

Is a Woman a Peace Agent by Instinct? The Example of Women's Position Towards the Israeli War Crimes in Gaza

Transcript

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Thank you. Hello everyone and thank you for OXP for inviting me to participate in this conference. Interesting and controversial issues raised. My approach overlaps with the approaches presented in the morning session, but I think I go beyond in order to avoid the essentialist narrative of gender and peacebuilding or peace work. So my presentation builds upon a paper that is under peer review by a feminist journal entitled Is a Woman a Peace Asian by Instinct, which critiques the liberal feminist assumption that dominate member states, Western countries in general. And this assumption focuses on women are inherently peaceful or naturally inclined to promote justice and reconciliation. My critique evolves in the context of Israel's ongoing war on Gaza. a war that many international legal experts, the UN Commission of Inquiry, and former Israeli officials and a human rights organization have declared as a genocide. As A Palestinian woman from Gaza, I acknowledge that my own positionality deeply shapes my critique and my analysis. not as a source of bias, but as an epistemological and ethical perspective that highlights the lived experience of colonial violence. The main argument in my presentation or my paper is that gender alone does not determine a commitment to peace, justice, or humanity. Instead, Women's political and moral agency, like men's, is influenced by the intersection of gender with other identities, including nationalism, religion, race, ethnicity, class, and personal and interpersonal interests or incentives. Women, like men, draw on their intersecting identities, including gender, to negotiate their experiences. and pursue power within the structures that already exist, regardless of whether those structures are, labelled, patriarchal, egotitarian, or something in between. Despite being empirically and theoretically discredited, the liberal feminist belief that including women or more women in leadership, practicing quotas and all this stuff will bring peace, continues to underpin the global WPS agenda and shape its operationalization implementation across conflict and non-conflict setting. Just recently in the UN Security Council remarks in last October, annual debate. He said, we speak of inclusion, yet far too often women remain absent from negotiation tables. In his speech, he explicitly views women solely as peace builders. As long as we have more women in negotiation tables, we have peace. The security general overlooks the role of women who already sit at the highest levels of negotiation

tables, including the Security Council itself and the ICJ. Instead of taking a just stance for those women who are at the highest level of negotiation tables, they support and legitimize state violence and injustice. Evidence from Gaza and beyond, in Sudan, in Congo, and so many parts of the world, shows that women in power have not only failed to challenge colonial and militarized violence and create peace, but have often enabled and legitimized violence. This evidence challenges the WPS global dominant narrative, which continues to equate numeric representation of women with transformation. Of course, throughout the history, there are so many examples that challenge the portrayal of women as inherently peaceful. Across time and geography, women from various levels of power have participated directly in war and atrocities. First example, in Nazi Germany, one-third of the Nazi party were women, many were active believers in the racial purity ideology of Hitler. In Rwanda, Bulinian, I don't know her surname, it's so long, the Minister for Family and Women's Development incited an organized sexual violence. In Serbia, Beljana Blavisk, the so-called Iron Lady, was convicted for her role in the Bosnian genocide. In Iraq, Abu Ghribe prison, American female soldiers, participated in the torture of detainees, including sexual torture, performing militarized masculinity to prove competence and loyalty. These cases reveal that women, like men, are capable of both violence and complicity when their actions align with dominant nationalist, ethnic, racial, or religious ideologies, as well as personal and interpersonal incentives. However, Acknowledging that women are equally capable of perpetrating violence in war does not imply that they, like men, are inherently violent. I argue that neither men nor women are inherently violent or peaceful. They both exercised their agency in various ways, both violent and peaceful, responding to context of conflict and the strategic prioritization of their multiple identities, including gender. Both women and men, as Saba Mahmoud said in her studies, conform to or subvert the dominant patriarchal norms to achieve goals that extend or go beyond gender. In the West, there are many examples. In recent decades, gender equality has become a celebrated marker of liberal democracies. Yet, instead of serving peace, gender equality often serves state legitimacy and further militarization. For example, women now hold nearly 40% of seats in the European Parliament and 1/4 of senior defense roles in the EU. The president of the European Commission and the vice president are women. They have been standing beside Israel, supporting Israel, and haven't done anything against the genocide. They are currently calling for a significant increase in Europe's defense spending in the name of European security. And you know what are the consequences, not only in women, but also in all people. particularly. poor. Several prominent female leaders, like Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Lippon in France, Alice Wiedel in Germany, support militarization, anti-migration policies, and nationalist racist agendas. Similarly, in the US, women leaders, both in the Republican and Democratic administration, have pursued the same politics of male leaders, endorsed, or remain silent about war, sanction, and Israeli genocide in Gaza. And I can't imagine being led by a woman called Caroline Lavitt, the White House

spokesperson. This trend indicates that gender inclusion without ideological change simply diversifies the agents of violence rather than dismantling its structures. And within this trend, gender equality is merely a superficial decoration. Go to Israeli women. and their role as Asians and enablers of genocide. In Israel, women have played a crucial role both in politics and the military, a trend that Israeli secular leaders celebrated as a sign of gender equality. However, in the current context in Israel, this trend has been used to uphold settler, colonialism, and the oppression of Palestinians. For example, May Golan, Israel's Minister for the Advancement of Women has publicly supported the ruins of Gaza and advocated for the destruction of its population, including women and children, because Palestinian women and children are not equally humanized as Israeli women and children. Seven of nine female members of the Knesset far-right bloc, led by Netanyahu, have endorsed policies of ethnic cleansing and resettlement in Gaza. As stated in the Israeli right-wing mainstream media, I've reviewed so many mainstream media led by the right-wing, female combatants in the IDF, including religious women. have been celebrated for their toughness and killer instinct, embodying militarized masculinity as a measure of equality and a symbol of national heroism. The ultra settler women led by figures like Daniela Weiz. I mean, I'll just try to remember what she said. She was interviewed in the settlers documentary film. Maybe you watched it. It was produced by Lewis, by the journalist Lewis and aired on Channel 4 last April. She mobilized for a new settlement in Gaza, invoking motherhood and divine duty to legitimize genocide. In addition, Wiz Daniela Wiz was even nominated by three professors in Israeli University for the 25 Nobel Prize. This is a symbolic metaphor that highlights how colonial feminism redefines violence as a virtue. This example exposed the intersection of gender, religion, and nationalism in reproducing colonial violence. So what does the evidence or this evidence teach us both theoretically and practically? How can practitioners of the WPS Global Agenda learn to make their work more transformative? First, I believe that rethinking feminist essentialism is the first thing to do. The belief that women are inherently peaceful while men are responsible for violence is shown to be both theoretically and empirically incorrect. Second, the global WBS agenda need to re-politicize peace by shifting from women's inclusion in this process to tackling the root causes of violence, such as militarism, occupation, and global economic hierarchies. So we all ask ourselves, what is the point of having female leaders adopting the same hegemonic militarized discourse? We need to make demilitarization and anti-colonial accountability as a core of the WPS global agenda. by supporting and resourcing anti-colonial, anti-war, and anti-militarization women's movements and groups. The third action that we have to follow and use in our day-to-day work for peace is to adopt intersectional and decolonial feminist analysis. It is essential to avoid essentialism. Instead of merely asking how to include women as women, they are homogeneous group. They are not, of course. Yeah. We should ask which women for what purpose and within what structure of power we need these those women to get engaged and act. Only an intersectional

decolonial feminist framework can distinguish between inclusion that sustains oppression and inclusion that dismantles it. Gender intersects with other identity factors to shape the political position of women leaders, either to maintain or dismantle the oppressive colonial systems. To conclude, we need to realize based on historical evidence that the presence of women in positions of power, and we need to all ask ourselves what is #1 identity that shaped our politics as women and men. You know, the presence of women in positions of power does not inherently produce peace or justice. You look at all those women who contribute, millions of women contribute to demonstrations supporting peace in Palestine. Their message goes beyond their gender or women's solidarity. It goes to calling for justice. As the case of Gaza tragically demonstrates, women can be perpetrators, enablers, and legitimizers of colonial and militarized violence, and they have to be accountable as equal as men. Therefore, gender equality as a practice in liberal democracy and settler colonial context must be critically redefined. Instead of merely celebrating women's access to power, we must examine the political and moral agendas that they support. Genuine feminist transformation requires aligning with anti-colonial, demonetized, and justice-focused movement rather than just counting female figures in negotiation rooms or in halls of power. I worked with UN agencies and I know exactly how they work. In short, what the world needs is not more women in power. Maybe you disagree with me. We actually need more women and men committed to dismantling the system of power that enables genocide and sustains oppression and injustice. Thank you so much.