

Women's Power to Stop War: Lessons for the International Studies Association

Written by Natalie Florea Hudson

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NATALIE FLOREA HUDSON, JUN 4 2015

For most International Relations scholars, June 1st is a notable date – marking the submission deadline for paper and panel proposals for the Annual International Studies Association (ISA) Convention. This international convention brings thousands of scholars together from 115 countries each year to share research, to network and to learn about cutting-edge scholarship in the field of IR. And each year, the convention focuses on a particular theme; for the 2016 meeting in Atlanta, GA, the call for proposals requests research on the theme of peace as a conceptual lens, a theoretical tool and an empirical framework for analysis. Participants in the upcoming ISA Convention, particularly those interested in more deeply exploring “peace” would be well served to take a closer look at the most recent conference sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) held at The Hague in April. WILPF’s 2015 conference, entitled “Women’s Power to Stop War: Uniting a Global Movement,” marked the 100th anniversary of what is now the oldest women’s peace organization in the world. While ISA could certainly enliven the annual convention with free morning yoga sessions and an evening festival filled with poetry, theatre, song and dance modeled after the WILPF conference, that argument (and there is one to make) will have to be made elsewhere. The aim of this brief article is to examine some of the key themes from the WILPF conference and their relevance to scholarship in IR, particularly as one considers the link between research and activism, between theory and practice in the area of peace broadly defined. In this way, this paper seeks to link the intellectual challenges and political goals raised at the WILPF Conference to the academic initiatives driving ISA 2016.

Admittedly, the nature and scope of the WILPF conference is markedly different from ISA. Whereas ISA focuses on bringing together academics, some of whom are activists and/or see their research as advocacy, WILPF focuses on bringing activists and advocates together, some of whom are also academics. And while WILPF uniquely aims to reenergize a global peace movement, both WILPF and ISA 2016 centrally focus on contributing to a global understanding of what peace means and fostering a knowledge base about the state of global security today. As a participant at the WILPF conference and an active ISA member, I was struck by two key conceptual frames that not only raise important research questions for ISA convention-goers to address, but also highlight areas where scholarship and theory, if better integrated, have the potential to improve peace advocacy.

A Human Right to Peace: Framing the Discourse, Mobilizing the Movement

Throughout the WILPF conference, many participants articulated and argued for the legal recognition and global promotion of a human right to peace. Framing peace in this way is significant in so much that the frame speaks to different audiences and obligates different institutions to respond (Joachim 2007; McAdam et al. 1996; Snow and Benford 1988; Tarrow 1994). Just like the women’s movement framed “women’s rights as human rights” in the 1990s, the women’s movement once again is forward-thinking and catalytic in drawing attention to the issues that affect the majority of the world’s population (Friedman 1995). At the WILPF conference, Charlotte Bunch argued that it is time for the movement to move beyond women’s rights as human rights. Perhaps it is time for women activists and feminists alike to campaign for the establishment of a human right to peace, showing how women’s concerns are profoundly affected by the absence of peace and how both can be part of the human rights regime.

It is important to note that the call for a human right to peace is not at all new, and as early as 1978, the UN General

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Assembly passed the Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace, which states, "Every nation and every human being, regardless of race, conscience, language or sex, has the inherent right to life in peace. Respect for that right, as well as for the other human rights, is in the common interest of all mankind and an indispensable condition of advancement of all nations, large and small, in all fields." (A/Res/33/73, Art. 1). And of course, the UN Charter recognizes that peace is both a prerequisite and a consequence of the full enjoyment of human rights by all. Regional organizations also have articulated this right to peace; for example, Article 23.1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981 proclaims the collective rights of peoples to peace and security. And in 1984, the UN General Assembly approved resolution 39/11 proclaiming that "the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace," (Art. 1) declaring that "the preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State," (Art. 2) and appealing to "all States and international organizations to do their utmost to assist in implementing the right of peoples to peace through the adoption of appropriate measures at both the national and the international level"(Art. 4). While most of these statements emerge in the context of soft international law, the fact that states and intergovernmental organizations are recognizing peace as an individual and collective human right is critically important for peace activists as they work to put peace back on international and national policy agendas. As the research shows, framing, language and agenda-setting matter when it comes to transnational advocacy networks' capacity to impact global policymaking (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bob 2009; Carpenter 2014).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to be the drivers of transnational advocacy for a human right to peace, as they are in so many issue-areas. In 1999, over 10,000 activists and CSO leaders organized the largest peace conference in history, The Hague Appeal for Peace, at which a declaration entitled "Peace is a Human Right" was drafted. From here, civil society adopted the Luarca Declaration on the Human Right to Peace, which concretely situates peace as an "enabling" human right, prior to and indispensable to other rights, and it boldly asserts that peace will not be achieved without the realization of equal rights for men and women (Chowdhury 2012). This CSO declaration and the one that followed in Barcelona in 2010 were instrumental in bringing the concept of a human right to peace to the international community, specifically the UN and the Human Rights Council.

Notably on June 17, 2010, The UN Human Rights Council – an intergovernmental body within the UN system comprised of 47 states responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe – adopted a draft resolution entitled, "Promotion of the Right of Peoples to Peace" (Weiss 2010). This resolution (23/16) was sponsored by 22 developing states, and 31 states in the Human Rights Council voted in favor, 14 against, and 1 abstained. The resolution acknowledges the work of civil society and requests the Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee to draft a declaration on the right of peoples to peace.

Although the Human Rights Council is still working to achieve consensus on a draft declaration, with the third working session occurring in 2015, the progress reports show some significant conceptual achievements. First, peace is defined as both the absence of organized violence within or between countries, as well as the comprehensive protection of human rights, gender equality, and economic well-being, among other areas. Second, the essential elements of the right to peace include the right to human security, disarmament, peace education, conscientious objections, resistance to oppression, development, reparations and the environment as well as the duty to regulate peacekeeping and private security companies. Third, the progress reports attempt to propose standards for monitoring and implementation (van Boven 2012, 145). In short, CSOs have done a great deal to help both UN officials and scholars articulate what a human right to peace looks like.

Despite these conceptual achievements, negotiations among the member-states that sit on the Human Rights Council have stalled and the most recent draft declaration shows a very minimalist approach to the agreed-upon language. For example, Article 1 of the draft declaration has been revised from the simple and clear notion that "Individuals and peoples have a right to peace" to the convoluted and ambiguous statement that "Everyone is entitled to the promotion, protection and respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to life, in a context in which all human rights, peace and development are fully implemented." Here is where WILPF activism and ISA research can contribute: speaking to the challenges of this weak language and the inability of states to act in ways that promote peace, justice, rights and gender equality, and working to develop an empirical framework for analyzing how best to promote and protect a human right to peace. To be sure, the human right to peace is

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conceptually and empirically still in its infancy.

International Organizations: Reclaiming the Multilateralism

WILPF conference participants demonstrated serious and valid concerns about the state of multilateralism today, with a particular focus on the United Nations and its current approach to fulfilling its mission: maintaining international peace and security. At its core, the UN was established after the Second World War to be an organization dedicated to the promotion of peace and the stark reality is that much of what the UN does to promote peace actually involves national militaries, arms and even violence. The fact that the UN's peacekeeping budget is the largest budget of any other UN agency combined raises serious concerns. The approved budget for UN Peacekeeping operations for fiscal year 2014-2015 is about \$7.06 billion whereas the regular budget for the UN is \$5.53 billion. Where and how money is spent speaks to the profound and problematic militarization of the UN system. As Radhika Coomaraswamy pointed out during the WILPF conference, "The UN has gone away from its core vision: that it should be a place for putting swords into plowshares." She maintained "In a very turbulent and violent world, we must go back to our demand for peace." As we all know, the UN Charter, does begin with "We the people..."

This demand for peace is not an untenable aspiration or naïve optimism. For those attending WILPF's centennial conference, many of whom have lived through the worst of war and its violent aftermath, they still believe that peace is possible. The conference ended with grounded, sober and yet inspirational remarks from WILPF's Madeline Rees, who argued that "we have to believe peace is possible, that we have the power to stop war." Patricia Sellers reminded us that the practice of peace – from Ghandi to the civil rights movement in the U.S., to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa – has enabled communities to avoid war. This innovative, and for some irrational thinking, is just what activists and scholars need in order to contribute to collective ways of thinking that help us improve the world in the 21st century. While I certainly recognize that many IR scholars do not even begin to think about the relevancy or practical implications of their research for policy or for activists, many, many do. For example, in recent years, IR scholars have made tremendous strides in studying the impact of nonviolent movement and demonstrating the power of nonviolence in various social, political and economic contexts. For example, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (2012) demonstrate that for more than a century, from 1900 to 2006, campaigns of nonviolent resistance were more than twice as effective as their violent counterparts in achieving their stated goals. These scholars not only took peace seriously, but created a research project that is relevant for those working for peace in their own communities. What would it mean for more IR scholars, particularly those in security studies, to conduct research guided by the notion that peace is possible, and focused on figuring out how to achieve it?

At the WILPF conference, Carol Cohn and Maria Butler engaged participants in thinking about the impossible. They led a workshop where participants explored how building a road is a gendered project, and to my amazement the group articulated more than twenty ways such an endeavor was gendered. Building a road seems irrelevant, trivial and in many ways, unexciting for those of us studying war, peace and security. But as Cohn demonstrated, this is exactly the kind of innovative research that is needed not only to breathe new life into multilateralism, but to also address the underlying social structures that continue to perpetuate inequality and prevent lasting peace in war-torn societies. Cohn argued that there is nothing that is not a gendered issue, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction. From building roads to implementing privatization practices to generating state revenue to addressing government corruption, all reconstruction efforts have gendered consequences and as important as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has been, the question now is understanding and articulating what 1325 can and should be.

Carol Cohn operationalized these aspirations in her call to develop a "feminist playbook for peace." This scholar-turned-activist made it clear that current policies, resolutions, and other documents do not give us the creative energy and practical next steps needed to turn rhetoric around peace into actual practice in people's lives, particularly in the case of 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Documents, like UN Security Council Resolution 1325, are only institutional artifacts and do not, in fact fully incorporate what peace and security is for women. The documents are not all-encompassing nor are they all that we need, especially when such policy tools can easily be co-opted to reinforce the status quo – militarized approaches to peace.

Creative energy and renewed multilateralism is needed to challenge the ideological imperialism that dominates much

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of our thinking, research and action around peace and security. The ideological imperialism of militarism silences the majority. We must not forget that more of us want war to end than want it to continue. The WILPF Conference focused on whose interests are really represented in global politics today, and how those interests are determined by a few, elite, mostly male business and government leaders, and how those interests, while dominant and overpowering in many ways, do not represent the majority. These individuals perpetuate a certain system of interaction – one driven by weapons, war and violence – and this system does not have the consent of the majority of people in the world. During the WILPF conference, Ray Acheson rightly pointed out, “our governments spend 1.7 trillion dollars on weapons.” Laila Alodaat added, “they do not have our consent.”

Looking Ahead

According to Edith Ballantyne, a Holocaust survivor with 93 years-experience in peace activism and an attendee at WILPF, the world is worse off than ever before. Her impassioned and urgent call to change the direction the world is headed in should motivate WILPF and ISA members alike. We must do more and better research; research must inform advocacy, and activism must be able to rely on accessible and reliable empirical analysis. We must push ourselves, as Cynthia Enloe (2004) reminds us, to always start with genuine curiosity, not judgement.

The WILPF conference ended with each participant making a commitment, written by hand on a paper that was physically collected by WILPF leaders. As I reflect on that exercise, I wonder what ISA members, particularly those committed to research on peace, rights, justice, equality and security, would commit to if given the opportunity to at ISA 2016. What would it mean to commit to research and to intentionally developing ISA as an organization that is a more international, inclusive and critical collective? I believe, as IR scholars, we must aim for what Catia Confortini (2012) calls “intelligent compassion” as WILPF members have been doing for 100 years now.

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About the author:

Natalie Florea Hudson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Dayton, where she also serves as the Director of the Human Rights Studies Program. Natalie's research interests focus on women's activism in the global security arena, particularly in conflict-affected areas, and on the meaning, significance and applicability of human security and human rights in the 21st century. Her book, *Gender, Human Security and the UN: Security Language as a Political Framework for Women* (Routledge, 2009) examines the organizational dynamics of women's activism in the United Nations system and how women have come to embrace and been impacted by the security discourse in their work for rights and equality. Her expertise has led to consultancy work for governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including the European Union and the United Nations.