Peace workshop

18th September 2019, 9.30am-5.00pm

LSE, Houghton Street, WC2A 2AE, room: CBG.1.04

Aims and objectives

This workshop is the second in a series designed to interrogate the idea of a feminist/gendered peace.

The first workshop initiated a conversation among a group of feminist international law scholars on the concept of 'peace', to explore the implications of the term under international law. Although the maintenance of "peace and security" is the core objective of the international legal order (Article 1 (1) UN Charter, 1945), what is meant by peace remains largely unaddressed in law.[1]

This workshop builds on that exchange and aims to enrich our collective understanding of peace by facilitating a dialogue among feminist scholars across disciplines (women's peace history, gender history, IR, gender studies, economics, literature, genetics, architecture and law) and feminists across professions (academics, practitioners, activists, artists). We seek this multi-disciplinary and multi-professional exchange to overcome the siloes that can occur between our work and engage in substantive knowledge exchange and creation.

Our two immediate objectives are to think about the following questions:

  i)   *what* constitutes a feminist and/or gendered peace?; and
  ii)   *how* such a vision might be secured, not least in today's political climate?; what are feminist methods and strategies for peace?.[2]

This workshop is part of a project funded by the European Research Council on a Gendered Peace. The outcomes of this workshop will feed into the research conducted under this grant as well as a parallel project on a Feminist International Law of Peace and Security funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Context

Peace is an inherently elusive and multifaceted concept lacking clear (let alone universal) definition. Often it is used to connote a *negative* condition – an absence of war or of direct violence, most especially, collective violence. Conceptualising peace as a negative condition means that efforts are naturally directed toward developing norms, mechanisms, institutions and processes concerned with conflict deterrence, preventing violence or peacebuilding post-conflict. The negative conception of peace – albeit thin – is not without its problems. For example, feminist scholars and activists have

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[1] The 1919 Covenant of the League of Nations was adopted to "achieve international peace and security" but does not expand on what constitutes peace.
[2] The organisers recognise that distinguishing the 'what' from the 'how' is often artificial and difficult to sustain.

consistently pointed out the fallacy of treating violence as a clearly defined and demarcated concept arguing that it must be seen on a continuum and that indirect violence, which is typically structural, can result in the most extreme forms of harm.

Peace, conceptualised as a *positive* condition, signifies a far more expansive notion that is contingent, at a minimum, on the maintenance of a social order founded on tranquillity and on harmonious relations among peoples and between states. Feminist work has also highlighted the necessity of anti-imperialism, decolonisation and approaches to peace that capture the harms of environmental degradation and extractive capitalist expansion. The challenge in thinking about peace as a social condition that entails more than simply the absence of war and violence, is what might be fairly be included within its scope. The preamble to the ILO Constitution – the first statement of institutionalised international law – states "Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice". Likewise, early feminist peace movements saw economic and social justice as foundational to any notion of peace.

i)   Gendered/feminist peace

For feminist peace activists, peace has always been contingent, first and foremost, on **gender equality**. Without equality, women would be in a perpetual state of oppression making any notion of the freedom to enjoy peace meaningless.[3] To that extent, feminist peace activists and feminist scholars have been concerned with exposing and addressing the multiple manifestations of **patriarchy** and its co-productive operation with **militarism, imperialism/colonialism**, **neo-liberalism** and, more recently, with **anthropocentricism**. These critical engagements have led to the generation of a rich body of feminist research on the obstacles to peace.

The **morning session** is designed to take stock of some of those developments and to provide new insights that can inform campaigning, advocacy and further scholarship.

- Can a feminist peace be distinguished from other conceptions of peace and if so on what basis? (Would a feminist peace disrupt the social justice model or provide a useful starting point?)

- What, if any, is the difference between a 'feminist' and 'gendered' conception of peace?

- If peace is both personal and political, how do we articulate peace as plural, complex, intersectional and multi-sited?

- To what extent should we treat peace as a dynamic process? What advantages accrue? What are the risks?

- What epistemic and ontological shifts are required for, or demanded by, a feminist peace?

- How do different disciplines and perspectives generate new knowledge?

- How might we understand everyday practices of peace?

- How do temporal assumptions pre-determine the content of peace?

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[3] Not all have shared this view, arguing that questions of war/peace can be conceptually divorced from sex/gender equality.

ii) Feminist methods and strategies

Much of the work on peace – both historical and contemporary, in different disciplines and professions – is concerned with how to secure peace irrespective of how peace may be defined.[4] The need to create resilient systems, institutions and processes for effective and innovative problem-solving are common to many of these approaches as is the existence of some form of enforcement mechanism founded, ultimately and somewhat paradoxically, on the use of force. Violence and the threat of violence is therefore always central to peace. While pacificism and a commitment to non-violence has been subject to considerable criticism, there is a growing body of scholarship that is concerned with how peace might be secured through non-violent means including through the creation of cultures of peace and by focussing on the well-being of individuals and communities.[5]

Women have always played an active role in mediating disputes and promoting non-violence as a means through which to resolve disagreement within and between local communities (and, equally, have contributed to violence).[6] They have contributed to the advancement of peace through international organisations dedicated to peace (WILPF) and have taken non-violent direct action in pursuit of peace against their 'home' state (Greenham and other peace camps worldwide). Notwithstanding this record, much of their peace activism has remained unregistered or marginalised. Likewise, their intellectual contributions to furthering peace remains unacknowledged, sometimes erased, or has been co-opted for statist ambitions.

The **afternoon session** creates an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas and experiences on feminist peace strategies. What strategies have women and feminist groups employed in the pursuit of peace?

Rejecting violence

- One of the risks that feminists confront in their work on peace is the problem of essentialism (that is, that women are naturally peaceful). Does this matter? Denouncing violence and militarism in pursuit of peace is a political choice that has little to do with biology but how can this risk most effectively be navigated?

Spaces of peace

- To what extent has the physical occupation of spaces proven to be a successful non-violent strategy?

- What strategies have feminists pursued in spaces of occupation?

- How do feminists re-imagine and rearticulate peaceful geographies?

- Are there any spheres or platforms that are under-utilised/ unseen?

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[4] http://redraftingperpetualpeace.org/
[5] https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8NC77T1
[6] http://www.twn.my/title/manila.htm

Subversion, resistance

- What insights can we gain through the epistemic repositioning from a focus on sovereign states as key actors to the everyday practices of peace?

- What are the lessons from the past as well as contemporary modes of resistance?
- What alternative community practices have been introduced to reshape tradition?

Performance

- How have feminist peace activists used different activities (pilgrimage, non-action) or mediums (art, literature, poetry) in the pursuit of peace?

- How can peace cultures be nurtured?

- What knowledge exchange needs to occur between and within these sites and experiences?