International Dynamics of UNSCR 1325: A Feminist Critique of Women's Inclusion in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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ABSTRACT

Women, when empowered can contribute to the peace, economy, and development of a nation, and since the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) was adopted, which aims to promote the gender perspective in conflict contexts and eliminate disparities connected to sexually gender-based violence, its practical impact has encountered a variety of difficulties. Thus, this study seeks to examine the international dynamics hindering women's inclusion in peace processes in the DRC despite the institution of UNSCR 1325 and the deployment of UN peacekeepers in the country. The study adopts a qualitative analysis and quantitative data from the UN, and other sources to show evidence of women's marginalization in the DRC. The rationale for using the DRC is due to the recurring instability in the region and to assess the effectiveness of the resolution. This study concludes that the complex construction of the resolution has been a hindering factor for a successful implementation, as well as the lack of women's inclusion in peacekeeping and negotiation in the conflict process. This research recommends that the National Action Plans should be implemented with the full participation of the women at the grassroots level in the theatre of war, and the need for effective collaboration amongst stakeholders in ensuring peace and stability in the region. The applicability of the feminist theory illustrates how international dynamics coalesce to marginalize DRC women from peacekeeping and peace negotiations, which have affected the possibility of inclusive, effective, and sustainable peace in the DRC.

Keywords: Militarized Gender, Peacekeeping, UNSCR 1325, Social Relations, Feminist

INTRODUCTION

Despite women's presence on the frontlines during wartime, their experiences and contributions have been rendered invisible. But in 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) acknowledged that both men and women should take an equal role in and benefit from peace initiatives and because of this effort, gender mainstreaming was implemented inside UN peace operations, which required that all proposed actions, laws, policies, and programmes be evaluated considering their effects on both men and women (Schroeder 2005, 5).

Background Information

Since Mobutu's overthrow in 1997, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been plagued by deadly warfare. Amid media portrayals of the DRC as a region where "hell is just a local call away," an estimated 1.3 million people were evacuated by the end of March 2009, (Sadie, 2015:450). This happened despite the 2003 Sun City Accords and 2008 Peace Agreements (Goma Accords). Despite the signing of a new peace accord in February 2013 in Addis Ababa, known as the Framework Agreement or Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region, under the supervision of the UN

Secretary-General, coupled with the fact that the notorious M23 rebel group was routed in November 2013, very little progress was made in 2014 to enhance security for the people of the DRC. The number of displaced persons had grown due to the continuous fighting in the DRC, to 6.1 million, and the conflict rages on (UNHCR, 2024).

However, the DRC began experiencing the first set of UN peacekeepers after independence from Belgium in 1960, when she descended into chaos and disorder. From 1960 to date, the DRC has experienced two major UN peacekeeping missions being on Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO), which replaced the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) on 1 July 2010, with the mandate of civilians protection, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts, (UN, 2022).

Between, 1997 to 2013, women globally experienced empowerment through the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on "Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)" on October 31, 2000, which reiterated the UN's commitment to gender mainstreaming in conferences such as at CEDAW 1995. The UNSCR 1325 addresses the negative effects of war on women, the necessity of including women fully and equally in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, as well as the need to protect women from sexual and gender-based violence during conflicts, (UNSCR 1325, 2000).

Equally, equality in participation is a key factor in reaching sustainable peace, and as of now, there is a marginalisation of equal inclusion of women in peacekeeping and peace-making processes (UN Women, 2015). The UNSCR 1325 which was the first resolution on the WPS agenda, illuminated these deeply rooted issues in a way that had not been highlighted before and considering the above, this research is backed by its policy relevance, due to its evaluation of the resolution based on its provisions for women in an actual case study of peacekeeping and peace negotiation in the DRC. In this dissertation, I seek to investigate the continued marginalization of women in peacekeeping and peace processes despite the provisions of UNSCR 1325, as well as the deployment of UN peacekeepers in the DRC. I argue the dynamics of international and domestic actors in labelling women as victims, therefore, victims have no presence in the act of bringing peace coupled with the unequal power distribution in the international system and the complexities of gender in the DRC.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Feminist scholars such as Enloe, Yuval-Davis and other activists have lauded the UNSCR 1325 as being extremely important for women's anti-war and peace activities. The Resolution has a similar viewpoint to numerous other works of feminist scholarship that emphasise the differences between men's and women's experiences of war, conflict, and post-conflict, redefine sexual violence as a weapon of war rather than an unfortunate by-product and acknowledge the significant role played by women at the grassroots level in rebuilding post-conflict lives in their communities (Sorensen, 1998). Additionally, UNSCR 1325 depends on feminist literature that outlines the historical contribution of international feminist organisations to the mobilisation against militarism, war, and violence (Cockburn, 2007). This research will critically analyse the resolution, and its provisions using relevant literature to critique the resolution for women's marginalization, its domestic and international dynamics for exclusion and the potential outcome for women's lives, peace, and security in the DRC.

Ontological Assumptions

Women are prevented from participating in political and governing processes, and from attaining legal

rights due to patriarchal and societal norms. This is in line with (Shekhawat, 2021) argument that makes the case that preconceived notions about the roles that women should play, are frequently constricting and such presumptions are engrained, not accidental, the patriarchal system meticulously crafts them to create and perpetuate the supremacy of a specific gender and in a similar vein (Griffiths et al, 2021) argues that one of the main problems with UNSCR 1325 is the way it only presents women in terms of their gender, without considering how gender interacts with other aspects of identity, such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, age, and religion, and that this common method of "homogenising women" ignores issues with interpretation, localization, adaptation, and implementation. When women want to enter government, for instance, societal assumptions about sexual assault frequently have consequences.

However, these prejudices are particular to each society and the reality in the DRC is that women are not all the same as they represent a vast array of interests, problems, capabilities, attributes, and talents. The (UNSC 2008), annual report explains that certain traditional and cultural norms engender a "culture of impunity on which sexual violence thrives"; however, efforts to broaden the legal classification and treatment of women infringe on long-standing customs and obligations and one of the reasons there has been such a muted reaction to holistically addressing gender in conflict is because to do so thoroughly would require eliminating male privileges, and this work has in a variety of arenas proven to be exceedingly difficult for human rights practitioners over many decades.

The emergence of the second wave of feminism in the West during the 1970s and 1980s coincided with a recurrence of nondialogue at international conferences between women from the "first" and "third" world, in which one side would advocate for women's liberation as the main objective of the feminist movement while the other side would counter that it made no sense for them to speak about women's liberation as long as their people were not free, (Yuval-Davis, 2003:22). The discourse of the deaf was used to describe this. While third-world women vividly experienced being members of a subjugated group and frequently did not see an autonomous space for themselves to organise, western feminists believe that women's collective membership and its consequences for personal positionings are frequently kept invisible, and when western feminists did discuss their national narratives, it was typically from an opposing perspective (Yuval-Davis, 2003:22).

In accordance with the logic of women-as-more-peaceful, it is assumed that women are more involved in formal peacebuilding operations despite being defined via their abilities as community educators and mediators, but this is not how the reasoning functions. As a result, ideas, and behaviours that mostly males participate in active conflict and are seen as the key players in resolving it are heavily influenced by the underlying assumption that conflict and violence are a masculine domain (Ellerby, 2016:140). Women's involvement in informal peace-making and through civil society is also viewed as secondary and frequently not at all relevant to formal peace negotiations and processes because peace processes are typically treated as elite events in which parties to conflicts and negotiators are considered the most relevant actors. In other words, gendered belief systems support the concept that only people who have actively engaged in conflict (men) can bring about peace, hence women are not seen as the main stakeholders in peace processes (Ellerby, 2016:140).

It is crucial to question that; in a scenario where women are not commonly included in official peace discussions, to what degree does this affect UNSCR 1325 outcomes? Does women's descriptor absence from peace processes lead to their substantive exclusion from peace accords?

EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemologically, (Allen, 2011) submitted that Feminist criticisms were founded on the belief that sociology ought to reflect the lives of everyday women more accurately, which was either disregarded or

portrayed in a flat manner, the "masculine epistemological posture was questioned by feminists in the empirical tradition, who did not acknowledge "its own perceptivity" or its subordination to the world it saw. Additionally, it is a sort of power, according to that allows the world to be formed from a masculine perspective and given this, feminist empirical epistemology aimed to contextualise conventional techniques of social inquiry rather than outright rejects them. It achieved this by criticising how science was conducted but maintaining the idea of the scientific activity itself (Letherby, 2003:43).

Two later epistemological traditions aim to focus on the private, subjective, and personal aspects of women's lives that have traditionally been disregarded by the male objective stance in contrast to the "male-defined epistemologies," which deny the pertinence of the experiential, private, and personal. Given this, (Allen 2011:14) argues that feminism must start with experience and requires the identification of as "standpoint theory" because it is only from such a vantage point that one can see the extent to which women's worlds are organised in ways that differ from those of men, and as (Allen, 2011:15) explained, the experience and lives of marginalized people, as they understand them, provide the most significant agendas for the feminist research process.

Constructing a feminist research solution to inclusion requires a cursory inquiry into the lives and experiences of women in conflict areas and how marginalization has compounded the problems of their status as victims of war and marginalisation from an inclusionary peace negotiation hinged on women's issues. It is the most appropriate 'agenda' for a feminist research methodology. This research offers its theoretical and analytical arguments in a terse submission. Feminist peacebuilding approaches analyse power, dominance, and resistance from a relational perspective by examining the collective experiences of those at the margins, specifically at the intersections of gender, race, culture, class hierarchies, and exclusions, (Martin de Almagro, 2018). Feminist methodologies can also provide more complex understandings beyond the essentialist dichotomy of local vs. international, racial, and class distinctions and exclusions.

Is There a Feminist Methodology?

The ideas of (Schechter,1982), a study of the growth of public concern and services for abused women that explored women's responses to abuse, are crucial when considering the applicability of feminist theory and feminist activism, he further argues that there must be clarity on the possibility of feminist theorising to aid in the development of an appropriate research methodology. This calls for an answer to the question, "Is there a feminist methodology?", (Allen, 2011).

Different viewpoints exist in this regard and the literature does not agree on the existence of, or even the necessity of, a "particularly feminist approach to performing social research" (Allen, 2011). Additionally, there may be agreement that feminist research, in all its forms, prioritises the many experiences of women and the social structures that shape those experiences and the discussion of a feminist methodology also centres on the goals of the study itself, the power dynamics between researchers and those being "researched," responsibility and the possibility for the research to lead to change for women (Allen, 2011). Only in the 1970s was the idea of gender-separated from sex (Delphy 1993:2). Its name derives from the Latin term "genus," which means "kind" or "group" (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2013:3). Many academics have offered theories on this area, such as liberal political theory, which contends that gender is a personal trait based on biological categories of female or male, which further contends that gender disparity is caused by individual variations in men's and women's attitudes and behaviours brought on by sex-role socialisation (Deetlefs, 2017:34).

Understanding the concept of gender to change gender and its effects were based in part on the underrepresentation of women in important sectors, lower salaries, sexual objectification of women, and violence against women, which was a key experience for women in the DRC despite the gender protection

arm of UNSCR 1325 (New, 2005:54). Additionally, the separation of sex and gender allowed for the study of women and their suppression to move from biology to social constructs (Sydie, 2007:248). Others, including International Relations feminists, made the case that gender should not be seen as a categorization tool but rather as a power relationship between men and women (Kaufman 2013:8). Because patriarchy is ingrained in all institutions and perpetuates gender inequity, it hinders the oppressed (women) from questioning these power relationships (Eduards, 1994:183).

Also, understanding the gender idea is important for analysing how men and women are perceived and what is expected of them in society. A gender-sensitive study must consider gender norms, roles, and access to resources, which demonstrate how society has created the overall subordination and inequality of women compared to their male counterparts (UNDDR Resource Centre 2006:23). To be clear, researchers like Mirra Kamarovsky and Vida Klein stated that sex roles stem from a sex's place within the society and articulated the notion that various sexes had distinct functions in the 1940s (Delphy 1993:1).

Other academics, like the Poststructuralists (like Foucault), deny the idea of universality, which improved our comprehension of how the concept of gender developed (Steans, 2006:10). It is now possible to differentiate between genders depending on many social and historical situations. For instance, (Butler, 2006) points out that because gender is about the junction of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and regional modalities of discursively produced identities, it is inconsistent across historical contexts. More specifically, traits associated with femininity and masculinity "range between cultures, ethnicities, classes, as well as age groups, like the Hispanics in the United States who are inferior to Anglo-Saxon gender structure (Peterson and Runyan, 1999:30). Gender clearly isn't a universal construct; rather, it's part of a developing and contentious social system.

The gender mainstreaming idea was created in the 1990s with the intention that ramifications for both men and women would be considered at all stages of any activity, from planning and design to law and policies. The present concept of gender mainstreaming states that gender equality should be a top priority in all spheres of social development and that gender mainstreaming must take place at every stage of the process (UNDP, 2001). Achieving gender equality will involve changes in institutional practises and social interactions with a strong voice for women in guiding their societies, gender mainstreaming demands rethinking institutions, choices, and planning, frequently with an eye towards empowering women (Gender equality and peacebuilding, 2004).

Criticism against Gender Mainstreaming

As much as Gender mainstreaming has been praised for fostering women's inclusion, it has also been critiqued based on flaws such as emphasis on women being seen as women without focusing on other roles for women which diverse from leadership to participate in peace negotiations and this has been one of the flaws of the UNSC and this automatically creates a stereotype for women not being seen as an agent of change but rather victims of war, thereby, contradicting the provisions of UNSCR 1325, (Brewoo 2013:2).

Another criticism of gender mainstreaming is the understanding that biological sex determines political interest based on the resolutions adopted by UNSC and thus, women in peace processes will always focus on women's issues, (Shepherd 2010:152), and this raises the question, will women focus on women's issues, if these issues have been addressed generally or they have been invited from the beginning to represent their issues? Women, when empowered and included in processes of peace-making, will go all the way out in ensuring that stable and sustainable peace is the end goal for the sake of their families and future generations.

Despite the criticism against gender mainstreaming, it is crucial in achieving gender equality and demarginalization of women in conflict resolution and no stakeholder in peace processes should be favoured

at the detriment of another, and the perception of women being seen as victims rather than change agents must be changed, (Abiola and Alghali 2013: 14).

Social Relations in Militarized Gender

Gender is a multidimensional institution, system, or framework of social behaviours that incorporates activities at the macro-structural/institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels that reinforce one another (Ridgeway, 2009:146). People depend on social relationships with others to get most of what they want and need in life and to relate to another person to achieve a worthwhile goal, we must find a way to coordinate our behaviour with that other. This is a primary cultural framework for organising social relations (Ridgeway 1997, 2006, 2007) and traditional sociologists like Goffman from the 1960s and modern game theorists like Chwe from 2001 have come to the same understanding of what is required to resolve this coordination issue, as (Ridgeway, 2009), we require shared, or "common," information to act on to successfully coordinate our activities. Common knowledge is interdisciplinary information that we all take for granted. A specific kind of common, cultural knowledge is necessary to predict how each of us would react and to coordinate our activities appropriately, we need a shared framework for classifying and identifying "who" self and others are in the scenario.

Following on from the foregoing, scholars including (Christodoulou and Zobnina, 2009:1) have argued that gender is an identity that is shaped by a particular society. They explained that gender is seen as an identity given by being a part of a certain community, which is used as a classification tool to differentiate between being female or male (Mazurana, 2013:3). As a result, gendered identity is used to dictate the duties, behaviours, authority, and resources that each sex is entitled to (Miller and King 2005:36). For context, men are expected by society to support their families based on their gender, while women can bear children based on sex (IAWG 2012:8). Therefore, gendered identities eventually impact how men and women interact and behave in any given context. On this point, it should be noted that (Kaufman, 2013:7) contends that both identities have their origins in the formation of the modern state during the 18th and 19th centuries when women were supposed to stay at home and had little to no engagement in the public realm; the military was crucial in the creation of the modern state and contributed to the gender norm that males are the warriors and guardians of society, thus nothing has altered since the birth of the modern state as gendered identities still impact involvement in a variety of domains.

On the above ideology, the concept of militarism was established, which is a collection of concepts, much like an ideology, presumptions, ideals, and convictions, an individual, institution, or group that embraces militarism is also accepting a unique set of ideas about how the world functions and what motivates human nature, (Gosewinkel and Kunz, 2014). As "a state without an army is naive, hardly contemporary, and hardly legitimate", women require armed protection at times of crisis, and any man who declines to employ force in times of crisis is endangering his reputation and masculinity, (Gosewinkel and Kunz, 2014). Hence, militarization is not an ideology on its own, but socio-political. The multifaceted process of militarization entails the roots of militarism planted firmly in the *ground* of society: non-governmental organisations, governmental departments, ethnic groups, and international organisations. The timely exposure, criticism, and opposition to militarization can halt it; and if consistently done, can even stop it completely. It may, however, only be postponed if these actions cease for a while.

Additionally, the military uses images of militarised women from popular culture to persuade women that their disadvantaged roles are something to be proud of, women are less inclined to rebel against these roles if they can be persuaded to take pride in them because they might feel that their positions are natural, women are less inclined to rebel against the military's marginalisation of them, (Bell, 2009). An important quote by (Enloe 2000:34) on militarization was that "one of the things that grant gendered militarization its stubborn longevity is the persistence of the presumption that women's militarization is simply the outcome of nature or custom." As a result, women are reluctant to fight militarised gender roles because they

frequently believe the roles are the result of nature, not strategic decisions, therefore, the military maintains control over women and the services they offer by marginalising them, argued (Bell, 2009).

This viewpoint supports the dominance of men in the military, while in contrast, both men and women serve in the military. Men participate in the military, receive compensation for their labour, and enjoy respect for it. While women also engage in crucial duties in the military, they are not compensated or acknowledged for their work, and frequently receive nothing but disdain, (Enloe, 2000:45) goes on to say that "military leaders worry that their power is weakening when women begin to act in their interests". The truth is that it might be challenging for women to fight against militarization, particularly now that "the latest move has been to mask women's service to the military as women's freedom," (Enloe 2000:45).

Women have historically been denied the opportunity to serve in the military, and many feminists have battled for this right. The necessity to concentrate on the wider effects of militarization on society is, therefore, stronger (Enloe 2000; 33). Given this analysis, (Bell, 2009) argued that women must be aware of the ways in which militarism impacts them daily and develop the skills necessary to analyse the military messages to which they are constantly exposed. Women may unite to oppose the militarization of all facets of society when they recognise that their militaristic roles are not their biological destinies.

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS DYNAMICS

While gendered preconceptions resulting from cultural and patriarchal pressures are widespread in some countries, they are also evident in international agreements and decisions on policies. According to Nadine Puechguirbal, the United Nations repeatedly refers to women as "vulnerable persons," which maintains their victim status (Griffiths et al, 2021:277). The (United Nations, 2008) in an international study conducted, stated that women are undoubtedly the most survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse. Also, when UNSCR 1325 and succeeding WPS resolutions under Chapter VII are not adopted by the Security Council, different States decide on the mode of implementation. This, (Oudraat, 2013), highlighted that the failure to integrate women, peace, and security issues into mainstream international relations and security studies, as well as the lack of conceptual frameworks other than feminist conceptions of peace and security, have all contributed to the lack of political commitment at the highest levels and the stagnation of the women, peace, and security agenda.

Less than 42% of member states presently have a NAP, which limits the ability of civil society to hold governments responsible and reflects the desired result for NAPs give governments a way to designate priorities in WPS decisions (Griffiths et al, 2021:277). Additionally, when States establish NAPs, they frequently are insufficient or poorly thought out and states with NAPS that are externally focused frequently overlook the value of domestic reform. Even States that implement NAPs and try to boost the representation of women in politics deal with domestic issues. A 2016 Security Council Report claims that when women do enter politics, they are regularly harassed or punished if they do not act in accordance with gendered standards by both their peers and their constituents (Griffiths et al, 2021:277) and most of the time, the government does nothing to safeguard these women. This demonstrates the absence of political commitment to and support for UNSCR 1325, therefore, women's peacebuilding success in their various nations will remain impossible without local participation.

However, the ongoing characterization of women as victims as a group does not support the advancement of women as leaders in the pursuit of peace. All throughout the WPS of UNSCRs, the idea of women as victims is a recurrent one. For instance, the wording in UNSCR 1820 is replicated in practically all other U.N. documents pertaining to WPS, "Civilians account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict," the statement reads, "Women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate

civilian members of a community or ethnic group; and sexual violence perpetrated in this manner may in some cases persist after the cessation of hostilities", (UNSCR 1820, 2008).

Given this, the international community think twice before including women in the peace and security process just because they are victims of violence or trying to bring about stability there, particularly in the DRC. Even though it is done with good intentions, the ongoing victimisation of women could be detrimental rather than beneficial: in certain circumstances, donor aid offered in the guise of advancing the WPS agenda has hampered women's agency, which may restrict their capacity to play significant roles in peace processes, and assistance projects have strengthened the perception that women are victims by emphasising their need for protection, entrenching conventional gender dynamics, and offering little support to local level objectives that may concentrate on other areas (Griffith et al, 2021:282).

The evident failure of the UN in adopting the resolution and even designing a monitoring and evaluation framework gave states the liberty to decide the mode of implementation, with no on-the-ground intent for women, whilst also, labelling women as victims depreciated their mental, physical, and emotional ability to contribute and therefore, resulting in potential marginalisation.

Gender Mainstreaming in UN Peacekeeping Operations

The institutional injustices and power dynamics that shape gender relations at the UN are rarely addressed in the current attempts to mainstream gender. Gender mainstreaming has instead been grafted onto already-existing power structures that are constrained by the essentialist character of binary opposites, in which gender has been construed as woman and women continue to be distinguished from men (Willet 2010:140). While males are being portrayed as guardians and politicians, the stereotyping of women as victims in need of protection continues. Women's active contributions to resolving disputes and promoting peace are still underappreciated. International Peacekeeping women have been given a particular agency and identity through these discursive methods, specifically that of being the targets of protective action. As such, gender mainstreaming inside the UN can do nothing to undermine the prevailing military and masculinist discourse's epistemic foundations. Instead, it compromises dissent and invalidates the actions and voices of women by creating tokenistic "spaces" for alternate viewpoints under the guise of inclusivity. In this way, the prevailing epistemology of hegemonic masculinity, militarism, and war has absorbed gender discourse.

International Relations and "high" politics during the Cold War were based on a realist discourse that was centred on the balance of power, difficulties with national security, and Weapons of Mass Destructions, (WMDs) and as a result, militarism, sovereignty, and the defence of borders were all neatly associated with security. Realists disagreed with idealism intellectuals' theories on how to advance humankind and create a stable world order, (Willet, 2010:141). Due to this, women were systemically excluded from the realistic security system, including in the ranks of the military, government officials, and academia. But in the early 1990s, feminist scholars like Cynthia Enloe and Anne Tickner helped popularise the idea of how security, militarism, and conflict-affected both men and women (Willet 2010:141). In her argument, Enloe posed the straightforward but important question of international politics: "Where are the women?", she demonstrated how the realm of international politics and security was a highly masculinized sphere of influence by highlighting the lack of visibility of women in it (Enloe, 1989), and because ideas of masculinity are integrally linked to the values and presumptions that drive international politics, these values are given precedence over other values, which restricts the alternatives available to policymakers. The idea of "hegemonic masculinity," which is an ideal style of masculinity that changes throughout time and culture but supports male authority and female submission, is a result of the essential characteristics of masculinity being accorded higher societal value than those of femininity (Willet 2010:142). Additionally, gender relations take different shapes in different civilizations, but they nonetheless share an unequal distribution of power. The idea that "the intimate is political" thus forms the basis of feminist ideology.

The development and replication of male identities, as well as their impacts on the theory and practice of international relations, are revealed through a comprehensive examination of these gendered conceptions and activities. The essentialist presumptions regarding the sexes' inherent roles serve as the foundation for the power interactions between men and women. The oversimplified binary opposites that believe males to be strong, powerful, and authoritative and women to be weak, fragile, and passive reflect essentialism, which occurs via the stereotyping of fixed identities that reinforce gender disparities and inequality (Willet, 2010:144), which further elevated men to the positions of protector, warrior, and decision-maker while defining women as the war's victims. To allow for a more comprehensive response to peace and security, one that is inclusive rather than exclusive and one that empowers those who have previously been invisible in security discourse and practice, these critiques of male-dominated notions of security have helped to reformulate the concept of security.

In addition, applying gender analysis to peacekeeping exposes a system that is ingrained in a dominant and masculinized society. This is like the situation in which the highly masculinized forces of UN member nations are used to recruit UN peacekeeping personnel. Assumptions about masculine privilege, the status and skill of the warrior, and their function as the protectors of women and children frequently permeate the military. The idea of a "natural" relationship between the protectors and the protected is one of the most potent motivators for peacekeeping operations (Enloe, 2007:60). This assumption has the unintended consequence of distorting power dynamics when the peacekeepers or protectors assert their authority on behalf of the protected and the protected are silenced as a result.

However, the policies that the peacekeepers or protectors pursue rarely provide real protection to women and children and it is also clear that those with an interest in peacekeeping have a stake in painting the world as a dangerous place that justifies interventions, in which the spectre of suffering women and children is inevitably used to mobilise public support for peacekeeping, (Willet 2010;144). While ignoring the initiative-taking voices of women's peace organisations, peacekeepers in some instances may turn into sexual predators who prey on the weak spots of local women. In other cases, they may collaborate with warlords and military leaders to uphold male privilege and power and to force women's subordination in post-conflict societies. Therefore, modifying the interactions between the feminised protected and the masculinized protectors is a key component of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping. It means combating the power of people who assert insider military information that favours their position as security specialists (Willet, 2010:144).

UNSCR 1325: Intentions for DRC Women

One of the most decisive strategies for ensuring the daily security of women, men, girls, and boys is the qualitative transformation of institutions, policies, and people commonly referred to as "Security Sector Reform (SSR)", who are mainly responsible for collective and individual security; the SSR is the transformation of security architecture (which include government, military, police, intelligence services, legal and penal systems), to ensure an effective, legitimate, democratic, and accountable role in providing security to individuals and communities. In terms of participation, it states that women should have equal participation, like men, in the promotion of peace and that women should have equal access to peace and security decision-making processes at all levels and they should be appointed as negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers, police, humanitarian personnel, as well as been included and represented in all political spheres (Deetflets, 2017: 75).

MONUSCO is a UN military force of peacekeepers committed to the restoration of peace in the DRC. MONUSCO took over the UN peacekeeping Mission in the DRC on May 28, 2010, to assure inclusiveness and promote long-term peace in the area. This modification symbolised the country's transition into a new era. The new mission was given the mandate to use all means necessary to discharge its duties, including

assisting the Government of the DRC in its efforts to stabilise and consolidate the peace as well as protect civilians, aid workers, and human rights advocates who are in the constant danger of coming into direct physical contact with one another. This underrepresentation of women in peacekeeping is concerning because it may have an impact on demobilising and disarming female ex-combatants and the defence of women against SGBV. Women make up 53% of the population of the DRC, and the tiny number of female peacekeepers is worrisome in terms of their ability to help with security, (Mbambi and Faray-Kele 2010: 2) Additionally, women in MONUSCO were referred to as servicewomen rather than peacekeepers, and when they were accepted into Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), they primarily hold non-combatant positions in the national army (Baaz and Stern, 2012:718).

The importance of culture in fostering acceptance of gender equality in all spheres must be highlighted. Interviews with male FARDC soldiers revealed that they believed female soldiers from the DRC were inferior to female peacekeepers from Western nations (Baaz and Stern, 2011:572). They said that because these ladies are viewed as being more honourable and courageous, arming them with weapons will make them look weak (Baaz and Stern, 2011:572). Additionally, male soldiers find it absurd that women are allowed to serve in the military since they see them as being less aggressive and strong than men (Baaz and Stern, 2011:574). They go on to say that gender in the DRC is not necessarily based on traditional roles in which men are the protectors and women should be protected but rather, protection of the nation is prioritised over the women, and women who joined to serve as combatants assume a masculine identity and are no longer seen as women. This belief that women lack courage depicts men's courage and strengthens traditional male stereotypes of masculinity (Baaz and Stern, 2011:577).

Gender equality and justice have had a bad rap in foreign narratives about women in the DRC (Shekawat,2021). The DRC has also been referred to as "the rape capital of the world, where sexual violence is perpetuated in a war fuelled by conflict minerals", this was made in a speech by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict at the time, Margot Wallstrom (Martin de Almagro, 2018). The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo (2007) and The Man Who Mends Women (2015), which portray women in the DRC as victims of sexual abuse and other horrors, have further normalised these narratives in popular culture, which is worse than the removal of political or peace agency.

This emphasises the UNSC's central theme, which describes the gendered female body as a passive body that must be shielded from assault (Martin de Almagro, 2018). Gender, for example, is understood to be a transversal issue in the 2006 Security, Stabilization and Development Pact initiated by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, but it completely vanishes in the 2013 Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC, where gender as a power relation is replaced with a meagre mention of "women's empowerment." Additionally, the Goma proclamation on the elimination of sexual violence and the eradication of impunity in the Great Lakes area as well as the Kampala declaration on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in 2011 both addressed the problem and concentrated on sexual violence. Like the 2010 NAP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, which promotes women's participation and involvement in decision-making in peace and security matters as well as the mainstreaming of gender in all areas of peacebuilding, the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan in Eastern DRC (2009) focused on SGBV. The resolution has drawn a lot of criticism for its inclusion of language supporting the protection of women against SGBV in situations of conflict and for associating gender with women (Martin de Almagro, 2017). Although these plans and frameworks are national and regional institutions, the UN supports and finances them through MONUSCO in accordance with the WPS agenda, which explains the relevance of giving their provisions just passing consideration.

After considering the viewpoints, the narrative of parity in decision-making institutions is essential for long-term development and peace in the DRC, as opposed to concentrating on women's core needs. More so, while still including some of the terms that appeal to contributors, this major story is constructed in

contradiction to the former dominating narrative. The argument is that a successful bottom-up strategy for peace requires that women have access to political institutions, rather than being dismissed as either victims or recipients of peacekeeping, women should be given the chance to provide their perspectives on security concerns. It is important to remove the structural obstacles that have kept women indoors and exposed them to abuse and marginalisation.

The Congolese government and the UN peacekeeping forces do not defend the celebrated "victims," but rather seek stability at the expense of and without the participation of women, and the consequence of this is that women in the DRC continue to experience daily humiliation and live in constant terror. Given this, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 requires a multi-faceted approach to bridge the gap of women's marginalisation. This also raises the question of whether stability and peace are really what the long-term goal for the people and women of the DRC is or just a charade of operations to show that the UN is working. The reality is that women no longer want to be seen as victims but rather as contributors. If given the platform, they will contribute to ensuring sustainable peace in their country, for the conflict has lingered long enough and so many of them have lost their families, children, lives, and properties. What is evident is that the women of the DRC are desirous of peace, and the question remains: is peace possible in the country with the various dynamics that exclude women? Hence, peacekeeping and peace-support efforts should ensure the necessary resources and the availability of safe women's spaces to organize dialogues and peace as well as trust-building activities as a precursor to women's full involvement in the peace process, (Gosewinkel and Kunz, 2014).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND SECURITY IN THE DRC

What does the future hold for the women of DRC in the presence of unending war? Will the government be more deliberate in dismantling societal norms such as patriarchy which limits women? Despite the inability of MONUSCO to restore stability in the DRC, the UN peacekeepers are not to be blamed for their approach to peacekeeping in the DRC, but the international dynamics that strengthens marginalisation of women in the DRC and until these are tackled, a million peacekeeping missions in the DRC will not bring an end to women marginalisation.

It is not sufficient to have conferences or seminars, develop policies, and then do nothing about them. However, there is a deliberate need to involve all stakeholders, from the grassroots to the national and international arms, to ensure that women are empowered and viewed as capable of performing in any role, rather than just as support. There is a need to start contextualising some of the processes that favoured women's inclusion in the global north to the global south, where this exclusion is greatly witnessed especially regarding the implementation of the resolution. It is crucial to state that no society will achieve a balance of peace, development, and growth with the constant marginalization of women, especially in crisis-stricken societies.

This research revealed that women are still viewed as victims and passive actors in conflict situations by international dynamics. These findings are important for improving our comprehension of how to create more inclusive and successful peace processes by emphasising the involvement of women. It is accurate to state that UNSCR 1325's partial failure stems from the constant failure of efforts to maintain peace in the absence of women.

There is a need to reconstruct the meaning of gender globally; it was socially constructed and can be reconstructed (despite the tedious process), to encourage women to sign up for combatant roles in peacekeeping and peace negotiations. When more women become involved in peacekeeping, then the peacekeeping missions are more likely to be successful with less Sexual and Gender Based Violence in

conflict areas. If Resolution 1325 is to be implemented deliberately by the international and local actors, there will an attitudinal shift through ongoing sensitivity awareness initiatives, education, and empowerment for the women, peace negotiations and peace keeping missions will not be deployed until 50% of the actors are women.

Women are occasionally included in peace processes or paragraphs in documents just to be politically acceptable, but today's world demands that we go beyond symbols and guarantee the true inclusion of women. To achieve the meaningful engagement of women in peace and security, states and society must work together to look beyond the existing standards.Excitingly, the DRC has been able to produce her first female minister " Judith Suminwa Tuluka", this is a step in the right direction, for gender equality, peace, development, inclusion, and empowerment of the women's voices in the DRC, (Oyinloye, 2024).

Conflict resolution processes will not succeed in achieving their goals until women are no longer treated as invisible in conflict resolutions. However, this will not address the fundamental equation of money, natural resources, interest, and power that underlies these conflicts.

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