulates that IR scholars belong to specific groups of established theories, such as realism, post-colonialism, neoliberalism. *ibid.* 610

<sup>20</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe. *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (2010). 9

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