

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.**

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*Governing the Feminist Peace: The Vitality and Failure of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* by Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd is a comprehensive exploration of the dynamism and divisions of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Written by two of the world's leading scholars on WPS, this tremendously rich collaboration, reflecting the plethora of their feminist scholarship and WPS scholarship more broadly, exceeds all expectations.

Chapters 1–3 comprise the book's theoretical and conceptual framework. Chapter 1 introduces the project, including the motifs of “vitality” and “failure,” which they employ to map the messy realities of the WPS agenda and the tensions that underpin its fundamental principles. Rather than offering a sustained analysis of any one part of the agenda and domain of activity, Kirby and Shepherd approach WPS as a “policy ecosystem” with ever-shifting borders and boundaries. Chapter 1 concludes with the section “Mess and Methods.” To support their analysis of an eclectic and numerous body of material covering two decades of WPS, they outline the “bricolage method” (p. 27). This method enables them to link different parts of the “ecosystem” that are often considered distinct whilst drawing into the analysis various written, embodied, and affectual practices. They explain, “The collage as *process* and the collage as *product* is in keeping with the research mentality we bring to bear on our WPS ecosystem, which is also characterised by ‘fragmented ways of knowing’ and an almost overwhelming array of research material. Through bricolage we spin an interpretive web” (p. 28). This chapter will be a wonderful resource for students and scholars alike considering systems of policy and governance more broadly, not adequately captured by framing devices and methods focussed on puzzles and causality alone.

Moving beyond canonical narratives of WPS as a set of norms and principles encoded in United Nations Security Council resolutions, and implemented by various governments, institutions, and agencies, Chapter 2 conceptualizes WPS as a “policy ecosystem.” As the agenda has proliferated so too have the range of topics and actors that fall within its remit, touching every aspect of international politics, from migration, sexual and reproductive health, to the climate emergency. Classifying the agenda as an “ecosystem” enables them to apprehend the “whole” and its constitutive plurality (in the sense that it reproduces

and challenges global hierarchies of power), thus offering an analysis of WPS that draws much more policy and practice into the frame and, ultimately, into question. Chapter 3 describes, visualizes, and quantifies aspects of the ecosystem through maps, graphs, and charts and follows the agenda into multiple sites of WPS activity, outlining “who” does WPS and “what” WPS does. This includes paying attention to “proximate ecosystems,” including arms control and global health (p. 83), as well as tracing areas of visibility and aid investment (e.g., sexual violence in conflict) comparative to issues silenced and relatively starved (e.g., conflict prevention). While this is an initial surface-level analysis, it usefully sets the scene for the analytical chapters that follow (Chapters 4 to 7 inclusive).

Chapters 4–7 illuminate different aspects of the ecosystem. Chapter 4 provides a historiography of the ten resolutions that comprise the agenda as well as offering an account of the politics of adoption, honing in on the gendered geopolitics of the Council, and beyond. This includes a hitherto untold account of the “resolution that wasn't” (p. 97)—“the GBV resolution,” drafted but not adopted. This would have been the agenda's second resolution, but which instead foreshadowed the resolution that was officially adopted in 2008 (UNSCR 1820), disrupting any notion of origin stories and Council consensus. Chapter 5, “Domesticating the Feminist Peace” examines national productions and reproductions of WPS anchored in National Action Plans (NAPs)—the authoritative guidance for national WPS policies, which Kirby and Shepherd explain not only institutionalize and implement the agenda but actively constitute it, which is a condition of its possibilities (p. 121). Investigating national WPS policies, the chapter exposes the significance of race, nation, and indigeneity in the NAPs of mostly liberal democratic settler colonial states, adding significantly to WPS scholarship unearthing the colonial underbelly of the agenda. For example, paying attention to the centrality of Iraq and Afghanistan to the NAPs of the UK and US, powerful donor governments and so-called “WPS champions,” they expose how NAPs “separate histories of violence that are in truth conjoined” (p. 132).

Moving toward cracks in the surface of the ecosystem, Chapter 6 brings non-state actors into the analysis, drawing particular attention to the fractious relationship between civil society and security institutions. In particular, the analysis picks apart the unhappy, strategic marriage between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (a central actor in 1325's adoption and who have continued to lobby for its meaningful implementation); highlighting a muting of anti-militarist advocacy over time—often seen as foundational to realizing the agenda's much-vaunted “transformative potential.” More broadly, Chapter 6 speaks to the politics of complicity and

co-option, casting a shadow over those credited with pushing states and institutions to do WPS better. The final substantive chapter deals with emerging areas, proximate agendas, and horizons of possibility, and includes a discussion of areas of rights work, including sexual and reproductive health rights, the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, and women human rights defenders. The governance of arms is also discussed in Chapter 6, thus moving the chapter from a discussion around the expansion of the rights and subjects covered by WPS, to the Achilles heel of the agenda—the prevention of conflict at large.

Every chapter in this book could form the foundation for another on civil society, military actors, the Security Council, and so on. While Kirby and Shepherd acknowledge that “what we gain in comprehensiveness we lose in explanatory specificity” (p. 60), is, I would suggest, both generative and limiting. For example, in Chapter 5, several pages are devoted to delving into the NAPs of Brazil and Poland, paying particular attention to the visual elements of these documents, from paintings of historical women to the obligatory photographs of smiling peacekeepers. This is a welcome addition not least because such artifacts are seldom considered in WPS scholarship, but as Kirby and Shepherd demonstrate are central to understanding how the national WPS projects of Brazil and Poland are deeply enmeshed in state histories. While this visual analysis is far from comprehensive, and in some ways highlights the limits of attending to such an overwhelming amount of material, future projects that investigate the visual aspect of this sprawling ecosystem will be complementary to developing some of these ideas. Moreover, although the immense intellectual work to explore multiple points in the ecosystem simultaneously is mostly illuminating, there are times, in Chapter 6, for example, when the book makes jumps across topics where the thread of connection appears tenuous.

Lastly, while they draw from postcolonial and decolonial approaches to highlight the Eurocentrism of the agenda, they also continue to divert attention back to the center of power—the United Nations, in particular powerful donor states, acting as a centripetal force in the ecosystem model. Indeed, there is little discussion of social movements and grassroots organizing for “feminist peace” (in an expansive anti-militarist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist form) whether using, or organizing outside of, the formal WPS framework. As I have written with Hannah Wright, “the dominance of the WPS industry has meant that WPS and feminist peace work have come to be conflated in many contexts; however, the two have never been coterminous” (Hannah Wright and Columba Achilleos-Sarll, “Towards an Abolitionist Feminist Peace:

State Violence, Anti-Militarism, and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,” *Review of International Studies*).

Kirby and Shepherd conclude with a final chapter entitled “Forget WPS.” They propound that forgetting WPS is not about abolishing the agenda per se (or even abolishing the security institutions that implement WPS), but forgetting the singularity and coherency of “WPS.” This means, they argue, turning away from narratives of “victory” and “danger,” employing Dianne Otto’s terminology (Dianne Otto, “Beyond Stories of Victory and Danger: Resisting Feminism’s Amenability to Serving Security Council Politics,” in Gina Heathcote and Dianne Otto, eds., 157–152, *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality and Collective Security*, 2014). If anything, the conclusion felt a little abrupt, perhaps even limited; if we forget, as they write, “the will to know WPS” (p. 22) what does that mean for efforts to bring us toward an anti-militarist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist feminist peace. Moreover, as the world witnesses the escalation of Israel’s genocidal violence in Palestine, and the abject failure of the “international” community to respond—calling into question the Security Council’s leverage and authority on this agenda, alongside the multiple failings and tensions the book maps, it is perhaps time that scholars and practitioner ask more pressing questions of WPS than that which the book concludes with, namely: Is the agenda still relevant to the times and crises in which we live? If not WPS, then what?

The book is both familiar in the sense that it revisits and further excavates the fundamental tensions that WPS scholars and practitioners have grappled with since the first WPS resolution was passed in 2000, yet unfamiliar in its ability to collage multiple fragments of the agenda together in a way that paints various different pictures that traverse different scales, involve different actors, and encompass a range of gendered and racialized violence. This is feminist scholarship at its absolute best. Beautifully written, deeply insightful, and expertly curated—punctuated by graphs, tables, and pictures of various sorts, layer after layer of engagement for the reader. As Cynthia Enloe writes in her endorsement: “[they] push us, their lucky readers, to the edges of our seats. Reading this book sharpens our wakefulness, keeps us restless in our curiosities.” As someone who has spent many years working on an agenda so fraught with tension (although still a novice in comparison), this book has revived my feminist curiosity. I have no doubt that this will be essential reading for anyone seeking to understand not only the WPS agenda but policy and governance more broadly, and it will have longevity in the field of international relations, and beyond.