


Gendering peace in Northern Ireland: The role of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security

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Abstract

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on ‘women, peace and security’ was passed in 2000 to recognise and enhance women’s participation in peace-building. The Resolution has growing global significance in conflicted societies yet there is limited analysis of its implementation in specific social contexts. Utilising feminist theory on gender in conflicted societies and original empirical evidence from key grassroots community activists in Northern Ireland, I will consider the potential of the 1325 framework as a tool for conceptualising and achieving gender security and equality. This article contributes to an understanding of the importance of deep contextual interpretation for implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and argues for a feminist intersectional interpretation of the Resolution to enable its transformative potential for both peace-building and gender equality.

Keywords

equality, gender, Northern Ireland, peace, security, women

Introduction

I think if there actually was a plan (to implement 1325) it would be very controversial. We would really argue about it and we would argue about how useful it was and wasn't but it would give us a starting point ... (Focus Group 1)

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The Northern Ireland peace process and subsequent peace-building efforts are rarely evaluated with regard to gender equality or inclusion. As I have argued elsewhere, this is a crucial oversight (Pierson 2017). There is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that the inclusion of women in peace talks and peace-building, as well as having a positive impact on gender equality, has a positive impact on the longevity and sustainability of peace (Paffenholz 2015). The United Nations' (UN) women, peace and security (WPS) agenda has a crucial role to play in providing a framework to ensure the inclusion of women and gendered perspectives in peace-building. However, direct translation of the WPS agenda may result in simply an 'add women and stir' approach, incorporating women into existing institutions and structures without fundamental change. I argue here, based on empirical evidence from key activists in the Northern Irish context, that for a truly transformative approach to the WPS agenda, a deep reading of the structural and cultural inequalities in specific social contexts – coupled with an intersectional understanding that takes account of the variety of perspectives, experiences and identities of women in conflicted societies – must be used in its implementation.

The UN passed Resolution 1325 in October 2000 after the first open session of the Security Council dedicated to 'women, peace and security'. The session was initiated after intensive lobbying by women concerned at the neglect of women's positioning during and after conflict internationally and regionally (Cockburn 2007). The Resolution acknowledges the specific impact of armed conflict on women and on women's role in preventing and resolving conflict. The UN has passed subsequent Resolutions on the WPS theme, creating a framework which highlights gendered security concerns in conflict including sexual violence, political participation and, most recently, the role of women in countering violent extremism (Ni Aoláin 2015).

The explicit focus on women has powerful potential to highlight the importance, and further the inclusion, of the various lived experiences of women and girls during and after conflict (Hoewer 2013). In addition, it has the potential to disrupt gender norms and push gendered concerns higher up the political agenda (Tryggestad 2009). However, it is clear that implementation of the WPS agenda has been stymied globally by a concurrent lack of resources and (on some occasions) lack of will (Willett 2010). Both the most recent Resolution (United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2242) and the 15-year anniversary global study on the impact of the WPS agenda (UN 2015) acknowledge that implementation has been subject to obstacles and challenges. As such, although this article focuses on the Northern Irish context, it contributes to a global debate on methods to ensure the successful interpretation and implementation of the Resolutions. In addition, by acknowledging the limitations of the 1325 framework, it highlights methods to ensure a feminist reading and interpretation of the Resolutions.

Gendering peace in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland can be said to be acting in a vacuum with regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The United Kingdom has affirmed its commitment to implementing the Resolution internationally yet has noted 'there are no plans to integrate provisions relating to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland into the UK's National Action Plan' (United Kingdom 8th Periodic Report to United Nations

Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women 2018). Both of the Republic of Ireland's National Action Plans on 1325 include Northern Ireland, after intensive lobbying from civil society in both the north and south of Ireland. Locally, the Northern Ireland Assembly has established an All-Party Group on *UNSCR 1325: WPS*. Despite the lack of state-level implementation of the Resolution, there is a plethora of grassroots and women's groups' activities to raise awareness in local communities, lobby for implementation and produce research detailing potential issues for a Northern Ireland Action Plan (Hinds & Donnelly 2014).

Resolution 1325 was of course passed after the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland that culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998. The Resolution was, therefore, not integrated into the Agreement, yet has potential to impact on gendering peace-building in the region through implementation in the future. The negotiation of peace agreements at an elite actor level can serve to perpetuate gender inequality (Enloe 1993). Peace agreements are largely negotiated by men, and the concept of peace and post-conflict peace-building becomes a masculinised process dominated by a focus on reducing public violence rather than a transformation of society for all. Processes of creating consociational governments demonstrate how the privileging of ethnic or religious cleavages entrenches division and ignores the importance and intersection of other identity markers such as gender or class on reducing community tensions and creating equality (Kennedy et al. 2016; Taylor 2009).

In the Northern Ireland context, the marginalisation of women in the post-Agreement landscape has not gone undocumented. Although women have made some gains in representation in formal politics, they are largely excluded from community development and politics, particularly following the release of political prisoners under terms of the Agreement (Pierson & Radford 2016). Women's centres, in order to remain funded, have focussed on service provision and to a certain extent lost their political lobbying potential (Cockburn 2013). Certain groups of women have become distinctly marginalised, and their voices excluded from mainstream discussions of peace, particularly young women (Gray & Neill 2011), Loyalist female ex-combatants (McEvoy 2009; Potter & MacMillan 2008) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) women (Ashe 2018).

In addition to formal representation, gender policy issues remain peripheral and under-developed. Gender-based violence continues to be a cause of a significant proportion of crime, with rates of reporting of sexual and domestic violence increasing since the Agreement and, in particular, historic sexual violence becoming visible (O'Rourke & Swaine 2017; Pierson 2017). The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) recorded 3,443 sexual offences in the year 2017/2018 (an increase of 9.3% from the previous year) and a 17.8% increase in the number of reported rapes (with less than 2% of these resulting in a conviction) (PSNI 2018). Of more than 2,000 cases passed by the PSNI to the Public Prosecution Service between 2010 and 2014, no prosecution was pursued in 83% of them due to a belief that the case would not pass the 'evidential test'.

PSNI statistics show that reporting of domestic violence has doubled since 2004. There are an average of 39 domestic violence crimes reported every day, representing just over 13% of all crime. Policy on domestic violence in Northern Ireland has responded weakly to this violence. In 2005, the Northern Ireland Office issued a strategy for

addressing domestic violence with a multi-agency approach similar to the rest of the United Kingdom and an accompanying action plan. The strategy was to operate for 5 years but was not replaced by the devolved Assembly in the interim, although the action plan was periodically updated. It was reported in 2015 that an inter-ministerial working group on domestic violence, which first met in May 2008, had only met five times in total, and not at all since November 2012 (Wilson 2016). A new strategy to be launched in March 2015 was held up for clearance by senior officials in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Made public a year later, it came with no budget attached.

While the issues of domestic and sexual violence suffer from a lack of tangible commitment by government, other gender policy matters are ignored altogether. The 1967 British Abortion Act was never extended to the region, and the Assembly continues to block any change to Northern Ireland's abortion laws. The reality for women is either to travel to England, or buy abortion pills online, illegally, risking prosecution. One online abortion pill provider has reported that 5,630 women from the island of Ireland requested the abortion pill from their website between 2010 and 2015 (Aiken et al. 2017). A number of women have undergone or are undergoing prosecution currently for procurement of the abortion pill, and the police have raided the homes and workplaces of activists who are thought to have purchased the abortion pill. The region's abortion laws have been criticised by international human rights bodies, yet political parties largely oppose change (Pierson & Bloomer 2017).

In this context of gender inequality, Resolution 1325 could have great potential if implemented in Northern Ireland to address the exclusion of women from peace-building, allow the voices and experiences of women to be heard and ensure formal and substantive political representation. However, there is need for more nuanced and contextual analysis of the benefits and limitations of transferring international normative standards into national contexts. This author calls for an intersectional understanding of gender security and a broader consideration of those issues considered relevant to gendered peace-building in constructing the 'women, peace and security' narrative not just in Northern Ireland but globally.

Women, Peace and Security

Resolution 1325 aims to reform the way that states implement peace and security in post-conflict societies. It encourages greater participation of women, promoting a gender-sensitive approach to post-conflict peace-building and protecting women from, and providing justice for, sexual violence in conflict. Resolution 1325 explicitly concentrates on the exclusion of women from peace talks and peace-building processes. The Resolutions which have followed on the WPS theme can largely be grouped into two categories: women's leadership and participation in peace-building and conflict prevention (1325, 1889, 2122 and 2242) and the prevention of, and response to, conflict-related sexual violence (1820, 1888, 1960 and 2106). The WPS framework has been heralded by feminist academics as a ground-breaking and emancipatory piece of international law putting women at the centre of the peace-building and security agenda (Cohn et al. 2004). However, its realist assumptions which continue to construct violent

conflict as inevitable and which aim to provide peace and gender security within traditional, militarist structures have been critiqued as anti-feminist (Cockburn 2010).

The language used in the Resolutions is important. It both can shape understandings of women's potential contribution to peace-building and the issues which are considered integral to gendered peace-building. Analysis of the language of the Resolutions has highlighted its presentation of women and men within traditional gender roles and a binary/dualistic relationship (Pratt & Richter-Devroe 2011). Narrow constructions of femininity and masculinity allow women and men agency but only within certain boundaries and this in particular leads to definite interpretations of how peace and security are to be implemented and by whom. However, more recent Resolutions have begun to reverse this tendency and emphasised women's agency (Martín de la Rosa & Lazaro 2017).

The key roles ascribed to women through the Resolutions are those of peace-builder, peacekeeper or victim. This language relies on the feminisation of peace and the assumption that women are naturally weak and vulnerable during conflict (Otto 2006). The focus on sexual violence in conflict in the Resolutions following 1325, although vitally important, contributes to the protectionist narrative towards women coming out of conflict. Although subsequent Resolutions try to move away from this stereotypical language, women are still conceptualised as a vulnerable group. This may in fact exclude some women who have participated as actors in conflict or who have subverted or moved away from traditional gender roles in the fluid social boundaries that often occur during times of social and political upheaval.

Reading between the lines of the text, men are absent from the WPS agenda (Puechguirbal 2010). Lack of consideration of gendered power relations creates a false dualism between men and women, where women are implied to be naturally peaceful and in need of protection and men are those creating the violence and discrimination from which women need to be protected. It is also clear by their absence that men are assumed to be those holding the power to grant women's participation and security; therefore, men are positioned as the gatekeepers to women's entrance to peace and security building. Women are welcome to participate, but only if invited by men.

While the Resolutions have helped the international community highlight sexual violence in conflict, they have been relatively silent on other issues and identities. For example, the Resolutions have said little about reproductive rights, with Resolution 2106 (passed in 2013) and Resolution 2122 (passed in 2013) being the only ones to contain an explicit reference to reproductive rights (Thomson & Pierson 2018). Importantly, they are framed in the language of 'health' rather than rights, with no greater specificity as to what this might actually refer to in terms of service provision. The Resolutions may also be described as heteronormative, with little recognition that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and intersex (LGBTQI) individuals face particular homophobic and transphobic violence in conflicted societies. There has been some recognition, although not formally within the Resolutions themselves. At the Security Council debate marking 15 years of WPS, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Working Group on WPS did make explicit reference to sexual and gender-based violence against LGBTQI individuals in Iraq (Hagen 2016).

Laura Shepherd has pointed to the fact that political participation has often been equated with political agency implying that agency is profoundly linked to the achievement of

change (Shepherd 2011). Therefore, although the WPS agenda recognises ‘women’s important role’ and urges the inclusion and consultation of women, it is assumed that increased parliamentary representation of women will transform the political environment. Such an assumption needs to be more closely examined for the women that it includes – the burden on women is that as political actors they are assumed to always have a positive role. In addition, we need to go beyond descriptive representation to ensure that the substantive issues which affect women’s lives are included within peace-building programmes and initiatives.

It is clear that Resolution 1325 has an important part to play in highlighting and promoting the role that women play in societies transitioning from violent conflict and developing new international norms on gendered conflict resolution. However, how the Resolution is interpreted through its application in particular societal contexts will have important consequences for which women get included, which issues get prioritised and the subsequent impact on gender roles and agency in those societies. A conservative or narrow reading of the Resolution may simply result in the entrenchment of conservative or regressive power relations and conflict management rather than transformation. Consequently, it is of vital importance that in its implementation the WPS agenda is not simply translated into policy but interrogated contextually to ensure the inclusion of both mainstream and marginalised gendered perspectives.

Research approach

This article presents findings from my doctoral research, which aimed to investigate discourses of gender security in Northern Ireland since the GFA. The research adopted an intersectional feminist approach with the goal of identifying marginalised discourses and identities within security dialogues by putting women’s voices and experiences at the centre of the research process. The author takes the perspective that ‘for problems or facts to become questions of security, they need ... to be successfully constructed as such within political discourse’ (Hansen 2006). Through the documentation of gendered security narratives in Northern Ireland, a contextual analysis of how the WPS agenda could be implemented in Northern Ireland was completed, with particular reference to those issues which continue to be marginalised within mainstream security discourses.

An intersectional approach recognises that women are not a homogeneous group and that in societies divided by conflict differences between women can often be rendered invisible (Roulston 1997). Intersectional approaches have highlighted the fact that gender does not act in a vacuum and the important influence of social identities, social location and power relations embedded within these on how we identify with and experience gender (Spelman 1988). There are multiple categories of identity such as race, sexuality, class, age, (dis)ability, religion and ethnicity which contextualise and provide meaning to gendered experiences. The list is non-exhaustive. What tends to be common to the social identities is that they appear natural, that is, to result from biology and be pre-destined with natural characteristics (Yuval-Davis 2006).

The research documented here draws on data collected between 2013 and 2015. A total of 25 interviews and 7 focus groups were conducted with 88 women taking part in the research from across Northern Ireland. All data were collected, transcribed and analysed by the author. The data were subject to thematic analysis, which aimed to identify

key gender security discourses and identities and map these onto the WPS agenda. Participants were key activists in women's rights and community development in Northern Ireland and focus groups consisted of activists and women who used local women's centres. Participants were asked about particular gender security concerns in their communities, how these security concerns were dealt with both at a local level and through law and policy and about the meaning of Resolution 1325 to their work, the positives and negatives of implementation, and the tools needed for further implementation and the transformative potential of 1325. The following section addresses how gender security and identity were articulated and progressed in the Northern Ireland context.

Implementing gender security in the Northern Ireland context

Feminist security theorists have evaluated, questioned and contested the extent to which women are protected by the state and asked the obvious but important questions of who is secured, from what threats, and by what means. A re-evaluation of who or what is being considered by traditional security discourse has found that women's security needs are rarely on the agenda. The research documented here attempted to define and articulate non-dominant security concerns and narratives in order to provide an account of gender security in Northern Ireland and the potential impact of the WPS agenda. This section details the specific context within which activists must articulate their gender security concerns.

One of the key themes arising from the research was the conservative cultural environment in which the participants are required to operate. In the context of Northern Ireland, conservative and nationalist ideals of the role of women appeal to both traditions within Irish nationalism and British unionism (Ashe 2006b). The conservative discourse with regards to women's equality, constructed through a hybrid of religious faith and national ideologies, has been particularly noted within the debate on abortion access in the region (Bloomer & Pierson 2016). Conservative Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism both revere and aim to uphold conservative gender roles.

Women in Northern Ireland have in the past used these symbolic constructions of femininity as a justification for political action (Ashe 2006a) and on occasion in a subversive manner. Begoña Aretxaga details the role of women in political activism particularly from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities in the 1970s as a result of the Falls Road curfew and internment without trial (Aretxaga 1997). These acts triggered mass mobilisation of women who challenged curfews and established an alarm system to warn the community of British army presence. Such activism has been labelled 'accidental' due to the fact that women organised out of necessity rather than prior political ideologies. The reliance on gender stereotypes in order to advocate for gender equality was noted by activists:

So, what we've done without really knowing we've done it is to say this is an operational issue. So you always have to pull back and reframe your argument I suppose, and that's how you win. But you're always doing that. With women it only works as even if it's clearly about women you then have to say

it's about children, it's not about women and you're always going to the next bit because they don't care about women. But I don't care, as it's the end that matters not the means, but you always have to have a go. (Focus Group 1)

This statement from an activist involved in lobbying for women's rights implies that identity can be strategically used in order to make gains for women. The belief of this activist is that the traditional/conservative narrative is understood and believed to be important by those in the largely male-led government and as such is a useful lobbying tool. Although this strategic use of identity is useful in the short-term for making political gains, it may be problematic in the long-term by locating women's relationship with the state within conservative and narrow gender stereotypes.

Gender identities are reflective of power relations within society. Political engagement and political agency also emanate from specific networks of power (Ashe 2006b). Appealing to conservative narratives of female identity to make gains for women can be viewed as a challenge to sources of power by women, the ability to use conservative gender stereotypes for the benefit of women. However, this must be contrasted with its effect, which is to re-establish and reinforce normative notions of femininity within the political sphere. In the longer term, this may help women become established in the political world but only within a very specific notion of agency revolving around traditional female traits and positions.

In addition, forms of governance based on ethno-national power-sharing, although holding no obvious barriers for women, tend to marginalise gender issues and exclude women (Byrne & McCulloch 2012; Kennedy et al. 2016). This exclusion extends to a variety of identities, as observed by one participant:

I think from our experiences the entire way the Assembly is constructed and this cross-community approach and the fact that everything is painted as either nationalist or unionist, including the rights agenda which is a huge issue for us, it just means BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) issues, gender issues, LGBT issues, anything that's not Protestant or Catholic is just getting side-lined and is incredibly difficult to work on. (Interview 14)

In Northern Ireland, issues of cultural markers such as flags and parades and the legacy of the conflict continue to dominate the political terrain. Talks organised to discuss and resolve these issues clearly have little descriptive representation of women or awareness of the lack of female voices. The most recent 'Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition' Commission, appointed by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, includes 14 men and just 1 woman. Women can clearly see that their experiences and opinions lack validity or relevance as 'experts' in the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland. When it comes to discussing the hard issues of peace-building and conflict, the physical absence of women and the analytical absence of gender was noted:

... the very fact that from the formation of the peace process instead of women starting to feel engaged in it they started to feel more and more excluded and the basis of that was quite simply that they felt that during the time of the Troubles they were very active within their communities, they would argue that they held their communities together and they would also say that the politicians funding was falling over itself to come to them – they were flavour of the month. And then since the peace

process has developed, they've coined a phrase themselves which says – tired of people talking about them but not to them. So they feel completely disengaged from what actually is going on and today they would probably argue that things are worse now than they were before. (Interview 21)

Within this context, where women's voices are marginalised, there is also the additional marginalisation of certain gendered identities and issues with both the focus on ethno-national identity and the conservative environment ensuring that particular voices and experiences remain silenced. The specific violence and discrimination facing LGBTQI women was only noted by two participants and the issue of restrictions on abortion only by one:

I think there's a thing that lesbian and trans women buy into, well trans women do get sexually assaulted, but LGB women would kind of say ... physical violence doesn't really happen to us, it happens to gay guys. But it does happen to lesbian women, and either they don't talk about it, domestic violence is a really big deal. I would argue that's part of heterosexism and homophobia in society, or internalised homophobia and heterosexism. (Interview 16)

Gender security is about having rights regardless of your gender ... in Northern Ireland you have reproductive rights as a woman as long as you don't want an abortion. How dare you have autonomy over your own body? (Interview 24)

The findings detailed above give an indication of the structures and discourses, which shape activists' work for gender equality in Northern Ireland. Those which were articulated most often were the architecture of the peace agreement facilitating continued emphasis on ethno-national identity to the detriment of alternative identity concerns, conservative notions of gender which restrict women's political agency and marginalise particular issues and identities, and the restriction of those considered legitimate actors and perspectives in peace-building. The following section aims to address how the implementation of the WPS agenda could facilitate the formal and substantive inclusion of women.

The WPS agenda: interventions in Northern Ireland

Organisations within Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) 2013) and the international community have called for the implementation of Resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 2008). The GFA fails to acknowledge the importance of alternative cleavages of identity and inequality outside that of ethno-religious identity. Therefore, mechanisms to address gender inequality within post-conflict peace-building are piecemeal and 1325 can be used to provide a gendered analysis within locally agreed notions of peace and security. Activists believed that one of the roles of the WPS agenda could be to begin conversations within communities about women's role in peace-building and provide a framework and a vocabulary to make the argument for greater inclusion of women:

Before we start to engage the higher echelons, we still need to engage women, and you can't engage them if they're sitting there with all this conversation going on over their heads. You have to translate it into a language that people can understand and once they understand it they become passionately interested in it. (Focus Group 1)

Conceptual linkages between gender inequality and conflict are generally unacknowledged. This extends into the post-conflict arena where issues and policies for women are considered as separate from those of ethno-national conflict and sectarianism. In addition, the differential impact of policies on women may go unacknowledged either through a commitment to gender-neutrality or a lack of consideration of the multi-dimensional nature of identities that women inhabit, meaning that often policy lacks an understanding of the impact on different groups of women (Rooney 2007). Northern Ireland has a stagnant policy environment but one, which operates on a gender-neutral approach to equality and a lack of recognition of intersecting identities and inequalities:

... the Gender Equality Strategy in NI ... there is no mention of conflict, no mention of peace, there is one of the strategic objectives that was peace-building but there is no explanation of positive actions to encourage peace-building or to involve women and what really shocked me is trying to be gender neutral when the policy itself recognised that women are disadvantaged in the areas of employment, education and so on ... (Interview 6)

Strategies that highlight the importance of women's voices to peace-building must also acknowledge the intersection of gender inequality and the marginalisation of women in conflicted societies. As such, 1325 provides an internationally agreed document, which highlights the importance of such an approach and its implementation in regional contexts may serve as an enforcement mechanism to ensure the visibility of women. However, international documents operate within an agreed set of norms, which construct a particular version of gender and women. Participants recognised the importance of acknowledging the variety of women's experiences and identity and the limitations of recognising the range of identity in a society defined by ethno-national conflict:

I think 1325 could make an intervention in the debate of how we look at how the conflict actually affected women in different ways – because it didn't affect all women equally, it depended on your class or your relationship to the state. (Interview 11)

Unfortunately, intersectional approaches to equality are an increasingly difficult issue in a society built on recognising only ethno-religious identity and marginalising class, gender, sexuality and race as markers, which intersect to compound inequality. As a result, any implementation mechanisms must be considered carefully in terms of their implications for different groups of women:

Neutrality is alarming, in particular with 1325, looking at marginalised groups; LGB women are a marginalised group within another marginalised group. Women who are being discriminated against as women. That's why it's important to bring in a framework for 1325 in NI. (Interview 14)

1325 also has the potential to work in conjunction with implementation of the GFA to provide alternative forms of representation for women and other groups whose voices remain unheard in the formal political sphere. One of the strands of the Agreement, championed by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was to put in place a Civic Forum; a consultative body made up of representatives of civil society (GFA, Strand One, Section 34). The original Forum was set up in 2000 and suspended in 2002 along with the Assembly. It was not, however, restored when the Stormont legislature was restored subsequently:¹

I still see the Civic Forum as a place that sits very well with what we're trying to do on 1325 because to me it was about having a place where those bigger conversations that allow all the good work to be shared and also to help politicians absorb what's going on, on the ground ... so if we could bring in 1325 and champion the Forum as a place where women's voices could be heard and to remind them constantly of the need for women's voices to be heard. It's the ideal place, but it needs to be constructed in a different way. (Interview 9)

The Forum represents a participative mechanism where space is made to allow co-operation of differing groups and especially those who may feel excluded from formal politics (Pierson & Thomson 2018). In a consociational government where political parties are fiercely opposed by ethno-religious difference, often playing out as a zero-sum attitude to political decisions, the Forum could be a space for a more considered and deliberative approach to issues of policy and governance. It also allows those who are most marginalised from politics to have their voices heard – women from the most socially and economically deprived areas, young women, women from ethnic minority backgrounds and those from the LGBT community. However, integral to the notion of participation from civil society is a consideration of how consultation will be defined and how difference will be accommodated in a meaningful way (Palshaugen 2005; Pierson & Thomson 2018).

Discussion and conclusion

This article has attempted to interrogate the potential implementation of the WPS agenda in the Northern Ireland context, taking account of the specific environment which limits attempts to include a gendered perspective to peace-building and to achieving gender equality. The implementation of the WPS agenda must begin by considering the factors at play which can both marginalise women's voices, excluding them from peace-building, and homogenise women's voices, excluding particular experiences and perspectives.

Assuming women's ability to participate in peace-building fails to acknowledge the barriers that exist within specific societal contexts. As well as male dominance at a formal political level, there has also been the re-establishment of male power at community level (Pierson 2015). Whether this is through the re-emergence of paramilitary actors within certain communities or the widespread filtering of men into community development positions following the GFA, women have noted a retraction of political space for collective action. The erosion of political space for women includes both silencing, where

women are in fear of speaking out within particular communities, and in some cases the inability to find safe spaces for women to form groups (Pierson 2015). Accordingly, if measures adopted to increase female participation do not take into account unequal gender relations in society, they push the burden of participating onto women and find women at fault. Such an approach fails to challenge the militarised forms of masculinity still at play in societies emerging from conflict.

It is clear that a conservative moral climate born out of ethno-religious identity coupled with institutional structures of governance emerging from the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement work to exclude women's perspectives on the conflict transformational society and ignore a gendered perspective on peace-building. The lack of focus on gender has been noted in discussion around recent initiatives in peace-building, for example, 'dealing with the past' has been recognised as having a gender neutral premise and resulting dialogue with limited participation by women or opportunity for women's views and experiences to be heard (Legacy Gender Integration Group 2015). Resolution 1325 is viewed as a go-to response within such debate, and its focus on sexual violence may begin to create a space where conversations about sexual violence in the Northern Ireland conflict can begin to take place.

The pillars upon which the WPS agenda are built – participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery – although open to interpretation may also work to make invisible particular issues from gendered approaches to peace-building. The invisibility of particular issues can be reinforced through conservative notions of gender in particular societal contexts, which silence certain topics. Despite the fact that the 1325 agenda has been successful in highlighting sexual violence, issues such as abortion, sexuality and gender relations are fundamentally important but under-considered in the 1325 debate. This invisibility translates into national contexts. For example, gender activism in Northern Ireland does not link abortion into the 1325 debate. A recent comprehensive 'Gender and Peace-building Toolkit' produced by the women's sector makes no mention of limited access to abortion as a factor in women's continued insecurity (Hinds & Donnelly 2014).

Political activism based in grassroots activism may provide the best platform for a range of women's voices to be heard and the inclusion of a wider range of issues and voices on political agendas. As such, an intersectional approach taking account of the multi-dimensional nature of identity is crucial to the implementation of the Resolution. Consequently, mechanisms or policies to implement 1325 within Northern Ireland must be informed by a broad notion of gendered security issues in peace-building and a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of intersecting identities – if not, it will simply work to quantitatively include more women in peace-building but ensure that existing inequalities remain intact.

The norms of the 1325 agenda are increasingly referred to in international, regional and domestic peace-building policy. Consequently, understanding the effects of implementation of its norms and values is of vital importance to the field of feminist conflict studies and gender security. A principal contribution to the literature provided by this article is to exemplify the importance of key stakeholders in civil society within analysis of implementation of the 1325 agenda to evaluate its transformative potential for gender security. However, as noted, the debate needs to go further to include and give voice to

women marginalised by deeply conservative and religious societal norms. Consequently, this article calls for a deep contextual reading and a feminist intersectional approach to the 1325 framework in specific country contexts. Such an approach allows for both the broader acknowledgement and understanding of identity and those issues relevant to gendered security and peace-building. Only in this way can the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda be truly transformative.

Note

1. In April 2013, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted to recall the Forum. However, no steps were taken towards reviving the body between that date and the suspension of the Stormont parliament in January 2017.

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