The Right to Be Here: A Case for the Inclusion of Women in Peace Negotiations

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"Why is it that women should bear the burden of proof of showing that they could make a difference while the man have long been making a total mess of our security situation? Again, the naughty answer can be, 'Well, we don't even have to make a difference. Like you, we have the right to be here. Period'" (Arnado 2011). Secretary-General of the Mindanao Peoples Caucus[1] Mary Ann Arnado's words are simultaneously intuitive and in tension with the rhetoric traditionally used to promote the inclusion of women in peace negotiations. The notion that half of a state's population should have a say in the formative process of negotiating for peace would seem intuitive for proponents of political representation. Yet, the strategies used to achieve this representation suggest a tension. In making the positive case for women as peaceful, reasoned, and worthy actors who deserve a place at the negotiation table, the case made for the inclusion of women relies not on what women can bring to the table as people, but for what they can bring in their gendered role as women.

This essay will push back against this essentialist and instrumentalist portrayal of women to argue for the importance of including women in peace negotiations solely on account of their personhood. This is an argument based on the premise that women are people and that people living in states should have a right to be included in peace processes irrespective of their gender. To make this case, I will first conceptualize and examine the nature of peace negotiations to demonstrate why they are a process that is particularly formative for the character, priorities, and orientation of a state in the complicated period of consolidating peace following a conflict and thus, why it is so crucial that women, as equal stakeholders in the state, should have a right to equal and meaningful representation during this decisive period. Secondly, I will outline and critically assess the literature which advocates for the inclusion of women on gendered and outcomes-based grounds – as pacifiers, mothers, and caretakers – to demonstrate why this approach is problematic with regard to the long-term political inclusion of women and the construction of gendered behaviour. Finally, drawing upon post-structuralist theories of gender and political theories of participation, I will build a case for the inclusion of women which rejects problematic discursive constructions of gender which subordinate women and their claim to equal political membership in society. In arguing for a feminist vision of peacebuilding, I seek to bridge the logic used to validate the participation of men, whose participation is not justified by, or contingent upon, the fulfillment of particular outcomes during the negotiation process.

Peace Negotiations: a Formative Process

A central component in the broader peacebuilding process, peace negotiations are formative spaces for the organization of post-conflict societies. In this section, I will argue for the importance of peace negotiations and situate them in the broader peacebuilding process; by establishing how influential peace processes can be for the structuring of a state, I argue that the exclusion of women from these processes is particularly harmful because it denies them the ability to stake claims, as equal actors, in the political, economic, social, and moral orientation of the state.

Before moving to a discussion about the nature of peace processes, it is useful to clarify what a peace process is in itself. Darby and Mac Ginty (2000: 6-7) outline the complicated task of assigning a definition by prefacing that "there is no universally agreed definition of a peace process." Nevertheless, they suggest five features which generally

characterize peace processes: protagonists willing to negotiate in good faith, the inclusion of key actors, negotiations addressing the central issues in dispute, negotiators refraining from the use of force to achieve their objectives, and a commitment from all parties to a sustained process. Definitions provided by the United Nations' Peacemaker website (a tool for 'peacebuilding professionals') adhere to similar conceptualizations, drawing upon Saunders (2001: 483) who claims they are "a political process in which conflicts are resolved by peaceful means" and Sisk (2003) who sees them as step-by-step reciprocal moves helping to gradually exchange war for peace. Villellas Ariño (2010) suggests that the thread linking the varied definitions of a peace process is that they all acknowledge an organized effort to put an end to armed conflicts through dialogue, involving parties in the conflict, and usually with some external assistance. Applying a more critical feminist lens will find that these conceptualizations of peace are insufficient; the absence of war, for example, does not equate with the absence of violence – particularly against women in post-conflict contexts (Pearce 2004). Shortcomings aside, when actors engage with the peacebuilding process, they consider themselves to be participating in some version of the process as outlined above.

The extent to which peace negotiations present a particularly formative political opportunity does not depend exclusively on the negotiations themselves. The opportunity they present comes in tandem with the malleable nature of a post-conflict society preparing itself for an era of peace, stability, and prosperity through the establishment of norms and institutions that are supportive of this task. Knowing how ripe these societies are for change, Alwis et al. (2013) argue that we should think of peace processes as more than just places where agreements are negotiated, drafted and signed. With an eye to gender relations, they suggest that these processes can exist as positive or negative spaces; they will either enable the positive restructuring of gender relations or they will reinforce existing inequalities, while also forcing women to forfeit the gains they may have made during wartime. Knowledge of the power these peace processes hold is precisely why women across cultural contexts, in the Global North and South, have mobilized and lobbied for their inclusion.

The cases of female mobilization in Northern Ireland through the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) in 1998 and the creation of a 'Sixth Clan' to represent women's interests in Somalia in 2000 are oft-cited examples of this. In the case of the former, the establishment of the NIWC as a political party founded by a Catholic academic and a Protestant social worker united women across sectarian divides and enabled the Coalition to be popularly elected to participate in multi-party peace negotiations. The NIWC's participation in these negotiations is credited with providing a platform for women's political participation, for helping to "seal a peace deal" in Northern Ireland, and for influencing the content of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement to call for women's full and equal political participation (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 14; Alwis et al. 2013: 169). In the case of the latter, the Sixth Clan acted as a counter to the five dominant, male-led clans which Somali society is comprised of. Mobilizing to represent women's rights at the 2002 Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference, where participation was initially restricted to the five clans, the Sixth Clan was able to achieve participatory status and used it to negotiate for the establishment of a Women's Ministry and a gender quota for seats in the Transitional Federal Parliament (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 26; Alwis et al. 2013: 169).

In both the long and short-term, negotiations lay the groundwork for how post-conflict societies will be structured. In the short-term, they do so by determining how law and order will be restored, how combatants will be reintegrated, and how displaced peoples will be resettled; in the long-term, they account for the devolution of political power, constitutional changes, and can have the capacity to address social, political, and economic inequalities. These latter possibilities thus make the era of peace negotiations a time of "crucial opportunity for more equitable gender relations and power sharing." (Alwis et al. 2013: 171). An example of this awareness, even predating UNSC Resolution 1325, are the 1996 Guatemala Peace Accords which demonstrated an express commitment to acknowledging and solving issues of gender inequality by stipulating the opening of space for women's social and political participation alongside improved access to land, healthcare, credit, and developmental aid. Though they fell short in their implementation, the Accords demonstrate an awareness among parties regarding the possibilities presented by the process.

Though a process in themselves, peace negotiations should also be considered for the role they play within broader peacebuilding processes which conventionally occur when an armed conflict is brought to an end. Duncanson (2016) frames peacebuilding as the ambitious project of building the institutions and infrastructure necessary to make peace sustainable; a moral valuation can be placed on this project, depending on whether one interprets current

peacebuilding mechanisms to be a tool of neo-imperialism or altruism. Regardless of this interpretation, however, is the reality that peacebuilding mechanisms are deeply gendered and often reiterate gendered power hierarchies and inequalities through the overrepresentation of empowered male actors. If peace negotiations act as a space for these inequalities to be reproduced, then they can also be re-conceptualized as spaces wherein these dynamics can be challenged through a change in who gets to participate, who is excluded, and which issues are prioritized. Recognizing the way in which gender (alongside other marginalizing structures such as class, sexuality, and ethnicity) influences people, practices, and policies which impact peace can make it even more important for these dynamics to be disrupted in order to enable the meaningful involvement of stakeholders who are better representative of a post-conflict society.

From a temporal perspective, an awareness of the way that gender, as a relational power dynamic, "underpins and sustains the war system" was largely absent in global politics until the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. Prior to this recognition, the disproportionate effects of conflict-related sexual violence were still felt by women and went unacknowledged. Even following this recognition and commit to progress, peace processes still failed to integrate women, according to Jenkins and Goetz (2010: 262), as evidenced by the dismal 4% of women involved in peace negotiations in the decade following the implementation of 1325 (Fisas 2008: 21). While the inclusion of women should not be interpreted as a guarantee that gender issues will suddenly come to the fore, the exclusion of women *is* a guarantee that the gender dynamics present throughout the conflict (and prior to) will remain "unquestioned and intact" to the detriment of women and men (Alwis et al. 2013: 192). If we accept that "peace processes represent exceptional occasions […] to act as the starting point for more profound transformative processes" and are incomparable scenarios for the alteration of structural causes leading to conflict in the first place, then it will be important to critically assess how to ensure the involvement of women in a way which ensures their long-term political empowerment as equal, rights-bearing subjects (Villellas Ariño 2010: 8).

Women as Peacemakers: Essentialist and Outcomes-Based Justifications for Inclusion

On account of the knowledge that peace negotiations serve as such a critical juncture in determining a nation's character and priorities following a conflict, cases have been made to challenge the exclusion of women and to build a case for their inclusion. These cases can be separated into two logics: the essentializing logic, which argues for the inclusion of women given their feminine nature and the instrumentalist logic, which believes that the inclusion of women will lead to better outcomes. I will assess both to demonstrate why they are antithetical to the goals of gender justice, despite being rooted in feminist ways of theorizing about peace and conflict. In the following section, I will build on this critical analysis to make a positive argument for dismantling gender-based claims to participation in peace processes.

The groundwork needed to understand the way in which women are conceptualized in the world of politics is critically established in Gentry and Sjoberg (2015: 2), who refer to the idealized images of femininity which portray women as "pure, maternal, emotional, innocent, and peace-loving" actors who, by virtue of being women, are "not prone to men's mistakes, excesses, or violence." Though these are qualities generally ascribed to women across cultural contexts, it is important to situate this characterization of women as one which specifically frames their involvement in global politics. This is the characterization that operates within the binary which uses masculinity to frame war, while framing peace as a feminine project associated with passivity, domesticity, tranquility, softness, compromise, and interdependence. In these terms, peace is framed as a "'being' rather than a 'doing'" and "an absence rather than a presence" and this passive understanding of peace is what allows it to be reasonably conceived of as a female project (Cohn 2013: 12). The notion that there is an innate female disposition to be peaceful should allow women to make a grounded claim for participation in peace processes, lending itself to what Sperling (2006: 114) refers to as "gender-based claims that women and mothers are incapable of committing murder" and thus, should make ideal peacemakers. This logic, whose origins lie in efforts made through feminist theory to extend the meaningful involvement of women in peace processes, is not confined to the discipline of its origins. It is compelling enough to be used in the construction of wider-reaching narratives in political science, such as the one posited by Fukuyama (1998: 34), where he acknowledges the contributions of feminist political theory in enabling his claim that the inclusion of women in politics would make the world a better place through "[controlling] the violent and aggressive tendencies of men". Women, after all, are unique in their ability to give birth and mother children which enables them

to think differently and more peacefully about how to resolve international political tensions. In tangible terms, he considers this "feminization of world politics" to be the controlling of male impulses through feminine and peaceful ways of conducting politics, be it through the creation of norms, laws, agreements, or contracts (Fukuyama 1998: 34). Deploying this 'maternal' logic to construct women conceives of them as mothers and wives first, and as people (divorced from any particular moral orientation) second. In other words, theorists who make the case for female involvement make their case on the grounds that female decision-making is distinct from male decision-making because it is driven by maternal logic, as opposed to nuanced or politicized reasoning.

Derivative of this characterization of women, which essentializes an entire gender as naturally inclined to peace and compromise, is the instrumentalist logic: that involving women in peace negotiations will lead to better outcomes. Though it can be argued that thinking of women in instrumentalist terms is reductive, advocates for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes argue that women should strategically harness this perception of their nature to gain a seat at the table. By having a seat at the table, women will be able to place items on the negotiation agenda that are often neglected by men; it means that they can advocate for sustainable, community-based peace initiatives and can ensure that gender-based issues (i.e. sexual violence) are adequately addressed. In having the option to make this strategic concession lies the dilemma of feminist approaches to peacebuilding; as Duncanson (2016: 54) puts it: "if we mobilize as women for change, do we cement the very identity – and the idea of fixed identities – that we have identified as part of the problem?". While men exist in a space where their involvement in peace negotiations is not contingent on assuring that a particular outcome is delivered, the hostility women have faced when seeking a place at the negotiation table requires them to demonstrate their value as peacemakers in instrumentalist terms.

A standard argument made to justify the exclusion of women is that they do not play a role in the conflict or in the pre-conflict political processes of the country. This argument was made during the 2002 Democratic Republic of the Congo peace talks, when the Congolese government and other warring parties sought to keep women out of the negotiation process, insisting that "war and peace are exclusively the business of men" (Mpoumou 2004: 122). An attack on the offices of the Réseau des Femmes pour la Defense des Droits et la Paix[2] by a rebel group was a physical assertion of this logic. Women have also been kept out of peace talks by male negotiators who insist that their interests can be represented without their participation. Following the 'tenuous' inclusion of women in the 1998 Arusha III peace talks, Burundian negotiators "categorically [refused]" the inclusion of women in Burundi's 2000 round of peace negotiations. They insisted that male negotiators were equipped to represent women's interests and that women had ought to go home to look after their children (Puechguirbal 2005: 5-6).

When faced with this level of fundamental gender-based opposition, it is reasonable to infer that making a counterclaim, also on gendered grounds, seems like the only way to legitimately challenge exclusionary logics; by doing so, women can demonstrate how and why they bring unique value to peace processes. In making this case for their involvement, women must be able to distinguish their contributions from what men are traditionally able to bring to peace negotiations. Alwis et al. (2013: 175) describe this as strategically using patriarchal assumptions to bring an end to violence, to gain moral authority, and to secure inclusion in peace processes. These assumptions include the notion peddled by Boru Raba, leader of the Ethiopian Peace Committee of Elders, who acknowledged that "women are better than men" because they can "play both a fueling role and a cooling role" – meaning they can intervene to make men change their minds (McCabe 2007). Duncanson (2016: 12) agrees that this framing can be turned on its head to improve the representation of women in peace processes, which is useful granted that "women have many insights and an impressive track record in working for peace" but she questions if it should be.

There are a number of reasons to be skeptical about this link between the involvement of women and the assurance of successful outcomes, four of which are of particular relevance. Firstly, the association of women as guarantors of peace can prevent both women and peace from being taken seriously in the realm of the political. Secondly, this association can be used to justify the exclusion of women from public roles in politics beyond the realm of peace activism. Enloe (2002: 23) argues that this characterization of female complements to militarized masculinity in the time of peacebuilding enables the "[exclusion of] women from full and assertive participation in postwar public life." Thirdly, assigning women as the primary actors driving the peace project can exclude men from fulfilling peaceful roles; in this respect, the feminization of peace reinforces the masculinity of war, and thus reinforces a binary of political action which is strictly gendered. Fourthly, Inglehart and Norris (2003) posit that operating within these

idealized notions of femininity will trap women into idealized roles based on their gender, thus threatening 'the rising tide of gender equality' by denying women (and by extension, men) the opportunity to present themselves as complex and multifaceted political actors who are driven by motivations which extend beyond their gender. Women also exist as members of national, religious, racial, and socio-economic groups who can be driven by political agendas that exist in separation from, or in opposition to, notions of gender justice.

In making the participation of women contingent on their ability to embody their gendered role as actors for peace and to deliver successful outcomes, the ultimate danger women can befall is failure to achieve these outcomes or fulfill these roles. If women are given a place at the table on the guarantee that they will 'secure the peace', and if they are unsuccessful in doing so, this means that they have failed as both women and as peace negotiators. Consequently, the already difficult task of securing women's political participation is made even more difficult.

Deconstructing 'the Woman': an Equal Claim to Personhood and Peace-Building

If the most ideal case for female participation in peace negotiations does not come from the essential nature of women or the outcomes that they are able to guarantee, then the question remains: is it important for women to be included in peace negotiations? In this section, I will make a positive argument for the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and broader peace processes. This argument relies on the premise that women should not have to make their claim to participation on any grounds beyond those which stipulate that they are equal members of their societies and thus, have a right to be included in the peacebuilding process. Situating this premise within theories of broader political representation, I draw upon Phillips' (1995) argument that no group should have the inherent right to monopolize political office and Cohn's (2013) contextually specific argument that women should participate in peace processes, not because they are innately peaceful or because they have been victimized by wars, but because they are political subjects with rights. To exercise these rights, they need not be better or more peaceful than men. In an ideal world, the best practice of inclusion would not be contingent on fulfilling constructed gender roles; this means that women could contend for a place as mediocre actors and men could make claims for their participation as 'peaceful' actors.

In order to first reject the assumption that "women are naturally more peaceful than men" or that women are particular victims of war, we must look further into the construction of gender itself. Butler's (1990) post-structural approach to thinking about feminism posits that we should abandon a 'fixed' understanding of gender in order to think about gender as a malleable site of social regulation where relations of power are reproduced. If gender is indeed 'fluid' and not 'fixed', then it cannot be taken for granted that all women are innately more peaceful than all men. In other words, the notion that people share characteristics because they belong to the group 'man' or 'woman' should be abandoned. Butler's (1993: 70) case for abandoning this notion extends beyond recognizing the artificial nature of gender constructions to account for detrimental power dynamics, given that these 'fixed' ways of thinking about women reiterate 'hegemonic norms' wherein gendered hierarchies are created and reproduced by gendered social power. In spite of these discourses being artificial and intersubjective social constructions, as Peterson (1999: 35-64) suggests, this is not to say that they do not hold real power in "[regulating] global politics: in interstate relations, international development, and international security" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2015: 5). In harnessing their discursive power, Sjoberg and Gentry (2015: 8) contend that these constructions contribute to the preservation of "discursive structures of gender subordination" which idealize the attributes of "sex-assumed men." It is important to recognize the structural impact of these constructions if we are to consider gender parity to be a straightforward matter of just political representation; as Phillips (1995: 63) argues, it is "patently and grotesquely unfair for men to monopolize representation" and their present capacity to do so is evidence of intentional or structural discrimination on gendered grounds.

A feminist case for the inclusion of women in peace processes thus needs to critically analyze manifestations of gender in global politics. The reasoning for this is threefold. Firstly, its purpose should be to undo the limitations placed on women's decision-making power, which presently confines them to decisions about their femininity and maternity. Secondly, a feminist case should expand the political agency of women beyond what their "womanly instincts" and "use-value" permit (Otto 2006: 139). Finally, it should create a conception of women as serious "political players" in opposition to their conventional portrayal as "passive victims in need of protection" (El-Bushra

2007: 140; Tickner 1992: 59).

If these are the goals of a feminist vision for female inclusion in peacebuilding, then a critical analysis of gender dynamics should seek to accomplish material and normative progress; the former being understood in terms of how status and resources are allocated to support the presence of women in peace negotiations and the latter being achieved with the dismantling of the present normative valuation which places 'masculine war' above 'feminine peace'. These goals should be achieved not solely for the sake of women, but for the sake of our broader humanity; the present association of women with peace, whether it is to empower their participation or justify their exclusion, is detrimental to men because it "[serves] as the collective projection of a pure and peaceful Other against which a violent male is constructed" (Elshtain 1982: 342). Acknowledging the artificiality of this construction and undoing it thus enables men to be agents for pacification if they so wish. For proponents of peace and conflict resolution, the removal of an innate association between masculinity and war should provide less incentive for men to feel inclined to become agents of violence.

Ultimately, the feminist case for female participation should be made on grounds that may appear to be deceptively simple. After all, women are people and they constitute an approximate half of the population; if the populace is entitled to a set of rights as political subjects, then women should be entitled to these rights irrespective of how good or how peaceful they are as individuals. Assigning group characteristics, based on 'fixed' constructions of gender limits the scope within which women can act as political actors. After all, female actions do not necessarily derive from a politics of gender; race, religion, class, and nationality are other political interests that can orient the judgement of women when they are sitting at the negotiation table. Granting women the right to represent these interests does not mean validating the interests themselves; rather, the right of representation means giving women the right to make their case in the same way that men have historically been able to. Advocating for this right stems from the "very core of feminism" which holds "the conviction that women matter for their own sakes" and not for any unique impact they can have, or for any valuable role they can play (Enloe 2013: 15). When given this right, women *can* harness it to push 'women's issues' or they can use it to drive other political agendas, which can be critiqued on political grounds. The case of Edita Tahiri, Foreign Minister of alternative Kosovan political institutions between 1991 and 2001 and the sole female negotiator at the Rambouillet Peace Conference with Serbia in 1999, speaks to the role women should be able to play in peace negotiations. Tahiri has since openly reflected on her role in the Conference as one which was deeply driven by an Albanian nationalist agenda and paid no regard to gender issues. Given another opportunity, Tahiri says that she would now be more gender-aware, but this does not discount that her largely nationalist motivations in 1999 are demonstrative of the role women should be able to play: as political actors divorced from expectations of their gender (Villellas Ariño and Morena 2008: 18-19).

The conundrum, however, remains unsolved. A feminist vision of peace can be conceived of in two irreconcilable ways: is feminist peace that which creates conditions for the safety and security of all women? Or does it allow for multitudes of female perspectives to be heard, on equal footing with male perspectives, regardless of what the consequences may be for other segments of women in society? By drawing upon post-structuralist theories of gender, this section has sought to make a case for the latter vision of peace – which is unique in recognizing the complexities of female perspectives and in granting the agency needed for these perspectives to be represented – at the negotiation table, in broader peace processes, and in political systems at large.

Conclusion

Peace negotiations serve as formative processes which have the capacity to orient the priorities of a state as it navigates the challenges of establishing norms and institutions in a post-conflict context. The exclusion of women from this process serves not only to diminish the representation of issues relating to gender, but more critically, this exclusion denies women the opportunity to participate in the process of state re-formation as equal political actors who have a legitimate claim to participation by virtue of their personhood as rights-bearing subjects. In order to make the case for women's inclusion, feminist theorists have suggested that women have essential qualities and/or a unique capacity to ensure that peace negotiations lead to ideal outcomes. Though both arguments are rooted in the 'good' intention of promoting women's political participation, they are ultimately counterproductive because they perpetuate constructions of gender which serve to disempower women and undermine peace processes.

Instead, this essay has argued for a post-structuralist understanding of gender which eschews a fixed notion of gender for one which is fluid. This understanding of gender recognizes that women are individual beings with individual beliefs which can orient them towards peace and gender issues – or away from these considerations. Simply sharing the group identity of 'woman' does not, and should not, serve as an assurance that women will represent gender issues; racial, religious, and class-based cleavages can supersede gendered considerations for women – as they do for men. In an ideal world and operating within the framework of an ideal feminism, women will have the opportunity to participate in peace negotiations as political actors, *even if* their contributions are counterproductive to the mission of peace. If a feminist vision of peace is about ensuring the involvement of women during the peacebuilding process to ensure their long-term political participation, then this is the only way. Men have been afforded this right and have monopolized it for far too long.

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Notes

[1] The Mindanao Peoples Caucus is a grassroots network of communities and leaders in the Philippines who have a common vision of achieving peace in Mindanao through informal negotiations.

[2] A women's group mobilizing to send representatives to the peace talks

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