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FORUM: THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AFTER WAR PROJECT

Women's Rights After War and Genocide: Contradictions and Challenges

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Introduction

Over the past 25 years, a groundswell of attention has been directed towards the inclusion of women in the process of ending wars. Much of this attention has stemmed from the realization that – in addition to being a force for destruction – war can also serve as a critical juncture, giving rise to rapid and sometimes progressive periods of social change and institutional transformation. A large body of work, including our own, posits that periods of rebuilding after war can offer unique windows of opportunity for forging more gender-equal societies.[1] Whereas the global average of women in parliament hovers right under twenty-five per cent, countries that have more recently emerged from war – such as Burundi, Ethiopia, Mozambique, East Timor, Nicaragua, and Rwanda – each have more than thirty-five per cent women in their national legislatures.[2]

Beyond the normative opportunities that war can provide for advancing women's rights and power, many advocates of women's inclusion in transitions from war to peace focus on the fact that women's entry into politics helps shore up the democratic credentials of a state.[3] Over the past decades, aid and stabilization programming has coalesced around the idea that liberal democratic polities, underpinned by free market economics, are the surest route towards a stable global order. Democracies, the refrain goes,

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[1] Marie E. Berry, War, Women, and Power: From Violence to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Cynthia Cockburn, From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008); Melanie M. Hughes and Aili Mari Tripp, "Civil War and Trajectories of Change in Women's Political Representation in Africa, 1985–2010," Social Forces 93, no. 4 (2015): 1513–40; Milli May Lake, Strong NGOs and Weak States: Pursuing Gender Justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel, Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics in Post-Genocide Rwanda (Routledge, 2016); Mary H. Moran, "Gender, Militarism, and Peace-Building: Projects of the Postconflict Moment," Annual Review of Anthropology 39 (2010): 261–74; Funmi Olonisakin, Karen Barnes, and Eka Ikpe, eds., Women, Peace and Security: Translating Policy into Practice (Abindgon: Routledge, 2010); Aili Mari Tripp, Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jocelyn Viterna, Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Kaitlyn Webster, Priscilla Torres, Chong Chen, and Kyle Beardsley, "Ethnic and Gender Hierarchies in the Crucible of War," International Studies Quarterly 64, no. 3 (2020): 710–22; Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks," Annual Review Political Science 11 (2008): 539–61.

[2] Hughes and Tripp, "Civil War and Trajectories"; Tripp, Women and Power in Post-Conflict.

[3] Daniela Donno, Sara Fox, and Joshua Kaasik, "International Incentives for Women's Rights in Dictatorships," Comparative Political Studies 55, no. 3 (2021): 451–92; Sarah Sunn Bush and Pär Zetterberg, "Gender Quotas and International Reputation, American Journal of Political Science 65, no. 2 (2021): 326–41.

do not go to war with each other.[4] And since women and racial and ethnic minorities have too often been excluded from political and economic power, a consensus has emerged that their incorporation into these systems is foundational to representative democracy and, therefore, to peace. Building on this logic, recent research has demonstrated that including women in politics after war and genocide reduces the risk of conflict recurrence.[5]

Alongside their other normative commitments to women's political representation, policymakers have spearheaded myriad efforts underpinned by these logics.[6] The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 that launched the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda,[7] and the nine resolutions that followed are notable for offering concrete frameworks for ensuring women's participation at the peace negotiation table, in constitutional re-drafting processes, and in all phases of postwar reconstruction. Scholars and advocates have celebrated the success of these frameworks in bringing gender-specific concerns related to how women experience war to the forefront of policy conversations. The agenda has also brought unparalleled attention to the leadership roles women play during war, especially as they work to prevent conflict, resolve local tensions, build peace, and rebuild their communities. Women's inclusion in transitions from war is seen as desirable because it reflects a commitment to equality and serves an instrumental goal of building more peaceful and just societies.

We began thinking about these topics while conducting research for our dissertations more than a decade ago. As we worked in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we were interested in understanding how both contexts had experienced devastating violence that had created some new opportunities for women to assert political and institutional power. Rwanda had emerged from the 1994 genocide with the world's highest percentage of women in parliament and a suite of new gender-inclusive institutions and policies. DR Congo had experienced decades of mass violence and state weakness, while activists and donors placed a heavy emphasis on legal accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence and sought justice for their victims in courts of law with limited resources or capacity. We began to investigate the various laws, politics, and constitutional reforms that had made possible such remarkable strides.

As we began to trace the contours and nuances of this progress, however, we struggled to account for some gaping contradictions we encountered. In Rwanda, all of the women in government were tightly aligned with the ruling political party – a party that had consolidated its political control in the aftermath of the genocide through an

[4] Michael W. Doyle, "Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace," American Political Science Review 99, no. 3 (2005): 463–66; Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, "The Imperial Peace: Democracy, Force and Globalization," European Journal of International Relations 5, no. 4 (1999): 403–34.

[5] Sarah Shair-Rosenfield and Reed M. Wood, "Governing Well After War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace," Journal of Politics 79, no. 3 (2017): 995–1009; Rebecca H. Best, Sarah Shair-Rosenfield, and Reed M. Wood, "Legislative Gender Diversity and the Resolution of Civil Conflict," Political Research Quarterly 72, no. 1 (2019): 215–28; See also Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, "Women Waging Peace," Foreign Policy (2001): 38–47; Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Piia Bränfors, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," International Interactions 44, no. 6 (2018): 985–1016.

[6] Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, Sex and World Peace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[7] Carol Cohn, Helen Kinsella, and Sheri Gibbings, "Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325," International Feminist Journal of Politics 6, no. 1 (2004): 130–40.

authoritarian crackdown on civil society and freedom of speech. Rwanda's President Paul Kagame was celebrated for his work championing women, but he simultaneously orchestrated extrajudicial killings of political opponents and massive human rights violations.[8] In DR Congo, justice was available to only a very small subset of women who were able to frame their injuries in terms that were palatable to gender justice campaigners. These trends made us wonder how women's rights had been instrumentalized as a smokescreen to mask creeping authoritarianism, and how the selective provision of rights to certain women who had experienced certain forms of violence and harm created new cleavages and hierarchies of access.

It struck us then, as it has many times since, that the inclusion of women in transitions from war to peace can create an illusion of progress towards liberal democracy while failing to challenge the root systems responsible for causing the war in the first place. Indeed, in Rwanda, far from transforming the ethnic hierarchy of the postcolonial state or entrenched poverty, women's political rise actually helped to consolidate an illiberal minority regime and deepen divisions of women from different ethnic backgrounds. We began to learn about similar patterns in other places. In Colombia, for instance, the 2015 peace agreement brought an end to the sixty-plus year war between the Colombian state and the FARC, won President Santos a Nobel Peace Prize, and included around forty gender-sensitive provisions. However, it has not altered the daily threats of gender-based violence directed at women social leaders, especially those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities; nor did it weaken the coercive power of the state security forces, which again cracked down on social protestors in 2021, killing dozens and injuring thousands. In Colombia, and in contexts like Nepal and Sri Lanka, we observed international NGO and multinational advocates unwittingly implementing projects focused on women's inclusion and empowerment without considering which women were represented, allowing particular political factions to entrench their political/ethnic/caste control. We also watched as poor, rural, minority women often served as the domestic workers whose household labour created the possibilities for elite women to participate in such "women's empowerment" opportunities, allowing gender empowerment initiat-ives to inadvertently entrench class (and often ethnic) hierarchies.

Motivated by these contradictions and a desire to better understand whether and how women's empowerment interventions after war were working, and to what ends, we sat down in 2017 and designed The Women's Rights After War (WRAW) project. Our core goal was simple: to understand who was benefiting from the slew of programmes aimed at empowering women after violence. Was it the women themselves? If so, which women? Was it the governments or political parties advancing such "gender-sensitive" programing? If so, what had this focus on women's advancement revealed, and what had it obscured? Finally, we were curious about the other externalities such efforts resulted in. What were the new cleavages and hierarchies of access that emerged? How did new laws and their implementation enforce historical legacies of domination, or create new terrain on which class, ethnic, and caste divisions could play out? And

[8] Jennie Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," African Affairs 107, no. 428 (2008): 361–86; Timothy Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality or Serving an Authoritarian State?" in Women in African Parliaments, ed. Gretchen Bauer and Hannah E. Britton (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006): 133–50.

how did the politics of victimhood, alongside other axes of violence and oppression, shape the contours of the postwar peace?

A secondary goal was to think about how to realize a multi-sited research project in conflict-affected contexts using a feminist research design grounded in intersectional and decolonial praxis.[9] We had seen enough research (and participated in enough ourselves) that felt extractive and potentially harmful for communities who had lived through profound violence. We wanted to think about what it might look like to challenge who the experts were, what counted as data, who should be shaping the questions and directions of the project, and how to work as a team.

Part of this goal was political, because we know there is often a moment in the aftermath of war in which the old arrangements of the past can be tossed out and reimagined. We wanted to think more seriously about how we can bring more just and equitable worlds into being in these moments of disjuncture, and especially consider how to harness such openings to fundamentally challenge the structures underpinning violence in the first place.

The Project

Using a multi-stage and mixed-method research design, the WRAW project evaluates women's rights reforms and empowerment efforts in six countries that have experienced armed conflict since 1980: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Iraq, Nepal, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka. We selected these six countries to capture the geographic and regime-type diversity among countries that have implemented women's rights reforms during their constitutional and legal re-drafting processes that followed war. The selection also varies with regard to the war's conclusion, including conflicts in which a single party emerged victorious from the war (Rwanda and Sri Lanka), and conflicts that involved complex power-sharing arrangements (Bosnia, Colombia, Iraq, and Nepal).

In addition to compiling a dataset of laws and policies,[10] we scrutinized reforms across six substantive areas: women's political representation, civil and family law reform; criminal law reform; transitional justice; economic opportunity; and security sector reform and peacebuilding through Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plans. We worked with members of our core research team, as well as in-country research partners, research leads, and organizations, to conduct in-depth legal analysis, qualitative interviews, and sub-national case studies. We continue to examine the conditions under which women's rights reforms in each of the above six areas advance the goals of gender equality in practice, and create the foundations for durable peace and security.

[9] Our project was intended to align with and draw inspiration from reflections on fieldwork and collaborative knowledge production grounded in an ethic of care and solidarity by scholars including Marina Cadaval Narezo, "Methodologies for Collaborative, Respectful and Caring Research: Conversations with Professional Indigenous Women from Mexico," in Feminist Methodologies: Experiments, Collaborations and Reflections, ed. Wendy Harcourt, Karijn van den Berg, Constance Dupuis, and Jacqueline Gaybor (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022): 139–61; Beryl Exley, Susan Whatman, and Parlo Singh, "Postcolonial, Decolonial Research Dilemmas: Fieldwork in Australian Indigenous Contexts," Qualitative Research 18, no. 5 (2018): 526–37; Roxani Krystalli and Philipp Schulz, "Taking Love and Care Seriously: An Emergent Research Agenda for Remaking Worlds in the Wake of Violence," International Studies Review 24, no. 1 (2022); Maria Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Hypatia 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–59; Chela Sandoval, Methodology of the Oppressed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Laura Shepherd, "Research as Gendered Intervention: Feminist Research Ethics and the Self in the Research Encounter," Critica Contemporanea Revista de Teoria Politica 6 (2016): 1–15. In designing and implementing the project, we sought to center partnership and collaboration in each stage of the research.

[10] Marie Berry, Milli Lake, Sinduja Raja, and Soraya Zarook, "Post-war Gender Laws Dataset, V1," Women's Rights After War Project, 20 October 2022, https://thegenderhub.com/projects/womens-rights-after-war/.

The Forum

In this forum, we present five essays focused on women's rights after war that deepen our understanding of the relationship between armed conflict and the plight of women in its aftermath. Our goal with this collection is to expand our understanding of how women's rights after war and genocide play out in practice, as well as to direct attention towards the limits of dominant frameworks of action.

In the following five essays, you will read early findings and reflections from our core project team, alongside one reflection from a practitioner we invited to provide perspectives from beyond the academy. With attention to interdisciplinarity and disrupting hierarchical relationships in research design and implementation, the project comprises a consensus hub of four people, who make up our core team. In addition to the two of us, this core group includes Soraya Zarook, a scholar of literature and an expert in trauma studies, and Sinduja Raja, a student of protest and feminist mobilization. Each brings invaluable insights to this project, honed through their divergent disciplinary train-ing, as well as by their personal political commitments. Both have shaped the direction of the questions we ask and the research we have conducted through their sharp feedback, incisive observations, and intuitive understanding of the relationships at the heart of the project. Their pieces for this Forum reveal what their unique perspectives bring to the themes that have emerged.

Sinduja oversees our data collection efforts, managing relationships with our in-country research partners. Over the early years of the project, we compiled a dataset of women's rights reforms in the aftermath of war in our six focus countries, analyzing reforms in the areas of women's electoral representation; economic empowerment; criminal law; transitional justice; family law; and security sector reform.[11] In her essay for this Forum, Sinduja embarks on an analysis of these legal reforms, scrutinizing their capacity to effect and enact change, while reflecting and refracting the social world in which they were forged. Sinduja draws on contributions from feminist and critical legal scholars to demonstrate how legal language can structure harm and entrenches existing inequalities, even while simultaneously providing some opportunities for redress for some women.

Soraya oversees our project's core research operations. In her dissertation research, she examines how the frame of trauma is used to understand tragedies of war and disaster, with a focus on Sri Lanka. She uses novels, short stories, and memoirs to trace how literary prose and clinical analyses intersect in the creation of a political economy of trauma. She shows how certain forms of knowledge are privileged in responding to lived experiences of violence and loss, and how those excluded from institutionalized knowledge can dismantle these economies through alternative and creative forms of art, poetry, literature, and scholarship. In her essay for this Forum, Soraya analyzes Sri Lanka's Declaration of the Disappeared, which declared 20,000 missing Eelam Tamils dead. Subsequently, the Sri Lankan cabinet approved the issuance of death or missing person certificates to next of kin, who were entitled to land restitution and a one-time allowance of 100,000 rupees for the "rehabilitation of family." Soraya uses a short story by Ilankai Tamil and American author V. V. Ganeshananthan to show how institutional attempts to

[11] Sinduja's introduction to the project in 2019 coincided with the WRAW project's first grant from the UK Government through the Global Challenges Research Fund and LSE's "Gender, Justice and Security Hub," The GJS Hub, 28 April 2022, https://thegenderhub.com/. This grant funded the compilation of the dataset.

instill forgetting failed in enforcing a closure of enduring trauma of war and militarization. She bears witness to demands made by mothers and widows of the forcibly disappeared who have asked others to amplify their work by validating their certainty in the face of institutional violence. Soraya shows us how art and literature offer us an entry point into what is often otherwise silenced.

You will also read essays written by two of our country research leads. Dhana Hamal and Luisa Salazar Escalante both grew up in contexts of insecurity and conflict in Nepal and Colombia respectively. Their sharp analytical skills and deep knowledge of the wars that played out in their childhoods offer the nuance, depth, and clarity that outsiders are rarely able to access. Their essays offer detailed explorations into the challenges that electoral gender quotas in Nepal and Colombia have met in their efforts to improve the lives of women and bolster democratic accountability in each country. Both Colombia and Nepal have been celebrated for their attention to gender within their postwar political settlements. In both Colombia's peace accord and Nepal's 2015 constitution, and their related legislative reforms, women are foregrounded as part of the process of building more durable and responsive democracies. Each context achieved a power-sharing agreement with the rebels, and the negotiated settlements allowed space for women's rights advocates and international advisors to secure specific measures to include women in the architecture of the democratic postwar state.

These two essays advance our understanding of the complex relationships between women's rights, electoral representation, and peace. But they also reinforce two overarching findings that we have observed across the different cases of the project. First, interventions in the name of gender equality can inadvertently create new terrain on which other struggles for power can play out – particularly those bound up in hierarchies of race, class, ethnicity, and caste. We document how women's rights reforms can be deliberately instrumentalized by political actors to shore up ethno-nationalist agendas and promote anti-feminist policies. Second, both essays show how the lack of attention to the underlying root systems structuring violence and inequality are too often missed by the women's empowerment frameworks focused on legal reforms, and specifically on women's political representation.[12] By focusing on inclusionary reforms in the after-math of spectacular, headline-grabbing instances of violence – i.e. in the aftermath of war – these interventions neglect the multifaceted ways that women experience insecur-ity in their daily lives. Moreover, limiting the focus of gender advocacy to postwar contexts and war-to-peace transitions invisibilizes the ways in which patriarchal, capitalist, militar-ist, and imperial power function in ostensibly secure liberal democracies.

Throughout the project, we have also foregrounded the knowledge and expertise of those with situated experiences of conflict and activism that differ from members of our project team. We have consistently sought to centre the expertise not only of scholars but also of activists, practitioners, artists, and others, with different lived experiences of war. This expertise shapes the questions we ask, the findings we project, and our modes of communication and dialogue. Thus, we end this Forum with an essay from Dominique Vidale-Plaza which offers the perspective of an implementor and practitioner who has worked for over a decade with survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence in

[12] Andrea Cornwall and Anne Marie Goetz, "Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives," Democratisation 12, no. 5 (2005): 783–800.

conflict contexts. Dominique has observed firsthand the impacts of programming decisions for populations profoundly affected by war and genocide. In her current role at the Dennis Mukwege Foundation, Dominique has worked to reject narrow rights-based responses to conflict-related sexual violence, designing and implementing an expansive model of survivor-centred holistic care through the Panzi One Stop Centre. Through her work, which echoes insights shared by Soraya, Dominique argues that survivor-led healing must be centred in post-war recovery. Dominique foregrounds the expertise and agency that survivors of gendered violence themselves bring to the table in imagining, creating, and realizing possibilities for peace and societal transformation in their daily lives, showing how survivors practice care every day. She simultaneously documents the obstacles encountered in scaling survivor-centred holistic care models. Drawing from her experiences in DR Congo, Colombia, Guinea, and Central African Republic, she shows how standard international toolkits for post-conflict recovery and peace-building are not only limited in their capacities to translate the full ethos of survivor-centered care into practice, but how they also often serve to constrain or co-opt the radical potentialities of both “survivor-centeredness” and “care.” She shows us how easily the language of survivor-centeredness can be co-opted in rights-based approaches, serving to deradicalize and disempower the very populations they purport to serve, to the ultimate detriment of durable and inclusive peace.

Taken together, these essays show that gender reforms after war that focus narrowly on legislative, actionable, and top-down mechanisms to ensure women’s inclusion into existing structures (through, for example, some women’s inclusion in politics), typically leave other axes of hierarchal power unchecked. The preservation of these intersecting inequalities, which often laid the foundations for conflict grievances in the first place, have troubling repercussions for peacebuilding in divided postwar societies.[13] Moreover, while scholarship has shown that women’s inclusion in politics often leads to greater emphasis on progressive policies such as higher social welfare spending,[14] reformist and incrementalistic logics can invisibilize the broad reach and insidious violence of patriarchy that sustains gender unequal societies. Finally, in focusing on certain experiences or categories of violence over others – such as the violence women face resulting from armed actors over the violence they face from intimate partners, police, or extractive industries – champions of women’s rights can inadvertently create new hierarchies of victimhood that thwart possibilities for building more just societies in the future.[15] These essays highlight some of the specific ways that incorporating women into politics, law, markets, and militaries without attending to other axes of oppression often fails to dismantle the very systems that produced gendered harm and war in the first place.[16] They also leave us with a profound question: where do we go from here?

[13] Karl Marx, “Estranged Labour” (1844), in Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings, ed. Charles Lemert (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2010), 32–8; Laura Beth Nielsen, “The Work of Rights and the Work Rights Do: A Critical Empirical Approach,” in The Blackwell Companion to Law and Society (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 63.

[14] Amanda Clayton and Pär Zetterberg, “Quota Shocks: Electoral Gender Quotas and Government Spending Priorities Worldwide,” Journal of Politics 80, no. 3 (July 2018): 916–32.

[15] Judith Butler, Frames of War: When is Life Grievable? (New York: Verso Books, 2016); Mahmood Mamdani, “Responsibility to Protect or Right to Punish?” Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding 4, no. 1 (2010): 53–67.

[16] Michael McCann, “Law and Social Movements: Contemporary Perspectives,” Annual Review of Law and Social Sciences 2 (2006): 17–38.

We take away from our research to date an urgent imperative for re-imagining interventions that seek to dismantle gender injustice following war and genocide. We leverage this imperative to consider how periods of upheaval can allow us to imagine a world that is free from violence, and in which more people have the opportunity to thrive. Our research findings assert that the strategies for social transformation currently at the forefront of global politics and international advocacy are a paltry substitute for the type of collective transformation that is required to dismantle patriarchal power. As each of the essays in this Forum make clear, we – as activists and as scholars – may be missing opportunities to engage in forms of more radical thinking in post-war contexts and build architectures, institutions, and commitments that can scaffold these visions going forward. The prevention and punishment toolkits that have been developed since the end of the Second World War have frequently reproduced existing axes of oppression – or created new ones – and have repeatedly failed to prevent catastrophic human and planetary suffering.

We posit that those working in or adjacent to war-to-peace transitions must think more boldly and intelligently about how we can unravel the brutalities of a violent geopolitical order that thrives on the reproduction of hierarchy and subjugation. We draw inspiration from anarcho-feminist and abolitionist thinkers who insist that safety will never be provided by institutions that were built to maintain the violent order of imperial systems. Freedom and security can never be delivered by bringing women into police and militaries that uphold "permanent security logics"[17] that legitimize violence, nor into "border imperialist"[18] regimes that demarcate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and codify conditions of deservingness by virtue of citizenship or geography.

These thinkers – and the women involved in our own research – have led us to a series of commitments that we believe should guide post-war interventions going forward. Instead of a focus on women's empowerment, we suggest that a focus might be on securing wellbeing. Citing Dean Spade, the idea that "everyone deserves everything they need"[19] is an essential baseline international actors and advocates must recognize in the design of effective interventions. Yet Spade is careful to call attention not only to material needs but to opportunities for everyone to thrive, encouraging creative thinking about where such resources can come from. Like Soraya, we urge a recognition of people's full humanity in efforts at remedy and redress, and a need to look far beyond conventional metrics of harm, suffering, or loss. And like Dominique, we suggest that those involved in postwar interventions and women's inclusion efforts must reconsider the values at the core of our efforts. Instead of "security," we posit love and care may be among these.[20] A focus on care asks us to think in terms of mutuality.[21] How are all of those in the ecosystem of our environment cared for? If they are not cared for, what alternative infrastructures must be constructed to ensure the community has all it needs to survive? This logic quickly gives way to the idea that care means creating, nurturing, supporting, and loving.[22]

[17] Dirk Moses, The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[18] Harsha Walia, Undoing Border Imperialism, Vol. 6 (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2014).

[19] Dean Spade, Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and The Next) (London: Verso Books, 2020).

[20] Joan C. Tronto, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care (New York: Routledge, 2020); Krystalli and Schulz, "Taking Love and Care Seriously."

[21] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018).

As Dominique's essay so clearly demonstrates, the discourse of care can be easily coopted and a narrow emphasis on need is inherently limited. A focus on needs risks framing those harmed by status quo systems solely as victims rather than agents of change. This obscures the important roles that survivors themselves already play in enacting love, care, healing, recovery, and peace in the pursuit of rebuilding lives after war. In synergy with Dominique's and Sinduja's essays in this Forum, we thus posit that any discussion of rights and needs must be first rooted in conditions of possibility to create joy and freedom and must be led by the communities targeted by prospective intervenors.

Moreover, as Dhana and Luisa show, advocates should assume any holistic intervention aimed at securing women's wellbeing is incomplete unless and until it includes all those marginalized by existing systems. Anchored in the idea that no one is free until everyone is free, effective and transformative movements explicitly centre conditions of possibility for those most underserved by existing rights frameworks.[23] Erin Mayo-Adam has persuasively shown that movements for justice are most effective when they create coalition unity across multiple fields of fragmentation.[24] However, hierarchy and fragmentation consistently reemerge. Thus, building solidarity and collective power means continually and collectively reevaluating – and undoing – the ways in which new forms of hierarchy and division manifest in struggles for justice.[25]

We hope that these essays help to sketch out some of the contradictions and preliminary questions necessary for scholars, practitioners, and activists to begin thinking more expansively about imagining and creating the conditions for more durable, just, and free transitions to peace after war and genocide.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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[22] Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, eds., Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016); Spade, Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity.

[23] Cornwall and Goetz, "Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives."

[24] Erin Mayo-Adam, Queer Alliances: How Power Shapes Political Movement Formation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); See also Erin Mayo-Adam, "Intersectional Coalitions: The Paradoxes of Rights-Based Movement Building in LGBTQ and Immigrant Communities," Law & Society Review 51, no. 1 (2017): 132–67.

[25] K.C. Luna, Gemma Van Der Haar, and Dorothea Hilhorst, "Changing Gender Role: Women's Livelihoods, Conflict and Post-Conflict Security in Nepal," Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs 4, no. 2 (2017): 175–95; Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason, "Movement Intersectionality: The Case of Race, Gender, Disability, and Genetic Technologies," Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race 10, no. 2 (2013): 313–28.

Milli Lake is an Associate Professor in International Security in the International Relations Department at the London School of Economics. Her research examines questions of state-building, institutional reform, (in)security and political violence in post-conflict and post-colonial states, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa. Her first book, Strong NGOs and Weak States: Pursuing Gender Justice in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa (2018) explores the challenges and opportunities faced by activists and organizations pursuing legal accountability for gender-based crimes. Her research is published in the American Political Science Review, International Organization, Law and Society Review, International Studies Quarterly, World Development, the Annual Review of Law and Social Science and PS: Political Science & Politics among other outlets.