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DECOLONIZING THE MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER IN PEACEBUILDING: TOWARD AN AGENDA FOR AFRICA

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Launched in March 2012, the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) supports independent African research on conflict-affected countries and neighboring regions of the continent, as well as the integration of high-quality African research-based knowledge into global policy communities. In order to advance African debates on peacebuilding and promote African perspectives, the APN offers competitive research grants and fellowships, and it funds other forms of targeted support, including strategy meetings, seminars, grantee workshops, commissioned studies, and the publication and dissemination of research findings. In doing so, the APN also promotes the visibility of African peacebuilding knowledge among global and regional centers of scholarly analysis and practical action and makes it accessible to key policymakers at the United Nations and other multilateral, regional, and national policymaking institutions.

ABOUT THE SERIES

"African solutions to African problems" is a favorite mantra of the African Union, but since the 2002 establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the continent has continued to face political, material, and knowledge-related challenges to building sustainable peace. Peacebuilding in Africa has sometimes been characterized by interventions by international actors who lack the local knowledge and lived experience needed to fully address complex conflict-related issues on the continent. And researchers living and working in Africa need additional resources and platforms to shape global debates on peacebuilding as well as influence regional and international policy and practitioner audiences. The APN Working Papers series seeks to address these knowledge gaps and needs by publishing independent research that provides critical overviews and reflections on the state of the field, stimulates new thinking on overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding, and engages scholarly and policy communities with a vested interest in building peace on the continent.

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Peacebuilding is big business in Africa and the gendering of peacebuilding even more so—if the number of workshops and funding proposals with gender as their focus is anything to go by. As an academic enterprise, gender and peacebuilding have equally grown in stature and scope.[1] But more often than not, gender acts as a proxy for women, especially because we are continuously reminded that they must be included in all peacebuilding efforts because they make up more than half of the population and war and its aftermath affect them differently. So why bother with mainstreaming gender if it is actually just about adding women? Practice has shown that the rhetorical commitment to gender within peacebuilding programs (hailed as positive by some) has neither changed the generally widespread gender-blind nature of policy and practice nor led to more than an increased mainstreaming of women's and girls' needs based on a very narrow interpretation of male-female categories.

At the heart of the problem lies the conceptual conflation of sex and gender equality, the former referring to biological differences between men and women and the latter entailing, for feminists, the social construction of masculinities and femininities.[2] With reference to peacebuilding dynamics in post-conflict states in Africa, this paper, therefore, makes a case for

employing gender "decolonially" in a way that would allow for a reexamination of the relationship between gender and women. I conceptualize a decolonial-feminist approach as a critical strategy that steers us away from simple conflations as well as simple binaries. Dichotomous thinking in terms of liberal selves and illiberal "others" in post-conflict situations runs the risk of becoming further entrenched when sex and gender are equated because both conflation and binary thinking originate from the same source; namely, a lack of appreciation of complexity.

In order to achieve a "thicker," gender-sensitive, decolonial approach to peacebuilding, it is helpful to be reminded that gender lenses are necessary conceptually, for grasping the meanings of global politics; empirically, for seeing realities; and normatively, for promoting positive change.[3] Taken together, we must "look" beyond the mainstreaming of gender in peacebuilding processes as an acknowledgment of gender inequality and women's needs in peace processes. Considering gender also includes seeing the differential impact of conflict on men and women and the unique knowledge and experiences that all groups (men, women, and gender minorities) bring to the peace table. People's responses to violent conflict and peace are shaped by their gender identity. Mentally "seeing" this paves the way for more practical consequences—such as concrete improvements in women's lives and improved gender relations. Moreover, if peacebuilders understand the role gender plays in shaping and mitigating conflict and peace, more meaningful programs can be devised, thereby increasing the chances of successful institutionalization of a more just post-conflict order. The obverse is also true, "the exclusion of women and/or the failure to consider gender in peacebuilding processes risks not only women's rights, but also the general failure of peacebuilding as an enterprise."[4] In practical terms it means that peacebuilding without gender mainstreaming contributes to greater disconnect across various processes. Thus, while we cannot separate women from gender, gender is about much more than just women-focused activities. Normatively, it is necessary to interrogate which type of values we aspire to when we "do" gender in peacebuilding. A recognition that gender relations are about unequal power relations should compel peacebuilders to acknowledge the political nature of gender dynamics, that context matters, and that there is more to the mainstreaming of gender than implementing a set of mechanical steps.

"Doing" gender (as a verb) is fundamentally different from using gender as a variable (noun) or descriptor of an identity category. These distinctions

are important to avoid conflating categories of women and gender or sex and gender. Asking the question "where are the women?" facilitates this slippage. For instance, statistically disaggregating data about women in peace negotiations and then devising measures to address the gaps does not provide sufficient insight into power relations. As a corrective, gender as a noun/verb/logic recognizes "gender itself as a power relation," enabling us to understand that peacebuilding is gendered because it relies on the logics of gender.[5] The way in which we assign gendered characteristics to objects as well as the associations we make between objects and subjects determine the extent to which we see our social realities as gendered. In addition, therefore, we need to also ask, "what is masculinity doing?" forcing the analyst or practitioner to think more broadly of the whole of global politics as gendered and not just of women.[6] It is this tension between narrow thinking and sweeping, unreflective implementation that needs to be dislodged or decolonized to make room for more holistic thinking applied in a more targeted way.

Following this, if we acknowledge that gender is about more than just women, can we push the boundaries of the term to include other marginalized groups and individuals? Part of the problem is the slowness of current international discourses—including United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR)—to transcend narrow heteronormative understandings of who qualifies as women (and men). The documents rarely, if at all, mention masculinities, femininities, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community, with serious consequences for policy and the capacity to address gender-based violence against transgendered people, for instance.[7]

In view of the evidence of an emergent global gender equality regime that has become intertwined with the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, the particular treatment of gender in this regime is the target of this paper's decolonial imperative, with reference to the African peacebuilding context. While there is no consensus on what peacebuilding as a concept and a practice entails, I opt to base my gender-decolonial analysis on the understanding that "building peace is an idea at once broader than and an important framework for the peacemaking and peacekeeping work done by soldiers and diplomats."[8] If peacekeeping is viewed as an effort to contain the violence of a conflict, peacemaking can be seen as an attempt to transform the attitudes of combatants, and peacebuilding encompasses both while attempting to understand and change the root causes of the conflict.[9]

The challenge is therefore, firstly, how to make sure that peacebuilding is an inclusive process in real and not only rhetorical terms—especially since civil society at large and women's organizations more specifically operate between and across the spaces occupied by security experts (academics) and policymakers. The second challenge relates to finding ways of subverting the conflation of women and gender to make room for other identities. My aim is, therefore, to highlight two "subversive tools"—a gender-relational or intersectional approach and a focus on everyday experiences—by which to challenge the centrality of certain ideas about the gender-peacebuilding nexus. My conceptualization of peacebuilding is deliberately broad, as this paper does not focus on a specific peacebuilding practice or sector, even though some of my examples address activities related to security sector reform, elections, women's presence at the peace table, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The object of analysis is not the gendering of state-building, security governance, local ownership, or any other project, but rather the coloniality of some aspects of the WPS agenda and how the proposed tools can erode entrenched ideas about gender equality as the means to build peace gender-sensitively. Since my decolonial-feminist project is wary of state-centric practices, I propose a gender-relational approach that can be applicable to all levels and areas of peacebuilding, whereas a focus on everyday practices transcends mainstream (state-centric) delimitations to consider ordinary people as individuals and/or as collectives/communities.

In the section that follows, I briefly clarify what I mean by the act of "decolonizing," after which I discuss the way in which gender mainstreaming and gender equality are framed in international discourse. It is necessary to start with the WPS agenda to show how it has evolved from women to gender and also to clarify why the conflation between women and gender has become so difficult to dislodge. This prepares the way for the next two sections in which I elaborate on the tools for decolonizing mainstream thinking about gender and peacebuilding.

WHOSE AGENDA?

Peacebuilding is an intensely political project with contested meanings (as mentioned above), captured by the growing body of critical literature as well as critiques of the critiques.[10] Critics would generally agree that the most fundamental flaw of liberal peace is its imperial construction of a series of dichotomous discourses that pit developed and undeveloped, modern and

traditional, global and local, and liberal and illiberal against each other. And "other" is the operative word here: "For liberalism 'Others' are the problem to be solved," putting the onus on the Western Self to produce peace, since the non-Western Other is assumed to be unwilling or unable to maintain it.[11] Although practitioners and policymakers have become more sensitive to the local and attempt to avoid a colonial gaze, a covert link is made between the public domain, stability, and legitimacy, whereas the private or informal is characterized as volatile, violent, and illegitimate. The effect of this is that processes continue to run the risk of having little relevance to the complexity of human (in)security on the ground. When viewing reliance on informal economies as illegitimate, vulnerable groups of people (such as women, who operate mainly in the informal sector) are disempowered and in practice not deemed worthy of peace.

The real violence/harm of liberal peacebuilding is therefore found in the multidimensional way in which it engages in "othering"—through gendered and racialized forms (among others). "Othering" as a "colonial" tool is a complex yet systematic process of subjugation, reflecting a pattern where the Self first establishes dominance by making the colonial Other aware of who holds the power, then entrenches the Other's inferiority, culminating in the denial of access to knowledge and technology.[12] The peacebuilding process of external intervention, under the veneer of rights-based approaches, rule of law, and multilateralism, similarly reflects this expression of difference, essentialism, and dehumanization in the way that it frames gender in liberal-feminist terms, oblivious to the long history of African feminists who have developed "other" ways of doing.[13] In this regard, Desiree Lewis reminds us that African feminists have developed key insights into the links between the gendered violence of the postcolonial state, gendered (hetero-patriarchal) nationalisms, and gendered militarism and argues that—rather than just inserting gender into peacebuilding research in Africa—these bodies of work can deepen gender and security scholarship on the continent.[14]

One could, therefore, argue that knowledge produced about gendering peacebuilding gains respectability by virtue of being produced in the West, as part of the liberal family. In this scenario, it does not mean that local knowledge is always ignored, but rather that local contexts are "domesticated" as sites of empirical knowledge where Western theory is applied. The local is, therefore, viewed in terms of its potential to provide content to be studied and explained and not as having theoretical agency of its own.

With this problematique in mind, I define decolonizing tools as critical intellectual strategies aimed at identifying specific dimensions of the coloniality of peacebuilding epistemology, ontology, and methodology. Liberal peacebuilding forms part of an entangled global coloniality that is racialized, patriarchal, heteronormative, and Eurocentric at its core. Although I draw in my analysis on an understanding of the entanglement of modernity, capitalism, and coloniality, my lens is not specifically and purely one of decoloniality as espoused by scholars such as Quijano and Mignolo.[15] I use the term in a more general way to suggest that liberal-feminist assumptions have become embedded within liberal peacebuilding discourses and practices to such an extent that they are part of the problem. In this context, decolonizing the mainstreaming of gender in peacebuilding, therefore, involves the formulation of tools or strategies that not only problematize such polarized narratives and practices of Self-Other relations but also offer ways of constructing more complex and holistic understandings that are reflective of men and women's everyday life experiences as they cooperate with and/or resist global oppressions.

THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA: TO DECOLONIZE OR NOT?

Two broad schools of thought on the growing WPS agenda have emerged. The first captures broadly the international organizational perspective of the UN and regional bodies. Over the last fifteen years, a set of liberal norms in WPS—centered around women's protection and equality with men—has gradually been institutionalized within the UN. Some scholars hail this as a significant step reflecting changing Security Council attitudes regarding WPS specifically.[16] It is also hailed as a clear sign of norm diffusion globally. Helga Hernes argues that the evolution of international norms on women's rights has benefited women coming out of conflict in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in particular.[17] Local women were able to invoke these norms to argue for their inclusion in constitutions, peace accords, and cease fire agreements.

The WPS agenda includes the landmark UNSCR 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security," its fifteenth anniversary celebrated on October 13, 2015. The resolution advocates for the protection of and participation (agency) of women by emphasizing how conflict affects men and women differently and that women have a positive role to play in peacebuilding. To date, seven follow-up resolutions have also been passed. UNSCR 1820 recognizes rape

and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity, UNSCR 1888 emphasizes the need for justice reform to support survivors of SGBV, and UNSCR 1889 underscores women's participation in peacebuilding and the mainstreaming of gender in post-conflict recovery processes. UNSCR 1960 asks for strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of SGBV in conflicts, underlining more stringent application of the zero tolerance policy, UNSCR 2106 is significant in that male survivors of SGBV are explicitly mentioned, while UNSCR 2122 offers a roadmap for a more systematic approach to the implementation of commitments to women, peace, and security. Many countries, including several from Africa, have also now developed national action plans (NAPs) for the implementation of Resolution 1325. The newest addition to the WPS collection of resolutions, namely UNSCR 2242, could possibly signal a shift from an exclusive focus on women and girls to an agenda that considers women as well as gender more broadly. The resolution calls for, among other things, the integration of gender as a crosscutting issue in counterterrorist activities. I do, however, remain cautious not to jump to conclusions, mainly because the women-gender nexus cannot (and should not) be disentangled entirely and it may be too early to celebrate a change in the Security Council's thinking about gender equality. What is needed is a clarification of the ambiguous relationship between women and gender equality.

The state of affairs on the African continent with regard to WPS presents a somewhat mixed and ambivalent picture. Gender mainstreaming declarations at the continental level include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). This regional treaty is closely aligned with UNSCR 1325 as well as the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equity in Africa. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development also calls for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In 2010, African leaders declared 2010–20 the "African Women's Decade" with the subtheme "Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment."[18] On the one hand, there is some room for optimism when it comes to the visibility of gender issues within the African peace and security architecture. Toni Haastrup is relatively upbeat in her assessment that "gender equality is integral to Africa's regional and international politics."[19] In this view, the Solemn Declaration offers a regulatory framework for implementing gender equality policies through mainstreaming, serves as a bridge between other African instruments mentioned above, and informs the Action Plan for the Solemn Declaration and the AU Gender Policy of 2008. These instruments,

thus, offer ample opportunities for member states to apply the principles of UNSCR 1325.[20] At the same time, however, Haastrup highlights a fundamental tension between liberal Western feminism and its emphasis on the inclusion of LGBTI issues, which are largely ignored in Africa, and Africa's own selective, pragmatic interpretation of Western liberal principles; for instance, women's rights as human rights discourse and an emphasis on women's equal representation (i.e., adding women). Rhetorical commitments to "the empowerment of women, the eradication of domestic violence, and the equal social, economic and political development of men and women" are not enough to shift patriarchal power relations.[21]

Thus there is evidence of some normative progress, but fundamental challenges remain at the continental, subregional, and national levels regarding implementation. To return to the central question of this paper, it is not about whether gender is acknowledged in the broader institutional frame, but whether the kind of approach utilized would actually contribute to sustainable peace. In other words, will or can the emergent continental gender equality regime, as it is at once complicit and different from its universal counterpart, deliver or contribute conceptually, practically, and normatively toward decolonizing liberal peace? The proof in the pudding lies in whether gender operates as shorthand for women and whether gender equality is used instrumentally; namely, to create the appearance of progressiveness or to genuinely reflect a normative change.[22]

A second school of thought, largely consisting of academics (feminist security studies scholars) from the global North, is skeptical as to the prospects of fundamental gender-sensitive transformation, arguing that the perceived global norm diffusion remains tenuous.[23] According to these scholars, UNSCR 1325 and its offspring represent trade-offs for women "between influence and co-optation, and between changing international law and changing the situation of women."[24] These scholars criticize the WPS package for its liberal-feminist approach, arguing that the overemphasis on gender equality boils down to an almost exclusive focus on women in practice. And these resolutions do little to challenge structural or root causes and power hierarchies that perpetuate women's inequality and insecurity, thus making them little more than blunt tools of protection (such as in Syria). At a very concrete level, as reported by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the planning for the fifteenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 was disrupted when Spain moved the date back nine days, from October 22 to October 13, 2015, to accommodate the schedule of its

prime minister. This illustrates that despite the hype, individuals with clout are prioritized over the presence of women on the ground, thereby exacerbating problems with the participation of women's groups in civil society in particular.[25]

Feminist scholar-practitioners from Africa have also added their voices to this critique. Funmi Olonisakin, Cheryl Hendricks, and Awino Okech, for instance, question whether the motives of those responsible for implementing the WPS agenda on the continent are aligned with the principles of gender equality "or [whether] . . . they perform the role of guardian or gatekeepers to the structures that perpetrate gender inequality, which in turn sustains the cycles of insecurity for women."[26] They take the mobilization that led to the adoption of UNSCR 1325 as an example of successful convergence of feminist security analysis, civil society activism, and policy decision making. However, they contend that in Africa at present these three agendas or pillars of influence remain "organically disconnected."[27] Under the veneer of "busy work," perceptions of normative change are cultivated, but on closer inspection, engagement with gender equality remains piecemeal and superficial. Quantity is no substitute for quality. Even with several African countries now having approved NAPs for implementing UNSCR 1325, "it is difficult to observe real transformation in the key areas that form the focus of NAPs."[28]

At the heart of the problem lies a preoccupation with solving problems taken to extremes after 9/11, when "peacebuilding as statebuilding" no longer simply meant the construction of effective legitimate institutions of governance according to liberal-democratic principles. Increasingly in Africa, in particular, attention turned to "the compromises between democracy, stability and sovereignty in dealing with failed states."[29] Stabilization now goes hand in hand with an emphasis on conflict management techniques, effectively relegating peace and normative understandings of peacebuilding to the background. This clearly has had a ripple effect on the way in which gender equality in post-conflict contexts is understood. In real terms, gender equality has become synonymous with women's representation, turning liberal-feminist principles and practices into the handmaiden of the securitization of peace.

A case in point is the role played by Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) within this broader global and continental peacebuilding consensus. A survey of its footprint from 2013 to 2015 reveals topical engagement with women's issues of the day, such as women's exclusion from mediation, the

abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls, the gendered dimensions of Ebola, women and elections, SGBV, regional action plans, agriculture, and the role of civil society in monitoring progress in terms of women's representation. FAS is a prominent continental player, participating in the review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (May 2015) and as a member of the New York Task Force in support of the High Level Advisory Group on the Global Study of the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (May 2015), among others. That said, the question remains as to whether FAS has become a multiplier of international (colonial) discourse. While its advocacy work is invaluable, FAS is institutionally very much a part of a liberal gender framework with meetings, press statements, a Women's Situation Room for peaceful elections, and talk about "recipes for peace." Its website also reports on recent GIMAC (Gender Is My Agenda Campaign) developments, such as the consultative meeting on June 8–9, 2015, in South Africa. GIMAC has been a long-standing feature of the AU since 2007, but deeper critical engagement between women's issues and gender relations may have been overtaken by a need to respond to immediate crises.[30] Following the logic of African women's organizations (wittingly or unwittingly) serving the ends of liberal feminism, which in turn props up securitized peace, one therefore begins to understand why the FAS Women's Situation Room was hailed as such a success. The idea emerged in 2011 during the presidential and legislative elections in Liberia, and, within a short space of four years, it has now been adopted as best practice in all African elections. The uncritical elevation of a practice that has not been sufficiently tested (although subsequently used in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Mali, Senegal, and Kenya), and that looks "grassroots" but actually is managed by elite women, could have unintended consequences. Notwithstanding the fact that it may have sensitized governments to the issue of gender equality, the hype around this tool may distract from real issues on the ground and may not necessarily influence election and policy outcomes.[31] To date, this tool has not attracted long-term sustainable international funding either.

For gender mainstreaming to work, it is imperative to understand that there are different approaches to it based on very different understandings of gender equality. These approaches include gender equality viewed as sameness, difference, and diversity.[32] Firstly, gender equality conceptualized as a problem of achieving equality on the basis of sameness is a narrowly woman-focused approach. It is linked to the political strategy of equal opportunities and inclusion and is challenged for its liberal-feminist assumptions of gender-neutrality. These typical "add women and stir" integrationist

approaches do not challenge the male norm and, in the words of Theresa Rees, simply "tinker" with the system.[33] Secondly, gender as a tool to affirm difference from the male norm questions the assumption that women should imitate this norm. Instead, this radical approach seeks to reverse the state of affairs by advocating for the recognition of a specifically female gendered identity. Rees terms this process "tailoring," which, in practical terms, calls for gender equity rather than equality, achieved through actions that encourage the participation, presence, and empowerment of marginalized groups (usually women) with the help of civil society advocacy.[34] Lastly, the diversity approach is postmodern and seeks to deconstruct and transform those discursive regimes that engender the subject. It is the gendered world itself that is to be problematized, not just the exclusion of women (liberal approach) or the existence of a male norm (radical approach). Gender is used as a vehicle for the transformation of all established norms and standards of what is/should be female and male. A transformational strategy concentrates more on long-term shifts in gendered power relations and is directed at changing cultural (attitudinal), structural (institutional), and behavioral (direct) patriarchal patterns. The latter approach not only corresponds with my conceptualization of a decolonial-feminist approach to peacebuilding but is also strongly reminiscent of Galtung's original framing of a peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping triad (see earlier).

Despite all this talk about gender mainstreaming, the reality is that it is still far from universal practice. Case in point is the serious lack of progress regarding women's representation in formal peace processes. For example, a UNIFEM study in 2008 showed that less than 10 percent of members in formal peace negotiations and less than two percent of signatories to peace agreements were women.[35] UN Women estimated that, in 2012, women comprised 4 percent of signatories, 2.4 percent of chief mediators, 3.7 percent of witnesses, and 9 percent of negotiators between 1992 and 2011.[36] Between August 2008 and March 2012, women were signatories in only two of the sixty-one peace agreements.[37] For the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women comprised 5 percent of the signatories, none of the mediators, and 12 percent of the negotiating parties in the 2003 Sun City peace talks. In Zimbabwe's mediation process in 2008, women were entirely absent as signatories and constituted only 16 percent of the negotiating parties.[38] At the same time, the value of representation should not be overstated. Women's greater presence does not necessarily mean there is more gender equality.[39] In a male-dominated environment, such as within the security sector, gender-sensitive reform in reality means women having to become like

men in order to fit in and does not necessarily promote women's rights, leading us to see that "gender integration is leaving in place the discursive and performative elements of gender subordination."[40]

There is a fine line between textbook mainstreaming of gender, that is, making both women's and men's concerns and experiences integral to all peacebuilding interventions in a way that both benefit equally, on the one hand, and gender-neutrality that completely overshadows the security needs of women, on the other. The problem is that we are not working with a level playing field—gender mainstreaming tends to assume a symmetry of position between women and men. And for this reason it may be worthwhile to see the three mainstreaming approaches as complementary, so that there is room for a context-specific, thick analysis of gender relations, structural or institutional change, and attitudinal change and a revised understanding of the relationship between critique, idealist, or utopian alternatives and the limits of policy reform.[41] If we were to follow the advice and make mainstreaming about the analysis of "the complex way in which gender is created and sustained by social and power relations," I would propose two related ways to achieve this: first, by paying attention to the complexity of women and men's multiple identities and roles in the design of the peace process; and, second, by mapping this more holistic, intersected, and complex understanding onto the politics of everyday peacebuilding.[42]

DISLODGING GENDERED BINARIES THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL OR GENDER-RELATIONAL ANALYSIS

In this section, I problematize the gendered binaries or stereotypical representations of men and women as static and homogeneous categories, with men typecast as protectors and/or aggressors and women as peaceful mothers. I argue that we need to "trouble" the gendered dimensions of the notion of agency to make room for multiple subjectivities.

Agency, as the capacity to exercise independent choice and act on it, is both constrained and facilitated by temporal/historical and structural factors.[43] Subjectivity, therefore, does not operate free from structural constraints and sociocultural context. Furthermore, it links up with standpoint feminist theory, which maintains that women's struggles against patriarchy can generate "situated knowledges" about the gendered meanings of conflict and peace.[44] Such a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between agency and structure helps to make the concept less abstract, providing a

foundation for seeing that one could have agency in one context or relationship but not necessarily in another. Another advantage is that it enables us to move away from a simple binary of women as victims and men as protectors or perpetrators. Not only does this label not reflect the reality of men's and women's complex roles and identities in everyday life, but such narrow stereotyping also has latent conflict potential if not addressed.

Scholar and practitioner insights on women's agency in war have been increasing steadily, ranging from documenting evidence on military women who engage in torture, Middle Eastern suicide bombers, women drug traffickers, and women who directed and participated in genocides in Rwanda.[45] These feminist studies illustrate the tenacity of gendered stereotypes. When women do exercise agency in violence, it is not usually considered a particular manifestation of femininity (e.g., "hard" or masculine femininity). Instead, those women are depicted as nonhuman—as freaks or deviants.[46] In the post-conflict period, women's agency also vacillates between newfound responsibility and economic independence (which often dissipates after the conflict) and being considered as natural agents of peace, as in Rwanda.

While it is easy to think of women and children as vulnerable, it is not so "natural" in the case of men. Adam Jones explains that, despite clear evidence of gendercidal targeting of males, there have been attempts to rewrite history in order to depict women as the principal targets.[47] Nowadays the gender-selective targeting of women through rape enjoys much attention, and, as a result, it is often simply assumed that because women were raped, they had to be the main victims. The consequences of such narrow thinking can be huge. The United Nations' gender-selective evacuation policy in Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina was partly instrumental in the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys.[48] If we see men as an undifferentiated and static group representing the whole population, we not only risk not seeing their specific needs, but we also obfuscate their gender identity "by viewing them as 'default humans.'"[49] It follows that we need to be careful how we capture men's complex relationship to violence, as Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern have shown in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). [50]

Except for UNSCR 2106, most of the follow-up resolutions to UNSCR 1325 focus solely on women as victims of sexual violence and the establishment of accountability measures to address this during armed conflict and not in peacetime.[51] Feminist work also indirectly reinforces this silence, as it tends

to explain SGBV and other forms of male violent behavior through the lens of hypermasculinity and militarism.[52] An exclusive focus on male violence against females has, therefore, contributed to overlooking males' gendered experience, with implications for peacebuilding processes when programs fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of masculinities.[53] On the flipside, the situation is changing and the acknowledgment that multiple nonviolent masculinities can be fruitfully used in making men critical agents of change also bodes well for a shift toward a decolonial appreciation of diverse subjectivities.[54] A better understanding of men's varied positionalities allows one to view patriarchy, rather than individual men, as part of a global coloniality that also comprises militarism and capitalism. Once again, the case is made for a more holistic frame of analysis.

While being cognizant of the fact that African feminisms are framed in terms of an emphasis on family, community, and relevance to broader political struggles (and being cautious not to impose universalist notions under the guise of decolonization), we can say that the AU tendency to cherry pick what is considered gender equality and what is not is unjustified.[55] As discussed earlier, the AU has opted to interpret rights-based approaches in a blinkered way, narrowly focusing on women, but also paradoxically shying away from gender equality when it looks as if women's empowerment will exclude men.[56] And although there is overwhelming evidence to support this pragmatic pro-women choice, given the precarious state of security of many women in Africa, the dismal track record of African governments in extending rights to sexual and gender minorities could, to some extent, undo any normative progress. The AU cannot have it both ways. Understanding the social dynamics of gender is crucial in also understanding homophobic or transphobic violence. In South Africa, for example, corrective rape is reported to be a major threat to the bodily security of black lesbians.[57] The conceptual, empirical, and normative implications of widening the range of gender and sexual identities are salient. Conceptually, widening shifts the focus beyond a simple male/female binary; practically, it complicates the analysis but may also make policy more effective, more specific. So by broadening conceptually, on the ground it is narrowed (paradoxically) for better results. This is decolonization in action. In contrast to the dominant approach of the narrow conceptualization of male and female categories (heteronormativity), which leads to blanket implementation along the lines of sameness rather than difference or diversity, a more inclusive but nuanced concept could make for more targeted implementation. For instance, in Colombia, LGBTI issues are taken into consideration in the reintegration

process by considering how to include access to hormonal treatment in health care packages of transgender ex-combatants.[58]

Key to achieving this reversal is the use of intersectionality, a feminist tool with the potential to decolonize when forms of inequality are studied not as separate, layered, or cumulative oppressions, but as intertwined, impossible to untangle or reduce to a monocausal explanation.[59] The interdependence of racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, national, ethnic, cultural, and religious dimensions further makes it difficult to argue that the overlapping identity categories are all equal, which in turn could prompt attentiveness to context. Although intersectionality is commonplace in critical feminist scholarship on security and peace, it has only recently gained traction in peacebuilding practitioner circles in the form of a gender-relational approach to peacebuilding, where the interplay between gender and other identity markers, such as age, social class, sexuality, disability, ethnic or religious background, marital status, or urban/rural setting, is emphasized.[60] Such an approach also highlights the fact that planning regarding gender issues in the post-conflict period should be sensitive to both intra- and intercategorical differences, needs, and interests. For example, issues of reintegration affect different categories of women and men differentially, such as former women combatants, bush wives not usually considered as combatants, women whose livelihood was dependent on their involvement in the transfer of small arms, and male or female rape victims with or without HIV and AIDS.

Conceptually, this tool helps us to think differently about the meaning of gender equality, expanding the concept on the basis of a normative commitment to greater inclusivity, complexity, and, by implication, social justice. Practically, an inter- or intrasectional lens enables the practitioner or policymaker to see who is the most vulnerable, whose attitudes pose a barrier, or whose attitudes and practices are most amenable to transformation.[61] More specific targeting also has positive implications for budgeting, making sure that money reaches the right group, and the approach can be applied across different sectors of peacebuilding work. It further facilitates seeing the connections between individual and structural factors. Changes to how organizations function do not happen without the agency of people, collectively or individually. In sum, the tool changes who we see, what we study, and where we find subjects (context). If this process of shifting the gaze is sustained, then we can begin to consider it as part of the process of decolonizing gender equality. However, then we must see context as a physical and

mental space that encapsulates all overlapping identities and not rigidly adhering to a men-women focus. Appropriately, these variations are best viewed in the context of the everyday.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP DECOLONIZED: FOCUSING ON GENDER AND THE EVERYDAY

Because women's groups tend to have a voice in global fora, much more than at other levels, the gender equality regime in Africa appears to have adopted a top-down character, which is good for global (universalist) norm diffusion but not for bringing knowledge generated at the grassroots level in informal everyday settings to the fore.[62] This state of affairs is symptomatic of the broader dilemmas surrounding local ownership and how locals are represented in peacebuilding processes. Séverine Autesserre, in tracing the everyday practices and routines of diplomats, donors, NGO staff, and military peacekeepers involved in peacebuilding, finds that not much has changed on the ground in terms of the promotion of local ownership.[63]

As mentioned, liberal peace discourses create a classic "us versus them" situation. While these binaries may not be intentionally imperialist, they are built on flawed representations of the societies in need of help, where the West (the international community, donors, and international organizations) consider themselves the benefactors and only maintainers of order and effectively close off the possibility of constructing local definitions of security and well-being. The effects of this can be quite disempowering because the relationship between state and civil society takes a back seat and often remains limited to an inter-elite (foreign and domestic) consensus.[64] Since civil society tends to be viewed through a Western lens, everything but the state is lumped together. This does not bode well for the recognition of the agency and diverse needs of civil society actors. It masks huge disparities in power and influence that exist between different civil society actors (especially in the aftermath of conflict). The needs of some groups (e.g., rebels and warlords) are met while the needs of others, such as children, women, and the elderly, are not.[65] It is this failure to recognize intergroup differences, together with the perpetuation of myths about women's gender-stereotypical roles in peacebuilding related to womanhood and motherhood, that prevents us from seeing women's real contributions and that keeps the coloniality of the liberal peace intact.

As an alternative, Oliver Richmond proposes the notion of "everyday peacebuilding."[66] For him, the everyday refers to "a culturally appropriate form of individual or community life and care," with everyday peacebuilding described as a local-global hybrid around which both international and local actors are mobilized to deal with everyday issues, such as setting up representative institutions.[67] The concept is held up as returning autonomy to the locals to find contextualized solutions on the ground, with the help of internationals. He argues that everyday peacebuilding enables the liberal peace to reconnect with the subjects on the ground.[68] However, reconnecting with liberal peacebuilding by repoliticizing the local will not make for a revisioning of gender equality if the everyday is not recognized as fundamentally gendered. In fact, it will reinforce liberal-feminist additive approaches to gender mainstreaming in the name of sameness. In this way, the local or everyday loses its potential to become a site where top-down liberal assumptions about peace can be subverted.

Instead feminists have argued that gender analysis delivers legitimacy and substance to a wider security concept because it offers a different kind of bottom-up foundational logic. We can learn a lot about global processes by looking at the private, the informal, the local, and the personal—but not in isolation. A fundamental part of decolonizing the local is locating

> ethnographic gender analyses within the larger framework of debates shaping academic understanding of contemporary wars. It is not enough to know what is happening to men, women and children in war—and how those experiences differ—we should strive to know why, and how these various experiences are tied to political and economic structures, opportunities and incentives at local, national and international levels.[69]

For feminists, people are the key substance of peacebuilding. Wars and peace processes both impact people's daily lives, making them part of international politics; the personal is not only political but also international.[70] This suggests, to cite Laura Sjoberg, "that the impact of war [and peace] on ordinary (often marginalized or subaltern) people is not one-directional—that people influence war(s) [and peace] as well."[71]

Apart from this linking of global and local, feminist scholarship exposes a variety of dimensions of the everyday, such as its experiential, sensory,

mundane, and extraordinary nature, which we normally would not have seen through a gender-neutral lens. The everyday, whether during peacetime or conflict, is about experience, a variety of bodily experiences, affective and sensory—feeling, tasting, smelling, hearing, and seeing the textures of war and peace.[72] And while some of these experiences are daily and repetitive in nature, others are spectacular. War and peace can be prosaic and profound at the same time; a woman warrior's experiences are just as valid as those of peace women.[73] What makes them significant is that they all remain the gendered and racialized experiences of ordinary people, not states. They are experienced first-hand, not via media or state discourse or filtered through the lens of academics. These narratives and experiences have texture in that they reveal rough agentic edges. Irma Specht's study of the experiences and motives of female ex-combatants in Liberia is illustrative, revealing the multilayered motives of girls for taking up arms, such as purely economic need and motives linked to poverty, but also as a means of obtaining luxury items such as a pair of red shoes.[74] A study of the life of a Liberian woman called "Black Diamond," leader of the armed women's unit (Women's Artillery Commandos), a rebel unit that fought with the LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy), reveals how she was raped as a fifteen-year-old and forced to witness the killing of her parents. As a leader, she was depicted as a fierce combatant, yet was kind to her troops.[75]

SGBV as a key issue on the international agenda serves as a good example of how the spectacular and the mundane become enmeshed. Eve Ayiera argues that too much international and media attention is paid to the spectacular nature of SGBV as a tool of war.[76] This preoccupation with the horrors of war often leaves no place for the narratives of the everyday, other forms of violence, as well as violence during peacetime. Ironically, violence is often the key constant between war and peacetime. In this case, an intersectional lens helps us to uncover interlinked layers of agency and victimhood to reveal a complex reality. For instance, the Life & Peace Institute reported on the disturbing trend toward the "sexualization of peacebuilding at the local level."[77] Relatedly, there is also increasing evidence of how women's organizations use the WPS agenda for their own gain. Donor support of women's organizations in Africa, for instance, brings status and legitimacy within their own communities. To keep the international community interested, there is a tendency to play the numbers game and to fixate on the brutality of SGBV cases. While this could be construed as a case of complicity that reinforces women's victimhood, Évelyne Jean-Bouchard,

with reference to the eastern DRC, contends that we should allow room for other interpretations.[78] Such gendered actions could very well be a form of agentic expression when—in particular cultural contexts—women's organizations adapt SGBV discourses to meet particular socio-material needs; for instance, land and marriage. Viewing these actions in terms of the larger political economy of SGBV puts the motivations of individuals and organizations in a different light—an insight that would have been missed if a gender-neutral lens was employed.

The value of a gender-relational approach to the everyday reveals the intersected nature of identities as they feel the collective violence of capitalism, patriarchy, and militarization on the ground. Feminists do not distinguish between private and public forms of violence. Because structural or institutional violence and physical violence are all connected, this vantage point enables us to see the entrenchment of militarization in the everyday. Intimate partner violence at the interpersonal level and organized crime and gang violence at the community level are linked to the broader normalization and legitimization of violence as an acceptable response to conflict in peacetime. They are all manifestations of national and international norms entrenched in militaries, peacekeeping forces, and privatized security.[79] A bottom-up logic of looking at the gendered impacts of capitalism and militarism on the everyday lives of men and women and how they resist these processes tells us a lot more about how peace is constructed than merely adding gender to peacebuilding discourses and practices as a variable. Similarly, Kathleen Jennings traces peacekeepers' interaction with locals in Liberia and the DRC. Her findings on the gendered and racialized nature of day-to-day interactions (through domestic work, sex work, and private security) drive home the fact that in real life, political economy and (militarized) security are inseparable.[80]

CONCLUSION

So what would a decolonized gender and peacebuilding agenda look like? In this paper, I have contested the simplistic equation of gender, sex, and women and have highlighted how the emerging WPS agenda has to some extent contributed to the narrowing of the debate. The important place of WPS issues within the gender equality regime notwithstanding, I have argued that a particular understanding of gender, as a category to describe a specific identity, has been incorrectly grafted onto women, disallowing a deeper understanding of power relations. Throughout the analysis,

I have reiterated that gender is an important lens, but only if it is viewed as an action/relation/logic rather than a descriptor. The lens, therefore, has to take on conceptual, practical, and normative functions in order to serve the ends of disrupting liberal peacebuilding and liberal-feminist notions of equality. This, I have depicted as an act of decolonizing the gender-peacebuilding nexus.

My qualified critique of the emergent yet ambivalent gender equality regime of the AU and some African women's organizations served to set the scene for the two tools of decolonization that I propose; namely, a gender-relational analysis and a focus on gender and the everyday. An intra- or intercategorical analysis of identities makes for a culturally contextual gender analysis. In post-conflict African contexts decolonization cannot, therefore, just be about transforming gender or patriarchal relations. It has to be about the transformation of patriarchal, heteronormative, and racialized relations. Just as there are multiple femininities and masculinities, so are patriarchies plural, taking on different forms as they interact with race, class, sexuality, rural/urban status, and age. A gender-relational approach underscores the fact that not only are there differences within the category of "women" but also that gender in peacebuilding is about more than women. Sexual and gender minorities and masculinities all need to be taken into account conceptually, practically, and normatively. And while the first tool compels us to look at context, a focus on gendered and racialized experiences of peacebuilding at the everyday level makes the analysis even more specific because it is often through lived experiences that one actually begins to see the manifestation of interlocked identities. It is in daily life where one begins to see the combined violent impact of global structures. If conflict is conducted along gendered lines, then successful peacebuilding entails addressing the structural, gendered, racialized, and militarized systems of violence together; that is, challenging the gendered systems of violence that sustain militarism and war/peace economies.

In the final analysis, a decolonized gender and peacebuilding agenda comprises not getting stuck on differences and also not fixating on equality as sameness, but acknowledging diversity or intragroup variation in how insecurity and peace are experienced. There is no singular female or male experience, and the categories of male and female are not unchanging and monolithic. As I have argued, a thick, intersected, everyday peace through a gender lens means peacebuilders must "think big and apply small."

Phrased differently, it means a more holistic and complex understanding/policy of gender equality must see targeted implementation—and justice for those who need it the most.

Opting for seeing gender in all its complex entanglements, therefore, means that we must steer clear of easy conflations and lazy bifurcated thinking. This point is no better illustrated than in the words of Hendricks and Olonisakin, when they conclude that

> there are, thus, two international peace and security agendas: the women, peace and security agenda and the peace and security agenda, with the latter not needing the prefix of men, but for all intents and purposes, protecting and projecting the needs and interests of men as universal. If we are to make headway, we need to break down these dichotomies and barriers so that we all work on, and toward, the same peace and security agenda.[81]

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