

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards an abolitionist feminist peace: State violence, anti-militarism, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda

Hannah Wright¹  and Columba Achilleos-Sarll² 

¹School of Politics and International Relations, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK and ²Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Corresponding author: Hannah Wright; Email: hannahwright@qmul.ac.uk

(Received 18 August 2023; revised 2 April 2024; accepted 10 April 2024)

Abstract

Ever more doubts are being raised over the ‘transformative potential’ of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and whether it brings us closer to realising feminist peace. Underpinning a current of WPS activism and scholarship is a radical conceptualisation of feminist peace rooted in anti-militarism, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism. This strand shares many commonalities with abolition feminism, yet the two literatures and movements are rarely put in conversation. While both begin from similar political commitments and analyses of the international system, they propose radically different solutions for bringing about feminist liberation. Building on this observation, we ask: (1) how would abolition feminism explain why the WPS agenda has often failed to make progress towards a radical vision of feminist peace?; and, as a corollary, (2) what does abolition feminism demand of the WPS agenda? First, using the framework of ‘reformist’ and ‘non-reformist reforms’, we argue that many WPS policies are better understood as reformist rather than transformative. Second, we argue that abolitionist thinking suggests deeper critiques of WPS than those often put forward by its anti-militarist critics, based on a broader conceptualisation of militarism. Ultimately, abolition feminism demands non-reformist, anti-carceral solutions that raise challenging questions about pathways towards feminist peace.

Keywords: abolition; conflict-related sexual violence; feminist peace; gender violence; militarism; women peace and security

Introduction

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on ‘Women, Peace and Security’ (WPS). UNSCR 1325 calls for, among other things, women’s equal participation in national, regional, and international security institutions and peacebuilding and peacekeeping measures; the protection of women’s rights in conflict and post-conflict situations; the incorporation of a gender perspective into peace negotiations and agreements; and for states to prosecute those responsible for acts of sexual violence in armed conflict.¹ The resolution resulted from concerted advocacy efforts by feminists inside and outside the United Nations (UN), who regarded the resolution as a breakthrough for feminist peace activism. Just six months earlier, in April 2000, Angela Y. Davis gave the keynote address at the Color of Violence Against Women conference in Santa Cruz, California. The gathering advanced a vision of gender justice

¹United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1325, UN doc S/RES/1325, 2000. A further nine resolutions have since been adopted under the title ‘Women, Peace and Security’: UNSCR 1820 (2008); UNSCR 1888 (2009); UNSCR 1889 (2009); UNSCR 1960 (2010); UNSCR 2106 (2013); UNSCR 2122 (2013); UNSCR 2242 (2015); UNSCR 2467 (2019); and UNSCR 2493 (2019).

that foregrounded the connections between gender violence and state violence. Davis's speech offered an excoriating critique of feminist efforts to address gender violence through criminalisation, asking: 'How ... can one expect the state to solve the problem of violence against women, when it constantly recapitulates its own history of colonialism, racism, and war?'.² Arguing that women's participation in state security institutions would not solve this problem, she asked: 'Does giving women greater access to official violence help to minimize informal violence? Even if this were the case, would we want to embrace this as a solution?'.³

The adoption of UNSCR 1325 and the Color of Violence conference are both described as historic. Resolution 1325 marked the founding of the WPS agenda: an international political framework to increase women's participation in security governance, protect women's rights in (post-)conflict situations, and apply a gender perspective to all efforts to maintain peace and security. The agenda has since given rise to nine further UNSCRs, WPS national action plans adopted by more than 100 governments, and a WPS industry comprising non-governmental organisations (NGOs), consultants, academics, and grassroots organisations. The Color of Violence conference led to the formation of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (now known as INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans People of Color Against Violence) – a US-based organisation advancing a movement to end violence against women of colour and their communities. A few months later, INCITE! and Critical Resistance would publish their 'Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison-Industrial Complex', often credited as a foundational document for abolition feminism.⁴ This movement calls for the abolition of institutions of state violence, including policing, prisons, and borders, and has also given rise to transnational political communities, grassroots organising, and scholarship.⁵ While both UNSCR 1325 and the Color of Violence conference addressed the question of how to tackle violence against women and achieve feminist peace, they were, in many ways, worlds apart in their political convictions and proposed solutions.

This article puts these two feminist literatures and movements, which, until now, have rarely been considered together, despite developing concurrently, into conversation. We do so because abolition feminism helps explain why the WPS agenda has struggled to advance the radical feminist peace project to which some WPS advocates aspire, and, we argue, offers more coherent strategies to realise that project. Underpinning some versions of WPS activism and scholarship is a conceptualisation of feminist peace rooted in anti-militarist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist feminist activism, which has many common threads with abolition feminism. We argue that abolition feminism offers practical ways forward for WPS scholars and activists who raise ever more doubts over the 'transformative potential' of WPS and whether it brings us any closer to that vision of feminist peace. Building on this observation, we ask: (1) how would abolition feminism explain why the WPS agenda has often failed to make progress towards a radical vision of feminist peace?; and, as a corollary, (2) what does abolition feminism demand of the WPS agenda?⁶

² Angela Y. Davis, 'The color of violence against women', *ColorLines* (10 October 2000), available at: <https://colorlines.com/article/color-violence-against-women/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Critical Resistance and INCITE!, 'Critical Resistance-INCITE! Statement on gender violence and the prison industrial-complex' (2001), available at: <https://incite-national.org/incite-critical-resistance-statement/>; Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2022), pp. ix–xiii.

⁵ Throughout this article 'abolition feminism' refers to these movements to abolish systems of state violence. These are distinct from feminist efforts to abolish the sex trade through criminalisation, which, though also sometimes called 'abolitionist', are in direct opposition to prison-industrial-complex abolition. Some feminists also advocate the abolition of 'gender', a project sometimes linked with abolition feminism. See Crystal Jackson, 'Upholding racist heteronormativity: The anti-Blackness of prostitution neo-abolitionism in the United States', *International Journal of Gender, Sexuality and Law*, 2022:2 (2022), pp. 326–59; Jules Joanne Gleeson, 'Abolitionism in the 21st century: From communication as the end of sex, to revolutionary transfeminism', *Blindfield* (2017), available at: <https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/07/abolitionism-in-the-21st-century-from-communication-as-the-end-of-sex-to-revolutionary-transfeminism/>.

⁶ The authors would like to thank Paul Kirby for helping us to reformulate our question in this way.

In addressing these questions, we offer two contributions to the literature on WPS and feminist peace, which have wider implications for feminist peace organising and advocacy. First, drawing on the framework of ‘reformist reforms’ (those that attempt to modify existing security institutions) and ‘non-reformist reforms’ (those that seek to transform and/or abolish them),⁷ we argue that the WPS agenda that has been implemented by international organisations (IOs) and states is better understood as a reformist rather than transformative project, and that organising for feminist peace demands a non-reformist approach. Secondly, we call for a more expansive conceptualisation of militarism, as sometimes put forward by abolitionist scholarship and activism. This extends narrower conceptualisations adopted by even more radical strands of WPS activism and, in turn, poses a challenge to its embrace of (some) gender-sensitive security-sector reforms, informing our deeper critique of the institutionalised project of WPS as reformist. Considering the implications of this broader conceptualisation of militarism, we suggest further questions for research and analysis regarding how we map new pathways towards feminist peace.

The article unfolds over five sections. The first section traces the history of UNSCR 1325 through two origin stories that highlight how the WPS ‘ecosystem’⁸ both invokes and disavows a radical notion of feminist peace. We map these stories to draw out common threads and tensions between WPS and abolition feminism in the second section and explain how abolition feminism can productively respond to dilemmas within the WPS agenda at this moment in the latter’s history. The next section outlines the concept of non-reformist reforms to explain why most WPS reforms are reformist even though some have been envisaged as ‘transformative’ or non-reformist by WPS scholars and advocates. Using this framework as a springboard, the fourth section extends and deepens the anti-militarist critique of WPS by showing that the same arguments that some anti-militarist WPS advocates have made against reforming militaries can equally apply to other systems of state violence. We conclude this discussion in the final section by considering the implications of this broader conceptualisation of militarism for feminist peace activists, including WPS advocates, which opens up avenues for future research.

Two WPS origin stories: Liberal and anti-militarist

Women, Peace and Security is often narrated by academics and civil society advocates as emerging from several decades of feminist peace activism, in which the gathering of over 1,000 women from 12 countries at the International Congress of Women in 1915 to end the First World War is cited as a foundational moment.⁹ While the Congress called for universal disarmament, equal rights for women and men, and peace education for children, the demands of its successor organisation, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), expanded over the intervening century to incorporate the elimination of racism and imperialism, capitalism, the nation-state system, and environmental destruction.¹⁰ Crucially, WILPF, who, along with other organisations, advocated for the adoption of 1325, argues that militarism – understood as ‘a way of thought’ in which ‘perceived threats are likely to be met with weaponry rather than words’ – is the primary obstacle to the realisation of feminist peace.¹¹

⁷ André Gorz, *A Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 7–8.

⁸ See Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Women, Peace and Security: Mapping the (re)production of a policy ecosystem’, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6:3 (2021), p. ogaa045.

⁹ E.g. J. Ann Tickner and Jacqui True, ‘A century of International Relations feminism: From World War I women’s peace pragmatism to the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:2 (2018), pp. 221–33.

¹⁰ See, WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions, 19th Congress, Birmingham, England 1974’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1974.pdf; WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions, 24th Congress, Sydney, Australia 1989’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/WILPF_triennial_congress_1989.pdf; WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions, 31st Congress, The Hague, the Netherlands 2015’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/WILPF_triennial_congress_2015.pdf.

¹¹ WILPF, ‘WILPF Manifesto 2015’ (2015), p. 1, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/WILPF-Manifesto-2015_ENG.pdf.

'Feminist peace' resists any singular definition, but most articulations describe a form of positive peace,¹² encompassing the elimination of structural violence and inequality, including, but not limited to, patriarchy.¹³ Various theorisations call for, among other things, defunding police forces, reparations to colonised and enslaved peoples, and the transformation of the UN Security Council into a Peace Council.¹⁴ Although not all WPS advocates would support all of these measures, there remains a current of WPS advocacy and scholarship that roots its politics in similarly expansive conceptions of feminist peace. This includes the work of, among others, WILPF, Women in Black, Al-Shabaka, and critical feminist scholars, including our own past engagement with the agenda.¹⁵ While elements of this notion of feminist peace were incorporated into the UN's 1995 Beijing Platform for Action – including 'the conversion of military resources and related industries to development and peaceful purposes'¹⁶ – feminist and peace activists felt it would be impossible to transform how security was understood and maintained globally without engaging the UN's highest body: the Security Council.¹⁷ In advocating for the adoption of 1325, however, NGO advocates were clear that their goal was not (just) to increase women's participation in security institutions but 'to transform the terms of the discussions, to change business as usual, to shift the paradigm from war to peace.'¹⁸

A second origin story emphasises that 1325 was not solely a civil society-led initiative but the product of a collaboration between NGOs and gender equality advocates within the UN, whose political aims reflected their institutional positions in UN bodies and member-state delegations.¹⁹ The latter's concerns, though diverse, were driven less by feminist anti-militarism than by an urgent concern with mitigating the harmful impacts of both conflict and peace operations on women and girls. To push 1325 through the Security Council, NGOs and UN advocates made a tactical decision when drafting the first iteration of the resolution not to include critiques of militarism in the text.²⁰ Thus, while WPS is sometimes described as having been hijacked by bureaucratic

¹²Johan Galtung, 'Positive and negative peace', in Johan Galtung and Dietrich Fischer (eds), *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research* (Springer: Berlin, 2013), pp. 173–8.

¹³See, *inter alia*, Feminist International Law of Peace and Security Project, 'A letter on feminist peace', LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security (21 September 2020), available at: {<https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2020/Letter-on-Feminist-Peace.pdf>}; Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, and Catia Cecilia Confortini, 'Introduction', in Tarja Väyrynen, Tarja, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, and Catia Cecilia Confortini (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1–10; Sarah Smith and Keina Yoshida (eds), *Feminist Conversations on Peace* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022).

¹⁴Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, Madre and WomenCrossDMZ, 'A vision for feminist peace' (2020), available at: {<https://feministpeaceinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/FPI-Report-English.pdf>}; Feminist International Law of Peace and Security Project, 'A letter on feminist peace'.

¹⁵Among others, Nicola Pratt, 'Reconceptualizing gender, reinscribing racial-sexual boundaries in international security: The case of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security"', *International Studies Quarterly*, 57:4 (2013), pp. 772–83; Swathi Parashar, 'The WPS agenda: A post-colonial critique', in Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 829–39; Toni Haastrup and Jamie J. Hagen, 'Global racial hierarchies and the limits of localization via national action plans', in Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J. Shepherd (eds), *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), pp. 133–51; Hannah Wright, 'Masculinities perspectives': Advancing a radical Women, Peace and Security agenda?, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22:5 (2020), pp. 652–74; Columba Achilleos-Sarll, 'The (dis-)appearance of "race" in the UK's institutionalisation and implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Studies Quarterly*, 67:1 (2023), pp. 1–12.

¹⁶United Nations, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', UN doc A/CONF.177/20, 1995, paragraph 143.

¹⁷Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, 'Civil society's leadership in adopting 1325 Resolution', in Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Women, Peace and Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 38–51.

¹⁸Anderlini, 'Civil society's leadership', p. 42.

¹⁹Jennifer Klot, 'UN Security Council Resolution 1325: A feminist transformative agenda?', in Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 723–45 (pp. 733–4).

²⁰Carol Cohn, 'Mainstreaming gender in UN security policy: A path to political transformation?', Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights (2008), p. 12, available at: {https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/mainstreaming_gender_in_un_security_policy_-_a_path_to_political_transformation_0.pdf}; Jennifer Klot, 'The United Nations Security

military and foreign policy interests, compromises were intrinsic to its inception, without which the resolution would not have passed. UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions therefore reflect feminist conceptions of gender equality and security couched in the institutions and concepts of human rights and liberal peacebuilding, not anti-militarist feminism or feminist peace as we describe it here. Many activists and scholars, who are or have been WPS advocates, are therefore also its staunchest critics – perhaps, more accurately, ‘advocate-critics’.

These compromises continue to haunt the agenda, and persistent concerns over its recuperation by state interests challenge earlier, more celebratory accounts. WPS advocate-critics variously argue that the agenda’s focus on incorporating women into security institutions, alongside a failure to transform them, make WPS complicit with militarism;²¹ that it is sometimes framed as exporting ‘gender progressive norms’ to states and societies believed to be lacking them, reproducing racial and colonial hierarchies;²² and that its approach to political economy focused on promoting women’s labour-market participation implicitly accepts neoliberal capitalism as the bedrock of liberal peacebuilding.²³ Given the imbrication of WPS with multiple systems of state violence and oppression, some feminists question whether the agenda can ever make progress towards a radical vision of feminist peace. For example, Kirby and Shepherd argue that eclipsing anti-militarist demands with a state-centric agenda ‘makes the revival of a radical WPS practically impossible’;²⁴ Cohn and Duncanson argue that WPS policies’ failure/refusal to challenge capitalism as a driver of both the climate emergency and armed conflict renders the agenda ‘utterly inadequate to the time and the crisis in which we live’;²⁵ while Heathcote suggests that recent moves to integrate counter-terrorism objectives into WPS may mean it is time for feminists to consider abandoning the WPS framework altogether.²⁶

Nonetheless, many feminist scholars and practitioners resist surrendering WPS to state interests, instead proposing to revise it through the application of intersectionality,²⁷ decolonisation,²⁸ localisation,²⁹ and domestication.³⁰ Nonetheless, we remain troubled by these complicities that

Council’s agenda on “Women, Peace and Security”: Bureaucratic pathologies and unrealised potential’, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (2015), p. 210, available at: <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3101/>.

²¹ Among others, Dianne Otto, ‘Securing the “gender legitimacy” of the UN Security Council: Prising gender from its historical moorings’, The University of Melbourne Faculty of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 92 (2004), available at: https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/Otto_-_Securing_the_Gender_Legitimacy_of_the_Un_Security_Council_-_Prising_Gender_from_Its_Historical_Moorings.pdf; Cohn, ‘Mainstreaming gender’; Cynthia Cockburn, ‘Snagged on the contradiction: NATO, Resolution 1325, and feminist responses’, *Women in Action* (2012), pp. 48–57; Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Making war safe for women? National action plans and the militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Political Science Review*, 37:3 (2016), pp. 324–35.

²² Among others, Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender’; Chamindra Weerawardhana, ‘Profoundly decolonizing? Reflections on a transfeminist perspective of international relations’, *Meridians*, 16:1 (2017), pp. 184–213; Parashar, ‘The WPS agenda’.

²³ Among others, Claire Duncanson, ‘Beyond liberal vs liberating: Women’s economic empowerment in the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 111–30; María Martín de Almagro and Caitlin Ryan, ‘Subverting economic empowerment: Towards a postcolonial-feminist framework on gender (in)security in post-war settings’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 25:4 (2019), pp. 1059–79.

²⁴ Paul Kirby and Laura J. Shepherd, ‘The futures past of the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Affairs*, 92:2 (2016), pp. 373–92 (p. 391).

²⁵ Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson, ‘Women, Peace and Security in a changing climate’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22:5 (2020), pp. 742–62 (p. 755).

²⁶ Gina Heathcote, ‘Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: Progressive gains or dangerous development?’, *Global Society*, 32:4 (2018), pp. 374–94 (p. 391).

²⁷ E.g. Sarah Smith and Elena Stavrevska, ‘A different Women, Peace and Security is possible? Intersectionality in Women, Peace and Security resolutions and national action plans’, *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 5:1 (2022), pp. 63–82.

²⁸ E.g. Marjaana Jauhola, ‘Decolonizing branded peacebuilding: Abjected women talk back to the Finnish Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *International Affairs*, 92:2 (2016), pp. 333–51.

²⁹ E.g. Michelle Elizabeth Dunn, ‘Localising the Australian national action plan on Women, Peace and Security: A matter of justice’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68:3 (2014), pp. 285–99.

³⁰ E.g. Katherine A. M. Wright, Toni Haastrop, and Roberta Guerinna, ‘Domestication +: The fifth U.K. national action plan on Women, Peace and Security’, *The Dossier* (May 2023), available at: <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/20230510-Dossier-WPS-UK-NLISAP-1.pdf>.

have become part and parcel of the agenda. As we will elaborate, for Davis and other abolition feminists, the capitalist, racist, and patriarchal state – which comprises the institutions of global governance, including the UN – cannot produce feminist peace; instead, these institutions and discourses must be ‘radically subvert[ed]’; they must be abolished.³¹ In the following section, we highlight how the commonalities between the anti-militarist strand of WPS narrated in this section and abolition feminism, which we elaborate on below, warrant putting these literatures and movements in conversation.

WPS and the politics of abolition

The inheritance of the ‘abolitionist’ name from the movement to abolish slavery reflects an analysis showing that present-day systems of state violence are legacies of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.³² While abolition is most closely associated with Black liberation movements in the United States, abolitionist ideas and movements have emerged across the globe, in former colonies and in the metropole, led by (often multiply marginalised) people of colour.³³ Although abolition means slightly different things to different organisers and thinkers, abolitionists reject the commonplace assumption that the primary function of state security institutions, such as criminal justice systems and borders, is to keep ‘us’ safe – where ‘us’ comprises the majority, including the poor and marginalised. Rather, these systems promote ‘order and security for a few at the cost of generating violence, inequality, and social disruption for the many.’³⁴ Abolitionist movements strive to abolish these systems by transforming the conditions that make them appear necessary, including by dismantling capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy.

While reformists focus on achieving security through incremental modifications to bring about better prisons, better policing, and better militaries (for example), abolitionists instead advocate radically restructuring economies and societies to address the root causes of the harms that these systems of state coercion purport to address.³⁵ This calls not only for dismantling particular institutions, but creating alternatives focused on meeting human needs: ‘abolition calls for a revolution – in care, safety and wellbeing.’³⁶ Abolitionists’ distinctive focus on dismantling systems of state violence is often attributed to states’ increasing reliance on these systems as key enforcers of the neoliberal order since the 1970s.³⁷ While an insistence on the redistribution and collectivisation of resources and care situates abolitionism alongside other revolutionary ideas such as Marxism and anti-colonialism, on which it draws deeply, abolitionism also critiques the carceral turns these unfinished projects have sometimes taken.³⁸

³¹ Davis, ‘The color of violence against women.’

³² Among many others, Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Liat Ben-Moshe, ‘Dis-epistemologies of abolition’, *Critical Criminology*, 26:3 (2018), pp. 341–55.

³³ Among many others, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and Stephen Sheehi, ‘Abolitionism, settler colonialism and state crime’, *State Crime*, 12:2 (2023), pp. 132–45; Arash Davari, Omid Tofghian, Golmar Nikpour, and Naveed Mansoori, ‘Is abolition global? Iran, Iranians, and prison politics (part 1)’, *Jadaliyya* (2 September 2020), available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/41658/Is-Abolition-Global-Iran,-Iranians,-and-Prison-Politics>; Susana Draper, ‘No estamos todas fallan las presas! Contemporary feminist practices building paths towards prison abolition’, *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 22:2 (2020), available at: <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3842>; Cops Are Flops, ‘Re-imagining justice in South Africa beyond policing’ (2020), available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1krNcg_saPFABqjuFkQvtVKUpLjivd8Es/view?fbclid=IwAR1RcLBihctGRXPbaGjC3HOM2lwtf0YH8y_5rbgML8N8JoHIYeu0eQDdbiM].

³⁴ Julia Sudbury, ‘A world without prisons: Resisting militarism, globalized punishment and empire’, *Social Justice*, 31:1/2 (2004), pp. 9–30 (p. 16).

³⁵ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during This Crisis (and the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020); Aviah Sarah Day and Shanice Octavia McBean, *Abolition Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2022); Clarissa Rojas and Nadine Naber, ‘Genocide and “US” domination ≠ liberation, only we can liberate ourselves’, in Alisa Bierra, Jayeka Caruthers, and Brooke Lober (eds), *Abolition Feminisms: Organizing, Survival, and Transformative Practice Volume 1* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), pp. 11–57.

³⁶ Cradle Community, *Brick by Brick: How We Build a World without Prisons* (London: Hajar Press, 2021), p. 11.

³⁷ Sudbury, ‘A world without prisons.’

³⁸ Kelly Gillespie and Leigh-Ann Naidoo, ‘Abolition pedagogy: Force fields of critique’, *Critical Times*, 4:2 (2021), pp. 284–312.

The fact that debates about WPS have engaged with abolitionist thought only in piecemeal ways, and that abolition feminist thinking and organising have rarely engaged with the WPS agenda, is largely unsurprising. WPS policies aim to reform institutions that abolitionists seek to dismantle, and often invoke carceral feminisms³⁹ – those that seek gender justice through the criminalisation of gendered harms, which are heavily critiqued in abolitionist literature.⁴⁰ For NGOs working on WPS, their dependence on governments for funding, access, and influence often acts as a deterrent to making radical demands.⁴¹ However, abolition feminism shares many common political and theoretical commitments with the radical conceptualisations of feminist peace underpinning anti-militarist strands of WPS activism and scholarship. These include a critique of the dichotomy between ‘war’ and ‘peace’, including a concern with everyday forms of war-making in ‘peace time’; a rejection of approaches to security that use state violence to manage social, political, and economic problems, instead of addressing their underlying causes; and a corresponding commitment to radically transforming structures of oppression that underpin so-called security problems.⁴² As we discuss further below, anti-militarist WPS advocates envisage many of the reforms they call for as non-reformist reforms, or those ‘of the abolishing kind’.⁴³

Although the abolitionist stance towards militaries implied by WILPF’s call for universal disarmament⁴⁴ has become increasingly muted and contested in WPS advocacy in recent years,⁴⁵ some WPS advocates demand the abolition of specific military institutions such as NATO,⁴⁶ foreign military bases,⁴⁷ or technologies such as nuclear weapons.⁴⁸ Civil society advocates and scholars have also objected to the narrowing of WPS activity by states and IOs around preventing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) rather than abolishing the war system.⁴⁹ Civil society actors monitoring the implementation of 1325 have raised concerns about, for example, states’ efforts to increase women’s military participation being construed as part of the WPS project.⁵⁰ But while the question of whether feminists should seek to reform and/or abolish militaries has been the subject of debate among WPS advocate-critics,⁵¹ these conversations rarely extend to other elements of state

³⁹ Elizabeth Bernstein, ‘Militarized humanitarianism meets carceral feminism: The politics of sex, rights, and freedom in contemporary antitrafficking campaigns’, *Signs*, 36:1 (2010), pp. 45–71.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Whalley and Colleen Hackett, ‘Carceral feminisms: The abolitionist project and undoing dominant feminisms’, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 20:4 (2017), pp. 456–73; Mimi Kim, ‘From carceral feminism to transformative justice: Women-of-color feminism and alternatives to incarceration’, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 27:3 (2018), pp. 219–33; Beth E. Richie, Valli Kalei Kanuha, and Kayla Marie Martensen, ‘Colluding with and resisting the state: Organizing against gender violence in the US’, *Feminist Criminology*, 16:3 (2021), pp. 247–65.

⁴¹ Columba Achilleos-Sarll, ‘Women, Peace and Security advocacy in the UK: Resisting and (re)producing hierarchies of gender, race and coloniality’, PhD thesis, University of Warwick (2020), available at: <https://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/165375/>.

⁴² E.g. Hastrup and Hagen, ‘Global racial hierarchies’; Wright, ‘“Masculinities perspectives”’.

⁴³ Thomas Mathiesen, *The Politics of Abolition Revisited* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 231.

⁴⁴ WILPF, ‘WILPF Manifesto 2015’, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Kirby and Shepherd, ‘Women, Peace and Security’, p. 6. Feminist anti-militarism is increasingly contested since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the 2023 escalation of Israel’s genocidal violence in Palestine.

⁴⁶ WILPF, ‘WILPF statement opposing NATO’s military and nuclear policies’ (24 November 2008), available at: https://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/wilpf-statement-opposing-natos-military-and-nuclear-policies/; Cockburn, ‘Snagged on the contradiction’; WILPF Canada, ‘NATO is a threat to people and the planet’ (2012), available at: https://wilpfcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/02-NATO-is-a-Climate-Criminal_Fact-Sheet.pdf.

⁴⁷ WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions: 29th Congress, Santa Cruz, Bolivia 2007’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WILPF-Triennial-Congress_Resolutions-2007.pdf.

⁴⁸ WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions: 30th Congress, San José, Costa Rica 2011’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WILPF_triennial_congress_2011.pdf; WILPF, ‘WILPF Resolutions: 32nd Congress, Accra, Ghana 2018’, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/WILPF-Triennial-Congress_Resolutions-2018.pdf; Ray Acheson, *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

⁴⁹ Sara Meger, ‘The fetishization of sexual violence in international security’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 60:1 (2016), pp. 149–59; Soumita Basu and Laura J. Shepherd, ‘Prevention in pieces: Representing conflict in the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *Global Affairs*, 3:4–5 (2017), pp. 441–53.

⁵⁰ E.g. Cockburn, ‘Snagged on the contradiction’.

⁵¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Globalization and Militarization: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. 63–92; Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the*

security apparatuses. For example, while the recruitment of female police officers, peacekeepers, prison, and border personnel, along with the implementation of gender-sensitive policies in these institutions, have, to differing degrees, been key objectives of states' and IOs' WPS policies,⁵² these have not attracted similar controversy; on the contrary, they have received considerable support from WPS civil society advocates.⁵³

Despite their differences, we suggest that the commonalities between abolition feminism and the anti-militarist feminist peace project that haunts WPS warrant putting these two bodies of feminist thought in conversation. Moreover, in a moment where many who have supported the WPS project raise increasing doubts over its capacity to realise their (our) anti-militarist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial aspirations, we argue that an abolition feminist analysis of state violence helps clarify why WPS remains caught in its own contradictions and what an alternative path to feminist peace might look like. Indeed, some WPS advocate-critics have recently sought to bring abolitionist thought more directly to bear on conversations about WPS: WILPF, for example, published a series of essays in 2020 urging feminists to draw links between the projects of 'replacing capitalism with degrowth and ecological sustainability; replacing police and prisons with structures of promiscuous care and transformative justice; and replacing weapons and war with nonviolence and cooperation.'⁵⁴ Similarly, Haastrup and Hagen argue that it is high time to 'confront what room there is for abolitionist aims within this [WPS] agenda,'⁵⁵ while Engle, Nesiah, and Otto point to advocacy at the UN to decriminalise sex work as a model for how anti-carceral feminisms could be introduced into WPS.⁵⁶

By asking how abolition feminism explains these WPS shortcomings, and what it demands instead, we extend this conversation by exploring how abolitionist thought offers a more realistic pathway to achieving the feminist peace that some WPS advocates conceive as its end goal. To contextualise these demands, in the following section we take instruction from the conceptual framework of reformist and non-reformist reforms. This helps us to explain why, although there is a strand of anti-militarist WPS activism and advocacy that envisions the goals of WPS as non-reformist, or transformative, its advocacy demands (even in relation to militaries) have often remained reformist in character.

A reformist (WPS) agenda?

While rejecting *reformism*, many abolitionists argue that organising to bring about specific institutional reforms is necessary to further revolutionary goals. Attempting to overcome the dichotomy between reform and revolution, André Gorz introduced the concepts of 'reformist reforms'

Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (New York: UN Women, 2015), p. 135; Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward, 'Regendering the military: Theorizing women's military participation', *Security Dialogue*, 47:1 (2016), pp. 3–21.

⁵²Laura J. Shepherd, 'Making war safe for women? National action plans and the militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', *International Political Science Review*, 37:3 (2016), pp. 324–35; Angela Mackay, *Border Management and Gender* (Geneva: DCAF, OSCE, ODHIR and UN Women, 2019); Omar Phoenix Khan, *Places of Deprivation of Liberty and Gender* (Geneva: DCAF, OSCE, ODHIR and UN Women, 2019).

⁵³NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, '2015 civil society Women, Peace and Security roadmap', p. 2, available at: {https://www.womenpeaceandsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/NGOWG_Civil-Society-Roadmap_03-2015.pdf}; Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict*, pp. 121, 125, 139–46.

⁵⁴Ray Acheson, 'Abolition: Thoughts for change' (2020), p. 123, available at: {https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/WILPF_PDF_Abolition_Web.pdf}.

⁵⁵Toni Haastrup and Jamie J. Hagen, 'Race, justice and new possibilities: 20 years of the Women, Peace and Security agenda', LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security (20 July 2020), available at: {<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/07/28/race-justice-new-possibilities-20-years-of-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda/>}.

⁵⁶Karen Engle, Vasuki Nesiah, and Dianne Otto, 'Feminist approaches to international law', in Jeffrey Dunoff and Mark Pollack (eds), *International Legal Theory: Foundations and Frontiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 174–96 (p. 185).

(those that shore up the status quo) and ‘non-reformist reforms’ (those that advance revolutionary change).⁵⁷ While Gorz developed this distinction to support labour movements, Ruth Wilson Gilmore expanded its use to discuss strategies for prison abolition. It has since been adopted by movements to abolish prisons,⁵⁸ policing,⁵⁹ and borders,⁶⁰ among others. Drawing on this framework, we argue that, contrary to many current WPS practices, a non-reformist approach to feminist peace organising that builds popular, democratic power towards anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-militarist goals is needed to advance feminist peace.

Gorz explains that a reformist reform is ‘one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicality of a given system and policy’, whereas ‘a not necessarily reformist reform is one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands.’⁶¹ Gorz’s suggestions for identifying a non-reformist reform are schematised by Akbar, who identifies two elements: first, ‘a non-reformist reform aims to undermine the political, economic, and social system’ in order to move ‘toward[s] a particular ideological and material project of worldbuilding’; second, it ‘draws from and builds the popular strength, consciousness, and organization of revolutionary or agential classes or coalitions.’⁶² A non-reformist reform is distinguished from a reformist one by the horizon at which it aims (revolutionary change, exceeding the logic of the present system) and the power relations it reconfigures in the process (redistributing power away from elites to mass movements). Whereas reformism treats reform as an end goal, non-reformist reforms are situated within wider revolutionary political projects. The notion that, where wholesale revolution is not imminent, certain reforms can advance revolutionary goals appears elsewhere in feminist theory. For example, bell hooks’s writing on revolutionary feminisms similarly emphasises consciousness-raising, movement-building, and eradicating logics of domination as components of these efforts.⁶³ As we elaborate, by applying the concept in their organising against systems of state violence, abolition feminists have developed empirical accounts of which reforms have served (non-)reformist ends and why, in ways that bear directly on WPS policy and practice.

As feminists trained to be sceptical of conceptual binaries, we might question the dichotomisation of these categories, and Gorz acknowledges there is ‘not always a very clear dividing line.’⁶⁴ While abolitionists often highlight reforms that meet either all proposed criteria or none,⁶⁵ the presence of multiple, perhaps contested criteria introduces ambiguity. Because oppressive systems are constituted by multiple material and ideological processes, reforms may disrupt some of those processes while reinforcing others. Accordingly, reforms might be positioned along a spectrum

⁵⁷ Gorz, *A Strategy for Labor*, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁸ E.g. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 242; Mariame Kaba, ‘Towards the horizon of abolition: A conversation with Mariame Kaba’, *The Next System* (9 November 2017), available at: <https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/towards-horizon-abolition-conversation-mariame-kaba>.

⁵⁹ E.g. Mariame Kaba, ‘Police “reforms” you should always oppose...’, *Prison Culture* (7 December 2014), available at: <https://truthout.org/articles/police-reforms-you-should-always-oppose/>; Amna A. Akbar, ‘Demands for a democratic political economy’, *Harvard Law Review Forum*, 134 (2020), pp. 90–118.

⁶⁰ E.g. Fiona Jeffries and Jennifer Ridgely, ‘Building the sanctuary city from the ground up: Abolitionist solidarity and transformative reform’, *Citizenship Studies*, 24:4 (2020), pp. 548–67; Gracie Mae Bradley and Luke De Noronha, *Against Borders: The Case for Abolition* (London: Verso, 2022).

⁶¹ Gorz, *A Strategy for Labor*, p. 8.

⁶² Amna A. Akbar, ‘Non-reformist reforms and struggles over life, death, and democracy’, *The Yale Law Journal*, 132:8 (2023), pp. 2360–2657 (p. 2527); see also Akbar, ‘Demands for a democratic political economy’, pp. 103, 104–6.

⁶³ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 20–1, 159–66.

⁶⁴ Gorz, *A Strategy for Labor*, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Interrupting Criminalization, Project Nia and Critical Resistance, ‘So is this actually an abolitionist proposal or strategy? A collection of resources to aid in evaluation and reflection’ (2022), available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee39ec764dbd7179cf1243c/t/630398e383d20c0139686f16/1661180144236/Abolition+Binder_Web+Version.pdf, pp. 7–30, 50–3, 56–9.

between ‘reformist’ and ‘non-reformist’ according to their combination of aims and methods. Indeed, rather than convert these criteria into lists of necessary and/or sufficient conditions for identifying a non-reformist reform, abolitionist organisers often propose questions to be deliberated collectively and in relation to specific social, political, and historical contexts.⁶⁶ They ask, for example, ‘Does it (as a whole or in part) legitimize or expand the carceral system we’re trying to dismantle? ... Does it undermine efforts to organize and mobilize the most affected for ongoing struggle? Or does it help us build power?’⁶⁷ This strategy of posing questions rather than ticking boxes acknowledges the messiness and uncertainty of political strategising, to which all revolutionary movements must acclimatise. While it is therefore not possible to make blanket, decontextualised assessments about the whole WPS agenda, we argue that much of the agenda is pursued in ways that make it overarchingly reformist in character, undermining the transformative potential that more radical WPS advocates envisage.

While some WPS scholars equate ‘transformative potential’ with ‘realizing a gender perspective on peace and security’,⁶⁸ for others it entails transforming institutions beyond recognition.⁶⁹ A common argument for incremental, ‘internal’ reforms to existing peace and security apparatuses (in accordance with a present logic of possibility)⁷⁰ is that over time they will have a cumulative, compounding effect that will eventually change the essential character of these institutions (fostering the conditions that made a prior logic of impossibility thereafter possible).⁷¹ This could occur when institutions reach a point where they are either transformed beyond recognition or their existence becomes untenable and/or unthinkable.

Transforming militaries is an area where anti-militarist WPS scholars and advocates have perhaps the most non-reformist aspirations. For example, Cockburn and Hubic argue that regendering masculinist cultures in peacekeeping operations to promote ‘recognition and respect’ and ‘humanity and warmth’ could radically alter the fabric of militaries, their orientation and purpose.⁷² Similarly, Duncanson and Woodward call on feminist scholarship to develop ‘a framework that is *open* to militaries being regendered “forces for good”’.⁷³ They argue that gender mainstreaming and increasing women’s participation can displace the discursive association between masculinity and militarism that undergirds military culture and revalue feminised attributes of empathy and care. They locate these measures among ‘the multiple small revolutions that at unanticipated and unexpected moments galvanize into deeper ruptures that accelerate tectonic shifts of the underlying logics of domination and what is considered possible’.⁷⁴ These small wins are presented as something akin to non-reformist reforms that gradually transform the underlying logics of the institution until it is barely recognisable.⁷⁵

Comparing central tenets of WPS to the two key characteristics of non-reformist reforms described above, however, further substantiates that the former are largely reformist. While it

⁶⁶Ibid.; see also Akbar, ‘Non-reformist reforms and struggles’, p. 2570.

⁶⁷Interrupting Criminalization, Project Nia and Critical Resistance, ‘So is this actually’, p. 11.

⁶⁸E.g. Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, ‘Women, Peace and Security: A transformative agenda?’, in Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 3–14 (p. 4).

⁶⁹E.g. Pratt, ‘Reconceptualizing gender’.

⁷⁰Laura J. Shepherd, *Narrating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 62.

⁷¹E.g. Davies and True, ‘Women, Peace and Security’, p. 6; Shepherd, *Narrating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*, p. 118.

⁷²Cynthia Cockburn and Meliha Hubic, ‘Gender and the peacekeeping military: A view from Bosnian women’s organizations’, in Cynthia Cockburn and Dubravka Zarkov (eds), *The Postwar Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2002), pp. 103–21 (pp. 116–17).

⁷³Duncanson and Woodward, ‘Regendering the military’, p. 13.

⁷⁴Edgar Pieterse, *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development* (London: Zed Books, 2008), p. 6, quoted in Duncanson and Woodward, ‘Regendering the military’, p. 11.

⁷⁵E.g. Cockburn and Hubic, ‘Gender and the peacekeeping military’; Claire Duncanson, *Forces for Good? Military Masculinities and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Duncanson and Woodward, ‘Regendering the military’.

is impossible to undertake a thoroughgoing evaluation of the entire agenda here, a few examples illustrate our argument. If the first identifying feature of a non-reformist reform is its aim to undermine the present social, political, and economic order rather than legitimising existing systems, WPS work to increase women's participation in uniformed peacekeeping (via militaries and police forces) represents a reform that – notwithstanding the arguments above concerning its transformative potential – does not fulfil this aspiration. Abolitionists show that diversifying and 'demilitarising' state security institutions increases their funding and legitimacy rather than challenging their core purpose.⁷⁶ As Duncanson and Woodward note, 'the creation of regendered militaries cannot on its own transform the neoliberal underpinnings of peace operations', and while this does not mean they 'count for nothing',⁷⁷ the structural function of security institutions in a racial capitalist order shapes the direction of change. This is arguably why, where women's participation has begun to regender military and security institutions, it has often valorised femininities that legitimise their militaristic function rather than challenging it.⁷⁸ While recruiting more women is intended to produce a 'softer', less militarised approach to peacekeeping and policing, such efforts ultimately focus on addressing 'techniques ... rather than structures of violence'; tinkering with their methods while leaving their central role intact.⁷⁹

If this scepticism towards change-from-within appears deterministic, then the second aspect of non-reformist reforms – how the struggle to achieve them reconfigures power relations – signals how change can be driven from outside the state. For WPS advocates, a version of 'popular power' is sometimes envisaged through the practice of 'capacity building', which mostly describes either state or civil society actors building relationships with the local population and/or enhancing the resources, skills, and processes of grassroots organisations to drive change. This capacity building often precipitates NGOisation, which describes the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of grassroots, local organisations, a process often criticised for moving feminist activism away from movement building (often located and rooted in particular local struggles) towards building and empowering NGOs.⁸⁰ Processes of 'NGOisation' in the history of feminist peace work – as in feminist movements more broadly – have seen radical political projects recuperated by state interests in ways that serve as cautionary tales.⁸¹ This can serve to produce classes of professional experts who are positioned as the most legitimate actors in a given context, prioritising elite advocacy and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) over local organisations and community organising. These dynamics reproduce Global North/South hierarchies as well as elite/non-elite hierarchies between Global South advocates and organisations,⁸² as they compete over shrinking

⁷⁶E.g. Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, 'Beyond Bratton', in Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton (eds), *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter* (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 171–99; Day and McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, pp. 60–1.

⁷⁷Duncanson and Woodward, 'Regendering the military', p. 13.

⁷⁸Laleh Khalili, 'Gendered practices of counterinsurgency', *Review of International Studies*, 37:4 (2011), pp. 1471–91; Indrapal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Hannah Wright, 'The making of militarism: Gender, race and organisational cultures in UK national security policymaking', PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (2021), available at: {<http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/4341/>}.

⁷⁹Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (New York: The New Press, 2022), p. 121; see also Marsha Henry, *The End of Peacekeeping: Gender, Race and the Martial Politics of Intervention* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024).

⁸⁰E.g. Sabine Lang, 'The NGOization of feminism', in Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, and Debra Keates (eds), *Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminism in International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 101–17; Sonia E. Alvarez, 'Advocating feminism: The Latin American NGO "boom"', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1:2 (1999), pp. 181–209.

⁸¹E.g. Islah Jad, 'The NGO-isation of Arab women's movements', *IDS Bulletin*, 35:4 (2004), pp. 34–42; Whalley and Hackett, 'Carceral feminisms'.

⁸²E.g. Krystal Whetstone and Luna K. C., 'Disrupting the saviour politics in the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the Global South: Grassroots women creating gender norms in Nepal and Sri Lanka', *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 10:1 (2023), pp. 95–121.

donor funds.⁸³ To challenge these hierarchies, Global North and South organisations – including WPS advocates – have long called for ‘localising aid’ so as to remove the need for INGO intermediaries, who absorb some of this scarce funding, as well as aid conditionalities that lead to constrained projects, short project cycles, and a preference for concrete deliverables. However, Khoury and Scott’s analysis of localising aid during the Syrian war demonstrates that it served only to formalise the labour and risk-taking of local actors as frontline responders to the crisis and was not accompanied by a corresponding shift of power within the global aid architecture.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, WPS implementation in post-conflict settings is not only a site for top-down, donor-led agendas – an argument that can reproduce racialised constructions of local communities and women as lacking agency.⁸⁵ Women’s rights organisations engage strategically with donor and INGO agendas⁸⁶ and have found ways to repurpose donor funding for more radical projects. However, feminist organisations persistently identify minimal donor support for movement-building activities.⁸⁷ While donor funding is not the only means of resourcing feminist peace work, this does suggest that the institutionalisation of WPS in the aid industry makes the movement-building component of non-reformist reforms difficult to achieve. Attempts to localise aid as a means to transfer power to local communities notwithstanding, structures of aid delivery remain at odds with building and mobilising ‘popular power’ through developing modes of organising rooted in communities, with the aim to transform popular consciousness and develop new social relations in a worldmaking project beyond capitalism, militarism, and carcerality. As Akbar elaborates, ‘the central engine for societal transformation is building “autonomous” popular power, independent from the state and capital, rather than “subordinate” to them.’⁸⁸

We have aimed to show that even some reforms envisaged as non-reformist by WPS scholarship would typically be characterised as reformist by an abolitionist analysis because, in practice, they tend to attract funding and legitimacy to institutions whose function is inherently violent, as we elaborate below. More importantly, whereas non-reformist reforms pave the way for building mass movements and rehearse ways of relating to one another that prefigure new social orders, WPS reforms have often resulted from advocacy that positions states and NGOs as a, if not *the*, key locus of change. While there are similar critiques in the existing WPS literature, the reforms prioritised in WPS advocacy have perhaps been chosen because of a sense that there is no alternative: that it would be irresponsible not to attempt to reform organisations that are ‘not going to disappear anytime soon.’⁸⁹ Yet, by developing and operationalising the concept of non-reformist reforms, abolition feminism offers tools for conceptualising an alternative that often appears lacking. We do not discount the possibility that the WPS framework can be strategically leveraged to pursue non-reformist reforms – efforts to forge transformative justice and provide transformative reparations in cases of CRSV could, for example, be developed in that direction.⁹⁰ However,

⁸³ Angelika Arutyunova, ‘Beyond investing in women and girls: Why sustainable long-term support to women’s rights organisations and movements is key to achieving women’s rights and gender equality’, in Khan Zohra and Burn Nalini (eds), *Financing for Gender Equality: Realising Women’s Rights through Gender Responsive Budgeting* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 247–71 (p. 258).

⁸⁴ Rana B. Khoury and Emily K. M. Scott, ‘Going local without localization: Power and humanitarian response in the Syrian war’, *World Development*, 174 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106460>.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Mesok, ‘Beyond instrumentalisation: Gender and agency in the prevention of extreme violence in Kenya’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:3 (2022), pp. 610–31; Vanessa Farr, ‘UNSCR 1325 and women’s peace activism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4 (2011), pp. 539–56.

⁸⁶ E.g. Yasmin Chilmeran, ‘Women, Peace and Security across scales: Exclusions and opportunities in Iraq’s WPS engagements’, *International Affairs*, 98:2 (2022), pp. 747–65; Mesok, ‘Beyond instrumentalisation’.

⁸⁷ Association for Women’s Rights in Development, ‘How funders can resource feminist movements: Concrete practices to move more money to the drivers of change’ (13 November 2020), available at: <https://www.awid.org/publications/how-funders-can-resource-feminist-movements-concrete-practices-move-more-money-drivers>.

⁸⁸ Akbar, ‘Non-reformist reforms and struggles’, p. 2573.

⁸⁹ Duncanson and Woodward, ‘Regendering the military’, p. 13.

⁹⁰ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Catherine O’Rourke, and Aisling Swaine, ‘Transformative reparations for conflict-related sexual violence: Principles and practice’, *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 28 (2015), pp. 97–146.

non-reformist reforms for feminist peace would require a radical shift towards movement building which, due to its reliance on the aid industry, professionalised NGOs, and the relationship to state security apparatuses, WPS is not currently well placed to deliver.

WPS scholarship often attributes the failures of WPS policies to produce the intended transformation to a lack of adequate resources or political will, or a failure to grasp the theory and politics of feminist approaches.⁹¹ However, by positioning patriarchy as the defining feature of security institutions, which must be overcome to transform their purpose and orientation, some earlier WPS advocacy tended to underestimate the extent to which the purpose and potential orientation of these institutions are shaped and limited by their relationships to capitalism and coloniality. While an intersectional perspective is increasingly mainstreamed and advocated for within NGO and state WPS work, it often adopts an individualised concern with the interplay between identities to advocate more inclusive solutions to violence, rather than prioritising structural intersectionality that accounts for the co-constitution of patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy as they pertain to state violence.⁹²

Even the more radical strands of WPS advocacy tend to rest on the liberal assumption that the capitalist state and its most violent institutions can be captured and repurposed by anyone, including anti-militarist feminists. Although abolitionists do not share a unified theory of the state, they reject this assumption, pointing to the role of states in maintaining class power, and the necessity of organised state violence to the liberal capitalist order.⁹³ While non-reformist reforms depend on the possibility that 'popular struggles could shift the balance of power in ways that were absorbed by the state,'⁹⁴ no amount of extra resourcing or political will for gender mainstreaming or even intersectionality can transform the capitalist state into one that *fully* dismantles its own instruments of control. In what follows, we elaborate this conceptualisation of the role of systems of state violence and its implications for the WPS agenda.

Deepening the anti-militarist critique of WPS

While military institutions have been singled out for abolition by some anti-militarist WPS advocates, interlinked practices of policing, bordering, and incarceration have, to date, been approached in WPS advocacy (if at all) as objects of reform rather than abolition. However, given the common function of these systems in upholding racial-patriarchal capitalism, and how they use coercion and violence to 'solve' social, political, and economic problems, we argue that abolishing these should be integral to the revolutionary feminist peace project we have outlined. Having argued that WPS advocate-critics' proposals to reform militaries fall short of their non-reformist aspirations, in this section we argue that the application of non-reformist, or abolitionist, goals is too narrow and advocate a more expansive understanding of militarism encompassing multiple, inter-linked systems of state violence. This expansion demands a more far-reaching critique of WPS than even its more radical anti-militarist critics and adherents typically put forward.

While WPS advocate-critics challenge states' overemphasis on prosecutions in preventing CRSV,⁹⁵ they largely remain committed to criminal justice as one among many tools for addressing gender violence. In the UNSCRs, 'justice' is understood in terms of 'ending impunity' by securing

⁹¹ E.g. Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict*; Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Follow the money: Assessing Women, Peace and Security through financing for gender-inclusive peace', *Review of International Studies*, 48:4 (2022), pp. 668–88.

⁹² Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1245–51.

⁹³ Kaba and Ritchie, *No More Police*, pp. 204–25.

⁹⁴ Akbar, 'Non-reformist reforms and struggles', p. 2526.

⁹⁵ Paul Kirby, 'Ending sexual violence in conflict: The Preventing Sexual Violence initiative and its critics', *International Affairs*, 91:3 (2015), pp. 457–72; Karen Engle, 'A genealogy of the centrality of sexual violence to gender and conflict', in Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 132–44; Anette Bringedal Houge and Kjersti Lohne, 'End impunity! Reducing conflict-related sexual violence to a problem of law', *Law and Society Review*, 51 (2017), pp. 755–89.

prosecutions, as opposed to restorative or transformative justice processes.⁹⁶ Consequently, although there are many primary prevention efforts to stop CRSV before it occurs, much WPS activity also embraces a form of carceral feminism, pursuing justice through new criminal laws and the extension of police powers and resources.⁹⁷ WPS advocates criticise states' lack of attention to the root causes of both sexual violence and war, highlighting that prosecutions do little to prevent CRSV.⁹⁸ Yet, even as these arguments echo abolitionist critiques of carceral systems, WPS advocates stop short of recommending abandoning criminal justice responses to violence altogether.

In contrast, abolition feminists understand criminal justice systems not as a solution to, but as a form of, gender violence. Carceral systems not only fail to prevent gender violence but actively produce it: 'policing *is* and *requires* racialized, sexual, gender, homophobic, transphobic violence.'⁹⁹ They highlight, for example, the high rates of sexual and domestic violence committed by police officers and other agents of the state; the normalisation of sexual violence in prisons and detention centres; the routine use of sexual humiliation as a law enforcement tactic; the use of police powers to abuse and exploit sex workers; the number of female, queer, and trans survivors of violence who are incarcerated; and the broader role of the state in policing gender, sexuality, and the family.¹⁰⁰ Whereas for most WPS advocates these are failures of patriarchal institutions that can be rectified through gender-sensitive reforms, for abolition feminists this is evidence of these institutions working as intended. This disagreement reflects a discrepancy in how these different feminisms understand the central function of policing, which for abolitionists is to protect and maintain economic, political, and social arrangements that constitute racial-patriarchal capitalism: 'it is only thereafter *naturalised* as a response to individualised harm, as part of legitimising the existence and function of police in society.'¹⁰¹

Abolitionist thinking conceptualises policing, incarceration, and bordering as interlocking components of a wider system of state coercion, constituting 'how capitalism saves capitalism from capitalism'; that is, how the capitalist state insulates capital accumulation from the social problems it creates, and which could threaten its continuation.¹⁰² As others elaborate in detail elsewhere, an examination of the origins and contemporary operation of policing, bordering, and incarceration demonstrates their interconnectedness as well as their function.¹⁰³ Emerging alongside historical practices of enclosure and colonial dispossession that created a racialised pattern of wealth distribution within and between nations, borders and criminal justice systems were built in large part to protect private property from poor and colonised peoples.¹⁰⁴ By quelling unrest and regulating the movement of people, these interconnected systems – historically and today – facilitate ongoing

⁹⁶ E.g. UNSCR 1325 (2000), p. 3; UNSCR 1820 (2008), p. 2; UNSCR 1888 (2009), p. 2; UNSCR 1889 (2009), p. 3; UNSCR 1960 (2010), p. 1; UNSCR 2106 (2013), pp. 1, 2, 4; UNSCR 2122 (2013), pp. 1, 5; UNSCR 2242 (2015), pp. 5, 7; UNSCR 2467 (2019), pp. 2, 6.

⁹⁷ Engle, 'A genealogy of the centrality of sexual violence'; Houge and Lohne, 'End impunity!'; Engle, Nesiah, and Otto, 'Feminist approaches to international law'.

⁹⁸ E.g. Sahla Aroussi, "'Women, Peace and Security': Addressing accountability for wartime sexual violence', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4 (2011), pp. 576–93; Houge and Lohne, 'End impunity!'.

⁹⁹ Kaba and Ritchie, *No More Police*, p. 127, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Among others, Critical Resistance and INCITE!, 'Critical Resistance–INCITE! Statement on gender violence and the prison industrial-complex'; Beth Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), pp. 125–56; Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now*, pp. 77–122; Day and McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, pp. 78–88; Kaba and Ritchie, *No More Police*, pp. 75–89.

¹⁰¹ Day and McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, p. 71, emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Race, capitalist crisis and abolitionist organizing: An interview with Jenna Lloyd', in Ruth Wilson Gilmore (ed.), *Abolition Geography: Essays toward Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022), pp. 454–70 (p. 470).

¹⁰³ E.g. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Sudbury, 'A world without prisons'.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Rawlings, *Policing: A Short History* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2002); Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*; Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Citizens and others: The constitution of citizenship through exclusion', *Alternatives*, 40:2 (2015), pp. 102–14.

processes of capital accumulation by securing private wealth and maintaining a supply of readily exploitable, predominantly racialised labour.¹⁰⁵ Just as war-making (conventionally understood) is used to protect and maintain a global order constituted by the colonial distribution of wealth and power, borders and criminal justice systems do likewise through different means, though sometimes employing similar tactics.

Given the common function of militaries, police, borders, and prisons, we concur with those scholars who advocate treating them as interwoven branches of the same system,¹⁰⁶ some of whom use the term ‘militarism’ to encompass all of these practices and institutions.¹⁰⁷ Though not exclusive to abolitionists, and not always labelled as ‘militarism’, this theorisation of the violent arms of the state draws on the Black, Marxist, and anti-colonial traditions from which much abolitionist thought springs. As recent critiques of the concepts of militarism and militarisation highlight, conceptualisations of militarism that elide everyday forms of state violence erase the experiences of the marginalised (often racialised) subjects who bear the brunt of them and, often, underestimate the scale of what anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, anti-colonial movements are up against.¹⁰⁸ While WPS advocates often worry that policing, prisons, or borders have *become* militarised, treating these practices as always already components of militarism entails an anti-militarist critique that draws much more of WPS policy and practice into question.¹⁰⁹

WPS advocate-critics whose anti-militarism is framed particularly in opposition to military institutions often justify their position with reference to militaries’ function as instruments of the war system and the global order it upholds, as well as their close association with violent constructions of masculinity, which militaries reproduce in their ranks and are sometimes presented as cultural ideals thereof.¹¹⁰ For example, arguing against treating women’s military participation as a liberatory goal, Enloe cautions that militaries’ function in upholding a patriarchal, heteronormative, racial-capitalist order makes them unlike any other state or societal institution: ‘So long as the military is an instrument of coercion designed to uphold a political-economic and ideological order that rests on the subordination of women, the military must not be seen as simply one more institution – like schools or businesses – where women will try to gain access.’¹¹¹ Peterson and Runyan similarly note militaries’ ‘essential purpose’ as ‘an agent of coercion/destruction’, while warning that the ‘aggressive and hypermasculinized climate of militaries’ distinguishes them from other institutions in which women seek representation.¹¹² Yet the work of upholding a racial-capitalist global

¹⁰⁵ Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2014); Harsha Walia, *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021); Bhambra, ‘Citizens and others’.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Derek S. Denman, ‘The logistics of police power: Armored vehicles, colonial boomerangs, and strategies of circulation’, *Society and Space*, 38:6 (2020), pp. 1138–56; Sabrina Axster, Ida Danewid, Asher Goldstein, Matt Mahmoudi, and Cemal Burak Tansel, ‘Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: Rethinking the neoliberal security state’, *International Political Sociology*, 15:3 (2021), pp. 415–39; Nivi Manchanda and Chris Rossdale, ‘Resisting racial militarism: War, policing and the Black Panther Party’, *Security Dialogue*, 52:6 (2021), pp. 473–92.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Manchanda and Rossdale, ‘Resisting racial militarism’.

¹⁰⁸ Katharine M. Millar, ‘Mutually implicated myths: The democratic control of the armed forces and militarism’, in Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (ed.), *Myth and Narrative in International Politics: Interpretive Approaches to the Study of IR* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 173–91; Alison Howell, ‘Forget “militarization”: Race, disability, and the “martial politics” of the police and of the university’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20:2 (2018), pp. 117–36; Nivi Manchanda, ‘The Janus-faced nature of militarization’, *Critical Military Studies*, online first: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2021.2022852>.

¹⁰⁹ See also Howell, ‘Forget “militarization”’.

¹¹⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004); Claire Duncanson, *Forces for Good?*

¹¹¹ Cynthia Enloe, ‘Women in NATO militaries: A conference report’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 5:3/4 (1982), pp. 329–34 (p. 331).

¹¹² V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan, *Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010), pp. 159, 252.

order is not exclusive to militaries, and feminist scholarship demonstrates that violent, masculinist cultures also permeate policing, prisons, and border forces.¹¹³

If feminist peace demands an end to militarism, capitalism, and coloniality, then, this should entail not only the closure of military bases or the abolition of nuclear weapons, but the dismantling of interlinked systems of coercion and control that make the persistence of racial capitalism tenable. This argument is not new: abolition feminists such as Davis and Gilmore consistently locate struggles against carcerality, borders, and the war system as part of the same political project,¹¹⁴ and abolition feminist organising against the prison-industrial complex has often been framed as working against militarism and for peace.¹¹⁵ By bringing abolitionist analyses of the carceral state to bear on anti-militarist critiques of WPS, however, we add to the concerns already raised about the agenda's capacity to realise feminist peace.

In the final section, we consider some implications of this broader conceptualisation of (anti-)militarism for WPS, including the rejection of carceral solutions to CRSV, which we anticipate raising questions from feminist peace activists. While the possibilities of an abolitionist framework for feminist peace raise more questions than we can address here, we propose avenues for further research and areas where anti-carceral logics and practices already residing within WPS could be extended.

Towards an abolitionist feminist peace: Questions and implications

Perhaps the most fraught unanswered question for an abolitionist approach to feminist peace concerns how abolitionist analyses translate across different geographies, epistemological positions, languages, and ways of organising. It is vital to reflect on the positionalities from which abolitionist demands are made, for whom they are made, and to whom they/we are accountable, including along North/South and West/East divides. Abolitionist arguments will resonate differently, for example, in sites of ongoing armed conflict, or where states have collapsed. We see scope for further research comparing how abolitionist ideas are already being forged in different contexts, reflecting states' differing relationships to coloniality, militarism, and global capitalism, or exploring where other concepts resonate better. Abolition is conceived as an internationalist project, whose goals, strategies, and tactics are developed contextually in relation to local struggles, but always with an eye to global connections.¹¹⁶ There is danger in treating ideas and practices arising from US or European contexts as 'best practices' to be replicated elsewhere – as criminal justice models often have been¹¹⁷ – but also in framing abolition as a solely Global North-based project, as abolitionists from Palestine to South Africa to Argentina attest.¹¹⁸

While both abolition feminists and WPS advocates promote primary prevention and transformative justice approaches to gender violence that address the structural causes of violence

¹¹³E.g. Sylvanna Falcón, "National security" and the violation of women: Militarized border rape at the US–Mexico border', in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (ed.), *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), pp. 119–29; Leigh S. Goodmark, 'Hands up at home: Militarized masculinity and police officers who commit intimate partner abuse', *BYU Law Review Collections*, 2015:5 (2015), pp. 101–63.

¹¹⁴E.g. Angela Y. Davis, 'A vocabulary for feminist praxis: On war and radical critique', in Robin L. Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Minnie Bruce Pratt (eds), *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism* (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp. 19–26; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Part III: Prisons, militarism and the anti-state state', in Ruth Wilson Gilmore (ed.), *Abolition Geography: Essays toward Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022), pp. 197–352.

¹¹⁵E.g. Sudbury, 'A world without prisons'; Rojas and Naber, 'Genocide and "US" domination ≠ liberation'.

¹¹⁶Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore, 'The other California', in Ruth Wilson Gilmore (ed.), *Abolition Geography: Essays toward Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022), pp. 242–58; Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (London: Penguin, 2022); Rojas and Naber, 'Genocide and "US" domination ≠ liberation'.

¹¹⁷Tonia St Germain and Susan Dewey, 'Justice on whose terms? A critique of international criminal justice responses to conflict-related sexual violence', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 37 (2013), pp. 36–45 (p. 39).

¹¹⁸Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sheehi, 'Abolitionism, settler colonialism and state crime'; Gillespie and Naidoo, 'Abolition pedagogy'; Draper, 'No estamos tod@s faltan las presas!'.

to prevent its recurrence,¹¹⁹ WPS advocates typically propose these as a complement to, not a replacement for, retributive justice.¹²⁰ Although abolition feminists elaborate detailed arguments for anti-carceral solutions to gender violence,¹²¹ the particular context of CRSV raises questions about, for example, how to protect people from gender violence during armed conflict. Although abolitionists reject militarism as an organised system of imperial violence, neither abolitionism nor anti-militarism equate to pacifism. Abolitionists often invoke the work of the Black Panther Party, for example, who organised armed community defence groups against police violence in Black communities in the United States and supported Palestinian self-defence against Israeli occupation.¹²² Many abolitionists would likely agree with those anti-militarists who distinguish between statist and/or imperialist and defensive violence, and support, for example, Kurdish women organising militant people's defence units against Da'esh.¹²³ Questions remain over how to respond to armed conflict, however: as Nguyen writes, 'how might a transnational abolitionist framework capture the formative contexts in which political violence circulates; respond to the material realities driving affective desires for "more reliable" security infrastructures; and challenge the normative distinction between routinised structural violence waged by state militaries and occupying forces, and criminalised episodic violence enacted by political militants and armed militias?'¹²⁴

Regarding responses to CRSV, anti-carceral approaches could be in tension with the survivor-centred approaches favoured by WPS advocates.¹²⁵ However, existing research suggests a more complex picture of survivors' understandings of justice, which are inevitably shaped by the often limited options available and emphasise accountability as much as retribution.¹²⁶ While there are concerns that rejecting criminal justice approaches could undo the immense work undertaken to get the international community to take CRSV seriously,¹²⁷ transformative justice seeks accountability while also challenging structural causes, which criminal trials do not. We observe similarities between abolitionist approaches to accountability and some people's tribunals already championed by WPS advocates to address CRSV and other war crimes, such as the World Courts of Women.¹²⁸ Established to protest against the failures of state justice systems and practise new forms of justice beyond law, people's tribunals can offer generative starting points for imagining anti-carceral responses to CRSV. While decriminalisation ultimately constitutes part of the puzzle,

¹¹⁹Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, 'Transformative gender justice?', in Paul Greedy and Simon Robins (eds), *From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 150–71, Kaba and Ritchie, *No More Police*, pp. 255–64.

¹²⁰E.g. Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict*, p. 102.

¹²¹Critical Resistance and INCITE!, 'Critical Resistance-INCITE! Statement on gender violence and the prison industrial-complex'; Chloë Taylor, 'Anti-carceral feminism and sexual assault: A defense', *Social Philosophy Today*, 34 (2018), pp. 29–49; Judith Levine and Erica R. Meiners, *The Feminist and the Sex Offender: Confronting Harm, Ending State Violence* (London: Verso, 2020); Mariame Kaba and Eva Nagao, 'What about the rapists?' (2021), available at {<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ebe13ab85b30366d31ce462/t/644a113c272ca0042670b89d/1682575678794/what%2Babout%2Bthe%2Brapists%2B%2Bmariame%2Bkaba%2B%2526%2Beva%2Bnagao.pdf>}.

¹²²Manchanda and Rosedale, 'Resisting racial militarism'; Day and McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, pp. 70, 130–1.

¹²³Dilar Dirik, 'Feminist pacifism or passive-ism?', *Open Democracy* (7 March 2017), available at: {<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/feminist-pacifism-or-passive-ism/>}.

¹²⁴Nicole Nguyen, *Terrorism on Trial: Political Violence and Abolitionist Futures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), p. 329.

¹²⁵Mimi Kim, 'Alternative interventions to intimate violence', in James Ptacek (ed.), *Restorative Justice and Violence against Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 193–217 (p. 211).

¹²⁶E.g. Philipp Schulz, 'Examining male wartime rape survivors' perspectives on justice in northern Uganda', *Social & Legal Studies*, 29:1 (2020), pp. 19–40; Kathleen Daly, 'Sexual violence and victims' justice interests', in Estelle Zinsstag and Marie Keenan (eds), *Restorative Responses to Sexual Violence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 108–39; Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland, 'Kaleidoscopic justice: Sexual violence and victim-survivors' perceptions of justice', *Social and Legal Studies*, 28:2 (2019), pp. 179–201.

¹²⁷Houge and Lohne, 'End impunity!', p. 783.

¹²⁸Dianne Otto, 'Impunity in a different register: People's tribunals and questions of judgement, law and responsibility', in Karen Engle, Zinaida Miller, and D. M. Davis (eds), *Anti-Impunity and the Human Rights Agenda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 291–328.

it need not be the first piece; after all, abolition is primarily ‘about presence not absence’ – ‘building life-affirming institutions’, not only demolishing oppressive ones.¹²⁹

Importantly, some feminist peace work already embodies abolitionist praxis. Gilmore emphasises that the work of abolition – of building new social relations and practices that help to render carceral systems obsolete – is already taking place globally and is usually not labelled ‘abolitionist’.¹³⁰ Not all of this work focuses directly on carcerality: many efforts to transform capitalist social and economic relations, collectivise health and housing provision, or divest from fossil fuels, for example, do abolitionist work by challenging the conditions that make carceral systems appear necessary. Where left organisations and movements are working to meet human needs outside of capitalist logics, resist conditions that force people into criminalised activities, or build non-carceral approaches to justice and accountability based on an ethics of care, we see opportunities for mutual learning and solidarities across contexts.

Conclusion

Asking how abolition feminism might explain WPS’s shortcomings and what it demands instead opens up new possibilities for rethinking the agenda at a critical point in its history. Responding to these questions, we have made two arguments. First, by drawing on the framework of reformist and non-reformist reforms, we have argued that both the content of many WPS reforms and, particularly, the methods through which they are pursued – limited by the NGOising tendencies of the aid industry – make them reformist reforms that entrench rather than dismantle existing structures of power. Non-reformist reforms, situated within wider revolutionary political projects, we have suggested, may offer avenues for developing more realistic strategies for realising feminist peace. Second, we have argued that, if feminist peace is understood as anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-militarist, then feminist peace activism, organising, and scholarship must challenge *all* militarist systems of state coercion that preserve racial capitalism, including not only militaries but also police, prisons, and borders. Despite long-standing ambivalence among WPS advocate-critics towards the agenda’s occasional embrace of gender-sensitive military reforms, their relative comfort with similar reforms to police, prisons, and borders obscures how militarism functions to preserve the status quo.

These findings have implications for feminist peace activists and scholars whose work pursues the radical, emancipatory vision we have outlined. First, the dominance of the WPS industry has meant that WPS and feminist peace work have come to be conflated in many contexts; however, the two have never been coterminous. Indeed, if one were designing an anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, anti-colonial feminist peace project, it is unlikely one would begin from WPS – at least in its dominant liberal framing. Much political organising that could advance an expansive feminist peace has a much longer history bearing little resemblance to WPS as conventionally understood in resolutions and legal frameworks, from movements to resist border enforcement to efforts to practise community accountability, to mutual aid practices in marginalised and crisis-affected communities. The enormous work to institutionalise the agenda does not obligate us to force it to contain all feminist approaches to peace.

Second, it remains an open question whether what would remain after abolishing the security institutions that implement it would still be ‘WPS’. In the meantime, many aspects of the agenda can be summarised by Gayatri Spivak’s description of liberalism as ‘that which we cannot not want’:¹³¹ few could not want, for example, post-conflict constitutional settlements that enshrine women’s rights, or humanitarian assistance in conflict situations that addresses the specific needs

¹²⁹Ruth Wilson Gilmore, ‘Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration Conference’, University of Mississippi, December 2019.

¹³⁰Gilmore, ‘Race, capitalist crisis and abolitionist organizing’, pp. 465–69.

¹³¹Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 45–6.

of women and girls – reforms for which WPS has provided impetus, resources, and some accountability. We therefore see a need for contextually situated analyses of whether and which aspects of the agenda (if any) could be strategically leveraged in non-reformist ways. The concept of non-reformist reforms – which we understand as existing along a spectrum – provides starting points rather than a clear-cut blueprint, necessitating collective feminist deliberation on ways forward, which may or may not draw on the WPS framework.

While some NGOs may be able to pursue non-reformist reforms (whether or not they are named as such), we do not expect the WPS industry writ large to adopt an abolitionist stance, not least because of the structures and constraints of the international aid industry. Many abolition feminist critiques of the NGOisation of anti-violence movements apply equally to the aid sector, if not more so.¹³² Competition among humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding NGOs for donor funding and access rewards those offering to ‘solve’ problems identified and articulated by states and IOs. Finally, like ‘intersectionality’ and ‘decolonisation’,¹³³ ‘abolition’ risks being emptied of its radical content when adopted by neoliberal institutions, which has already happened in some of its uptake by academics, the media, and public figures.¹³⁴ As Day and McBean emphasise, ‘abolition cannot be anything other than a revolutionary, anti-capitalist project’;¹³⁵ its future lies in building organised movements independent of state power, interlinked across multiple struggles, to create more safety and freedom for all.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000354>.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank Paul Kirby, Laleh Khalili, Ida Danewid, and the three anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback and constructive suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

Funding statement. The first author’s time spent on this article was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under grant ES/X007480/1 and the Global Challenges Research Fund Gender, Justice and Security Hub (AH/S004025/1). The funders played no role in the design, execution, analysis, or writing of the article.

Hannah Wright (she/her) is an ESRC postdoctoral fellow in the School of Politics and International Relations at Queen Mary University of London. Her research explores how militarism and coloniality are undergirded by constructions of gender, race, and class, and feminist strategies for unsettling and dismantling these structures.

Columba Achilleos-Sarll (she/her) is a lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham. Her primary research examines the United Nation’s Security Council’s ‘Women, Peace and Security’ (WPS) agenda. More broadly, her work focuses on feminist and post/decolonial approaches to international relations, civil society and advocacy, and visual global politics.

¹³²INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Whalley and Hackett, ‘Carceral feminisms’.

¹³³Sara Salem, ‘Intersectionality and its discontents: Intersectionality as travelling theory’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 25:4 (2018), pp. 403–18; Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang, ‘Decolonisation is not a metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

¹³⁴Meghan G. McDowell and Luis A. Fernandez, ‘“Disband, disempower, and disarm”: Amplifying the theory and practice of police abolition’, *Critical Criminology*, 26 (2018), pp. 373–91.

¹³⁵Day and McBean, *Abolition Revolution*, p. 70.