

# FEMINISTS *connecting* FOR PEACE

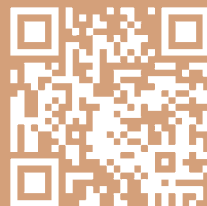


SECURITY

«We must talk about mental health. It is very challenging, if you are not ready for the pressure that comes with being an activist.»

OLIN MONTEIRO  
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# DEAR READER

What does security mean to you? Which people, places, sounds and senses make you feel safe? What is threatening your safety? These questions are central in many discussions within our global network of feminist peace activists. Therefore, we chose to focus on safety and security for this second edition of the «Feminists Connecting for Peace» magazine.

Security is a relevant topic for all of us. However, it can take on very different meanings depending on the context, political or economic interests, and on who holds the power to define security. Particularly women, LGBTQIA+ people and racialized individuals face security threats and lack of safety every day. In times of armed or political conflict, incidents of violence and discrimination increase.

Discussions about security and safety often have a strong focus on military and/or police. Security is generally directly related to armament, increased numbers of officers, surveillance technology, weapons production and distribution. As a feminist peace organization, we are strongly opposed to this concept of security as the only possible option to build secure societies. Rather than creating safety, militarized security often endangers and kills people. In pursuing a feminist vision of peace, our approach to security centers on the people affected by violence and insecurity. We take a hard look at how security

is created and ask: Security for whom? By which means? What are the long-term consequences of increased militarization in the name of security? Who benefits from today's security politics?

In this publication, feminist peace activists from around the world have their say. They describe what safety and security mean in their contexts and share stories from their countries and lives. They also make demands and propose strategies to reach genuine security for all.

We wish you an interesting read,



**CARLA WEYMANN** Network Coordinator    **ANNEMARIE SANCAR** Network and Program Manager

Bern, August 2023

A note on terminology: In English, safety and security describe two different things: Safety refers to the condition, where people are protected from threats and dangers and the wellbeing of all is guaranteed. Security, in turn, means to protect people from danger. This differentiation does not exist in German and in many other languages, however, it is important to understand the difference for the understanding of the articles of this publication.

# FEELINGS OF SAFETY

**A few years back, I transitioned from being a youth coordinator in an NGO in my home country Switzerland — a country that is considered safe — to being seconded as a peace advisor to Mindanao, Southern Philippines, a place with high security risks due to conflicts and natural calamities.**

I stayed in three different cities in Mindanao for almost six years. Along the way, I went through four relocations that were imposed on us by (almost exclusively male) decision-takers who mainly used security-related arguments. The reasons were diverse: potential violence during the election period, the worsening security situation in Western Mindanao, the siege of Marawi (the Islamic centre in Mindanao), which led to escalated conflict between so-called «violent extremist groups» and the Philippine government, and lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic.

My security feeling during this time varied a lot. I became aware of my strong need for transparent and efficient communication. It was important to me to discuss my insecurities with my local partners, since I had built a sound relationship based on trust with them. Moreover, I felt a strong need for being understood about what was going on and what the occurrences meant to me and our team, as individuals, as a family member and as seconded advisors to our local partner organisations. My own feelings of security went far beyond the security-rationale of protecting me from potential harm; it rather included being provided with a set of measures that allowed me to continue transforming conflict into positive solutions, without putting myself or our partners at risk.

A couple of months after my last relocation, while still being subjected to the strict lockdown in the Philippines, and after contracting Dengue fever, I took the decision to end my assignment in Mindanao and go home. I wanted to go back to my familiar social network that provides me with the safest of all feelings: being at home with family and friends.

When I arrived in the city of Bern, I suddenly felt insecure and unsafe, which took me by surprise: I found myself close to a gathering of angry looking people behaving aggressively, targeting and partly destroying buildings, cars, and other objects. Later, I learned that this was a protest against the Covid-19 measures. The protesters complained about the «Swiss dictatorship imposing measures against our democracy». I was astonished by the intensity of the protests, particularly as I had just come back from a place with one of the strictest and longest lockdowns in the world, where the president at the time publicly commanded the military and police personnel to shoot those who do not obey to the lockdown rules.

Only few weeks later, my feeling of safety and security was turned upside down again: Someone broke into our rural family home and stole some of our material and emotionally valuable belongings, leaving a massive destruction behind. Due to this incident, my family and I had to actively restore our sense of being safe at home as we did not want our feelings of safety being destroyed by those who violently entered our safe space.

All these experiences made me think about what makes me feel safe and how I define security for myself, regardless of where I am. I realized that security risks are always there, no matter the context. Being prepared and aware of them, is helpful, certainly. My approach of dealing with insecurity is to build and claim secure and safe spaces. If needed or demanded, I adjust to and accept measures imposed by others who assessed them from a protection perspective. Measures that are meant to protect me as an individual, the community I am immersed in, or the overall purpose, which is the creation of gender just, peaceful, and inclusive societies free from exploitation and oppression.

In an ideal world, security must be understood comprehensively and not from a militaristic, patriarchal perspective. It is a world where universal human needs<sup>1</sup> such as trust, respect and belonging

are at the core of our work and where we are willing to transform insecure spaces into safe ones. To me, being safe means having the possibility, potential, and freedom to mitigate risks in a way that minimises danger. A safe world means to be empowered to create and contribute to feminist visions of peace.



**KARIN WIDMER**

is a cultural anthropologist and passionate advocate for inclusion, justice, and participation who engaged in peacebuilding initiatives in Mindanao (Philippines) for six years. She is part of the PWAG team since mid-2022.

# COURAGE TO DISTURB THE HARMONY

Olin Monteiro has worked with PWAG for many years, strengthening the feminist movement in Indonesia. Currently, she is implementing the project «Feminist Art & Healing Gathering» that addresses the challenging process of learning organizational management among feminist activists, as well as the need for healing within the feminist community. PWAG's Carla Weymann met Olin Monteiro for a conversation about security, activists' mental health, and healing.

*Carla Weymann: What is the current situation like for feminist peace activists in Indonesia?*

Olin Monteiro: It depends on whether the activists live in the city or in rural areas. In Jakarta, feminist activists are mostly privileged. Many are well-educated and well-travelled. But in remote areas, especially on the islands, far from the capital Jakarta, activists are facing a lack of access to information, sexual harassment, bullying or the accusation of bringing Western ideas to the villages. Activists and human rights defenders in religious areas (such as Aceh) generally receive more threats. Although today, people are much more receptive of the idea of feminism and willing to discuss feminist issues, patriarchy is still strong.

*Carla: Do you have an example?*

Olin: I found an interesting concept for solving problems on one of the islands, which illustrates the challenge of being a feminist activist in rural Indonesia: Some women said that they are told to not disturb the harmony, but to rather accept the situation to maintain the peace. The question is: What is this harmony based on? I think the desire for harmony is deeply rooted in patriarchal culture. So, asking for things like gender equality disturbs the harmony of the village according to local wisdom. It takes a lot of courage for the activists to disturb the harmony or question the common sense.

*Carla: How is this affecting their mental health?*

O. M.: The mental health of women in the big cities and on the islands is different. The patriarchal way of thinking on the islands makes women adjust. I met some of the young activists, who still fear their parents and are anxious about how their future is going to look like. Social media increases this anxiety, because as activists, they become very aware of issues such as gender-based violence. It gives them more anxiety because they are more aware. It is very challenging if you are not ready for the pressure that comes with being an activist.

Recently, many activists resigned. Some told me they cannot handle the pressure of being activists, because they must always seem strong. They are expected to understand, know everything, and help others – while sometimes they cannot even help themselves. There is also a difference between generations: In my generation, being a feminist is a way of living, I understand why I must sacrifice things. However, some think that activists are some kind of celebrities, and when they face problems, they can't handle it.

*Carla: Your current project with PWAG – the Feminist Art & Healing Gathering – provides training for young feminist activists in various regions of Indonesia, but also by creating space for them to heal. How did you come up with the idea for this project?*

Olin: Most Indonesian feminists are expected to become counselors. Automatically, people think that as an activist, you are also a psy-

chologist – all organizations receive requests for support, but not everybody can do that, we need a proper counselling training.

Many activists have their own problems; they were victims of violence themselves. They survived, became activists and want to counsel. However, if they are not solving their own problems and want to help others, it can be very dangerous. I talked to young women in Bali and Sumba Island and told them that everybody needs to do counseling for themselves first. You must be aware of your own feelings and know your problems before helping others.

For feminist work it is crucial that we talk about this.

*Carla: So, will there be a space for collective healing at the Art & Healing Gathering?*

Olin: In my experience, many of the survivors who became activists have relationship problems with other people, which can create internal conflict for the organizations if it is not handled well. It can harm their programs. On Sumba Island as well as other islands in Indonesia, I saw a lot of tension between activists. We are facing great threats; our environment gets destroyed, but the most difficult thing is when the activists are not connected. We really have to sit down, respect one another and heal conflicts between activists to focus on the common goal. I think it is important for the young feminist groups to do counseling and have a proper training. We will talk about it at the Feminist Art & Healing Gathering. We will also invite a psychologist, who sits down, talks to the people and makes an assessment of the situation.

So, it serves as an impulse for them to look inside. The gathering will also be a place to think, reflect, and create new collaboration in the future.



**OLIN MONTEIRO** *left*

is a feminist activist, researcher, writer, consultant, and producer. She has been working for the women's movement since the 1990s. She founded several women's organisations in Indonesia and actively coordinated PWAGs Indonesian network since 2004. She founded «ArtsforWomen» in 2011, connecting women activists, artists, art workers and cultural workers for a feminist collaborative space.

**CARLA WEYMANN** *right*

is a program officer at PWAG, coordinating the global network of feminist peace activists, as well as the «Feminists Connecting for Peace» magazine. She is also working with Olin Monteiro on the Feminist Arts & Healing Project.

# WOMEN'S SECURITY AND SAFETY IN THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS IN CAMEROON

**The «Anglophone Crisis» in the North- and South-west of Cameroon has rendered women and girls extremely vulnerable to coercion. They are paying the price for an ongoing conflict with devastating consequences. Ghost town operations, lockdowns, and curfews have not only heightened the risk of domestic or sexual violence, but also deprived women of their access to medical care. Women humanitarians and peacebuilders are specifically targeted.**

Since its beginning in 2017, the so-called Anglophone Crisis, also known as the Ambazonia War or the Cameroonian Civil War, has affected the safety and security of women in the private and public sphere. Various cases were reported, where the safety of women was jeopardized by non-state armed groups and the military. The United Nations recorded 4,300 cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the Anglophone regions between February and December 2020. Almost half of these incidents involved rape or sexual assault, with

30% of the victims being children. Despite incomplete data from many districts and the reluctance to report rape due to societal stigmatization, the available numbers are significant and alarming.

### **Intentional attacks on women**

Women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, who are continuously providing relief and care services, are in great danger. These women work in the most complex contexts, where their advocacy actions have been blackmailed and their photos and personal information have been displayed on social media. While it is important to talk about the safety and security of women in general, attacks that specifically target women human rights defenders in Cameroon must be particularly discussed.

During the early stages of the conflict in the North- and Southwest regions of Cameroon, women from the Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force (SNWTF) organized a lamentation campaign calling for peace and an end to the killings. These peace-making efforts led to their ruin as they became targets, which is why many of them had to flee and leave behind their belongings. Hundreds of such stories exist, and hence, the very people trying to provide support and relief became victims themselves, having no access to aid in their most difficult times. Women humanitarians report that they have to deal with sexist comments from armed men when they try to secure access to remote areas to provide life-saving services to the affected people.

In Cameroon, rape has been used by armed men as a form of war on the bodies of women, which under international humanitarian law is considered a war crime. However, perpetrators of sexual offences remain unpunished – often living in other countries – while putting the lives of several women peacebuilders and human rights defenders on the line by calling them «black legs» (enemies or traitors). This situation is further exacerbated because socially, survivors are exposed, while perpetrators are protected. Therefore, it is common to see posts on social media portraying and bullying rape survivors while the perpetrators are neither denounced nor cancelled. Hence, the institutions and the government must ensure the protection of women and girls both on- and offline.

### **Feminists demand action!**

Feminists in Cameroon draw attention to the fact that the strategies to protect women often fail to address the underlying causes of gender-based violence and rape. For example, many safety and security measures focus on protecting women by restricting their movement. This happens predominantly in ghost towns (abandoned villages or towns), where the economy is paralyzed and no one is allowed to go out of their homes, leading to the desertion of public places, the restriction of movement, and the imposition of dress codes. Feminists argue that these measures further restrict women's lives, whereas the focus should instead be on changing the social norms and creating a culture of respect towards women.

A feminist concept of safety and security should embrace the complex realities of women affected by crisis, taking into account their ethnicity, class/caste, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Several strategies have been proposed by feminist activists to address gender inequality and promote safety and security of women. For example, they advocate for education and run awareness-raising campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and encourage men to become active allies in ending gender-based violence and harassment. Feminists also call for the provision of safe public spaces and mental health services for survivors of gender-based violence. They are convinced that legal and policy changes are necessary to ensure the protection of women's rights. Additionally, there is an urgent need for safe spaces to be open and accessible for women and girls at risk of harassment and abuse with trained staff to fulfil the psycho-social needs of those persons.

### **A need for solidarity and sisterhood**

Human rights organizations in Cameroon providing support to activists in distress are urgently needed, particularly because those in danger are often left alone or abandoned and suffer from severe trauma. Unfortunately, safety and security are not always the priority of the donors. Many do not have flexible budget lines to cater for the security and welfare of their recipients. Donors and partners, who are committed to supporting the safety and security of women as well as peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts, should first focus on



the wellbeing and mental health of activists and humanitarians and hence take care of those risking their lives to serve others. This said: There is a need for feminist organizations and institutions to show solidarity and sisterhood across borders to support our women.



**CARYN DASAH**

**is a social justice activist and peacebuilder who believes in the power of locally rooted actions as solutions to end injustices. As the general coordinator of the Cameroon Women's Peace Movement (CAWOPEM), she helps to ensure that Cameroonian women are part of the peacebuilding process.**

«Feminists in Cameroon draw attention to the fact that the strategies to protect women often fail to address the underlying causes of gender-based violence and rape.»

CARYN DASAH

# GENDER- TRANSFORMATIVE PEACEBUILDING: WHAT ABOUT MASCULINITIES?

Feminist activists have historically called for a paradigm shift in peacebuilding practices and the way security is understood. However, existing policies on gender and conflict resolution often overlook the crucial aspect of masculinities<sup>1</sup> and their impact on militarism, peace, and (in)security. This article emphasizes the urgency to transition from a gender-sensitive to a gender-transformative approach to conflict resolution.

Despite men holding significant positions of power, notably in the security sector and peace operations, little attention has been paid to men and boys as gendered beings. Consequently, their multifaceted roles and associated gender norms in driving conflict and building peace remain poorly understood and largely unaddressed. This observation prompts reflection on the prevailing notion that a gender analysis of conflict often looks at the realities of women and girls. The omission of men's and boys' roles is particularly striking given that existing policy frameworks refer to the inclusion of men and boys, including two UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Hence, it is critical that a gender-transformative

1) Masculinities are referring to a set of socially constructed and prescribed roles and practices for men and boys.

2) Bias L. and Janah Y. (2022): Scoping Study: Masculinities, Violence, and Peace. Basel: swisspeace.

approach to peacebuilding takes a holistic look at gendered roles in conflict and avoids portraying women solely as passive carers, reproducers or victims, and men only in terms of militarized or hegemonic masculinity.

How can the concept of masculinities be integrated into a feminist approach to peacebuilding? We propose four combined steps.

## **Understand gender as relational**

Gender analyses in conflict resolution and security policies need to integrate gender as a system of power that operates on a fluid and relational scale. Relational refers to the understanding that gendered norms establish hierarchies that distinguish between individuals and behaviours deemed more or less worthy. Those hierarchies extend to institutions, states, and their relationships, and are important drivers in the realm of security. On top of this power structure sits hegemonic masculinity over other masculinities, which guarantees access to privileges, resources, and power for those who conform to it. This form of masculinity is often associated with stereotypical traits, prioritizing militarism, control, and violence.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that these gendered norms are not only upheld by men but also by women, military institutions, state organizations and other actors and social structures. The dominant sets of roles are maintained and reproduced as a significant practice for perpetrating different forms of violence, including the subjugation of the lives and bodies of women and gender minorities.

## **Masculinities in plural: applying an intersectional feminist approach**

Just as identities are multiple and at times contradictory, so are masculinities and femininities. Adopting an intersectional approach is important to recognise the multifaceted nature of masculinities in fragile and conflict-affecting settings. For instance, the traditional roles of men and boys as breadwinners, protectors, and gatekeepers may be challenged, because the conditions of armed conflict and pervasive violence often hinder their ability to fulfil these ideals. Military organisations and non-states armed groups precisely mobilize expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity, by explicitly

linking armed forces with manhood and militarised masculinities. Recruitment strategies thus build on militarised masculinity and economic factors with a rhetoric of war economy, leading some men and boys to join the war system, as this is a viable alternative to these role's ideals in times of conflict. Meanwhile, other men may take on roles such as mobilising for peace.

Thus, intersectional analyses of masculinities aim to capture overlooked forms of violence and varied experiences of men and boys in cases of armed violence, both as perpetrators and victims. Simultaneously, it is imperative to recognise context-specific factors such as class, race, age, sexual identities, or religion, which shape men's level of vulnerability.

### **Identifying existing practices: differentiating engagement from transformation**

When working on/with masculinities for gender justice, two prevailing approaches exist in practice: First, «engaging men and boys» and second, «transforming masculinities». The former actively engages men in gender equality initiatives. It recognizes the importance of the participation of men and boys as «allies» and «agents of change». While this approach seeks to address gender inequalities and promote more equitable relations, it might not guarantee a change of gendered norms.

To overcome this challenge, a transformative approach to masculinities has emerged, which goes beyond individual engagement. It focuses on transforming the underlying social structures and norms that perpetuate harmful practices and fuel violence. This approach aims at challenging patriarchal power structures and redefining deep-rooted notions of gender(ed) norms, to create more inclusive and gender-just societies. Both approaches are valuable and offer unique angles; they are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

### **Weighing masculinities against multifaceted risks**

Lastly, integrating masculinities into peacebuilding policies must be carefully weighed against potential risks. There is a danger of misusing the term, confusing and equating masculinities mainly with

hegemonic masculinity. This can result in describing men's roles in monolithic and singular terms. If donors use the term without contextualisation and without implementing feminist principles, their actions can be viewed as an externally imposed agenda that contradicts local feminist priorities. The concept of masculinities may also be co-opted to reinforce men's traditional roles and practices, further harming the very people the transformative approach tries to protect. Military and policy actors could misuse the term to advocate for reallocation of funding from gender equality and peacebuilding initiatives to a militarised and hard security approach to conflict. This would favour men in power, increase military budget, harm civil society and marginalised groups, and justify the use of force under the banner of women's empowerment.

In sum, to mitigate the risks of misuse and co-optation, it is indispensable to thoroughly contextualize masculinities, be accountable to, and collaborate closely with local feminist, LGBTQIA+-people, and youth civil society. While including masculinities needs to be weighed against these risks, the nuanced analysis of masculinities proves to be an important tool to redirect gender-sensitivity towards a more transformative approach.

Embracing a gender perspective that captures the complexity of masculinities allows policymakers, peacebuilding practitioners, and researchers to enhance their efforts directed at preventing conflicts. Moreover, it enables to recognise and integrate the impact of masculinities into security policy frameworks, such as feminist foreign policies and NAPs on 1325, with the aim of challenging the underlying norms that induce violence.



**YASMINE JANAH**

is the associate gender and peacebuilding advisor at swisspeace. In her role, she contributes to the civil society consultation process for the upcoming Swiss 5th National Action Plan on UN Security Council 1325. Prior to that, Yasmine supported multi-stakeholder national dialogues on peace and security issues in Congo, Cameroon, and Morocco.

# HOW TO WALK THE WAY FROM WAR TO PEACE

**How do women in Ukraine understand security? With this question in mind, the Kharkiv Regional Foundation Public Alternative and PWAG started their joint journey from war to peace in 2021. Women from local groups and NGOs met at the Women's Peace Tables (WPTs) in the Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv regions of Ukraine. The WPTs opened safe spaces for women to talk about (un)safety and discuss common strategies to improve their daily conditions. Today, two years later, war is a brutal reality and security priorities must be redefined. The project continues in these challenging circumstances. PWAGs Annemarie Sancar met with Olena Zinenko, media researcher, lecturer, and manager of Kharkiv Regional Foundation Public Alternative for a conversation.**

Olena Zinenko: It was in 2022 on February 24th when the aggression from Russia towards Ukraine started. Kateryna Khaneva, activist and participant of the WPT, noted: «Life before and after. How and what it will be? War broke into life immediately, so quickly that some time was needed to realise what had happened. And realisation came when the last train had left Donetsk long ago.»

*Annemarie Sancar: As it turned out, the primary need and survival strategy from the beginning of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine was to stay connected. Previous acquaintances enjoy a high degree of trust and enabled quick requests from activists regarding the needs of women in the frontline areas. PWAG was ready to adjust their project logic and started a campaign for the provision of immediate humanitarian aid quite successfully, thanks to the mobilization of the network of activists.*

Olena: We wondered: Has the new wave of war changed women's security needs? What we could observe was that the needs have not changed, but they have become more urgent: The risk of not meeting both basic needs (saving life, protection from domestic violence, primary medical care, water, food, and housing) and others (destruction of a life projects, internal displacement, etc.) have increased. Additionally, we have witnessed the separation of families, the flight of women to other countries, mostly with children, and the discrimination of men as they were hindered from leaving the country. The risk of multiple discrimination against girls, elderly people, and people with disabilities (impossibility of mobility, dependence on other family members etc.) has also grown, so has discrimination against Black people in Ukraine.

*Annemarie: It is important to listen to these women talking about their needs in times of war. Therefore, we started – together with local women's NGOs – a series of storytelling activities. These spaces motivated women to tell their geographical, social, and emotional journeys.*

Olena: We collected stories of the displacement of women fleeing war. Those who wanted to stay talked about their needs for medicine, personal hygiene products, and food. Women who decided to flee the war with their children talked about a long journey under shelling, about their travels in overcrowded trains or cars, and about queues at the border. Some activists and officials had to leave their homes and cities due to the threat of being captured and killed. At that time, in the first days and months of the war, it was a journey from point A, war, to point B, unknown.

*Annemarie: In September, representatives of women's organizations located in the Ukraine met for a panel*

*discussion online: Women from Eastern Ukraine, who moved abroad, and activists from other countries, shared their experiences and learned from each other.*

Olena: Yes, we identified five key pillars according to the activities of women in the community, which essentially described the understanding of their security, namely:

1. involvement of women in socially relevant activities,
2. education about safety,
3. protection of women's rights,
4. combating violence and trauma, and
5. political influence of women.

The collected material was organized in key themes and prepared for being communicated. Trainings online and in person helped women to work on their personal stories in a way that they could be told to a wide audience.

*Annemarie: All participants were asked to bring an object that symbolized safety in a situation of displacement due to war: a cup, a puppet duck, a cross from their grandmother, and even a cat. These items were taken as a starting point for their stories told in Krakow in autumn 2022.*

Olena: Some Ukrainian women experienced displacement for the second time, the first after the events of 2014, when the territories in the east of Ukraine were occupied and the Crimea was annexed. Those women shared this experience with those who faced the tragedy of war for the first time in 2022, an experience which helped to «unfreeze» and to get involved with women facing threats. The analysis of the materials collected since spring 2022 enabled us to define a concept for further networking and common projects: «The pathways from war to peace» reflect the dynamics of the movement of women in search of security for themselves and their beloved.

*Annemarie: In February 2023, Ukrainian women met in Frankfurt an der Oder, where many of them are staying now to find out what the concepts of «war» and «peace» mean for women who left their homes due to war – a collection of impressions, emotions, images...*

# THE UKRAINIAN WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN AND MEN IN THE REGION

Olena: Participants wrote post-its about war. They wrote down the following terms: re-evaluation of values, impossibility to be where you would like to be with the beloved, pain, occupation, fear, inability to make decisions by oneself, imposition of somebody's will and desires, and injustice.

They did the same about peace. What they wished for was: unity of Ukraine, will, independence, choice, return home, and confidence. Women do not see the path from war to peace as a political story, but as the story of their lives.



**ANNEMARIE SANCAR** *left*

holds a doctorate in Social Anthropology focusing on migration and development cooperation. She has been involved in feminist networks and gender projects with a focus on economic literacy, peacebuilding, and migration for many years. Currently, she is working as a network and programme manager at PWAG.

**OLENA ZINENKO** *right*

is a non-discrimination, human rights, and media literacy coach, and mother of two daughters. She is an Ukrainian feminist who promotes gender equality and creates spaces of communication with respect for human dignity.

The war in Ukraine, along with the closely related processes of romanticizing war and the rapid growth of militarization in the region (Belarus, Baltic States, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Poland), has led to the increasing celebration of toxic/brutal masculinity (in essence, the identity of an abuser) as the only correct masculine role model. As a result, male identity is experiencing a serious crisis that affects a large number of men and women.

The hierarchical segmentation of the societies as well as a rise of patriarchal narratives and attitudes in our region are increasing even in unexpected spheres such as the independent Belarusian media, for example.

The men's groups who have been impacted by toxic, militarized masculinity are often not perceived as «real men», and therefore face the pressure of public opinion. These groups include:

- Men who refuse to take up arms and join the military or who have served in the military and wish to leave for various reasons,

- Former Ukrainian and Belarusian combatants who have been wounded and are unable to continue fighting. They face difficulties to socially reintegrate and readjust to civilian life. Also, many of them feel guilt, resentment, and disappointment, and some of them suffer from mental health issues, which are highly tabooed and painful issues,
- Former male political prisoners from Belarus who left the country are facing pressure from the protesting diaspora community demanding their participation in Ukrainian military actions, however, they are unwilling or afraid to do so, and
- LGBTQI+-individuals who do not conform to the traditional gender role of being the protector and provider of the family.

This reinforcement of toxic masculinity as the only correct role model for men also affects women: There is an increase of intrafamilial domestic violence since men are socially perceived as heroes, particularly Ukrainian former combatants and Belarusian former political prisoners and combatants fighting on the side of Ukraine (many Belarusian fighters who were imprisoned due to the 2020 protests are fighting for Ukraine as they are in solidarity with them and as they want to gain combat experience to go back to Belarus to free it from Lukashenko's dictatorship with weapons in their hands). The problem of domestic violence is being silenced because families do not know what to do about it or how to deal with it. It is difficult for any woman to admit that the man who is socially celebrated as a hero is abusing her at home. Her hands are tied because she lacks the experience to stop it and fears social condemnation and victim-blaming.

### **Talking about war has become a taboo**

We have lost the focus on the most crucial level – grassroots – where predominantly women work with refugees, children, marginalized groups, or people in extreme poverty. Due to the lack of attention, burnout, and chronic fatigue, the grassroots activists lose their motivation, and hence, their networks slowly fall apart. Women who have been traumatized by the war in Ukraine or terror in Belarus find themselves in a marginalized position with a lack of public attention towards their social, economic, psychological, and other issues. Talk-

ing about peace has become a huge taboo: Women who talk about peace or participate in peacebuilding efforts face new threats and risks like harassment, threats of physical violence, and death.

Going forth, the competencies and knowledge of the international peacebuilding organizations and transnational feminist movement are only used to a very limited, uncoordinated extent, even though there are numerous opportunities to use their skills by providing assistance to conscientious objectors, supporting traumatized people, or strengthening local communities.

### **Countering patriarchal narratives**

Due to this background, the following recommendations can be made:

First, the UN Resolution 1325 must be implemented for an effective involvement of women in decision-making processes in peacebuilding activities. Women peacebuilders who work in high-risk situations, even within EU countries, and at the grassroots level with local communities, must be empowered and supported, as well as their rights must be defended.

Second, men who are facing significant challenges due to the spread of patriarchal narratives – particularly conscientious objectors and deserters – must be supported.

Third, conflict prevention and peaceful conflict resolution, including assistance in facilitating trauma work for former combatants and their families, should be particularly emphasized.

Fourth, all forms of violence against women, whether it be wartime sexual violence or domestic violence within the families mainly of former political prisoners or combatants, must be combatted. The trauma work focusing on children and women needs improvement.

Fifth, in all activities, feminist approaches and narratives must be strengthened as a counterbalance to the dominant militaristic patriarchal narratives and toxic/brutal masculinity.

Last but not least, these recommendations need financial resources to be implemented.

From a feminist peace activists' perspective, the implementation of these recommendation will determine whether radical sentiments grow and how much the war will impact all countries and social segments within this region and beyond. Compared to former times, the situation in terms of the tolerance of violence and brutality has changed for the worse, society has become even more brutal, and violence is reinforced and rewarded after the last events in the region.



**OLGA KARATCH**

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«Talking about peace has become a huge taboo: Women who talk about peace or participate in peace-building efforts face new threats and risks like harassment, threats of physical violence, and death.»

OLGA KARATCH



# FEMICIDE IN KOSOVO: A PERSISTENT CRISIS UNDERMINING WOMEN'S SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Femicide, defined as the intentional killing of women due to their gender, remains a pressing issue in Kosovo. Rooted in stereotyped gender roles, power imbalances, and damaging social norms, femicide poses a significant threat to women's lives. The insufficient response from the courts and lenient punishments erode the trust in the judicial system, discouraging victims of domestic abuse and families of killed women from seeking justice. This article delves into the rising trend of femicides in Kosovo, the systemic failures in addressing gender-based violence, and the urgent need for societal change.

Femicides and judicial inefficiency in Kosovo are heavily undermining women's equality and their trust in the legal system. The following case from 2018 exemplifies the shortcomings of the justice system: Pjeter Ndrecaj, found guilty of murdering his wife and daughter, first received a lifelong sentence. However, subsequent legal proceedings resulted in a retrial, where the Court of Appeals sentenced him to only 24 years and six months in prison.<sup>1</sup> The reduction of penalties in such cases reflects a lack of seriousness in addressing violence

1) <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-courts-too-lenient-in-femicide-sentences-ngo-warns/>

2) Masculinities are referring to a set of socially constructed and prescribed roles and practices for men and boys.

against women and sends the wrong message to potential offenders. The Kosovo Women Network (KWN) – the largest women's rights NGO in the country – expresses concerns that these lenient punishments encourage criminals to carry on as before and discourage victims from reporting the offenders.

Escalating violence and post-war integration challenges were evident for Kosovar women. Women were particularly affected by the war, suffering not only from sexual abuse, but also profound mental and physical trauma. However, few sexual violence cases were reported during the war, despite the widespread occurrence of domestic violence at the time. Since the end of the war in 1999, instances of violence against women and femicides have steadily increased. The heightened prevalence of violence and the higher amount of awareness and confidence among women might explain the rise of gendered violence reports.

After the war, Kosovar women from civil society rapidly organized and established five women's shelters throughout the country. A report about violence against women in Kosovo<sup>2</sup> submitted to the United Nations showcases the Center for the Protection of Women and Children's substantial work in assisting 1,960 victims of war rape, including the support of 29 young women in terminating forced pregnancies resulting from the conflict. However, the report also contained concerning statistics, such as the fact that 60-70% of the women residents of shelters returned to their spouses due to financial dependence, and the inability of 90% of residents to secure employment after leaving the shelters.

Many women in Kosovo face obstacles in exercising their rights – for example property rights – due to their families' reluctance and discrimination. Limited access to education jeopardizes women's well-being and perpetuates their dependence on spouses and families. The Kosovo Women's Network emphasizes that no space is truly safe for women in Kosovo, highlighting the urgent need for solidarity and protection against the systemic assault.

In Kosovo's patriarchal society, men usually have the final say in family matters and control women's access to social and economic resources. At the same time, men often criticize women for «mis-using» the liberties they have obtained. Despite male resistance, women have gained self-confidence, economic empowerment, and

awareness of their rights, challenging the traditional power dynamics. Consequently, powerful men resort to violence to regain dominance and control over women. What these men fail to recognize is that women's struggle for equality is not primarily about men relinquishing their overwhelming freedom and power. Rather, compared to the war period, women have come to understand that they can independently access their rights, without relying on the men in their households to bestow them upon them.

The women of Kosovo are no longer remaining silent; they are actively rejecting violence, publicly denouncing injustices, and confronting gender inequalities. Education, economic empowerment, and justice remain key to the women's dignified wellbeing. Efforts must continue to improve education for young girls, enhance women's economic situation, and facilitate access to property rights. Citizens, political elites, NGOs, and international actors should work collectively to foster a more egalitarian society.



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# WHAT REALLY MAKES US FEEL SAFE? US MILITARY BASES, MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEMS, AND MILITARIZATION

Traditional CHamoru culture provides a concept of safety that contrasts militarism. For CHamoru women in Guahån (Guam), traditional values are the basis for resistance against U.S. occupation and the military base located on the island.

The CHamoru women are the matriarchs of the Mariana Islands in the Micronesian region of the Pacific. Traditional CHamoru culture was matrilineal, matricentric, and matrifocal, meaning that women played a critical role in decision-making, peacebuilding, and caring for the land. We were revered for our child-bearing abilities and land was transmitted from mothers to their daughters, ensuring that the land remained a resource available for the future generations. The *maga'haga*, or female chief, held complimentary authority to her eldest brother, the *maga'lahi*, or male chief. These sibling leaders of the clan made decisions with everyone's best interest in mind. As a female CHamoru elder stated:

«We had a lot, but grandmother always said: 'What you have is useless without love'. So, all the time, she would tell us that, if God

gave us more than others, we needed to help the rest. 'It's not just for you, but it's to take care of the rest'.»

This human-centered philosophy is nicely articulated and written down in the CHamoru values of *inafa'maolek* (collective peace) and *fa'taotao* (respect for humankind).

The CHamorus' homeland of Guahån (Guam) is an unincorporated territory of the United States, which has been occupied by the U.S. Department of Defense after the Spanish-American war was ceded by the Treaty of Paris in 1898. The U.S.' footprint makes up approximately one-third of the island's 212 square miles. The island was an active war zone from 1941-1944, when the Japanese Imperial Army invaded the island in an attack on the U.S.. In World War II, the CHamorus suffered extreme atrocities such as mass murders, starvation, and sexual slavery. In 1944, the U.S. reoccupied the island and, until today, continues to build up its military presence. The island's strategic geopolitical and geographical location in the Pacific makes it the center of triangular military exercises. Guahån has been threatened to be bombed by North Korea and China, which has a bomb named «Guam Killer». As the U.S. finds itself in a constant state of war preparation, the island's military budget has increased significantly, with current plans to construct a new missile defense system worth \$1.5 billion USD. The community is told that this project would protect the island and that the U.S. Department of Defense's assets were secure. The announcement of this project begs the question, «what *really* makes us safe?».

CHamoru women conceptualize safety as the caring for others. It is linked to the concept of genuine security, where our community has all things necessary for life. This includes the protection of our natural environment, meeting all basic human needs, and respecting the inalienable right to self-determination for all peoples of the world. The International Network of Women Against Militarism gave birth to this conceptualization decades ago by recognizing the need for an alternative model of security that challenges the idea of national security presented by nation states. This perspective is consistent with the vision that peace transcends the absence of war to create thriving communities defined by a culture of life.

Many CHamoru women on Guahån reject the notion that military bases, fences, and missile defense systems create safety and peace, particularly as militarism is rooted in fear and devoid of respect

for humanity. Our very human experience as a U.S. unincorporated territory highlights this insecurity. Therefore, we make use of our imaginations to reclaim *peace* so that it might eventually be re-centered on the ancient CHamoru wisdom of *inafa'maolek* (collective peace) rooted in *fa'taotao* (respect for humankind). These fundamental values have guided our people for millennia. As women, it is necessary to let our ancient wisdom resuscitate. As my elder aptly reminds us: «What you have is useless without love.»

Let us bring love to the tables for peace and genuine security.



**LISA LINDA NATIVIDAD**

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# «DECENTERING THE STATE»: COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING BEYOND RESOLUTION 1325

The UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on «Women, Peace and Security» (WPS) was — and still is — considered a milestone in feminist peace and security policy since it was passed 23 years ago. But how does it manifest «on the ground» and how is it part of an «entangled global coloniality»? At our webinar «Memory and Transformation», academic and activist Yaliwe Clarke spoke about how she sought to counter liberal feminist discourses around WPS in her research with community peace groups in Uganda.

«It is important to me to speak on this topic to people who think very deeply about questions of peace and security and how it relates to gender equality and feminism.» With these words, Yaliwe Clarke began her presentation at the webinar «Memory and Transformation», which focused on the legacy of conflict-related violence and injustice and the lasting impact of excluding the voices and experiences of marginalized groups when dealing with this history.

Yaliwe shared the findings of her research on five community peace groups in Uganda between 2012-2018. These groups were set up by local peace activists during the militarized conflict in North Uganda, from the late 1980s to the 2000s, and during the post-conflict reconstruction period. Only one was set up after the UNSC Resolution 1325 was passed. Yaliwe focused on thinking «from the ground» and asked herself how peacebuilding and peace processes were understood by the community activists.

Resolution 1325 formed an important backdrop to her research. She described it as «the key document that has shaped the way in which this focus on a feminist analysis of peace and security has been channeled internationally.» Her research was driven by her desire to think critically about the prominent global discourse since the passing of the Resolution. She wanted to figure out how this discourse is manifested in community groups in militarized contexts and underscored by a focus on femininity, womanhood, and security.

«I sought to counter what I called ‘liberal feminist discourses’ that form part of an entangled global coloniality which is racialized, patriarchal, heteronormative, and Eurocentric at its core. I think Resolution 1325 is part of that entanglement.» With South African academic Heidi Hudson’s critique of liberal peacebuilding in mind, Yaliwe’s study embraces a decolonial interpretation of gender and peacebuilding. Hudson, she said, «offers ways for constructing more complex and holistic understandings that are reflective of men’s and women’s everyday life experiences as they cooperate with and resist global oppressions.» Her work in Uganda took an approach that «decentered the state», choosing to focus on what these five groups did to foster a process of peacebuilding rather than focusing on governments and international processes of «peace-making».

She shared four theoretical points that she discerned from her six-year interaction with these groups and the women who founded and led them:

1. Conduct a nuanced intersectional analysis of women’s socio-economic and political power in militarized contexts. This requires an understanding of how power works in these contexts and how it is located in women’s bodies, networks, and spheres of influence in the communities where peacebuilding interventions are undertaken. This ensures that women’s complex social positioning in terms of age,

race, class, family, and geographic location in relation to militarized conflicts is understood beyond normative framings of femininity. One of the difficulties of the WPS discourse, she said, is that it assumes that femininity in and of itself is essential to peacebuilding processes. This assumption must be disentangled. Giving attention to women's positioning in communities during militarized conflict ensures that their power and agency is understood and centered in social change processes without giving «undue attention to men's realities and their concomitant versions of masculine power.» It also avoids an overemphasis on women's vulnerabilities as victims of violence.

2. Pay attention to gendered experiences of survival when drawing on local efforts to build peace. Yaliwe asked the women why they set up peace groups just for women. Consistent across her study was their articulation of «fractured masculinities.» The women felt they needed to intervene because men were unable to deal with the crisis. As a result of these «fractured masculinities», women's socio-economic roles and influence grew beyond their traditional/«normative feminine» roles in the communities.

3. Articulate militarism as a social and economic system that is intertwined with colonial histories of violence and patriarchal values and customs «that pitch masculine power as normative.» She described how British colonial histories of militarism influenced and shaped «how the conflict unfolded ethnically and travelled through a masculine militarized identity-based form of power.» Seeking to understand versions of British militarized masculinities was inevitable in making sense of how these kinds of masculinities were part of the causes of the war and also shaped how war unfolded in North Uganda.

4. Think about a shift in engendered power, particularly with regard to markers of socio-economic and political power. Land, for example, is central to society's capacity to recreate human security and a sense of social harmony.

The webinar was part of the project on civil society's contribution to the implementation of the Swiss National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 «Women, Peace and Security.» Find out more about this project, which we initiated in alliance with KOFF - swisspeace and the feminist peace organisation cfd on our website [1000peacewomen.org](http://1000peacewomen.org). A recording of the webinar is available under «News.»



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worked as a journalist for more than 20 years, 13 of them in South Africa. She was employed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation before joining PWAG in 2019.



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#### PeaceWomen Across the Globe - PWAG

PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) is a feminist peace organisation with an international network that works towards the equal inclusion of women in all areas of peace and security. The network of PWAG dates back to the nomination of 1000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. The international organisation is based in Bern, Switzerland, and is committed to the participation of women in peace-building. PWAG advances the sharing of experience and knowledge between PeaceWomen worldwide and advocates for women's sustainable and visible peace work.

[www.1000peacewomen.org](http://www.1000peacewomen.org)

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of PWAG.

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PeaceWomen Across the Globe

FRIEDENSFRAUEN WELTWEIT

نساء من أجل السلام عبر العالم

Femmes de Paix Autour du Monde

Женщины мира за мир на земле

MUJERES DE PAZ EN EL MUNDO

Mulheres pela Paz ao redor do Mundo

DONNE DI PACE NEL MONDO

ピースウーマン—国境を超え平和をつくる女たち

全球和平妇女