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THE WPS AGENDA AND THE 'REFUGEE CRISIS': MISSING CONNECTIONS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN EUROPE

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6/2017

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has successfully constructed the figure of the conflict-affected woman as a subject worthy of attention, inclusion and protection on the part of the international community. This concern is especially palpable when she is physically present in a conflict zone. As the conflict-affected woman flees and seeks safety and security in Europe, however, she moves to the periphery of the area of concern of WPS policies and discourses. In this working paper, we demonstrate that forcibly displaced persons skirt the margins of the WPS agenda: refugees are present in WPS policies, but as the subjects of marginal and inconsistent concern. We interrogate the effects of this marginalisation, and suggest that including refugee questions in WPS policymaking and scholarship carries the potential to improve security provision for those who have fled to Europe, as well as to revive the transformative potential of the WPS agenda.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda, codified in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequently expanded through seven further Security Council resolutions and a series of regional and national action plans, establishes a platform from which to engage in a "radical reform of peace and security governance".[1] This agenda lends the Security Council's "symbolic capital"[2] to feminist demands for women's participation in the governance of peace and security, their protection from conflict-related violence and the prevention of armed conflict. In so doing, the WPS agenda has successfully constructed the conflict-affected woman as a subject worthy of attention, inclusion and protection on the part of the international community.[3]

Conflict-affected women who have been forcibly displaced, especially those on the move to seek asylum in Europe, have remained peripheral figures in this agenda. Our attention was drawn to the marginality of displaced women, and the gendered security concerns of refugee women and men when, in a recent survey of the role of parliaments in advancing the WPS agenda in NATO member countries, only Turkey's parliament mentioned refugee protection as part of its efforts to implement WPS.[4] While this agenda has successfully established the conflict-affected woman as a figure who can no longer be ignored in the governance of peace and security, it seems that this concern only extends to women who are physically placed in geographic zones of conflict.

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1 Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, "Reintroducing Women, Peace and Security," *International Affairs* 92 (2) (2016), 249.

2 Diane Otto, "The Security Council's Alliance of Gender Legitimacy: The Symbolic Capital of Resolution 1325," in *Fault Lines of International Legitimacy*, ed. Hilary Charlesworth and Jean-Marc Coicaud (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 263.

3 Sam Cook, "The 'Woman-in- Conflict' at the UN Security Council: A Subject of Practice," *International Affairs* 92 (2) (2016): 353-72.

4 Audrey Reeves, "The Role of Parliaments in Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Nato Member Countries: A Survey by the Nato Parliamentary Assembly," (Geneva: DCAF, 2015), 20.

5 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015," (Geneva: UNHCR, 2016).

6 At the time of writing, the WPS resolutions count: SCR 1325 (2000), SCR 1820 (2008), SCR 1888 (2009), SCR 1889 (2009), SCR 1960 (2010), SCR 2106 (2013), SCR 2122 (2013), SCR 2242 (2015). For a summary of the resolutions, see Kirby and Shepherd, "Reintroducing Women, Peace and Security," 251.

7 Adopting the methodology developed in a recent UNHCR study, we searched the resolutions for 11 refugee-related terms: asylum, displace(d/ment), IDP(s), migrant(s), migration, on the move, refuge(es), stateless(ness), flee, border and returnee. Gender Equality Unit/Division of International Protection, "National Action Plans (NAPs) on UNSCRs on Women, Peace, and Security: Extracts and Analysis of Text on Forced Displacement and Statelessness," (Geneva: UNHCR, 2016).

8 SCR 1888 (2009) and SCR 1960 (2010) make no mention of forced displacement.

9 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1820, UN Doc. S/RES/1820, 19 June 2008. para 10.

10 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325, UN Doc. S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000. para 12; Resolution 1889, UN Doc. S/RES/1889, 5 October 2009. para 12.

11 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2242, UN Doc. S/RES/2242, 13 October 2015. para 6.

In this paper, we suggest that the WPS agenda only rarely intersects with policy and research discourses on refugees. We argue that this separation of the two policy areas is politically produced and normatively problematic: the fact that the conflict-affected woman on the move does not appear to enjoy the same policy attention and discursive prioritisation is particularly troubling given that the number of forcibly displaced persons is at a global historical high.[5] We first examine the extent to which the two areas overlap, with a view to demonstrate that this intersection is narrow, but could be productively broadened. Next, we engage in a brief exploration as to why the separation persists. Finally, we discuss the political and normative implications of leaving displaced women out of European WPS discussions.

THE LIMITED ATTENTION OF WPS TO REFUGEES

At the core of the WPS agenda sit eight thematic United Nations Security Council resolutions (SCRs) on 'Women, Peace and Security'.[6] Forced displacement[7] is mentioned in all but two of the resolutions.[8] The SCRs place obligations on UN agencies to provide protection from sexual violence in UN-managed refugee camps;[9] on parties to armed conflict to respect the humanitarian nature of refugee camps;[10] and on the Security Council to consider violations of international humanitarian law, including forced displacement, when adopting sanctions.[11] In other words, the SCRs recognise forced displacement as a gendered security concern, but only in the context of conflict-affected areas. Further, the scope of obligation extends to UN agencies, the Security Council, and conflict-affected parties, but not to UN member states more generally.

Despite the fact that concern for refugees is limited to zones of conflict in the SCRs, some national action plans (NAPs) in European[12] countries have expanded on these commitments. The majority of European NAPs make explicit mention of refugees.[13] Some, such as the UK NAP, mention refugees in conflict-affected areas, through provisions such as for "'safe spaces' programming to protect adolescent girls from violence *in conflict and post-conflict settings*, including projects in refugee settings".[14] In contrast, other NAPs make specific mention of refugees and asylum seekers *within* the host country.[15] For example, the French NAP commits to the objective: "Increase consideration of issues linked to gender and violence against women in asylum procedures."[16] While these commitments are not consistently articulated in European NAPs, they nonetheless evidence the possibility of a broader interpretation of the spirit of the SCRs – one that views conflict-affectedness as attaching to people rather than places.[17]

In sum, this overview of policy commitments demonstrates that the WPS agenda does in fact offer scope for considering questions related to refugees who attempt to flee war and violence by undertaking a journey towards Europe. This promise is implied by the Security Council Resolutions themselves, and developed further in some European national action plans. However, while present, the conflict-affected woman on the move remains at the periphery of this agenda – refugee questions are not consistently invoked in WPS discussions, and when they are, they are rarely at the centre of the agenda. The visibility of the conflict-affected woman in policy documents progressively decreases the further away she moves from the zone of conflict. As she flees to Europe, she all but disappears into the horizon of what is understood to constitute the core zone of the WPS agenda.

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Including refugee questions in WPS policymaking and scholarship carries the potential to improve security provision for those who have fled to Europe, as well as to revive the transformative potential of the WPS agenda.

ERASING THE CONFLICT-AFFECTED WOMAN ON THE MOVE: ENABLING CONDITIONS

We contend that this invisibility of the conflict-affected woman on the move is not simply natural, but a discursive construction worth interrogating. Following strands of poststructuralist feminist scholarship,[18] we argue that the WPS agenda in Europe can be understood as a discourse constructed around a series of hierarchically ordered binary oppositions, particularly between a 'peaceful inside' in Europe, and a 'conflicted outside'. In a classic critique of policy and academic discourse on 'North-South relations', Roxanne Lynn Doty argues that media, state authorities and other influential actors in donor states typically construct 'the South' as distinct from and inferior to the North: as less modern, less developed, more prone to chaos and disorder.[19] In iterations of the WPS discourses that emerge from donor countries, these binary oppositions (modern/traditional; developed/developing; orderly/chaotic) typically articulate themselves in ways that locate the need for action and intervention outside of national boundaries, and generally outside Europe. In a recent intervention, Laura Shepherd perceptively argues that recent NAPs produced by Australia, the US and four European nations interpret WPS in a way that "represents war and insecurity as something that happens primarily 'overseas' rather than within the national context".[20] This framing links the European 'self' to notions of peace and security, and locates conflict and insecurity as inherently foreign, playing out not 'here in Europe' but 'over there' (beyond Europe). Such representations constitute the security sectors of conflict-affected states as a legitimate field of paternalistic intervention, governance and reform in which European actors often play a leadership role. The latter self-present as already able to uphold protection and participation standards that the 'women, peace, and security' agenda aims to promote.

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Refugees are present in WPS policies, but as the subjects of marginal and inconsistent concern.

Considering this, we suggest that the key reason that the conflict-affected woman disappears from WPS agendas is that, once she leaves the conflict zone, she is no longer a subject of 'security initiatives' undertaken within what is understood as an insecure, warring and patriarchal 'outside'. We argue, therefore, that the limited application of the WPS agenda in the context of forced migration in Europe is both enabled by and productive of this imagined division between a safe/civilised Europe and an unsafe/uncivilised outside. The way this separation is (re)produced is problematic both because it sustains a hierarchical logic of global governance, but also because it obscures the ways the experience of insecurity persists for those people who flee the zone of conflict with the hope of finding asylum in Europe.

The notion that European states are 'safe', 'at peace' and already protecting and including women is at the very least a simplification of the variety of lives and experiences that unfold within them. The literature on the treatment of refugees within Europe has repeatedly demonstrated that asylum seekers often experience states of intense insecurity, as we discuss in the next section. Such examples point to the unreliability, from the conflict-affected woman's perspective, of an imagined boundary between a supposedly safe Europe and an unsafe 'conflict zone' she is fleeing. The maintenance of separation between a 'women, peace, and security' field and a 'refugee crisis' field thus mainly protects the self-image of European countries that imagine themselves to be conflict-free and more gender progressive than non-European societies.

12 For this paper, we examined the 28 European Union Member States and the EFTA states of Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Out of these 32 countries, at the time of writing, 20 have adopted NAPs. WILPF, "Member States," http://peacewomen.org/member-states

13 14 out of 20 NAPs examined make mention of refugees. The NAPs of the following countries do not mention refugees at all: Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden. UNHCR Gender Equality Unit/Division of International Protection, "National Action Plans." 14 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014-2017, 2014. Emphasis added. Among the NAPs examined, 6 refer to refugees exclusively outside of the country itself. These include the NAPs of: Austria, Denmark, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. UNHCR Gender Equality Unit/Division of International Protection, "National Action Plans."

15 These include the NAPs of Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

16 Ministère des affaires étrangères et du développement internationale, "France's Second National Action Plan: Implementation of the United Nations Security Council 'Women, Peace and Security' Resolutions 2015-2018," (2015), 20.

17 We would like to thank Sam Cook for suggesting this phrasing.

18 Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Post-Structuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1) (1988): 32-50.

19 Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

20 Laura J. Shepherd, "Making War Safe for Women? National Action Plans and the Militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda," *International Political Science Review* 37 (3) (2016), 326.

21 Jane Freedman, *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate*, Second edition. ed. (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 199-206.

22 Callum Watson, "Begging the Question: What Would a Men, Peace and Security Agenda Look Like?," Connections 14 (3) (2015): 45-60; Jamie J. Hagen, "Queering Women, Peace and Security," *International Affairs* 92 (2) (2016): 313-32; Henri Myrttinen, Jana Naujoks, and Judy El-Bushra, "Re-Thinking Gender in Peacebuilding," (London: International Alert, 2014); Maria Eriksson-Baaz and Maria Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2013).

23 Jane Freedman, "Sexual and Gender- Based Violence against Refugee Women: A Hidden Aspect of the Refugee "Crisis"," *Reproductive Health Matters* (2016).

24 Ibid.; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Monthly Data Collection on the Current Migration Situation in the EU," (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016).

25 Freedman, "Sexual and Gender- Based Violence against Refugee Women: A Hidden Aspect of the Refugee "Crisis"," 19.

26 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Monthly Data Collection"; Freedman, "Sexual and Gender- Based Violence against Refugee Women: A Hidden Aspect of the Refugee "Crisis"."

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY AND PUBLIC OPINION ON REFUGEE AND ASYLUM POLICIES

The separation in both academic and policy discourse of conflict-affected women who are in 'conflict-affected states' from those who flee beyond their borders matters, we contend, because this separation is normatively problematic and leads to undesirable outcomes. Namely, it limits the sharing of valuable knowledge across different subfields of feminist research; it increases the insecurity of conflict-affected women on the move; and it facilitates the circulation of xenophobic discourses that construct the archetypical refugee as prone to perverse performances of masculinity that threaten Europe.

With regard to the creation of research and knowledge on the insecurity experienced by conflict-affected women on the move, the lack of bridges and connections between scholarship on the refugee crisis and on the WPS agenda is problematic insofar as it impedes cross-learning. This is unfortunate, as scholarly discussions on the gendered experiences of insecurity of refugees shares many similarities with debates within scholarship around and implementation of the WPS agenda. Jane Freedman, who has extensively researched the gender dimensions of refugee policy, has pointed to a plethora of gendered concerns in refugee protection. These include an overly narrow focus on sexual violence, a lack of attention to men and masculinities that exacerbates violence in refugee camps, and inattention to the concerns of gender and sexual minorities.[21] These concerns echo in very clear terms the discussions WPS scholarship is grappling with as the catchphrase 'Women, Peace and Security' yields to a more inclusive 'Gender, Peace and Security,' attentive to the men as gendered actors, to the limitations of heteronormative assumptions and to a continuum of violences.[22] These similarities point to potentially productive, if under-explored avenues for research. Not insignificantly, better connecting gender-sensitive refugee research with the evolving WPS agenda may well consolidate existing tendencies towards conceptualising the security situation of conflict-affected women as inherently connected to that of conflict-affected men, and to prevalent understandings of femininity and masculinity.

Moving from research to the decision-making level, the failure to extend the concern for the conflict-affected woman who resides in a 'zone of conflict' to the one who seeks asylum in Europe leads to the latter's political erasure. This erasure leads to the systematic neglect of the conflict-affected woman and of gendered security dynamics in the implementation of refugee and asylum policies. Freedman notes that the EU and (by extension) European countries have a robust policy framework addressing gendered concerns in forced migration, but that a notable implementation gap hinders the adequate consideration of women and girls' needs.[23] Shortcomings include inadequate mechanisms for victims to report violence, inadequate housing conditions, including insufficient provision of gender-segregated sleeping, personal hygiene and recreational facilities and an "alarming" lack of data on GBV experienced by refugee women and

Migrants at the Greek–Macedonian border near Gevgelija, 24 August 2015



girls.[24] Freedman's own research nonetheless suggests that such GBV is rampant. EU states' policies of closing borders has contributed to refugees' reliance on smugglers, thereby rendering them more vulnerable to abuse or obliging refugees to use sex to pay for their passage.[25] There is also evidence of police and security forces committing gender-based violence against women, which has been met with little action at national or EU levels.[26] In short, lessons learned from other refugee contexts as documented in WPS scholarship are not being applied in the handling of the refugee situation in Europe. If it were the case, European states would devote more resources and attention to making refugee and asylum policies gender-sensitive, making sure that conflict-affected women are consulted and taken into account when taking decisions over who and how many refugees to take, where to house them, what support services to provide and so on. In contrast, the erasure of the conflict-affected woman living in Europe or at its borders impedes the implementation of gender-sensitive measures in refugee policy and masks the complicity of European states in creating or exacerbating her conditions of insecurity.

Finally, at the level of media representations and public opinion in the European citizenry, the lack of visibility of refugee women represents a loss for the potential to develop counter-narratives to the kinds of anti-migrant and xenophobic discourses that have circulated around the refugee crisis. The current hegemonic discourse overwhelmingly constructs the figure of the refugee as male, facilitating the portrayal of refugees as a security threat.[27] An alternative discourse endows a conditional concern for those refugees seen as 'deserving' of care due to a combination of experience of vulnerability and display of gratitude.[28] By contrast, we are hopeful that expanding the frame of WPS to concern for conflict-affected women seeking asylum could contribute to the development of counter-discourses on refugees that recognise the continued responsibility for their protection as well as emphasising their agency through a frame that is attentive to participation.

In other words, we argue that the separation of the normaive commitments of the WPS agenda on the one hand and the response to the refugee crisis on the other, lead to problematic outcomes at the level of knowledge production, policy commitments and broader public discourses. Most importantly, it enables the disappearance of conflict-affected women from policy frameworks upon their departure from a conflict-zone, with tangible negative implications for their security situation.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary overview of refugees in the WPS agenda leads us to two conclusions. First, this agenda is dynamic and constantly evolving. While the SCRs on WPS consider refugees in rather narrow terms, focusing on the dynamics of forced displacement within zones of conflict, some NAPs are demonstrably innovative, extending the consideration of refugees to the host country itself. Our overview of WPS policy commitments relating to refugees demonstrates that the agenda could evolve to consider the conditions of conflict-affected women who flee the conflict zone itself.

Second, the enabling conditions we identify and the implications of the separation of the two issue areas point to the conclusion that a narrow reading of the WPS agenda, one that does not consider refugees, reproduces the conditions for silencing and (re)marginalising certain conflict-affected women, namely those who flee the state identified as a 'conflict zone'. We suggest that examining the 'refugee crisis' through a WPS policy and discursive lens offers opportunities for productive scholarship, responsible policymaking and transformative politics.

27 Jill Walker Rettberg and Radhika Gajjala, "Terrorists or Cowards: Negative Portrayals of Male Syrian Refugees in Social Media," *Feminist Media Studies* (2015): 1-3.

28 Roland Bleiker et al., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees," Australian Journal of Political Science 48 (4) (2013): 398-416; Seth M. Holmes and Heide Castañeda, "Representing the "European Refugee Crisis" in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death," *American Ethnologist* 43 (1) (2016): 12-24.

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The separation of the normative commitments of the WPS agenda on the one hand and the response to the refugee crisis on the other lead to problematic outcomes at the level of knowledge production, policy commitments, and broader public discourses.

This is paper 6/2017 in the LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series. Thanks to the editors, Laura J. Shepherd and Paul Kirby for their insightful feedback in developing this paper and Kristin Valasek for sharing UNHCR research findings. Thanks are also due to participants at two workshops, the Gregynog Ideas Lab V and the 'The Futures of Women, Peace and Security' ISA workshop, for their thoughtful engagement with this work in progress.

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