

THE WOMEN'S PEACE MOVEMENT AT 100 YEARS: WITHER THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF WAR?¹

Frédéric Mégret*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The current precarious moment has been described as a “masculinist” one, involving a sort of profound post me-too backlash.² This backlash is of course all too familiar in the history of feminism, as every intellectual and social conquest has been met by efforts to reinstate the gendered or racialized status quo.³ In truth, it has also been long in

1. A portion of Part II of this article was published as a chapter in the OXFORD HANDBOOK ON WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL LAW (2025).

* Faculty of Law, McGill University.

2. Constance Grady, *The Mounting, Undeniable Me Too Backlash*, VOX (Feb. 3, 2023), <https://www.vox.com/culture/23581859/me-too-backlash-susan-faludi-weinstein-roe-dobbs-depp-heard>.

3. SUSAN FALUDI, *BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN* (2009).

the making⁴ and it is a global one at that,⁵ as seen in the performative masculine politics of Duterte,⁶ Putin,⁷ or Erdogan.⁸ It weaves together machismo, religious conservatism, patriarchy, and the rejection of “gender ideology.”⁹

Of note here is the movement’s connection to a particular politics of institutional militarized violence. This is evident in the United States where, for example, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has criticized women in combat roles and committed to bring “warrior culture” back, a move manifested by the firing of minorities in the military.¹⁰ It is also evident in the push to amnesty soldiers accused of war crimes¹¹ or the elimination of the Pentagon’s Civilian Protection Center of Excellence,¹² all pointing to a sense that the military is being weakened by excessively “feminine rules.” And it is evident in the sort of aggressive posturing towards other states that has been a hallmark of the second Trump

4. Joseph Bernstein, *The ‘Manosphere’? It’s Planet Earth.*, NEW YORK TIMES, Feb. 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/01/style/trump-zuckerberg-masculinity.html>.

5. Saskia Brechenmacher, *Trump’s “Gender Ideology” Attacks Are Following a Global Movement*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INT’L PEACE, <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/02/trump-gender-ideology-global-trend-women-lgbtq-rights?lang=en> (last visited Feb 17, 2025).

6. Sharmila Parmanand, *Duterte as the Macho Messiah: Chauvinist Populism and the Feminisation of Human Rights in the Philippines*, 29 REV. OF WOMEN’S STUD. 1 (2020); Jeremy C. De Chavez & Vincent Pacheco, *Masculinity in the Age of (Philippine) Populism: Spectacle, Hypermasculinity, and Rodrigo Duterte*, 9 MASCULINITIES & SOC. CHANGE 261 (2020).

7. Elizabeth A. Wood, *Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power: VLADIMIR PUTIN’S ICONIC RULE, 1999–2008*, 18 INT’L FEMINIST J. POLS. 329 (2016); Valerie Sperling, *Putin’s Macho Personality Cult*, 49 COMMUNIST & POST-COMMUNIST STUD. 13 (2016); Helena Goscilo, *Putin’s Performance of Masculinity: The Action Hero and Macho Sex-Object, in PUTIN AS CELEBRITY AND CULTURAL ICON* 180 (2012), <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/chapters/edit/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203108048-9&type=chapterpdf>.

8. Cenk Ozbay & Ozan Soybakis, *Political Masculinities: Gender, Power, and Change in Turkey*, SOCIAL POLITICS: INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN GENDER, STATE & SOCIETY 27 (2020); Cristina Ivan, *Revisiting Models of Political Masculinity in the Black Sea Region: Turkish Ottomanism and Russian Putinmania*, 9 INT’L J. OF THE IMAGE 45 (2018).

9. Ivan Jablonka, *Ivan Jablonka, historian: Trump’s agenda is driving a masculinist counter-revolution*, LE MONDE (Feb. 16, 2025), https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2025/02/16/ivan-jablonka-historian-trump-s-agenda-is-driving-a-masculinist-counter-revolution_6738220_23.html.

10. Phil Stewart et al., *Trump Fires Top U.S. General in Unprecedented Pentagon Shakeup*, REUTERS (Feb. 22, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-pushes-out-top-us-general-nominates-retired-three-star-2025-02-22>.

11. Noor Zafar, *Trump’s War Pardons Are Sabotaging the Military Justice System*, AM. C.L. UNION (Dec. 13, 2019), <https://www.aclu.org/news/national-security/trumps-war-pardons-are-sabotaging-the-military-justice-system>.

12. John Ismay, *U.S. Army Plans to Eliminate Office for Reducing Civilian Harm in War*, NEW YORK TIMES (Jan. 23, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/23/us/pentagon-civilian-deaths.html>.

Presidency, asserting claims over Panama, Greenland, Gaza or Canada in defiance of basic rules of international law.¹³ Even more spectacularly, the masculine ethos is visible from Ukraine to the Congo and from Ethiopia to Gaza as a form of paroxysmic violence between men but also, most blatantly, against non-men.¹⁴

All in all, the fundamentally gendered nature of aggression and violence as cultural and ideological symptoms of “hegemonic masculinity” has emerged as a constant far beyond the peculiarities of any one government or policy, that is simultaneously deeply immersed in an imperial and racist mindset.¹⁵ It coincides with a deep crisis in both the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello*. As to the former, the use of force has since at least the onset of the “War on Terror,” a model replicated transnationally and whose deep ramifications are still being felt, generalized the use of violence across borders; this has been accompanied by a loosening of the constraints on the use of force through technologies (e.g., cyberattacks) and normative discourse itself (e.g., humanitarian intervention); and it thrives on “exceptional” situations such as Israel-Palestine that do not fit the neat box of an armed attack by a state against the other. As to the latter, the law of war has proved vulnerable to capture and abuse both by non-state armed groups and sophisticated militaries keen to use it more as a legitimization of the use of force than as a limitation to it; it has been incapable of dealing with fundamental asymmetries in the regulation of the use of force; and it has reproduced fundamentally unequal patterns in warfare.

What should one make of that moment and what does it mean for international law? What is the long-term association of international law, war, and hegemonic masculinity? One starting point is that one cannot readily assume that this capture of political imaginations is entirely at odds with international law's own constitution, as I have sought to argue specifically in relation to the laws of war's dominant masculinist and heteronormative framing, even in its seemingly more benign and liberal variant.¹⁶ Rather, international law entertains a robustly constitutive relationship to masculinity's many variants and is itself a deeply gendered enterprise. As this propensity began to be conceptualized in the 1990s

13. Jeet Heer, *Trump's Phony Trade Wars Are Evidence of American Imperial Decline*, THE NATION (Feb. 5, 2025), <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/trump-phony-trade-wars>.

14. Tim Shand, *Masculinities and Putin's War in Ukraine*, 5 INT'L J. MEN'S SOC. & CMTY. HEALTH e18 (2022); Petr Kratochvíl & Míla O'Sullivan, *A War like No Other: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine as a War on Gender Order*, 32 EUR. SEC. 347 (2023).

15. Janie Leatherman, *Gender and U.S. Foreign Policy Hegemonic Masculinity, the War in Iraq, and the UN-Doing of World Order*, in GENDER AND AMERICAN POLITICS (2 ed. 2005).

16. Frédéric Mégret, *The Laws of War and the Structure of Masculine Power*, 19 MELBOURNE J. INT'L LAW 200 (2018); Frédéric Mégret, *Another Look at the Gendered Constitution of the Laws of War: Semantic Fields, Hegemonic Masculinities and the Reproduction of Heteronormativity*, 1 J. INT'L HUMANITARIAN LEGAL STUD. 1 (2023).

on the basis of a formidable development in feminist analysis of the law,¹⁷ it foregrounded the renewed investment by particular women in contesting the gendered structural inequities of international law.

This movement has garnered significant successes in the regulation of war as seen for example in the way sexual violence as a category has become much more central to the understanding of both the military institution, the laws of war and the *jus ad bellum*. At the same time, to suggest that it is the very anti-thesis of the masculinist ethos would be too simple. Some women's movements have also in late modernity been seduced by the prospect of the use of force, whether it is to justify humanitarian intervention to rescue women, to adopt a carceral agenda in relation to sexual violence, or to engage in broad exercises of self-defense, including against terrorism. Others have been inclined to romanticize the contribution that women might make to peace or the military, or emphasize diversity agendas that, ironically given some of the masculinist hostility they have attracted, sometimes remain deeply wedded to the centrality of the use of force and its further legitimization through feminization.

What, then, is the deeper connection of these iterations to the agenda of peace? How do feminist investments in the idea of peace not end up being coopted by mainstream masculine understandings of the law as merely pertaining to a specific "women's" constituency, the beneficiaries of gentlemanly *largesse*, or the acceptable side of masculine violence? What if feminist agendas merely become the acceptable form, a merely more feminine version of the centrality of violence to state building and imperial domination, whether by opposing enemies from within or from outside? What is the relationship of international law to both gender and peace? What does the current masculinist moment seek to displace and what does it imagine itself to be up against?

In this article, I¹⁸ propose to reflect on this moment and the

17. HILARY CHARLESWORTH & CHRISTINE CHINKIN, *THE BOUNDARIES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS* (2000).

18. I write this chapter as a male feminist sympathizer but nonetheless outsider, simultaneously keen to acknowledge his intellectual debt to the founding mothers of international law and to work through some of the dead ends that the male gaze on war has produced. In doing so, I am aware of the subtly dissonant effects of men engaging (in) feminist musings. On the one hand, a recognition that feminist thought is indeed a fundamental critique that international lawyers cannot afford to ignore and whose neglect reflects some of the worst instincts in the discipline (androcentrism, anti-intellectualism, and dogmatism). On the other hand, a wariness with the idea that men can "do feminism" from at least the more essentializing sectors of feminism; the risk of gendered appropriation and mainstreaming; and the ever-present danger of mansplaining. Julien Pieret, *Une justice pénale internationale vue par les femmes : continuités et bifurcations dans les analyses féministes de la pénalité*, CHAMP PÉNAL/PENAL FIELD (2016), <https://journals.openedition.org/champpenal/9224>; Kathleen A. Lahey, "Until Women Themselves Have Told All That They Have to Tell" *Symposium on Canadian Legal Scholarship*,

possibilities of problematizing this capture of the international legal imagination, by engaging in a counter-move, one that consists in looking back at the past of the idea of “peace” as it has been historically imagined and propounded by the so-called “women’s peace movement.”¹⁹ I am particularly interested in how the women’s peace movement, a self-consciously gendered movement to promote a particular value, has coexisted uneasily with dominant male musings, channeled through international law, about how to regulate the use of force. The article, then, asks the question of the extent to which women activists and thinkers have contributed, collectively and historically, to a distinct sensitivity on discussions of the topic, how that sensitivity has evolved over time, and what might be made of that legacy today. It argues that such a distinct sensitivity has indeed crystallized, and that rediscovering that narrative may even be crucial to efforts to renew, expand and ultimately challenge the dominant male-dominated narrative on the use of force.

The long arc of the women’s peace movement is presented here as exemplary of the promise and pitfalls of a gendered analysis of international law and of the tensions that have threatened that project even as its impact has unmistakably been felt. As we will see, earlier women’s contributions to the question were arguably far broader and more radical in their scope, entailing a deep critique of international law and anticipating on what might today be assessed as the true promise of feminist approaches to international law.²⁰ However, these contributions were also often contradictory and in tension with each other. They revealed strong disagreement about what a women- or feminist-informed conception of peace might mean, let alone a general notion of peace. If “honoring our foremothers”²¹ is to be meaningful, then, it must be coupled with a problematizing of both peace and womanhood as evolving social constructs that have often problematically relied on each other.

The article proceeds from an awareness of the risks of suggesting a

23 OSGOODE HALL L. J. 519 (1985). Having said that, I also wholly endorse the idea that if the feminist critique stands for anything, it is ultimately the problematization of gender and that, as such, it provides the tools for men drawn to the emancipatory promise of challenging toxic and hegemonic heteronormative masculinities. I also write on the basis of my own experience as a once conscript (sergeant) in the French army and UNPROFOR volunteer, mindful of the problematic character of the military institution.

19. RUTH ROACH PIERSON, *WOMEN AND PEACE: THEORETICAL, HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES* (2019); HARRIET HYMAN ALONSO, *PEACE AS A WOMAN’S ISSUE: A HISTORY OF THE U.S. MOVEMENT FOR WORLD PEACE AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS* (1993).

20. Hilary Charlesworth, *Feminist Methods in International Law*, 93 AM. J. INT’L L. 379 (1999).

21. Diane Marie Amann, *International Law and the Future of Peace*, 111 107TH ASIL PROCEEDINGS 2013 (2014).

specific “women’s vision” on any topic, and the fraught implications of the idea of an inherently feminine voice in international law, tied as it may be to essentialist tropes about gender. It will resist not only essentialization but idealization or romanticization of femininity when it comes to peace.²² One of its highlights will be the extent to which feminism has provided no respite intellectually from the challenges of thinking about peace. Indeed, it can certainly not be taken for granted that femininity has historically been associated with peace: some women have shamed men for not participating in war efforts²³ or at least supported their country in war as part of a predictable playing out of nationalist affiliations;²⁴ some ended up supporting policies (such as appeasement of Germany) that we have reason to be wary of in retrospect;²⁵ and others have even been associated with militaristic policies of aggression, not to mention genocide.²⁶

The claim, then, will be rather more modest: namely that, over time, a number of specific women identifying as such politically on the international stage have sought to advance what *they* described as a women’s approach to peace and war. This they did as part of particular efforts that are better understood as part of early feminist or proto-feminist efforts to deploy gendered analysis. Not all women at the time chose to engage in women’s advocacy for peace and indeed women have historically been well represented in the broader peace movement alongside men who were not particularly drawn to identifying specifically as women in that context. In other words, this article seeks to avoid essentializing women’s contributions on the question, acknowledging that women’s approaches to peace, such as they have been, inevitably emanated from a certain positioning at certain times and in certain places that centered various politics of womanhood. The search for an inherently feminine approach to war and law would be as doomed as it is relatively uninteresting compared to the historically contextualized study of those actual women who, at any given time, decided to claim the

22. Inger Skjelsbaek, *Is Femininity Inherently Peaceful?*, in GENDER, PEACE AND CONFLICT 47 (Inger Skjelsbæk & Dan Smith eds., 2001).

23. Stirling Moorey, *Step Forward the Cowards!—Humiliation, Shame and Countersbame in Memories of the White Feather Campaign*, 7 BRIT. J. MIL. HIST. 39 (2021); Peter J. Hart, *The White Feather Campaign: A Struggle with Masculinity During World War I*, 2 INQUIRIES J. (2010).

24. Alison S. Fell, *French Women Do Not Wish to Talk about Peace: Julie Siegfried and the Response of the Conseil National Des Femmes Françaises to the First World War*, in THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN WARTIME: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES, 1914–19 53 (Alison S. Fell & Ingrid Sharp eds., 2007).

25. Julie V. Gottlieb, *To Speak a Few Words of Comfort to Them: Conservative Women’s Support for Chamberlain and Appeasement*, in GUILTY WOMEN, FOREIGN POLICY, AND APPEASEMENT IN INTER-WAR BRITAIN 101 (2015).

26. WENDY LOWER, *HITLER’S FURIES: GERMAN WOMEN IN THE NAZI KILLING FIELDS* (2013).

“women’s” mantle for a range of political ends.²⁷

The difficulties of extracting a clear genealogy even from this relatively pared down account of “women” in international law remains, however, for a number of reasons. First, the women discussed in this article were very much, at every junction, women of their times, struggling with some of the same intractable dilemmas of international regulation that men did. Many did so in conversation and allyship with some men. Not all women, by any means, were even interested in questions of international peace anymore, of course, than men were. One of the challenges therefore will be distinguishing women’s vision on peace from the broader fields of women’s activism to which it was often intimately connected on the one hand, and from the field of men’s (or “men and women’s”) pacifism on the other.²⁸

Second, as will appear, the women’s peace movement was and remains rife with productive tensions and oppositions. Indeed, recognizing that the women involved were complicated and contradictory is to acknowledge their historical and intellectual agency. To chart the contours of women’s approaches to the international law on the use of force, therefore, is not to search for a feminine ontology but to highlight a halting, contradictory and hesitant process, albeit one marked by solidarity and the subjective willingness to articulate a specific women’s point of view on the issue. As will appear, complicating the “woman” in the “women’s peace movement” should count as one of that movement’s very legacies, as much as its contribution to our understanding of peace. This has, however, also presided over an almost endless process of fragmentation in women’s pacifist politics.

Third, the women of the peace movement have not traditionally and specifically been international lawyers or, for that matter, been *that* interested in international law. As we will see, there are reasons for this, both sociological and ideological. Methodologically, this does create hurdles since the article may appear to contend that women have “done” international law without necessarily doing so deliberately or being particularly aware that they were.²⁹ This hurdle can be overcome if one

27. Perhaps confusingly, of course, these women may at times have themselves thought there were fundamental characteristics of womanhood that naturally inclined towards a “woman’s position” on a range of issues; this does not prevent us, however, from treating such claims for what they were, namely themselves merely a form of performative positioning in the field of war and gender.

28. Michael Salla, *Women and War, Men and Pacifism*, GENDER, PEACE AND CONFLICT 68 (2001); Berenice A. Carroll, *Feminism and Pacifism: Historical and Theoretical Connections*, in WOMEN AND PEACE 2 (2019), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429426674-2/feminism-pacifism-historical-theoretical-connections-berenice-carroll>.

29. Immi Tallgren, *Absent or Invisible? Women Intellectuals and the Dawn of the Discipline*, in THE DAWN OF THE DISCIPLINE: INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND ITS EARLY EXPONENTS (Immi Tallgren & Frédéric Mégret eds., 2020).

adopts a capacious understanding of what international law-making entails: not only the somewhat rarefied practice of an arcane discipline by (mostly, historically) men, but the totality of intellectual forces that go to make international law what it is. Just because one is not writing directly *in* international law does not mean that one is not writing *about* international law, at least indirectly.³⁰ In that respect, there is no doubt that the women's peace movement has historically shared an overarching concern for peace with the profession of international lawyers. Partly the argument will be that one counts as international law-making is precisely the stake of participation by subaltern voices.³¹

The article is not a historical article, and it largely relies on the considerable existing research labor among professional historians of the women's peace movement. What it does try to do is specifically interrogate that work from the perspective of an international lawyer. It draws inspiration from the rediscovery of early feminist writers in international relations³² which obviously has some significant overlaps with international law. It will seek to trace genealogies between some of the first pacifist feminists and current feminists writing on questions of war and peace. Finally, although the article is principally interested in what have come to be known as feminist approaches to international law, it acknowledges the potentially anachronistic usage of the term and the fact that some women that have had a leading role in upholding resistance to the war narrative in the early days may not have described themselves as specifically feminist. Nonetheless, the article is largely premised on the idea that if womanhood is a construct, then the woman's peace movement must itself be understood from the broadly feminist lens devoted to problematizing that construct.

The article begins with a very broad description of the women's peace movement, as it is conventionally understood to have emerged in the crucible of the First World War, to set the stage for the argument. I seek to understand that early movement's programmatic specificity, notably in relation to or rather in comparison with international law, itself understood as a competing "movement" (since it is, after all, also the product of male activist investments energies of a sort).³³ In Part III, I highlight how the early women's peace movement gradually fell apart throughout the 20th Century, as ultimately too indebted to a particular white hegemonic liberal conception of womanhood, the

30. IMMI TALLGREN, PORTRAITS OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW: NEW NAMES AND FORGOTTEN FACES? (2022).

31. I draw here on ideas explored in other realms. See for example Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *The International Human Rights Movement Today Symposium: Reflecting on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 24 MD. J. INT'L L. 56 (2009).

32. Lucian M. Ashworth, *Feminism, War and the Prospects for Peace*, 13 INT'L FEMINIST J. POLS. 25 (2011).

33. MARTTI KOSKENNIEMI, *THE GENTLE CIVILIZER OF NATIONS: THE RISE AND FALL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 1870–1960* 14 (2001).

problematization of which could only lead to its fragmentation and partial absorption by a range of competing intersectional concerns, with an attendant devaluation or at least problematization of peace as such. This leads me to Part IV, where I emphasize the turn to a more conventional humanitarian posture, the narrowing of the women's peace movement's concerns to the fate of women in war, and the association with governance feminism. In asking what might be reclaimed from the legacy of the women's peace movement throughout the 20th Century in the midst of various "forever wars" (most notably, the so-called War on Terror), then, the article reflects on the politics of transgression, solidarity, and normalization.

II. WOMEN'S PACIFISM AS (IMPLICIT) CRITIQUE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW?

The peace movement was not initially particularly associated with women and indeed such groups as the Universal Peace Union or the Interparliamentary Union were largely male dominated. Leading pacifists in the nineteenth century such as Alfred Hermann Fried, Hodgson Pratt, Richard Cobden or Frédéric Passy were mostly men (the latter for example thought women useful to the peace movement but opposed women's suffrage). Nonetheless, nineteenth century developments in women's activism, notably, the suffragettes and the abolitionist movement (in relation to slavery but also, eventually, to women's trafficking) provided platforms for transnational socialization between like-minded women such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and the International Council for Women, as well as countless domestic and local organizations. Pioneers such as Bertha von Suttner, Anna Bernhardine Eckstein, Caroline Playne or Jane Addams participated in the vast peace movement alongside men, but they were also made aware of the potential for a distinct sensitivity to international questions of war and peace.

It was, however, mostly the First World War and its aftermath which crystallized the ascent of a highly distinctive women's peace movement that claimed peace, in the words of Harriet Hyman Alonso, as a "woman's issue."³⁴ During the first half of the 20th Century, the peace movement, in fact, became increasingly a *women's* movement and continued to be so intermittently afterwards. At no point was the women's peace movement dominant in politics, or even necessarily amidst various feminist endeavors. But it did coalesce over time and in response to world events around a series of structuring themes which also attracted the attention of international lawyers. The women's peace movement truly came into its own during the First World War. In the United States, the Woman's Peace Party, under the leadership of Jane

34. HARRIET HYMAN ALONSO, *PEACE AS A WOMAN'S ISSUE: A HISTORY OF THE U.S. MOVEMENT FOR WORLD PEACE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS* (1993).

Addams, activated against U.S. participation in the war. A delegation of European women travelled to the United States as early as 1914 to convince President Wilson to act as a mediator. But it was the 1915 International Congress of Women (1915 Women's Peace Conference) in the Hague that stands out as the most spectacular and well-known manifestation of women's pacifism in that era. The event involved more than a thousand women from twelve countries meeting in the Hague at the height of the First World War. It was organized in the space of only a few months and participants had to brave hostility and recrimination from propaganda outlets and public opinions.

The initiative for the meeting came from Dutch suffragist Aletta Jacobs and it was chaired by Jane Addams, an American peace and social activist who would receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. The Conference produced a series of solutions ("Some Principles of a Peace Settlement") that pressed participants in the war to define the terms of peace. It recommended a continuing role for women after the war in the management of international affairs. Several prominent women pacifists such as Rosika Schwimmer and Inez Milholland were also involved in the effort by Henry Ford to fund a "peace ship" mission to Europe to encourage belligerent nations to convene a peace conference.³⁵ It is worth noting that many women decided not to participate and aligned themselves with their states' nationalist agendas, often enlisting as nurses or code breakers.³⁶ They went as far as to criticize their sisters and former suffragette allies for meeting across enemy lines. The "peacettes" movement survived and was much admired in some quarters but was also the object of virulent denigration. Roosevelt described the women involved in the peace ship initiative as "hysterical pacifists."³⁷

In due course, the range of women's peace organizations would expand to include the more radical Women's Peace Union and the more centrist Committee on the Cause and Cure of War. Already in the 1920s fractures were beginning to appear between those opposed to participation in any war like the former and those more accommodating of the needs of self-defense, with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) somewhere in the middle. Does this varied group, at any rate, suggest a specific corpus of visions about international law and war? By specific, I do not mean that the views in questions could not be shared by male pacifists but that they nonetheless represent, collectively, a distinctive and intellectually coherent attitude to war and law. This is a complex question because women's pacifism was not

35. JANE ADDAMS, *PEACE AND BREAD IN TIME OF WAR* (2020).

36. Marianne Walle, *Allemagne, 1915. Le féminisme à l'épreuve de la guerre*, 219 *GUERRES MONDIALES ET CONFLITS CONTEMPORAINS* 63 (2005).

37. PEG A. LAMPHIER & ROSANNE WELCH, *WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY: A SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL ENCYCLOPEDIA AND DOCUMENT COLLECTION* 181 (2017).

explicitly about international law. But could it be understood as an at least implicit critique of international law? I will contend that it was, in fact, both inspired by some ideas taken from international law and the expression over time of an increasingly critical distance from it.

To be sure, the women's movement was not hostile to international lawyers' initiatives and, for example, shared in the great hopes of the 1899 and 1907 Hague conferences. Bertha von Suttner participated in the First Hague Convention with funding from Theodor Herzl and would become the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with international lawyer Tobias Asser on the development of an international order of peace.³⁸ Some of the 1915 Women's Peace Conference demands would feed into Wilson's liberal post-war agenda. The insistence on the establishment of international arbitration, the abolition of secret treaties or the need for consent of populations if a territory was transferred would not have been out of place in a range of mainstream peace pamphlets. Jane Addams wrote approvingly of international arbitration following the inauguration of the Peace Palace, somewhat incautiously heralding in 1913 that "the very codification of the body of international law . . . would bring about a changed state of mind" and that "there is no doubt that the mere existence of The Hague tribunal has tended to make war hard, that it has induced the nations to search their hearts before they ventured to open hostilities."³⁹ The WILPF naturally located in Geneva and was part of the League of Nations' emerging ecosystem. It supported the Briand-Kellogg Pact.⁴⁰

Some post-War organizations such as the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War came much closer to aligning themselves with then emerging and characteristically international legal pursuits such as the Briand-Kellogg Pact. They connected to legacies going all the way back to the 19th Century that had seen some women's organizations seduced by the promised temperance of the law on aggression. But there is also much evidence that women pacifists and male international lawyers proceeded from very different spaces and intellectual legacies. One might sociologically contrast, in that respect, the 1899 and 1907 Hague Peace Conference, on the one hand, and the 1915 Women's Peace Conference, on the other. On a superficial level of course, these were somewhat similarly inspired events, both concerned with the conditions of world peace and happening in the same symbolic city associated with the early and subsequent rise of international adjudication. Yet on another level,

38. Janne Nijman, *International Women's Day: Janne Nijman Puts the Spotlight on Peace Activist Bertha von Suttner (1843 - 1914)*, ASSER INST. (Mar. 8, 2019), <https://www.asser.nl/about-the-asser-institute/news/international-women-s-day-janne-nijman-puts-the-spotlight-on-peace-activist-bertha-von-suttner-1843-1914>.

39. JANE ADDAMS, JANE ADDAMS'S ESSAYS AND SPEECHES ON PEACE 53 (2006).

40. Women's Int'l League for Peace & Freedom [WILPF], *Resolutions*, (7th Congress, Grenoble, France, May 15th–19th, 1932), https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WILPF_triennial_congress_1932.pdf.

the two could not be further apart. The 1899 and 1907 conferences were elite, almost all-male diplomatic affairs,⁴¹ involving the ordinary conduct of international diplomacy. They were also largely prospective, armchair enterprises, at a safe distance from the wars of the nineteenth or the twentieth century. Those men of 1899 and 1907 who survived until the Great War would not go on to have particularly distinguished or visible stances during it beyond supporting their states' foreign policies. The 1915 Women's Hague Peace Conference, by contrast, was a deeply transgressive, provocative, and even subaltern response to the reality of war here and now as it affected the lives of women concretely. It was also, indirectly, both an attempt to carry over the spirit of 1899 and 1907 in new directions and an indictment of these meetings' limitations and failings.

If women pacifists were wary of international law, (male) international lawyers for their part were largely oblivious to the efforts undertaken in their close vicinity, and sometimes frankly hostile. Infamously, Jane Addams was refused admission into the American Society of International Law.⁴² One finds very few references to the work of the WILPF or other groups in leading international law journals (except in relation to the unrelated question of women's nationality),⁴³ and those references that exist tend to be oblique. In a very short review for the *AJIL* of a book based on a conference on chemical warfare organized by the WILPF, Amos A. Fries, a U.S. general, anti-communist and chemical warfare advocate could barely hide his masculine scorn:

This book . . . is neither accurate, nor scientific, nor sensible. It belongs in that class of pacifist literature which would have us believe that weakness spells safety It is full of errors and direct misrepresentations of fact, or erroneous conclusions from twisted facts, or insufficient data.⁴⁴

41. In truth, though, women were never far, and leading female pacifists did at least have a role of influence in the background, discreetly lobbying the men, within the parameters of what was considered acceptable. Von Suttner, for example, was "easily acknowledged by friend and foe as the undisputed standard-bearer of pacifism" and "she invited the formidable peace lobby gathered at The Hague to her salons and dinner parties and also through them, all well within the acceptable confines of establishment, as able to exert considerable influence on quite a number of susceptible diplomats." ARTHUR EYFFINGER, *THE 1899 HAGUE PEACE CONFERENCE: THE PARLIAMENT OF MAN, THE FEDERATION OF THE WORLD* 56 (1999). Nonetheless, genuine sociological differences remained prompting Eyffinger to note that "[a]t The Hague in 1899, with very few exceptions, the various worlds never really came to grips." *Id.* at 67.

42. Alona E. Evans & Carol Per Lee Plumb, *Women and the American Society of International Law*, 68 AM. J. INT'L L. 290 (1974).

43. Ellen C. Dubois, *Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930*, in *TRANSNATIONALIZING WOMEN'S HISTORY* (Karen Offen ed., 2010).

44. Amos A. Fries, *Chemical Warfare. An Abridged Report of Frankfurt-on-the-Main Conference, 1929, Called by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1930. Pp. 89. 2s., 25 AM. J. INT'L L. 417 (1931).

One of the few mentions of pacifism, let alone women's pacifism, in the columns of the AJIL is on the occasion of Rosika Schwimmer's denial of citizenship, but only from the perspective of the Supreme Court's treatment of said denial.⁴⁵

In what follows, I focus on only the most distinctive of women's peace contributions, showing how they fed on existing international legal initiatives but also challenged them. For example, the call for further international cooperation and even a "Third Hague Conference" clearly could be seen to insert the women's movement in the trajectory of international law. However, this was not always the case and in fact women's peace activism often took its participants in directions that were clearly at odds with mainstream international law.⁴⁶

A. Embodying Pacifism

Rather than looking at the women's movements thought, one way of interpreting its contribution to international law might be as a form of *praxis* which, in many ways, spoke louder than words. Participants in the women's peace movement exhibited an unusual ability and willingness to involve themselves collectively in ways that clearly challenged the status quo. Of course, men's own creation of institutions devoted to international law and peace has been well documented, but it took the quite different form of investment in scholarly movements oriented towards the professional and technocratic development of international law. Notably, the civilizing mission of international law was understood as seeking conditions for world peace but not particularly pacifist in the sense of producing a fundamental critique of war's social origins.

By contrast, women in the peace movement came from all circles and had to go out of their way to self-organize beyond the sort of rarefied professional socialization characteristic of international law. The peace movement, with some significant limitations that will be addressed in the next section, involved women from many horizons including middle class women agitating for the suffrage and labor activists with more distinctly working-class backgrounds. Moreover, women engaged in pacifist agitation at times at considerable personal risk and very much against the grain, particularly with the 1915 Women's Peace Congress, which led to sanctions and harassment of many participants.⁴⁷ A

45. Henry B. Hazard, *Supreme Court Holds Madam Schwimmer, Pacifist, Ineligible to Naturalization*, 23 AM. J. INT'L L. 626 (1929).

46. In this section, I focus on women who were most clearly associated with the peace movement, but I note there were clearly a range of women's organizations such as the International Alliance of Women or the International Council of Women whose reformism was not particularly interested in pacifism.

47. For example, Rose Pastor Stokes was prosecuted in 1917 under the Espionage Act for accusing the U.S. government of being allied with profiteers. Rosika Schwimmer suffered the indignity of becoming stateless after the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed

willingness to put their reputations, freedom and even lives on the line thus characterized the women's peace movement from the beginning, something which cannot generally be said of international lawyers.

Nor was the movement merely concerned with proposing new norms. The creation of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace for example, quite boldly engaged in parallel diplomacy with the warring parties and agitated (unsuccessfully, obviously) for the organization of a conference to bring all sides of the war together. That legacy can be observed as late as the Women for a Meaningful Summit privately meeting with Gorbachev in 1985. This commitment to concrete action was also evident in such initiatives as the Women's International Democratic Federation sending an international study commission to investigate U.N. military occupation in North Korea.⁴⁸ In short, the women's peace movement, in what it did rather than what it said showcased a form of embodied struggle that helped reshape the contours of what might be done by social activists in times of war.

A second characteristic of the women's peace movement was its transnationalism. War and the threat of war disrupted the ability of women to fight collectively and across borders, which had been one of their greatest strengths in peacetime. Moreover, it threatened to push back the agenda for women's rights by many years, under the guise of soliciting all forces to support men at war.⁴⁹ A continued claim to transnational organization was a way of rejecting this potential setback. This was not the "fair weather" transnationalism of international lawyers' commitment to commerce and exchange, but a transnationalism expressed at the highest moment of nationalism of the "Union sacrée." The cosmopolitan solidarity of womanhood that was on vivid display in the Hague was also deeply corrosive of the sort of methodological nationalism that undergirded international legal efforts to regulate war and the automatic assumption that matters of war and peace were to be decided by states, and certainly not civil society operating across lines of "enmity."

A third characteristic was the women's movement's tendency to play with, even as it criticized, gender stereotypes in ways that highlighted the

that her pacifist activism barred her from U.S. citizenship. The 1919 New York State Lusk investigation particularly targeted feminist pacifists as subversives because of their suspected lack of loyalty. One West German participant was tried for participation in the WIDF mission to North Korea. Charlotta Bass, a black journalist and peace activist was harassed by the FBI in her late years and considered a national security threat for her work in advocating against the H-bomb. The list goes on.

48. Celia Donert, *From Communist Internationalism to Human Rights: Gender, Violence and International Law in the Women's International Democratic Federation Mission to North Korea, 1951*, 25 CONTEMP. EURO. HIST. 313 (2016).

49. RENÉE DRAY-BENSOUSSAN, LA PREMIÈRE GUERRE MONDIALE A-T-ELLE RELANCÉ OU ARRÊTÉ LES REVENDICATIONS POLITIQUES FÉMINISTES? (2016), <https://hal-amu.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01500804>.

importance of gender to both war and the resistance to it. The ability to secure a foothold in conventional, male dominated international politics sometimes involved a willingness to play on gendered tropes. For example, Jeannet Rankin liked to claim that “peace is a woman’s job.”⁵⁰ One claim was that women “were the ones to suffer most, both in the perpetual violence against women during a military occupation and through the deaths of sons, husbands, lovers, brothers and fathers”⁵¹ The critique of masculinity and elevation of femininity as a form of salvation was particularly evident in the post-First World War work of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) which, according to

... subverted male ideology, reinterpreting it in a way which gave priority to women and women’s culture. Borrowing from temperance literature, WCTU pamphlets portrayed men as brutish and susceptible to violence. Like devil liquor, the martial spirit worked as a drug on the soul of man, seducing him from the path of peace. Women, who had learned to control their own wills and tempers, were the true followers of Christ’s teaching. Woman’s role was helping man to overcome his violent tendencies.⁵²

During the Cold War, Women Strike for Peace emphasized the power of the concerned mother as an active fighter for peace (the movement was born, in fact, from early women’s concerns about strontium-90 being released by atmospheric testing of nuclear bombs and making its way into mothers’ milk).⁵³

But resorting to such tropes was by no means an unambiguous strategy. It made women easier to dismiss as “peace ladies” even when that was an unfair description, and “allowed male-dominated political elites to marginalize peace as a women’s issue.”⁵⁴ Rosika Schwimmer only saw her denial of U.S. citizenship on the basis of her pacifist beliefs briefly overturned because a U.S. court found that “women are considered incapable of bearing arms” (and therefore could not possibly

50. Joan Hoff Wilson, “Peace Is a Woman’s Job. Jeannette Rankin and American Foreign Policy: Her Lifework as a Pacifist,” in “PEACE IS A WOMAN’S JOB, JEANNETTE RANKIN AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: HER LIFEWORK AS A PACIFIST 270 (2013), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110971125.270/pdf>.

51. ALONSO, *supra* note 34 at 57.

52. Susan Zeiger, *Finding a Cure for War: Women’s Politics and the Peace Movement in the 1920s*, 24 JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY 69, 71 (1990).

53. Amy G. Swerdlow, *The Politics of Motherhood: The Case of Women Strike for Peace and the Test Ban Treaty (nuclear Bomb)*, 1984, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/303306361/abstract/724A08BF013B4F8APQ> (last visited Feb 17, 2025).

54. PETRA GOEDDE, *THE POLITICS OF PEACE: A GLOBAL COLD WAR HISTORY* 130 (2019).

refuse to do so).⁵⁵ Having sometimes invoked such cultural associations, many feminists were eager to then shake them off. The WILPF certainly had a more nurturing association in its early years but later on steered clear of making claims on behalf of gender dictating their politics, preferring to emphasize the need for democratic representation of women.⁵⁶

Behind this tactical positioning lied deeper and divisive discussions about the nature of violence and, in particular, whether it was irredeemably gendered. For the more essentialist within the women's peace camp, the violence of war was inherently masculine. The First World War had been described, strikingly, as "maleness run riot."⁵⁷ Moral feminism provided justification, by contrast, for the notion that "women's socialization as nurturers and upholders of virtue could actually be used to their advantage."⁵⁸ For others, the idea that there was something uniquely feminine about the love of peace was a pipe dream.⁵⁹ That underlying debate was an intellectual one, but it was also one embodied in a multitude of tactical and strategic choices by women activists.

B. Wariness with Humanitarianism and Anti-Militarism

A second strand in the women's peace movement that is today a bit forgotten was an early wariness with the mere *humanitarian* regulation of war. Of course, many women were historically associated with the rise of a distinct humanitarian sensitivity in war.⁶⁰ Humanitarianism played powerfully to tropes about succor in the battlefield provided by women imagined as care givers, such as Florence Nightingale. Moreover, women's movements did certainly occasionally at least strategically invoke the commission of war crimes to bring attention to the atrocity of war. For example, Celia Donnert has explored the ways in which the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) international study commission in Korea invoked international law to denounce massacres of Koreans by U.S. troops, seeking to have General

55. Megan Threlkeld, *Citizenship, Gender, and Conscience: United States v. Schwimmer*, 40 J. SUP. CT. HIST. 154 (2015).

56. Carrie Foster, *The Women's Interwar Peace Movement*, 28 CANADIAN REV. AM. STUD. 189 (1998).

57. Claire M. Tylec, "Maleness Run Riot"—*The Great War and Women's Resistance to Militarism*, 11 WOMEN'S STUD. INT'L F. 199 (1988).

58. Melissa Anne Hensley, *Feminine Virtue and Feminist Fervor: The Impact of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the 1930s*, 21 AFFILIA 146, 155 (2006).

59. Isabelle Vahe, *Jeanne Mélin (1877-1964): une féministe radicale pendant la Grande Guerre*, in FEMMES FACE À LA GUERRE (Alison S. Fell ed., 2009).

60. Dolores Martín-Moruno, *A Female Genealogy of Humanitarian Action: Compassion as a Practice in the Work of Josephine Butler, Florence Nightingale and Sarah Monod*, 36 MED., CONFLICT AND SURVIVAL 19 (2020).

MacArthur tried as a "war criminal."⁶¹

Nonetheless, many leading women in the peace movement were wary of the possibility of war truly being humanized, specifically on account of women's own experience in war. Bertha von Suttner, the only woman to attend the second Hague Peace Conference (1907), was dispirited by what she saw as its emphasis on the laws of war, insisting in her Nobel acceptance speech that securing peace was

... what the second Hague Conference should be discussing rather than the proposed topics concerning the laws and practices of war at sea, the bombardment of ports, towns, and villages, the laying of mines, and so on. The contents of this agenda demonstrate that, although the supporters of the existing structure of society, which accepts war, come to a peace conference prepared to modify the nature of war, they are basically trying to keep the present system intact.⁶²

As one resolution adopted in the Hague in 1915 put it, "[t]his International Congress of Women opposes the assumption that women can be protected under the conditions of modern warfare."⁶³ Indeed, although the women of 1915 called for a third Hague Conference, they were careful to underline, lest they be mistaken, that this was not "to deal ... with the rules of warfare."⁶⁴ When most international lawyers were turning their attention to documenting and theorizing the war crimes of the other side for example, the women's peace movement strove until late to discover the conditions under which peace might be obtained. One sympathetic contemporary commentator was, in fact, "struck by the inordinate amount of time spent in an effort to 'humanize' warfare ... , and the small space devoted to devising means for making war avoidable."⁶⁵

This wariness with humanitarianism went hand in hand with a deeper aversion to the militarization of society. Rather than the primary problem of war being that of its military excesses, some women pacifists saw *militarism* as the key problem of war. Jane Addams deplored that the "very existence" of "the huge standing armies of Europe means that the maneuvers of war become the daily business of thousands of men during the very best years of their lives" and that "these impressive preparations have themselves made for war."⁶⁶ Her offhand remark in a speech to the effect that young men needed some sort of drug to engage in bayonet

61. Donert, *supra* note 48.

62. OLGA S. OPFELL, *THE LADY LAUREATES: WOMEN WHO HAVE WON THE NOBEL PRIZE* 15 (1986).

63. JANE ADDAMS ET AL., *WOMEN AT THE HAGUE: THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF WOMEN AND ITS RESULTS* 150 (1915).

64. *Id.* at 155.

65. Louis P. Lochner, *The International Peace Congress of Women*, 77 *ADVOC. PEACE* (1894-1920) 173 (1915).

66. ADDAMS, *supra* note 39 at 59.

charges created a firestorm.⁶⁷ Mary Sargent Florence, Catherine Marshall and C. K. Ogden devoted an entire book in 1915 to the idea that “[m]ilitarism has been the curse of women, as women, from the first dawn of social life.”⁶⁸ Among more distinctly anti-militarist suggestions of inter-war women pacifists were the “elimination of narrowly nationalistic textbooks from the schools, abolition of compulsory military training from colleges and high schools, . . . abolition of private manufacture of and trade in munitions.”⁶⁹ The Zurich Congress of the WILPF (Zurich Congress) urged the “abolition of conscription in all states joining the League,”⁷⁰ and asked for an amnesty for war prisoners particularly “political prisoners, including conscientious objectors to military services” and those sent to Siberia.⁷¹

The endorsement of conscientious objectors by the WILPF was, in fact, nothing short of resounding. Although carefully worded to “recognize the devotion . . . of those who believed that in offering their lives in war they were helping to end war” (note: rather than bring victory to their country), it put on the same plane:

[T]hose who, with equal courage and, as we believe, with deeper insight, fought war by refusing to take part in it. It fortifies our courage and our faith in the achievement of permanent peace, to know that in so many countries thousands of young men have for that end counted it worth the cost to bear the loss of health, fortune[,] and friends and to face imprisonment, obloquy and death.⁷²

This evidently went far beyond what international law has historically had to say on the matter, which is typically limited at best to a defense of conscientious objection insofar as it is covered by freedom of religion and is certainly not substantively committed to it. This anti-militaristic strand in feminism would lead the WILPF to convince the U.S. Senate to launch the investigation of the Nye Committee, which established the extent to which Wall Street finance and the weapons industry had promoted the American entry into World War I. It would become magnified during the Cold War as more connections were established between militarism, patriarchy, war, and ecological

67. Scott L. Pratt, *Jane Addams: Patriotism in Time of War*, 28 MIDWEST STUD. PHIL. 102 (2004).

68. MARY SARGANT FLORENCE ET AL., *MILITARISM VERSUS FEMINISM: AN ENQUIRY AND A POLICY DEMONSTRATING THAT MILITARISM INVOLVES THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN* (1915).

69. ADDAMS, *supra* note 39 at 354.

70. *Resolutions Adopted at the Second Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (1919), WOMEN'S INT'L LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM, at 4, https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1919.pdf [hereinafter WOMEN'S INT'L LEAGUE].

71. *Id.* at 7.

72. *Id.* at 15 (Resolution 29).

destruction.⁷³

C. Radical Pacifism as a Critique of the Jus Contra Bellum

A third little noticed but very significant difference between the women's peace agenda and international law as it began maturing after the First World War was the degree of emphasis on aggression as a specific marker of what is wrong with war. As is well-known, international lawyers have long been preoccupied, via the Just War tradition, with the question of whether some wars are legal and the possibility that some are not. The question of aggressive war became an increasingly central focal point for international lawyers during the First World War, laying the basis for "war guilt"⁷⁴ and an emphasis on the party that initiated hostilities. The women's peace movement certainly rejected any notion of a "right of conquest." By contrast with international lawyers, however, it seems to have been much less fixated on who had started the war and the question of responsibilities for war.

In fact, the organization of the women's peace congress in 1915 included a commitment by participants to *not* discuss the question of the "the relative national responsibility for or conduct of the present war." Instead, governments were urged to "put an end to this bloodshed, and to begin peace negotiations,"⁷⁵ with little distinction in terms of war responsibilities. Therefore, the transnational embodiment of pacifism was not merely an activist tactic: it also contained within it a radical critique of even well-meaning dominant approaches to the problem of international order focused on ascribing blame. This reluctance to designate war responsibilities was visible even after the First World War, when in 1919 the Zurich Congress denounced the final terms of the Versailles treaty imposed by the victors in the most startling terms:

By guaranteeing the fruits of the secret treaties to the conquerors, the terms of peace tacitly sanction secret diplomacy, deny the principles of self-determination, recognize the right of the victors to the spoils of war, and create all over Europe discords and animosities, which can only lead to future wars. By the demand for the disarmament of one set of belligerents only, the principle of justice is violated and the rule of force is continued. By the financial and economic proposals a hundred million people of this generation in the heart of Europe are condemned to poverty, disease and despair, which must result in the spread of hatred and anarchy within each nation.⁷⁶

The WILPF was also incensed by the stealthy war then conducted

73. *Id.*

74. ISABEL V. HULL, A SCRAP OF PAPER: BREAKING AND MAKING INTERNATIONAL LAW DURING THE GREAT WAR (2014), <http://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7591/9780801470653/html>.

75. ADDAMS ET AL., *supra* note 63 at 151.

76. WOMEN'S INT'L LEAGUE, *supra* note 70, at 2.

against Russia and Hungary and in particular the existence of a blockade. It urged not only that it be lifted but “to prohibit the use of transport from one country to another for the conveyance of luxuries until the necessities of life are supplied to all people” and “to ration the people of every country so that the starving may be fed.”⁷⁷

The criticism of Versailles further extended to a wariness with the more robust aspects of then emerging collective security arrangements. It was not that the WILPF did not support the “[e]stablishment of machinery for arbitration and conciliation” or the “abolition of secret treaties”—although it might certainly have shaped those differently.⁷⁸ For example, the Woman’s Peace Party insisted on a proposal for mediation, as developed by the Canadian Julia Grace Wales, which would have provided a sort continuous *bons offices* by intellectuals from neutral states rather than collective security or adjudication against the wrongdoer. A permanent Council of Conciliation and Investigation was to be appointed “for the settlement of international differences arising from economic competition, expanding commerce, increasing population and changes in social and political standards.”⁷⁹

But the WILPF was wary of the possibility that the League might enforce its decisions through military pressure or food blockades and insisted on the importance of thinking of “other means.” More importantly, its enthusiasm for such developments as were inscribed in the Covenant was significantly tempered by the continuation of practices whose abolition it felt were a precondition of lasting peace. In short, the typical Wilsonian internationalist prescription for international order was described implicitly as operating on the relatively superficial level of international legal superstructures, in ways that neglected some of the underlying conditions (including material) of war. On the international level, for example, the WILPF argued for “total disarmament” and as early as 1915 had pleaded that “all countries should, by . . . an international agreement, take over the manufacture of arms and munitions of war and should control all international traffic in the same.”⁸⁰ Fascination with weapons was specifically associated by organizations such as the WCTU with masculinity.⁸¹

Its plan for peace also included what might today seem like quite a paradoxical economic prescription including “universal free trade”⁸² and

77. *Id.* at 1.

78. *Id.* at 3.

79. ADDAMS ET AL., *supra* note 63 at 151.

80. *Resolutions Adopted at the First Congress of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom*, WOMEN’S INT’L LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM, at 4 (1915), https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1915.pdf (Resolution 12).

81. Zeiger, *supra* note 52 at 72.

82. WOMEN’S INT’L LEAGUE, *supra* note 70, at 3.

“free access to raw materials for all nations on equal terms,”⁸³ on the one hand and “[a]doption of a plan of world economy for the production and distribution of the necessities of life at the smallest cost.”⁸⁴ The Zurich Congress also recommended “[a]bolition of the protection of the investment of the capitalists of one country in the resources of another,”⁸⁵ in a startling anticipation of the demands of decolonizing countries decades later.

The women's peace movement, in fact, engaged the problem of war and peace with renewed depth even as it expressed a wariness with international law's ability to deal with the complex problems of war. According to Jane Addams, “appeals for the organization of the world upon peaceful lines may have been made too exclusively to reason and a sense of justice” when reason “is only a part of the human endowment.” Instead “emotion” and (quite awkwardly) “deep-set racial impulses” should be used as well, in a context where “the formal organization of international relations [has] up to this moment, rested so exclusively upon purely legal foundations in spite of the fact that international law is comparatively undeveloped.” The argument, then, was that “it would be impossible to adjudicate certain of the underlying economic and social causes of this war according to existing international law” and therefore a conference of dedicated “internationalists” would more “readily deal with the economic and human element involved in the situation.”⁸⁶

Instead of seeing the problem of war as mostly a problem of interstate anarchy—as international lawyers and international relations scholars long were and have been since wont to do. Moreover, women pacifists emphasized what might be described as the societal causes of war. Although they may not have been the only ones to agitate for such ideas, one may speculate that the women's movement was particularly attuned to the imbrications of war and women's oppression. For example, emphasizing that “war is commonly brought about not by the mass of the people, who do not desire it, but by groups representing particularly interests,” participants in the 1915 conference insisted on democratic control of foreign policy. Such demands were then tied to the need to enfranchise women “since the combined influence of the women of all countries is one of the strongest forces for the prevention of war.”⁸⁷ Internationally, this was to translate into women's participation in a permanent International Conference on peace. Socialist feminists,

83. *Id.*

84. *Id.* at 4.

85. *Id.*

86. Jane Addams, *Women and Internationalism*, in *WOMEN, MILITARISM, AND WAR: ESSAYS IN HISTORY, POLITICS, AND SOCIAL THEORY*, 130–131 (Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, & Alice Hamilton eds., 1990), <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780847674701/Women-Militarism-and-War-Essays-in-History-Politics-and-Social-Theory>.

87. ADDAMS ET AL., *supra* note 63 at 154.

meanwhile, tied the pacifist cause even more deeply to the need for changes in the labor market. Such efforts foregrounded the need for a kind of vertical integration between specifically international and domestic struggles, something that was long conspicuously lacking in international efforts to tackle security problems.

III. DECOLONIZING PACIFISM THROUGH INTERSECTIONALITY: WHOSE PEACE?

It has been argued that already after the First World War, the women's peace movement experienced a burnout, as it experienced the challenge of generational renewal.⁸⁸ One of the legacies of the First World War peace movement had nonetheless been the creation of the WILPF which provided a permanent abode for women pacifists and a site for debates. The WILPF was active in the inter-war, all the more so that by then, the fight for suffrage had been won in many countries. It was particularly active with the League which it engaged regularly, although by no means only on peace matters.⁸⁹ The influence of the peace movement declined, however, with the rise of fascism and the looming imminence of war. The leadership of Dorothy Detzer and Mildred Scott Olmsted, rigid as it was in its absolute pacifism, cost the WILPF dearly in terms of membership. The movement had been reduced to very little in the 1940s, as it transitioned from a hopeful peacetime organization to one implicated in appeasement and in the end a war time organization. The Second World War and its supreme moral stakes in the face of genocidal fascism lent itself less well to a pacifist critique than the First World War. Anti-fascism acquired prominence, not least among left wing organizations, and displaced the more agnostic 1915 agenda. The resumption of hostilities created a renewed need for displays of allegiance and tended to magnify stereotypical gender roles.⁹⁰

Red baiting and accusations that women pacifists had been infiltrated by communists further harmed the movement in the United States. It is true that the WILPF at times appeared aligned with the Soviet Union, as when it endorsed its 1932 proposal for universal disarmament. Although hardly a subversive organization, its connection to socialist and communist women ultimately did it significant harm in the minds of public opinion. These and other pressures arguably reoriented the WILPF's work in a more mainstream and liberal direction. Attacks on the military were toned down, whilst an emphasis on international

88. HARRIET HYMAN ALONSO, *THE WOMEN'S PEACE UNION AND THE OUTLAWRY OF WAR, 192–1942* 5 (1997).

89. Carol Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality": *Inter-War Feminists and the League of Nations* [1], 3 *WOMEN'S HIST. REV.* 219 (1994).

90. Julie V. Gottlieb, *The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning: British Feminists, Pacifism and the Politics of Appeasement*, 23 *WOMEN'S HIST. REV.* 441 (2014).

negotiation became more prominent.⁹¹

After the Second World War, the power of the feminist pacifist movement soon petered out. The intensity with which that total war had been fought had left even less place for transnational solidarity than the First World War did. The movement began to break apart, further isolating its pacifist and humanitarian strands. Initially, for example, the strength of broad pacifist sentiment was such that groups such as the Dutch Red Cross engaged in noticeable cooperation with the peace movement but prospects for lasting cooperation promptly dimmed, allowing humanitarians, paradoxically at a time when wars of aggression had never been so stigmatized, to further develop a separate and independent humanitarian sensitivity to war.⁹²

The fortunes of the peace movement were eventually rekindled, albeit in a somewhat distinct form, by the rise of nuclear weapons and the Cold War. Women Strike for Peace was created in 1960 to counter nuclear testing and organized the largest women's peace protest in 1961, at the height of the cold war, with more than 50,000 women participating. The Women and Life on Earth Coalition, inspired by ecofeminism, held major demonstrations in front of the Pentagon in 1981 and 1982 (the Women's Pentagon Action),⁹³ which fed eventually into the signing of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. A further initiative was organized at the Seneca army depot to blockade it. These challenges to Cold War orthodoxies and notably Western foreign policy led the women to be accused of big both unpatriotic and unwomanly.⁹⁴ The women's peace movement would nonetheless continue to manifest itself in this form until the end of the Cold War, and its leading organizations survive to this day, although as we will see in what form is not clear.

This chapter has so far provided an outline of what might appear to be a specific women's position on matters of peace and war, grounded in the activism of women over at least the last century most associated in the public conscience with what has come to be known as the "women's peace movement." Nonetheless, in its effort at portraying this movement with a broad brush, it has (deliberately) reproduced some of the blind spots of the historiography of the women's peace movement, one that has been quite focused on the WILPF and its successors as expressing, in the end, the vision of a rather narrow sample of the world's women. How can an understanding of the impact of the women's peace movement on international law be problematized from a more intersectional perspective as including a much greater variety of voices

91. Hensley, *supra* note 58.

92. L. van Bergen, *An attempt to combine humanitarianism and pacifism. The Red Cross and the Dutch movement for international peace*, 24 *GEWINA* 143 (2001).

93. MITCHELL K. HALL, *OPPOSITION TO WAR: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF U.S. PEACE AND ANTIWAR MOVEMENTS* 733 (2018).

94. Susan Frances Dion, *Challenges to Cold War Orthodoxy: Women and Peace, 1945–1963* 1 (Sep. 1991) (Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University) (ProQuest).

that problematize both “women” and “peace?”⁹⁵

A. Imperial blind spots

It will do well, certainly, to not caricature the women’s peace movement as it had emerged in the inter-war as a simplistically racist venture. The peace movement was “racial modernist” in its steadfast condemnation of racism, insisted occasionally on the connections between race and war and was to some extent interracial.⁹⁶ Jane Addams was not only a pacifist but also an anti-imperialist who had denounced the Spanish-American War and opposed the Monroe Doctrine as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act. By 1915, the WILPF opened its membership to African American women and the U.S. section of the WILPF lobbied in favor of the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill in 1935. The Zurich Congress included a recommendation on “race equality,” insisting that states “should do everything in their powers to abrogate laws and change customs which lead to discrimination against human beings on account of race color.”⁹⁷ An interracial WILPF team was sent to Haiti in 1926 to explore the effects of U.S. military occupation there, which ended in an unambiguous condemnation of American imperialism.⁹⁸ The WILPF took the defense of the eight African Americans who had been condemned to death in Scottsboro, Alabama.⁹⁹ Cora Weiss, who would go on to preside the Hague Appeal for Peace and was an early leader of Women Strike for Peace who subsequently co-founded the Jeannette Rankin Brigade which connected the fight against the Vietnam War and racism in the United States.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, women’s peace organizations, especially in their early years, remained largely white and middle class, focused on their common womanhood (such as it was understood) at the expense of other struggles. As Vellacott notes, “Black women activists may simply have had little interest in joining an organization that, although expressing concern about racism, seemed primarily interested in conflicts

95. Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” in *FEMINIST THEORY READER* (Carole McCann & Seungkyung Kim eds., 4th ed. 2016).

96. MELINDA PLASTAS, *A BAND OF NOBLE WOMEN: RACIAL POLITICS IN THE WOMEN’S PEACE MOVEMENT* (1st ed. 2011).

97. WOMEN’S INT’L LEAGUE, *supra* note 70, at 15.

98. EMILY GREENE BALCH, *OCCUPIED HAITI* (1972).

99. *Resolutions Adopted at the Ninth International Congress, Lubačovice, Czechoslovakia (July 27–31, 1937)*, WOMEN’S INT’L LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM, https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1937.pdf (last visited May 24, 2025).

100. Cora Weiss, *WOMEN IN PEACE* (July 18, 2017), <https://www.womeninpeace.org/w-names/2017/7/18/cora-weiss>.

in Europe.”¹⁰¹ In effect, “the slow pace with which the concerns raised by Black women . . . were addressed indicated the (WILPF’s) ambivalence about the significance of the project.”¹⁰² The colonial politics of the women’s peace movement, moreover, were not far removed from the sort of discourse that typically emanated from white men of the same era, mixing ideas of imperialism with a tradition of racial benevolence and paternalism. The resolutions adopted in 1915 at the Hague, for example, emphasized the need for a permanent International Conference to take into account the struggles “not only of the great Powers and small nations but also those of weaker countries and primitive peoples gradually adjusted under an enlightened international public opinion.”¹⁰³ Emily Greene Balch drew up a position paper on “international colonial administration” which was not far from what would become the League’s Mandate system.¹⁰⁴

Having said that, the hegemonic white liberal focus of the women’s peace movement may be a function of its sociology, but it is also, crucially, a question of historiography and what is included the narrative it has sprung. For example, Francisca de Haan has argued that historians have largely overlooked the role of the left-leaning WIDF.¹⁰⁵ Supported by the GDR and principally active in the Eastern block, it was targeted in the United States by the Committee on Un-American activities. Although principally involved in attempts to move away from solidarity to anti-imperialism in the development sector, it fostered a new third world women’s leftist internationalism which preceded Bandung by almost a decade.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the erasure of Black women from the larger narrative of the women’s peace movement calls for moves that highlight that legacy, not merely to give credit where credit is due, but to problematize the very meaning of that movement, including its embeddedness in racist and imperialist legacies.¹⁰⁷

101. Jo Vellacott, *A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom*, 2 WOMEN’S HIST. REV. 23, 152 (1993).

102. PLASTAS, *supra* note 96 at 242.

103. ADDAMS ET AL., *supra* note 63 at 155.

104. Catia C. Confortini, *Race, Gender, Empire, and War in the International Thought of Emily Greene Balch*, in WOMEN’S INTERNATIONAL THOUGHT: A NEW HISTORY 244 (Katharina Rietzler & Patricia Owens eds., 2021), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/womens-international-thought-a-new-history/race-gender-empire-and-war-in-the-international-thought-of-emily-greene-balch/26A5AA586D587FE8383CB111BA357B28>.

105. Francisca de Haan, *Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-Ae, and Claudia Jones: Rethinking Transnational Feminism and International Politics*, 25 J. WOMEN’S HIST. 174 (2013).

106. Elisabeth Armstrong, *Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women’s Movement in Asia and the Women’s International Democratic Federation*, 41 SIGNS: J. OF WOMEN IN CULTURE AND SOC’Y 305 (2016).

107. Valerie Amos & Pratibha Parmar, *Challenging Imperial Feminism*, FEMINIST REV. 3, 15–17 (1984).

B. Anti-Fascism, Not Pacifism?

As early as the inter-war and certainly during the Cold War, tensions emerged between a traditional feminist perspective on peace, and newer, anti-fascist or anti-imperialist movements that shared some affinity with the peace agenda but were also much more open to the possibility and even at times the necessity of violence. The WILPF at times collaborated with the League against War and Fascism, a group that was close to American communists but generally militated against the United States's entry into the Second World War. This made it vulnerable to the accusation that it was blind to how the search for peace at all costs might enable reactionary, nay fascist, forces.

Indeed, even the WILPF felt the pressure to take sides in what was an increasingly polarized world. Already in 1915, French women had largely boycotted the women's peace congress on account of its unwillingness to debate war responsibilities, French feminist organizations emphasizing the necessities of self-defense.¹⁰⁸ One contemporary British commentator noted dismissively that "the scope of international law is to be enlarged, at the very moment when the grossest infractions are to be passed over in silence."¹⁰⁹ Separately, leading socialist pacifists such as Crystal Eastman tied themselves in knots trying to reconcile their commitment to revolutionary social change and a politics of peace, especially in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution and its attempted suppression by the victors of the First World War.¹¹⁰

By the 1930s, amidst regular and anxious reassertions of the WILPF's traditional pacifism and insistence that the League should use only "propaganda" to secure peace, a cacophony of competing demands were increasingly being heard including: an insistence on revision of treaties; a focus on the plight of the Jewish minority; suppression of war propaganda; the connection to socialist parties; appeals on behalf of pacifists imprisoned in concentration camps in Germany and more generally indignation at the treatment of prisoners in that country; and concerns about threats to Austria.¹¹¹ The rigid pacifism of the WILPF increasingly seemed like it was not the ideology for the moment, as it was confronted with increasingly strident calls for war preparedness and denunciation of fascism. Helena Swanwick, one of the early founders of the movement, fell into depression and committed suicide at the onset of the war.¹¹²

108. JANE ADDAMS ET AL., *WOMEN AT THE HAGUE: THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF WOMEN AND ITS RESULTS* xvii (2003).

109. SHAPLAND HUGH SWINNY, *THE POSITIVIST REVIEW* 94 (1915).

110. AMY ARONSON, *CRYSTAL EASTMAN: A REVOLUTIONARY LIFE* (2019).

111. 8th Congress, Zurich, Switzerland, September 3–8, 1934.

112. *Helena Swanwick: A Woman of International Law*, UNIV. OF MANCHESTER -

Others significantly evolved away from the spirit of 1915. The trajectory of Emily Balch, a long-time participant and Secretary of the WILPF is illustrative, with her views changing from a strong pacifist stance to, in view of the fascist threat, defending “fundamental human rights, sword in hand.”¹¹³ Similarly, Mary Agnes Hamilton, a former British Member of Parliament in the Labour Party, went from pacifist to activist anti-fascist, denouncing the gullibility of the public.¹¹⁴ By 1937, the WILPF itself managed to condemn “any effort to accord to Franco the belligerent rights thus putting on the same footing the aggressor and the victim” and the invasion of Chinese territory by Japan.¹¹⁵ In relation to Ethiopia, it betrayed that its reluctance to both the *in bello* and the *ad bellum* dimensions of war’s regulation was now fast being caught up by events:

Before the eyes of all the world a crime has been committed against a whole nation. The most perfect inventions of modern technique have been used in the service of barbarism. A world has been forced to look on, though revolting against it, while the League of Nations did not dare to intervene to prevent the atrocities by using all the means at its disposal.¹¹⁶

By the end of the Second World War and after almost a decade of not meeting, all the WILPF could muster is a call “[i]n face of the new situation created by the horrors through which so many of our members have passed” was “its adherence to the necessity of firmly maintaining respect for the human rights of each individual friend or ex-enemy alike.”¹¹⁷ Peace was not even mentioned once.

C. Anti-Racist and Pro National Liberation Feminism

By then, the rallying cry for many in the Third World or among racialized persons in the North had increasingly been not pacifism but anti-imperialism. Demonstrations against the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy united African Americans and Italian socialists in 1935 in New York, offering alternative (left-wing, pan-Africanist) transnational solidarities.¹¹⁸ Although by no means primarily a women’s movement, the anti-imperial mindset did create opportunities for women, particularly women of color, to revisit the legacy of the peace movement.

WOMEN IN INT’L L. NETWORK (Dec. 22, 2016), <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/wilnet/2016/12/22/helena-swanwick>.

113. FREDERICK W. HABERMAN, NOBEL LECTURES IN PEACE 353 (1999).

114. Gottlieb, *supra* note 90.

115. 9th Congress, Luhacovice, Czechoslovakia, July 27–31, 1937.

116. *Id.*

117. *Human Rights - Resolution No. 1 (Preliminary Statement) (Aug. 9, 1946)*, WOMEN’S INT’L LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM, https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WILPF_triennial_congress_1946.pdf (last visited May 24, 2025).

118. William R. Scott, *Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934–1936*, 63 J. NEGRO HIST. 118 (1978).

Claudia Jones is a good example.¹¹⁹ A Trinbagonian-born journalist, Jones first moved to the United States where she became an influential feminist, communist, and Black nationalist before being eventually deported to the United Kingdom where she became a member of the British Communist Party. Jones had joined the U.S. communist movement largely because of its opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Although clearly a peace activist, she also asserted a distinct strand of left-wing pacifism. She condemned the hydrogen bomb, but less on humanitarian or anti-militaristic grounds per se than as an instrument of imperialism.¹²⁰ Her writings criticize war but also “monopoly capital” and “fascism.”

Third World leftist women activists, many of whom had emerged as active participants in national liberation struggles and came from rural backgrounds, would in turn seek to draw an explicit connection between fascism and colonialism, arguing that “internationalism required an expanded definition of antifascism that went beyond the military defeat of the war powers of Germany, Italy and Japan” to include the defeat of imperialism.¹²¹

These evolutions, in turn, powerfully shaped what could be contemplated under the banner of a women’s pacifist agenda, without exploding the tenuous bonds of women’s solidarity, as the notion of peace was reevaluated from a condition of non-violence between states to a more all-encompassing condition of non-violence between *and* within nations.¹²² Below the surface, the international women’s peace movement was due for a significant adjustment in light of both emerging decolonial politics and the fight for racial equality in countries such as the United States. Tensions had reached boiling point by the time the war on Vietnam put pacifist and anti-racist agendas on a potential collision course, as deep fissures appeared between white and black activists.

For some, mostly white activists, the focus should be entirely on ending the conflict, at the risk of otherwise watering down the struggle and losing white middle class support; for proponents of “multi-issuism” among which many black radicals, on the contrary, the focus should be on a range of domestic problems that were imbricated in the international situation and revealed a deeper malaise.¹²³ Gwendolyn Patton was one of the leaders of the latter tendency and argued for the

119. CAROLE BOYCE DAVIES, *LEFT OF KARL MARX: THE POLITICAL LIFE OF BLACK COMMUNIST CLAUDIA JONES* (2008).

120. CLAUDIA JONES, *WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY* (1950).

121. Armstrong, *supra* note 106.

122. Amann, *supra* note 21.

123. SIMON HALL, *PEACE AND FREEDOM: THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND ANTIWAR MOVEMENTS IN THE 1960S* 5 (2011), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.9783/9780812202137/html>.

importance of opposition to Vietnam to emanate from Black Power politics. Years later, she would recount her lack of patience with attempts at separating the debate on racism and the war, and the danger of being absorbed by a white-dominated anti-war movement.¹²⁴

Ironically, this tussle between a women's agenda focused exclusively on the pursuit of international peace and one more cognizant of the intra-societal dimensions of violence (including as mired in issues of race) mirrored some of the women's movement own earlier inter-war anxieties about whether the investment in the peace agenda might not ultimately detract from their core hopes for women's suffrage.¹²⁵ It highlighted the continued difficulty of pursuing a range of objectives at once that, though on one level deeply consonant, could expose the asymmetries that the movement sought to uneasily straddle. As a result, what had historically defined the women's peace agenda—if nothing else, at least a commitment to peace—came under increasing challenge. Virginia Woolf's cry that “as a woman, I have no country” would come under renewed attack in a decolonial age, to the point of being discredited by women's interventions in particular national liberal struggles.¹²⁶

There is no mistaking that support for violent tactics by national liberation movements was a thorn in the side for historical pacifists whose instincts inclined towards non-violence. As traditional non-violent feminists such as Barbara Deming continued to argue against the use of force even in national liberation, nonetheless:

In the more militant antiwar and liberationist atmosphere of the late 1960s, [younger activists] were more inclined to join with young men to question the effectiveness of the doctrine of nonviolence as the best path to world peace and social justice. They observed violence in national liberation struggles, in the American war in Vietnam, and in the streets of major metropolitan areas in the United States and Europe. The most militant antiwar activists eventually came to associate pacifism and nonviolence with weakness and effeminacy, opening an avenue toward considering revolutionary violence as a path to peace and freedom.¹²⁷

Some women, such as the Weatherwomen or the Black Panther women, radicalized in that era, emphasizing “their loyalty to antiracist and anti-imperialist movements” over feminism's traditional association

124. *No Outside Saviors!*, AGAINST THE CURRENT, <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc136/p1885> (last visited May 24, 2025).

125. ANNE WILTHER, *MOST DANGEROUS WOMEN: FEMINIST PEACE CAMPAIGNERS OF THE GREAT WAR* 123 (1985).

126. Michèle McHugh Griffin, *As a Woman I Have No Country*, 10 *PEACE REV.* 255 (1998).

127. Petra Goedde, *Gendered Peace, Women's Peace*, in *THE POLITICS OF PEACE: A GLOBAL COLD WAR HISTORY* (Petra Goedde ed., 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195370836.003.0006>.

with non-violence, to the point of engaging in armed action,¹²⁸ and thus potentially laying bare the intellectual weakness of the project of speaking the language of peace on behalf of all women.

IV. THE NORMALIZATION OF PEACE FEMINISM THROUGH INTERNATIONAL LAW: A BITTERSWEET MOMENT?

The aftermath of the Hague peace conference in the 20th Century has thus been the site of renewed feminist activism in relation to war but in ways that have further and deeply fragmented its outlook. In retrospect, the early movement may have only and barely managed to come up with a consistent position on the question of peace because of its exclusive provenance. It has been battered since by the rise of competing agendas. In international law, of particular note is the rise of a strong *jus contra bellum* project that, whilst undoubtedly pacifist on one level, has also foregrounded the importance of defending sovereignty and self-determination, as well as the significance of collective security. Neither self-defense nor Security Council action to push back against an armed attack particularly bear the hallmarks of earlier feminine pacifist thinking. Rather, they have arguably entrenched, in unison with the dominant humanitarian agenda, particular forms of moderate hegemonic masculinity that ultimately “civilize” violence but at the cost of deep conservatism, with the occasional tacit quiescence of some among women’s voices.

Indeed, that earlier pacifist sensitivity has tended to be squeezed and marginalized with the rise of new generations of female *cadre* of international law whose emergence has been both empowered by their feminism and limited by it, under the banner of what Vasuki Nesiah has described as “international conflict feminism.”¹²⁹ Beginning in the 1990s, feminism *does* start making significant inroads in policy making and the inner-sanctum of international law. In other words, and uncharacteristically up till then, feminism starts wielding real power¹³⁰ even if that power remains limited and is constantly under threat of marginalization. That newfound influence, however, coincides with a normalization of the women’s peace agenda through a series of adaptations and processes of cooptation. One manifestation of this normalization is the relative sidelining of historical organizations of grass root pacifist women for the benefit, precisely, of a more international, technocratic and law focused approach as well as the relative amnesia of emerging players about some of the longer histories of women and

128. Choonib Lee, *Women’s Liberation and Sixties Armed Resistance*, 11 J. FOR THE STUDY OF RADICALISM 25 (2017).

129. VASUKI NESIAH, *INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT FEMINISM: THEORY, PRACTICE, CHALLENGES* (2024).

130. JANET HALLEY ET AL., *GOVERNANCE FEMINISM: AN INTRODUCTION* (2018).

peace.¹³¹ Another is the ascendancy of an international law discourse of women's rights that is less committed to radical anti-war thinking, perhaps because it cannot simply displace what it is henceforth reliant on. And another is a commitment to a politics of surfacing women's concerns and visibility of gender within international law,¹³² at the expense of international law's contestation.

These moves occur against the background of a certain reassertion of Western intellectual primacy in the women-and-peace movement that displaces non-Western voices, even if the latter are increasingly audible.¹³³ This process presides, through the politics of expertise and professionalization, over a subtle ghettoization of "women's" issues. Something similar had long been evident, for example, in the League's willingness to enlist women in its work, but only in relation to humanitarian and women-oriented work.¹³⁴ On the one hand, this leads to opportunities for much needed targeted interventions on behalf of women; on the other hand, it is constantly at risk of missing out on a broader gendered critique of war, leaves men and masculinities somewhat orphaned of critical engagements, and renders women's issues vulnerable to instrumentalization and even weaponization. Where the early women's critique of war and international law was all-encompassing and striking in its willingness to make no intellectual prisoners, it has sometimes appeared as the shadow of its former self.

It is almost, then, as if the gendered critique of war was more prominent in the 1920s than in the 1990s, even as the theoretical possibilities of such a critique have never been more readily available. Ironically, the moment of the maximum reception by international law of the women's agenda has coincided with its significant tempering away from its radical pacifist roots, as well as with a unique moment of self-doubt among women and feminists that manifests itself in a pervasive sense of ambivalence about the investment in international law and what it might mean for peace. That ambivalence is evident in three main facets of feminist investments starting in the 1990s, namely humanitarianism,

131. For a rare example of a connection between the more recent developments and a century of history of women's international peace activism, see Dianne Otto, *A Sign of Weakness - Disrupting Gender Certainties in the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325*, 13 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 113 (2006) and Gina Heathcote & Paola Zichi, *Chapter 26: Feminist Methodologies*, in RESEARCH METHODS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW: A HANDBOOK (Rossana Deplano & Nicholas Tsagourias eds., 2021).

132. See, e.g., Judith Gardam, *Women and the Law of Armed Conflict: Why the Silence?*, 46 INT'L & COMPAR. L. Q. 55 (1997).

133. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, 12 BOUNDARY 2 333, 335 (1984), https://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_5/under-western-eyes.pdf.

134. Frédéric Mégret, *Gbénia Avril de Sainte-Croix*, in PORTRAITS OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL LAW: NEW NAMES AND FORGOTTEN FACES? (Immi Tallgren ed., 2023).

interventionism, and institutionalism. It highlights the bittersweet, tragic even, character of developing a voice within the formal temples international law in order to foster greater inclusion of women, if that comes at the cost of reneging on the promise of an all-out gendered critique of war.

A. Sexual Violence and Renewed Engagements with the Laws of War

As was seen, the laws of war had been viewed in the early variants of peace feminism as deeply problematic because associated with masculine militarism. Not so in the 1990s, where many women throw their weight behind efforts to reform the laws of war with a specific and even overriding goal in mind: combating sexual violence against women in war time.¹³⁵ This movement brings a highly welcome corrective to centuries of configuration of the laws of war articulated around male hegemony and exclusion. It has had a clear influence on international criminal jurisprudence¹³⁶ even as on many levels it is seen as only partially or imperfectly accomplished.¹³⁷

Yet this movement has also been heavily contested on its own terms. It is criticized for portraying sexual violence against women in wartime as particularly exceptional at the expense of the women of some groups,¹³⁸ vulnerable women in general,¹³⁹ including in peace time,¹⁴⁰ not to mention the children born of rape.¹⁴¹ The fear is that it reproduces the international law bias of a “discipline of crisis,”¹⁴² that ultimately prolongs the very unequal attention of the masculine gaze. Moreover, it is faulted for a simplistic representation of sexual violence as a means to a nationalist or genocidal end, rather than an end in itself and a specifically

135. Rhonda Copelon, *Gendered War Crimes: Reconceptualizing Rape in Time of War*, in WOMEN'S RIGHTS HUMAN RIGHTS (1995).

136. 20 ANNE-MARIE DE BROUWER & ANNE-MARIE L. M. DE BROUWER, SUPRANATIONAL CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE: THE ICC AND THE PRACTICE OF THE ICTY AND THE ICTR (2005); SERGE BRAMMERTZ & MICHELLE J. JARVIS, PROSECUTING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT THE ICTY (2016).

137. Niamh Hayes, *Sisyphus Wept: Prosecuting Sexual Violence at the International Criminal Court*, in THE ASHGATE RESEARCH COMPANION TO INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW 7 (2016).

138. Pascale R. Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics of Wartime Rape: Berlin, 1945; Yugoslavia, 1992–1993*, 31 SIGNS 995 (2006).

139. Jaya Ramji-Nogales, *Questioning Hierarchies of Harm: Women, Forced Migration, and International Criminal Law*, 11 INT'L CRIM. L. REV. 463 (2011).

140. Rhonda Copelon, *Surfacing Gender: Reconceptualizing Crimes against Women in Time of War*, in MASS RAPE: THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA 197 (Alexandra Stiglmeier ed., Marion Faber trans., 1994).

141. Robyn Carpenter, *Surfacing Children: Limitations of Genocidal Rape Discourse*, 22 HUM. RTS. Q. 428 (2000).

142. H. Charlesworth, *International Law: A Discipline of Crisis*, 65 MOD. L. REV. 377 (2002).

gendered form of oppression that is chronic even outside pathological war situations.¹⁴³ It can reinforce notions that women ought to be protected from sexual violence in order to protect the target group (ethnic, racial) that is its real and ultimate target.¹⁴⁴

Aside from the criticism of the modalities of the inclusion of gender in the laws of war, another critique challenges the extent to which this potentially normalizes the laws of war as the dominant and ultimately unchallengeable horizon of war reform.¹⁴⁵ One of the results has been a focus on women at the expense of both gender and even sexual violence against men and the broader critique of war, as expressed in the laws of war. This potentially if unwittingly reinforces masculine domination, further entrenches the hegemony of the laws of war, and imposes a kind of protection racket on women.

B. Feminist Interventionism(s)

Women have also featured increasingly prominently in discourses about humanitarian intervention, both literally and metaphorically.¹⁴⁶ Discourse on the global responsibility to protect has been faulted for insufficiently taking into account women's needs and role as well as the blatantly insufficient representation of women in key fora that decide upon interventions.¹⁴⁷ This points to the absence of women at key junctions in the genesis of international norms and the attendant biases of the norms thus produced. There is much to be said for taking into account how women stand to be impacted both by humanitarian intervention and lack of it and feminist approach to R2P have been developed¹⁴⁸ that seek to significantly rejig the dominant peace and security and sovereignty-as-responsibility framing of international law.

Nonetheless, here also there is a risk that focusing on the inclusion of women in interventionist agendas will only make them more female centric at the cost of ratifying their dominant international legal approach to the use of force. Various forms of feminist interventions can be seen as being surprisingly consonant with hegemonic agendas targeting violent extremism, Islam and gendered violence.¹⁴⁹ Critical scholars,

143. Doris E. Buss, *Rethinking 'Rape as a Weapon of War,'* 17 FEMINIST LEGAL STUD. 145 (2009).

144. K. Engle, *Feminism and Its (Dis) Contents: Criminalizing Wartime Rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 99 AM. J. OF INT'L L. 778 (2005).

145. Mégret, *supra* note 16.

146. RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AND WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: ALIGNING THE PROTECTION AGENDAS (Sara E. Davies et al. eds., 2013).

147. Hilary Charlesworth, *Feminist Reflections on the Responsibility to Protect*, 2 GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT 232 (2010).

148. Catherine O'Rourke, *Feminist Strategy in International Law: Understanding Its Legal, Normative and Political Dimensions*, 28 EUR. J. INT'L L. 1019, 1038–1041 (2017).

149. Vasuki Nesiah, *Lamfare, CVE and International Conflict Feminism*, in THE CUNNING OF GENDER VIOLENCE (Lila Abu-Lughod et al. eds., 2002).

notably TWAIL feminists, do not necessarily draw straight lines between governance feminism and forms of deployments of violent intervention, but they highlight their mutual entanglements. Often, feminist discourses on the oppression of women prepare the ground, unwittingly or not, for a particular distribution of violence across borders, in ways that espouse age-old patterns of civilizational hegemony with stark orientalist undertones. Agendas of “saving brown women from brown men”¹⁵⁰ will be deployed in ways that end up justifying more rather than less violence, and that ultimately have little to do with women’s rights. The concern with women’s rights may have unwittingly reinforced the dominance of the “masculine mode of decision-making”¹⁵¹ and surrendered to the underlying notion that the essential, defining debate, is always whether to use force or not, which rather concedes the premise¹⁵² in ways that obfuscate instead of shedding light on the inherently violent nature of international law.¹⁵³

The problem is made more intractable, however, by the fact that feminist arguments can continue to be summoned to buttress both the case for and against intervention. Despite the wariness of critical feminists with the narrative of muscular interventionism in particular as it invariably negatively impacts women,¹⁵⁴ some feminists point out that the problem of women’s oppression will not easily go away and still needs to be addressed. So-called “feminist hawks” have argued for example that, even conceding the tendency of interventionism to value militarism, aggression should be interpreted so as to exclude interventions designed to maximize the responsibility to protect as it applies to women.¹⁵⁵

Feminist interventionism, then, is on one view a far cry from women’s early peace agenda and on another view entirely consistent with it. It brings attention, in the *longue durée*, to the potential of repetition of never fully resolved underlying contradictions. If “womanhood” as a universal is not problematized, then it is not entirely surprising that it quickly devolves into a category of understanding to decide who is a woman worth hearing, who is a woman in need of rescuing and who is a

150. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND POST-COLONIAL THEORY - A READER (Patrick Williams & Laura Chirsman eds., 2016).

151. Troy Lavers, *Aggression, Intervention and Powerful States: Missed Lessons from Feminist Methodologies on Peace and Security Issues* *Opinion*, 5 AMSTERDAM L. F. 122 (2013).

152. Hilary Charlesworth, *The Hidden Gender of International Law Speech*, 16 TEMP. INT'L & COMP. L. J. 93 (2002).

153. Vanja Hamzić, *International Law as Violence: Competing Absences of the Other*, in QUEERING INTERNATIONAL LAW (2017).

154. Samantha T. Godec, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: Exploring the Impact of Military Humanitarian Intervention upon Sexual Violence – Post-Conflict Sex Trafficking in Kosovo*, 92 INT'L REV. OF THE RED CROSS 235 (2010).

155. Beth Van Schaack, *The Crime of Aggression and Humanitarian Intervention on Behalf of Women*, 11 INT'L CRIM. L. REV. 477 (2011).

woman who can be safely ignored. In that respect, although the agenda may have tilted at one point heavily towards intervention, there has been no shortage of feminist interventions to contest the more “pro force” bend that it risked taking.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, there persists a lingering doubt that this is a perversion of the feminist agenda which can be understood, in at least one reading, as always having been premised on a sense of peace for some and war for others.¹⁵⁷

C. Women as Peace Makers and the Security Council Agenda

Third, feminism has made considerable forays in incorporating gender in institutional collective security and peacekeeping arrangements, notably in the U.N.,¹⁵⁸ based on a rediscovery of the role of women as “peacemakers.”¹⁵⁹ Most famously, Resolution 1325¹⁶⁰ called for increased participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding as part of a then ascendant “women, peace and security” (WPS) agenda. Resolution 1325 has been the foundation of many institutional initiatives that have helped mainstream women’s concerns into the fabric of the U.N., including the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and its Task Force on Women, Peace and Security, the Office for the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. This has fostered a renewed politics of inclusion of women in peacemaking and peace/state building functions that takes seriously the concerns of women.¹⁶¹ The NGO Working Group has engaged the Security Council actively as a result. In 2008, Resolution 1820 highlighted sexual violence as a “tactic of war” that ought to be tackled by the Security Council.¹⁶²

On one account, this was a dizzying recognition one which, in addition, held the prospect for further integration of feminist ideas about war to be mainstreamed within the UN. On another account, much more could still be done to bring women’s concerns to the forefront of

156. K. Engle, *Calling in the Troops: The Uneasy Relationship among Women’s Rights, Human Rights, and Humanitarian Intervention*, 20 HARV. HUM. RTS. J. 189 (2007).

157. Christine M. Chinkin, *Kosovo: A “Good” or “Bad” War?*, 93 AM. J. INT’L L. 841, 847 (1999).

158. Susan Willett, *Introduction: Security Council Resolution 1325: Assessing the Impact on Women, Peace and Security*, 17 INT’L PEACEKEEPING 142 (2010).

159. Swanee Hunt & Cristina Posa, *Women Waging Peace*, FOREIGN POLICY (Nov. 19, 2009), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/19/women-waging-peace>.

160. S.C. Res. 1325 (Oct. 31, 2000).

161. Christine Chinkin & Hilary Charlesworth, *Building Women into Peace: The International Legal Framework*, in INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE THIRD WORLD (2008).

162. S.C. Res. 1820 (June 19, 2008).

international law and policymaking.¹⁶³ The politics of institutional visibility and presence that undergird the work of women's NGOs at the UN has only partially paid off. But more importantly, as Diane Otto has described it, in either case, what was also involved was a potential "exile of inclusion" one based on:

A pattern of selective engagement with feminist ideas as they are instrumentalised to serve institutional purposes; an across-the-board absence of strong accountability mechanisms, even as the outside pressure for accountability grows; and the tendency for protective stereotypes of women to normatively re-emerge following an initial flirtation with more active and autonomous representation.¹⁶⁴

Rather than a fundamentally distinct vision of peace, for example, Resolution 1325 has promoted a sense of women as participants in peace processes—no doubt an improvement on being excluded, but also a concession to a particular strand of essentializing thought that sees women as more adept peacemakers. As feminist legal scholars have pointed out, the idea that women are inherently more peaceful is dubious at best and may even contain the seeds of their relative marginalization in the service of dominant agendas of the use of force.¹⁶⁵ The WPS agenda has been criticized as falling short, in the end, of the sort "conceptualization of feminist peace rooted in anti-militarist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist feminist activism" that characterized earlier feminisms.¹⁶⁶ Contra the reformist institutionalist agenda evident in the Security Council's embrace, a view inspired by abolition feminism has been described as potentially much more transformative.¹⁶⁷

V. CONCLUSION: "SISTERHOOD IS (STILL) POWERFUL"?¹⁶⁸

How can one assess the legacy of the women's peace movement in relation to international law, in light of both its successes and its decline,

163. Hilary Charlesworth, *Talking to Ourselves? Feminist Scholarship in International Law*, 1 in FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL LAW 17 (S. Kouva & Z. Pearson eds., 2011); Anne Gallagher, *Ending the Marginalization: Strategies for Incorporating Women into the United Nations Human Rights System*, 19 HUM. RTS. Q. 283 (1997).

164. D. Otto, *Exile of Inclusion: Reflections on Gender Issues in International Law over the Last Decade*, 10 MELB. J. INT'L L. 11, 11 (2009).

165. Hilary Charlesworth, *Are Women Peaceful? Reflections on the Role of Women in Peace-Building*, 16 FEMINIST LEGAL STUD. 347 (2008).

166. Hannah Wright & Columba Achilleos-Sarll, *Towards an Abolitionist Feminist Peace: State Violence, Anti-Militarism, and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, REV. INT'L STUD. 1 (2024).

167. *Id.*

168. ROBIN MORGAN, SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL: AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITINGS FROM THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT (1970); ROBIN MORGAN, SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL: THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ANTHOLOGY (2016).

in a context of rising masculinist backlash? Historically, the encounter between both is perhaps best described as, ultimately, a missed one. The women's peace movement has had relatively little patience for international law, and perhaps understandably so. This is partly no doubt because it was not particularly socialized in the high temples of the discipline but also, one suspects, because of a deeper wariness with the compromises of international law with patriarchy and misogyny. In a 1914 article reflecting on the outbreak of the First World War, Jane Addams asked "Is the Peace Movement a Failure?" noting that "although the Tribunal at the Hague gave a concrete and living expression to International law, war did not become impossible simply because International disputes might be adjudicated with honor and just dealing."¹⁶⁹ Surely that judgment has been amply reinforced by history since. The suspicion, as it turns out, went even further: that international law left too much unaddressed, notably in relation to the underlying conditions of war. For later feminists writing in a more socialist or decolonial vein, the law was even more suspected of sustaining imperial structures.

Although there is by now a lively intellectual and scholarly interest in rediscovering the women's peace movement, this rarely leaves the domain of professional historians or feminist scholarship. Some of today's reappraisals of the role of international law in the Great War, by contrast, are notable for the scant treatment they reserve to the women's movement. Isabel Hull, for example, does not devote a single line to the women's peace movement, preferring instead to focus on how European governments took heed of the "scrap of paper."¹⁷⁰ In truth, women's and particularly feminists' efforts to disrupt international law have often been met by indifference from international lawyers, the sort of indifference that only the *dominant* can afford,¹⁷¹ in what remains a fundamentally sporadic dialogue between those traditions.¹⁷² This raises questions about the long-term implications of international law's myopia to its own biases, but also the tendency of feminism in international law to imagine itself as largely a 1990s development rather than rely on its own (fraught) pedigree. In a way, the riddle of why the women's peace movement and international law are a perpetual missed encounter is almost as interesting than whatever they may be reconstructed as having to say about each other.

The asymmetry between the two "sides" of this constitutive gender-

169. ADDAMS, *supra* note 39 at 59.

170. HULL, *supra* note 74.

171. Anthony D'Amato, *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*, 89 AM. J. INT'L L. 840 (1995), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2203946>; Fernando R. Teson, *Feminism and International Law: A Reply*, 33 VA. J. INT'L L. 647 (1992).

172. Hilary Charlesworth, *Cries and Whispers: Responses to Feminist Scholarship in International Law Special Issue: New Approaches to International Law*, 65 NORDIC J. INT'L L. 557 (1996).

professional divide are also evident and help explain in part this non-debate: at the risk of simplification, women pacifists have been primarily interested in peace and only secondarily in international law to the extent to which it might help achieve peace; male international lawyers, by contrast, have been primarily interested in international law and only secondarily in international peace, to the extent it was mandated by or not incompatible with international law and a range of other values, including sovereignty. The ground for mutual encounters was reduced and it exposed fundamental incompatibilities in culture between the cross-cutting, multi-disciplinary, and radical utopianism of the women's movement, and the elitist, state-bound, and positivist discipline of international lawyers. These continue to explain the hiatus to this day. Despite the increasing theoretical sophistication of international law, it remains a discipline that is, if not exactly anti-intellectual, at least persistently wedded to forms of positivist masculine *auctoritas* that are culturally ill-attuned to engaging the multifaceted and unorthodox manifestations of feminist thought.

The contribution of women pacifists to international law has nonetheless begun being reappraised including in international law publications¹⁷³ and is long overdue. But it is still of marginal interest to the discipline's pragmatic outlook, one that has remained remarkably constant notwithstanding its actual feminization.¹⁷⁴ This is despite the fact that feminist debates about peace¹⁷⁵ have been immeasurably livelier than those of international lawyers: real politics, as it were, as opposed to the mere make-believe, ossified politics of international law. If anything, thinking about that contribution could also lead to a rethink of what counts as a source of international law beyond its formalism, harnessing a much broader commitment to exploring the sort of intellectual origins to which international law is indebted.¹⁷⁶

With the benefit of hindsight, international law “won,” despite the

173. Louise Arimatsu, *Transformative Disarmament: Crafting a Roadmap for Peace*, 97 INT'L L. STUD. 1 (2021), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ils/vol97/iss1/35>.

174. Sheri Labenski, *'The World Is Not Organized for Peace': Feminist Manifestos and Utopias in the Making of International Law*, 12 GLOB. CONSTITUTIONALISM 438 (2023).

175. JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, *WOMEN AND WAR* (1995); Moorey, *supra* note 23; Donna Pankhurst, *The “Sex War” and Other Wars: Towards a Feminist Approach to Peace Building*, 13 DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE 154 (2003); Maja Korac, *Is There a Right Time for Gender-Just Peace? Feminist Anti-War Organising Revisited*, 28 GENDER & EDUC. 431 (2016); Judy El-Bushra, *Feminism, Gender, and Women's Peace Activism*, 38 DEV. & CHANGE 131 (2007); Catia Cecilia Confortini, *Feminist Contributions and Challenges to Peace Studies*, INT'L STUD. ASS'N COMPENDIUM (2010), https://www.academia.edu/download/40826945/Compendium_Article_Academia.edu.pdf; Haleh Afshar, *Women and Wars: Some Trajectories towards a Feminist Peace*, 13 DEV. IN PRACTICE 178 (2003).

176. Juliana Santos de Carvalho, *Under the Shadow of Legality: A Shadow Hauntology on the Legal Construction of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, 37 LEIDEN J. INT'L L. 866 (2024); Labenski, *supra* note 174.

descent into another world war, its powerful post war indictment, its Cold War impotence, and its subsequent reinvigoration in the neo-liberal moment. It has “won” not in any simple sense except that it has managed to maintain itself largely intact without ever having to produce a fundamental *aggiornamento* under the pressure of feminist critiques. It has prevailed in its non-response to the challenge, and its ability to get away with simply looking the other way. Worse, in the long run a particular enduringly masculine agenda emphasizing force as simultaneously the guarantor of peace and law has been further entrenched, nowhere more so arguably than in the trenches of the Donbas, the hills of Eastern Congo or the crosshairs of Gaza. International law has been significantly impoverished for it, especially at times of deep crisis when it has struggled to reimagine itself beyond a repetitious ‘protective’ instinct towards women.

Nonetheless, the women’s peace movement today is still alive. Its spirit occasionally flares up as when, in the best tradition of 1915, Russian feminists signed an anti-war manifesto in which they blamed Putin for aggression¹⁷⁷ or when Israeli women founded Women Wage Peace, a movement that seeks to develop connections with Palestinian women, notably via social networks, around the search for a resolution of the conflict.¹⁷⁸ WILPF has courageously sought to promote a unique, non-violent path to a sustainable peace in Ukraine, whilst acknowledging that “[t]his is obviously an incredibly difficult position to hold onto during a time when the violence and injustice towards the people of Ukraine is so blatant.”¹⁷⁹ Intellectually, interesting new work has gone into exploring the feminist pitfalls of international humanitarian law,¹⁸⁰ or calling out the “sexist epistemic biases” of revisionist Just War theorists.¹⁸¹ The movement’s contradictions have perhaps never been more evident for all to see, but it may be liberated by greater acknowledgment of its specificity and its contested, intersectional character. Where hegemonic masculinity is often barely aware of itself—such, it seems, is the obtuse privilege of domination—women’s struggles, and feminism have foregrounded in dynamic ways what it means to be a woman and to fight for peace.

177. Feminist Anti-War Resistance, *Russia’s Feminists Are in the Streets Protesting Putin’s War*, <https://jacobin.com/2022/02/russian-feminist-antiwar-resistance-ukraine-putin> (last visited May 24, 2025).

178. Yiftach Ron et al., *Women for Peace: Promoting Dialogue and Peace through Facebook?*, 6 SOC. MEDIA + SOC’Y 2 (October 2020).

179. Nela Porobić, *Holding Onto Nonviolence and Feminism in the Midst of War*, WILPF (May 9, 2022), <https://www.wilpf.org/holding-onto-nonviolence-and-feminism-in-the-midst-of-war>.

180. Griffin Ferry, *Oppression Through Protection: A Survey of Femininity in Foundational International Humanitarian Law Texts*, 35 LAW & INEQ. 57 (2017).

181. Jennifer Kling, *Engaging in a Cover-Up: The “Deep Morality” of War*, in PACIFISM, POLITICS, AND FEMINISM - INTERSECTIONS AND INNOVATIONS 96 (Jennifer Kling ed., 2019).

This certainly tempers the notion that the women's peace movement has nothing to say to present-day conditions of fratricidal enmity. Yet the women's peace movement is also hardly the (relative) force it once was, fragmented as it has become, at a time when the broader radical peace agenda itself is waning. Who, for example, amidst the unanimous clamor of support for Ukraine, sometimes evidently loudly encouraged by liberal or nationalist women themselves, will really risk sounding a dissonant note to blame the heavily masculine militarism of *both* Russia and Ukraine and their backers? How likely are direct encounters between Ukrainian and Russian women pacifists in today's conditions and how would they be received? At times, both feminism and the women's peace movement have been consumed by sororicidal struggles about their meaning, both theoretical and practical. This has created openings for new initiatives. For example, more than the WILPF, it is new, local, transnational and informal movements such as the Greenham Common women's peace camps in the 1980s¹⁸² or "women in black" more recently¹⁸³ that have taken over the mantle of bottom-up peace on the margins of governance feminism.

Nonetheless, the chiasms that have long characterized the idea of a women's peace movement¹⁸⁴ continue to resurface on the international plane, as when Kurdish militant fighters denounce Western feminist antimilitarism as missing the necessity of their armed struggle for both women's emancipation and self-determination.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, a number of feminists have refused to sign the "Feminist manifesto against war" (in Ukraine), criticizing "the expression of a general pacifist posture . . . associated with a political analysis that does not distinguish between aggressive war and legitimate resistance" and suggesting that peace in this case would mean "in practice calls to submit to both Putin and the great powers."¹⁸⁶ And there remains a distinct strand of feminism that is sanguine about the continued importance of the use of force to not sacrifice women's rights for an ultimately illusory peace.¹⁸⁷ Movements

182. Gwyn Kirk, *Our Greenham Common: Feminism and Nonviolence*, in *LIVING WITH CONTRADICTIONS* 610 (2018); Lynne Jones, *Perceptions of 'Peace Women' at Greenham Common 1981–85: A Participant's View*, in *IMAGES OF WOMEN IN PEACE AND WAR* 179 (Sharon Macdonald et al. eds., 1987); Florence Binard, "What Sort of Peace Do We Want?": *Greenham Common and the Fight against Nuclear Armament*, 20 *REVUE LISA* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.14259>.

183. Susan Finch, *Women in Black: A Women's Peace Movement*, in *DYNAMICS OF DISSENT* 154 (2019).

184. Alice Henry, *Women and Peace*, 32 *OFF OUR BACKS* 26 (2002).

185. Dilar Dirik, *Self-Defense Means Political Autonomy! The Women's Movement of Kurdistan Envisioning and Pursuing New Paths for Radical Democratic Autonomy*, 60 *DEVELOPMENT* 74 (2017).

186. Catherine Samary, *Comments on the "Feminist Manifesto Against War"*, *INT'L VIEWPOINT* (Mar. 25, 2022), <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7582>.

187. Karima Bennouna, *A Peace of Her*, 19 *UCLA J. INT'L L. FOREIGN AFF.* 63 (2015).

such as “women in black” precariously hold together constituencies that may also become more aware of their irreducible differences in the process¹⁸⁸ (as illustrated in Israel, for example, by the emergence of the “women in green” movement).¹⁸⁹

No doubt the continued sway of the male gaze on international prescription is partly to blame. The dominant discourse of international law, focused as it is on fighting, sanctioning and punishing those guilty of aggression or war crimes but sanctifying the use of force in self-defense and significant collateral and infrastructural harm, has never seemed further from dealing with the root causes of war.¹⁹⁰ It coexists with the broad failure of the disarmament agenda or any real international initiative to challenge war's cultural script. It reconducts a masculine consensus that can only think of force as being dealt with more force, and that exhausts itself in the pursuit of security rather than peace. The humanitarian project, in particular, seems to have long been coopted by a militarized and largely male military technocracy whose claim to “humanizing” war is dubious in the best of times, when it doesn't merely serve as a pretext for untrammelled violence.¹⁹¹ The continued investment in humanitarianism as the best hope to civilize warfare marks a striking abandonment, at least by comparison with early feminist wariness, empowering the military as they-who-decide-on-who-lives-or-dies, failing to problematize the deep power antinomies that have long characterized its existence, and leaving untouched the glaring “man” question at the heart of the contemporary production of violence.

But one may speculate whether forces other than rank misogyny have been at work in the sidelining of women's radical peace efforts, such as the very contradictions inherent to the idea of a *women's* peace movement. Born from the early transnational solidarity of the suffragettes and an intuition about the power of organizing across enemy lines, that movement has not necessarily aged well in an era of much greater attention to intersectionality, the fluidity of gender, and the perils of cooptation. On one level, the women's peace movement is susceptible to the criticism, clear in the above-mentioned international law snipes, that it expresses a utopian aspiration woefully out of line with the reality

188. Sandra J. Berkowitz, *Can We Stand with You? Lessons from Women in Black for Global Feminist Activism*, 26 WOMEN & LANGUAGE 94 (2003).

189. Tamy Amanda Jacoby, *Women's Organizing in Conflict Zones: A Case Study of Two Israeli Women's Protest Movements* (Dec. 2000) (Ph.D. dissertation, York University (ProQuest), https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=NQ67913&op=pdf&app=Library&is_thesis=1&oclc_number=54206880).

190. Laurent Borzillo, *Le droit international de l'usage de la force complique-t-il la résolution des conflits ?*, LE RUBICON (Jul. 19, 2023), <https://lerubicon.org/le-droit-international-de-lusage-de-la-force-complique-t-il-la-resolution-des-conflits>.

191. Thomas W. Smith, *The New Law of War: Legitimizing Hi-Tech and Infrastructural Violence*, 46 INT'L STUD. Q. 355 (2002).

of the world. Although luminous and inspired, the 1915 congress and efforts at negotiating peace behind the lines were on some level a dismal failure, as were of course the inter-war efforts to build security guarantees through the League. The post-World War II realist consensus was that the international order had suffered from too much utopianism, not too little. If the only very partially fulfilled promise of Wilsonianism was to blame, then a fortiori women's radical pacifism could not have been part of the solution.

That critique, however, is also a little tired and can easily be turned on its head. What is "realistic" about fighting wars to their bitter end?¹⁹² How well is the international community served by a Security Council dominated by Great Powers capable of freezing it when it would be most needed? Instead, it may be more helpful to see the problem as largely endogenous to women's pacifism and its continued dialectics. For one thing, what is left of the women's pacifist impetus is constantly threatened, not only by its enemies but by its would-be friends (what of the risk, for example, that under the guise of lending solidarity to Ukraine, hegemonic Western feminist voices will drown the voices of Ukrainian feminists?).¹⁹³ Perhaps more significantly the movement is threatened not only on account of the external opposition it receives, but also by its own internal dynamics. To the extent that it has existed at all, the women's peace movement has always been a complex riff on both womanhood and peace, in ways that are uniquely precarious and at risk of falling either into a mere "pro domo" protection of women or exhausting itself into an all-out attempt to rethink the world "de novo."

Still, that tension is in itself productive of the dynamics of thinking about peace in the process of problematizing it. On the one hand, the more the movement has spoken to questions of peace, the more its specificity and *raison d'être* have been susceptible to challenge. What was particularly "feminine" about the "women's peace movement" if it spoke about peace for all, as surely it had the ambition to do? And, in the event that the answer was "nothing" (because one resisted, perhaps wisely, making strong claims about women's inherent wisdom when it comes to peace), why ought there to be a specific women's peace movement that could not be folded into the general peace movement (where women, needless to say, have also long been active without necessarily having to identify as such)? The problem tended to become more acute the more women's prescription for peace morphed into a global project for order and justice: what, then, was left even of *peace*?

On the other hand, the more the movement spoke to the question of womanhood (to buttress its case that it *did* have something specific to

192. Frédéric Mégret, *To Surrender or to Fight On? A Human Rights Perspective on Self-Defense*, 5 JUS COGENS (2022).

193. Elisa Moros, *Ukrainian Feminists under Western Eyes*, INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT (May 17, 2022), <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7658>.

say), the more it exposed itself to the dynamics of fragmentation unleashed by intersectionality, pushing it steadily towards its vanishing point. How could there be a women's peace project if women were so profoundly different, and what internal hegemonic logic lurked behind speaking "in the name" of all women? In a way, the women's peace agenda only arguably prospered intermittently at the risk of bracketing the sheer diversity of what being a woman meant, in the process allowing forms of discrimination to seep in. The more the "woman" in the "women's peace movement" was problematized, conversely, the more womanhood has seemed to take it in all directions, including peace of course, but not only.

Be that as it may, these tensions have arguably precipitated a "normalization" of the women's peace movement, one that has found in feminist humanitarianism a common platform that seems unassailable, if less radical. Critical of humanitarianism's exclusions rather than humanitarianism's hegemony, it may have lastingly shifted the feminist critique away from pacifism and more towards attention to the variegated and distributive impacts of violence. If that is the case, then women's approaches to peace would have significantly retreated from their earlier association with a tradition opposed to all wars, to a fruitful but limited practice of merely ascertaining the costs and benefits of particular wars and forms of violence therein for women's constituencies. Maybe this is the appropriate codicil to at least a century of intellectual agitation around ideas of womanhood and peace, namely that peace is neither a particularly consistent ideal nor a specifically feminine one.

This might still set out the contours of a powerful critique of international law,¹⁹⁴ but one that would be henceforth much closer to the law's dominant practice and, awkwardly, in an increasingly commanding position towards it—a "feminism of governance"¹⁹⁵ that could even be deployed to harness force in defense of women's agendas. It would also ensure that feminism had, truly, come full circle in relation to war. However, it might also give up on what had always been one of the more powerful potentialities of the women's peace movement, namely, to stand not merely as a form of advocacy for women, but as a form of critique of gender that embraces "men" as well as the variegated permutations of gendered identity and targets the totality of international law as an ordering device. In that view, the fate of women in war is less the problem to be dealt with by law than the revelator of law's problematic gendered antinomies.

One persistent dead angle in that perspective is the glaring "man

194. Frédéric Mégret, *Féminisme et droit international : Le «féminisme de gouvernance» à l'épreuve du «féminisme critique»*, in *FÉMINISME(S) ET DROIT INTERNATIONAL: ÉTUDES DU RÉSEAU OLYMPE* (Emmanuelle Jouannet et al. eds., 2016).

195. HALLEY ET AL., *supra* note 130.

question” in both international law and war,¹⁹⁶ so evident is the conjoined masculine domination of both. As untrammelled violence is reinvested with gusto by a new generation of male political leaders and their occasional female enablers, gendered fault lines are constantly redrawn.¹⁹⁷ One danger is that feminism will provide a sort of veneer of legitimacy for violence, whether through appeals to women’s “soft” touch in counter-insurgency,¹⁹⁸ demands to “save” women through the use of force,¹⁹⁹ or a feminization of armed forces that remains rife with ambiguity.²⁰⁰ Making women into the “acceptable face of war” is clearly not what the women’s peace movement aspired to. It can in turn provide renewed opportunities for paternalism, patriarchy, and masculine domination as militarism continues to shape gender roles in war and in peace time.²⁰¹

The sort of feminism promoted by the women of 1915—solidarist, transnational and radical—at any rate, was very much at odds, perhaps even the polar opposite, of “governance feminism,” a feminism more deeply implicated in the contestation of international law through the contestation of war than is sometimes appreciated. That it was so at the risk of its own marginalization changes nothing to the fact that it produced a powerful alternative to the continued dominance of the masculine episteme in international affairs. Rekindling its potentialities will require new solidarities and perhaps less attention to investing the halls of power than subtly undermining their hold on legal imaginations.

196. John McMahon, *Depoliticization, Essentialization, or Transformation? UN Women’s Representations of Men and Masculinity*, in INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION, TORONTO (2013), <https://genderingworldpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/mcmahon-un-women-and-masculinity.pdf>.

197. Lynne Segal, *Gender, War and Militarism: Making and Questioning the Links*, 88 FEMINIST REV. 21 (2008).

198. Laleh Khalili, *Gendered Practices of Counterinsurgency*, 37 REV. INT’L STUD. 1471 (2011); Rachel Grimes, *Military Masculinities and Counter-Insurgency Theory and Practice in Afghanistan An Uneasy Relationship?*, in WAR AND WOMEN ACROSS CONTINENTS: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES 174 (2016).

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