

FALLACIES IN THE INCLUSION OF GENDERED PERSPECTIVES

An Assessment of Gender Parity in UN Peacekeeping

Aulina Pandey

Introduction

A pertinent question asked by feminist IR scholars while analyzing international politics and relations through a gendered lens is, *where are the women?*¹ Scholars and leaders like Cynthia Enloe (Enloe 2014) and Anne Linde, the foreign minister of Sweden, have repeatedly asked this relevant question in during academic or public discourse to encourage feminist dialogue. The recent decade has seen the adoption of feminist foreign policies and focus on gender parity initiatives by countries and organizations across the world as a way of showing solidarity and active support for increasing women's participation in global affairs. However, Enloe's famous question, *where are the women?* was not restricted to representation of women in leadership positions but diverse positions in the international political sphere as diplomats, soldiers, and international civil servants². The ingrained gender-blind system creates hurdles for active participation of women in the national and international sphere thereby affecting the overall development of nation states.

The aim of this paper is to understand the systemic underrepresentation that exists in such peacekeeping missions by the UN. Peacekeeping missions play a vital role in breaking the vicious cycle of conflict. In debates about war, peace, and security, scholars have identified peacekeeping missions as an effective solution to achieve long term peace. This paper highlights the fallacies that exist with respect to the inclusion of gendered perspectives in peacekeeping missions. To understand the theoretical underpinnings of a gendered approach, this paper will conceptualize gender, feminism, gender mainstreaming and parity. These concepts are blatantly missing in the overall construction of the organizations that deal with international security and relations. The paper addresses the lack in women's representation in the UN peacekeeping missions, providing an overview of the key theoretical

¹ Enloe, Cynthia. "Chapter one. Gender Makes the World Go Round." In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, pp. 1-36. University of California Press, 2014.

² Tickner, J. Ann. *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security*. Columbia University Press, 1992.

debates around active female participation in UN peacekeeping missions. In conclusion the paper identifies few important suggestions for a greater gender parity in these mission and international organizations more generally.

Conceptualizing Feminism and Gender Parity

The key concepts while adopting a feminist lens of analyses is the understanding of the terms ‘patriarchy’ and ‘gender’. The latter relates to the social construction of a man’s or a woman’s identity, whereas the former describes the dominance of male power within a given societal structure³. The adoption of a liberal feminist lens allows us to view global politics, which has constantly excluded women, through the perspective of women. The evolution of feminist application in the UN framework has been dramatic with varied types of feminist theories used for analyses since the 1960’s such as liberal, radical, Marxist, and post-colonial feminism⁴. The new millennium however has adopted intersectional feminism to address all forms of patriarchal and societal oppressions including race, class, gender, nationality, abilities etc. that have endangered women’s rights⁵. The change in the new millennium was facilitated by the United Nations Security Council through the adoption of Resolution 1325, which directly addressed the central role of women in contributing to international peace and security issues. Over the years, similar policy directives have been initiated to address the inclusion of gendered perspectives in the UN peacekeeping operations as well as personnel. The UN has undertaken suggestions to initiate gender impact assessment to address the gender gap in its operations.⁶ The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda of 2008 also known as the Resolution 1820 specifically called for the increase in female participation in peacekeeping operations. Additionally, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) also published the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy in 2018 setting targets till 2028 for recruitment of 15 to 30 percent female participation in

³ Smith, Sarah “Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory,” *E-International Relations*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/04/feminism-in-international-relations-theory/>.

⁴ Arat, Zehra F. Kabasakal. "Feminisms, women's rights, and the UN: Would achieving gender equality empower women?." *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 4 (2015): 674-689.

⁵Ibid.

⁶ Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “*Policy: Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations*,” United Nations. July 2010

military and police forces respectively⁷. As of 2020, there are 5,284 female peacekeepers deployed with accounts for 6.4% of the military and police personnel.⁸

Gender mainstreaming is part of the global strategy for all UN operations. It was first mentioned in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Through the process of gender mainstreaming the implications of any planned action including policies, resolutions and programs are assessed on women and men.⁹ The assumption is that the impact of certain plans and actions on women is different than men given the difference in their experiences, perceptions, knowledge, and interests. However, the creation of an organizational structure that is conducive to gender parity is required for effective gender mainstreaming. A gendered perspective illuminates gender as an integral component of any society that impacts people's life, opportunities, and interactions. The understanding and harmonious application of these concepts could encourage a gender-diverse and inclusive space in the international sphere, as is the need of the hour.

Female participation in UN peacekeeping operations

Despite proof that female participation improves overall mission effectiveness, females are systematically under-represented in these missions. The reasons cited for the improvement are that women tend to have access to populations and areas that are inaccessible to men. For instance, women have greater access to community members and civilians, especially women and children. Thus, they are able to provide a more comprehensive report about the potential security risks¹⁰. Scholars have also stated that female peacekeepers are possibly better equipped to deal with issues of gender violence and sexual abuse by increasing the reporting of such cases. It is important to note that this should not place additional burden on female peacekeepers. Rather it should be looked at as a missing feature of peacekeeping missions that should be urgently addressed through increasing female participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Closer inspection of gender biases reveals several complex cultural and

⁷ Nagel, Robert et al., "Peacekeeping Operations and Gender: Policies for Improvement," *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security*. May 2021.

⁸ Baldwin, Gretchen and Sarah Taylor "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations: Challenging Assumptions and Transforming Approaches." *International Peace Institute*. July 23, 2020.

⁹Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. "Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality." United Nations. August 2001.

¹⁰ Bigio, Jamille and Rachel Vogelstein. "Increasing Female Participation in Peacekeeping Operations" *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2018, <https://www.cgdev.org/article/increasing-female-participation-peacekeeping-operations-council-foreign-relations>.

sociological factors that have been ignored over the since the inception of peacekeeping operations after the Cold War. For example, the difficulty in accurately mapping the contribution of female peacekeepers in UN missions stems from a glaring gender data gap. The gap relates to the non-collection of sex-disaggregated data by the UN, a trend which only started in 2000¹¹. Gender parity would also contribute significantly to peacekeeping economies wherein peacekeepers initiate social, economic and logistical initiatives within the host country in order to expand their presence. In this case, a gendered perspective and diverse personnel can address issues around sex work or domestic work that arises out of the commonly understood gendered notions about women in the society.

Why women?

The focus on greater gender parity to enhance the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations has been in both military and police aspects. Female Engagement Teams have been created and deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq with military training, but without any definitive policy or standardized training¹². Despite lack in training, the inclusion of women has resulted in better reports from the local communities of these regions. There are observations that gender sensitive or democratic governments are more inclined to consider female participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Gender parity practiced at an international level could have a trickle-down effect on local communities wherein women would feel encouraged to engage with political and security sectors. Gender equality is a goal not just for the UN but for the host nation as well. Following this, researchers indicate that the presence of female protection advisors in UN operations results in higher probability of the host country adopting resolutions and policy frameworks that are gender inclusive and address the prevention of violence on women¹³. In recent times, there have been huge debates on the cost of achieving greater gender parity. The mere passing of resolutions and directives does not ensure gender equality. Implementation measures such as training, change in recruitment strategies, enabling systems for both genders on the field and having doctors available for all peacekeepers need political and financial backing.¹⁴ It has been observed that the inclusion of women in peace processes increases the chance for a lasting peace agreement and recent research has found a strong link between female political empowerment and civil peace.¹⁵ Despite resistance from critics about including more women in the peacekeeping operations

¹¹ Dharmapuri, Sahana. “Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping.” *International Peace Institute*. 2013.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kari M. Osland, J. N. *Female Peacekeepers and Operational Effectiveness in UN Peace Operations*. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Wilén, Nina. “It’s Time to Build a Gender-Just Peace: Here Is How,” *Egmont Institute*. February 14, 2019.

which might lead to increase in sexual violence and decreased effectiveness, evidence shows that gender parity helps mitigate possible sexual violence and abuse in the field.¹⁶

The dark side peacekeeping operations

Despite recognizing the protracted side-lining of women in peace and conflict matters the marginalization exists as a kink in the system of peace negotiations and operations. Systemic challenges and institutional biases including gender bias regarding the kind of work women are capable of doing which sometimes excludes patrolling and fieldwork. Other issues like sexual harassment on the field are certain issues that female peacekeepers continue to face till today. In an explosive article titled “UN Peacekeeping and Transactional Sex,” the authors bring to light the dark side of peacekeeping missions where peacekeepers in Monrovia engaged in transactional sex. The article by political scientists Bernd Beber, Michael Gilligan, Jenny Guardado and Sabrina Karim published in The Washington Post illustrates the flip side of UN peacekeeping missions in vulnerable countries. Such reports of sexual harassment by peacekeepers is not uncommon. Even in 1992, there were reports of all-male UN peacekeepers engaging in sexual assaults in Cambodia.¹⁷ No doubt that such reports lead to institutional changes within the system, with the Security Council adopting several policy directives to increase female representation in peace operations.¹⁸ However, a considerable backlash based out of gender bias and sexist norms prevalent in the military culture has been noticed with some stating that all-male units are more effective in combat than mixed gender units.¹⁹ Scholars have indicated the subsequent links of combat positions to military promotions and leadership that needs more females to encourage gender parity. The deeply rooted sexism and reinforcement of gendered stereotypes have constantly restricted the potential and abilities of female peacekeepers on the field.²⁰ Furthermore, there have been arguments about the lack of qualified women for deployment.²¹ Such arguments are baseless and ignorant of the ground reality which is that despite there being enough qualified women their

¹⁶ Bigio, Jamille and Rachel Vogelstein. “Increasing Female Participation”. 2018

¹⁷ Crawford, Kerry F., James H. Lebovic, and Julia M. Macdonald. "Explaining the variation in gender composition of personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping operations." *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 2 (2015): 257-281.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Thompson, Lyndsay B. "Gender Equality in International Institutions: Progress and Challenges in Moving Toward Gender Parity." *Inquiries Journal* 9, no. 02 (2017).

²⁰ Nagel, Robert et al., “Peacekeeping Operations and Gender,” May 2021.

²¹ Bigio, Jamille and Rachel Vogelstein. “Increasing Female Participation,” 2018

appointment is often flouted because of family constraints, societal stereotypes or because they are simply unaware of such opportunities.

Conclusion

There is a wide gap between the UN's theoretical approaches achieve gender parity and its implementation in the field. Preaching gender parity is the first step, however an overall review of policies, training and strategies needs to take place to ensure an institutional acceptance of a gender inclusive organizations. It is important to highlight important suggestions made scholars and activists to address gender parity issues in the UN peacekeeping forces. Leaders who are aware of how to implement gender mainstreaming and perspectives need to be selected. Additionally, ensuring the socio-economic empowerment of women would enable more representation at every level of the society.²² The accumulation of gender-segregated data sets will help tremendously to identify specific factors leading to severe underrepresentation and invisibility of genders other than males. This includes the application of gendered perspectives to be addressed and reformed proactively. Financial incentives for females could be an effective way to attract female personnel for peacekeeping operations. The allotment of gender-diverse influential roles as leaders and planners would help create a gender-balanced environment in the UN military and police system. In conclusion, it is important to reiterate the relevance of the question, *where are the women?* and the need to ask this at every stage in the process of attaining gender parity. It is a highly pertinent question for the operations that enable peace and security which is the ideal world each individual, irrespective of their gender, wants to live in.

²² Wilén, Nina. "It's Time to Build a Gender-Just Peace: Here Is How," 2019.

Bibliography

- Arat, Zehra F. Kabasakal. "Feminisms, women's rights, and the UN: Would achieving gender equality empower women?." *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 4 (2015): 674-689.
- Crawford, Kerry F., James H. Lebovic, and Julia M. Macdonald. "Explaining the variation in gender composition of personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping operations." *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 2 (2015): 257-281.
- Dharmapuri, Sahana. "Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping." *International Peace Institute*. 2013.
- Nagel, Robert et al., "Peacekeeping Operations and Gender: Policies for Improvement," *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security*. May 2021.
- Enloe, Cynthia. "Chapter one. Gender Makes the World Go Round." In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, pp. 1-36. University of California Press, 2014..
- Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. "Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality." United Nations. August 2001.
- Kari M. Osland, J. N. *Female Peacekeepers and Operational Effectiveness in UN Peace Operations*. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. 2020.
- Department of Peacekeeping Operations. "Policy: Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations," United Nations. July 2010
- Smith, Sarah "Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory," *E-International Relations*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/04/feminism-in-international-relations-theory/>.
- Baldwin, Gretchen and Sarah Taylor "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations: Challenging Assumptions and Transforming Approaches." *International Peace Institute*. July 23, 2020.
- Thompson, Lyndsay B. "Gender Equality in International Institutions: Progress and Challenges in Moving Toward Gender Parity." *Inquiries Journal* 9, no. 02 (2017).T
- Tickner, J. Ann. *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security*. Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Bigio, Jammille and Rachel Vogelstein. "Increasing Female Participation in Peacekeeping Operations" *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2018, <https://www.cgdev.org/article/increasing-female-participation-peacekeeping-operations-council-foreign-relations>.
- Wilén, Nina. "It's Time to Build a Gender-Just Peace: Here Is How," *Egmont Institute*. February 14, 2019