



RETHINKING PEACE PROCESSES: PROMOTING ENGENDERED, SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND SECURITY

Stacey M. Mitchell and Úrsula Oswald-Spring

In “A New Paradigm: Engendered-Sustainable Peace and Security,”¹ Úrsula Oswald Spring and Stacey M. Mitchell propose a new way in which to conceive of peacebuilding, different from the conceptions of peacebuilding proposed by policymakers and scholars influenced by Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Cosmopolitanism, and even Feminism. From a policymaking perspective, thinking of peacebuilding through the lens of a holistic engendered, sustainable peace and security (ESPS) improves on extant paradigms that approach peace largely as a matter of institutional change, norm revision, the absence of conflict, and/or neoliberal economic reforms, and all through a worldview created and dominated by men. By shifting the focus towards addressing the larger, systemic causes of violence and inequality, an ESPS provides the framework for a gender-egalitarian positive peace.

A Lack of Substantive Change

The use of traditional paradigms for peacebuilding has meant that the large-scale, deeply institutionalized conditions of gender inequalities, exclusion, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity remain inadequately addressed. This has grave implications for societies which have experienced egregious crimes perpetrated by fighting forces against women and children. The genocide literature and case law from international and domestic legal venues strongly indicate that these types of conditions contribute to the rise of xenophobic nationalism, authoritarian rule, and the continued targeting of vulnerable groups. In genocides and episodes of conflict more generally, women and children remain the chief targets for *jus cogens* violations (genocide, crimes against humanity) by rebel groups and states alike.

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Many theoretical frameworks that guide peace processes stray from implementing substantial changes or, if changes are implemented, they are done so inconsistently. Policymakers who consider peace through the lens of Realism, for example, restrict peace primarily to negative peace, eschewing major institutional and societal reforms on the grounds that they pose a risk to stability for the postconflict country. Whereas Liberalism advocates greater institutional change, it is a change based on the assumption that certain features of a democratic state (e.g., competitive elections and “good governance”) create conditions conducive to the rule of law and fair policymaking behavior on the part of ruling elites. Along similar lines, Neoliberalism contends that participation in the international system of free trade is necessary to promote economic welfare and democracy. Yet, this says little about the place of women in the overall structure of governance, society, and economy. Constructivism, Cosmopolitanism, and Feminism adopt a broader perspective. However, they can be faulted for a number of reasons, including Western bias, the absence of a practical means of addressing larger, historical gender inequities, and so forth.


Rwanda (like other countries in the developing world) demonstrates that reducing corruption and having elections is not a holistic peace in and of itself. Women in Rwanda certainly participate in greater numbers in economic and political life today; yet, their role is circumscribed by a patriarchal, top-down authoritarian system in which women’s access to institutions of power remains linked to their support for the ruling party. Moreover, economically speaking, the percentages of women in managerial positions lags far behind their male counterparts; pay inequities between men and women persist, as does political and domestic violence.

The Influence of Hannah Arendt

ESPS builds on the work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt describes the “space of appearance” as a space of political freedom and equality, constructed by citizens through the medium of speech and persuasion. She distinguishes the space of appearance from the space of the common world, a shared and public space with institutions, agendas, and actors. Both spaces are essential for the consolidation of citizenship and changing dominant power relationships. Arendt insists this recovery of a common world will reactivate a mode of citizenship where individuals and groups can establish relationships of support, reciprocity, and solidarity. It is in this space where gender-sensitive practices and peacebuilding can be developed, but *only* if women can exercise greater agency in the political and economic realms.

Engendered Sustainable Peace and Security

The need for ESPS emerges within a context of sexual violence, torture, and femicide carried out to demonstrate and reinforce domination along gender lines. It is a context that includes various forms of violence against women in wartime and peacetime (e.g., rape, human trafficking, forced labor). ESPS is a holistic approach that embodies and promotes worldwide feminist values of respect, care, and solidarity, which might be anchored in all societies. It is an approach that advocates structural, cultural, and sustainable peace to overcome the present male domination and its underlying prejudices. In this framework, peacebuilding is conceived of as a complex enterprise that involves society as a whole.



ESPS requires interventions from the top-down to create a legal background for changing thousands of years of patriarchal behavior. At the same time, without massive bottom-up involvement in peacebuilding and education, the negotiation process is incomplete. More recent efforts by the United Nations to include more women and youth in the peacebuilding process is a start, albeit one that only goes as far as the target country will allow. ESPS would strive for policies that give women agency and a greater voice to challenge dominant structures. Including more women in government while requiring they exercise no opposition to policies that negatively impact a gender egalitarian, positive peace is not a victory. ESPS advocates for the creation of civil society associations that represent women's interests *and* their ability to freely pursue their agendas on the political and economic stages. Moreover, ESPS recommends quotas ensuring for the inclusion of more women in management positions and on corporate boards, as well as the development of educational programs that replace notions of competition and rational self-interest with cooperation and empathy as ideals. All of these recommendations are grounded in principles of nonviolence, cooperation, and collective good (Gandhi's "ahimsa"). Institutional and cultural change can be a slow process. It will not take place *unless* a space is created for women to truly voice their concerns and assume greater leadership.

About the Authors

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¹ Úrsula Oswald Spring and Stacey M. Mitchell, "A New Paradigm: Engendered-Sustainable Peace and Security," in *Peacebuilding Paradigms: Approaches to Theoretical Diversity and Intellectual Isolation for Implementing Sustainable Peace*, ed. Henry F. Carey (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2020).

Recommended Reading:

- Oswald Spring, Úrsula. *Earth at Risk in the 21st Century: Rethinking Peace, Environment, Gender, and Human, Water, Health, Food, Energy Security, and Migration*. Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany: Springer Nature, 2020.
- Oswald Spring, Úrsula. *Úrsula Oswald Spring: Pioneer on Gender, Peace, Development, Water, Environment, Food and Water*. Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2019.
- Oswald Spring, Úrsula, Hans Günter Brauch, and Keith G. Tidball, eds. *Expanding Peace Ecology: Peace, Security, Sustainability, Equity and Gender: Perspectives of IPRA's Ecology and Peace Commission*. Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany: Springer International Publishing, 2013.