


ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Secrecy, Uncertainty, and Trust: The Gendered Nature of Back-Channel Peace Negotiations

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Back-channel negotiations are commonplace in peace negotiations and can serve as crucial mechanisms for reaching agreements. While there has been a moderate increase in scholarship examining back-channel negotiations in the last two decades, none has explored the gendered nature of these spaces. This article analyzes how and why back-channel negotiations are highly gendered processes and why their gendered nature matters for sustainable peace. We begin with a review of the current literature on back-channel negotiations and discuss how and why they are critical mechanisms in peace negotiation and agreement processes. Next, we show how women's inclusion in peace negotiations and agreement practices matters for sustainable peace. Thereafter, we discuss how secret negotiation spaces are infused with gendered power and masculine logics of war and peace. We argue that three key features of back-channel negotiations—secrecy, uncertainty, and limited trust—come together to create an echo chamber of hypermasculinity ideas, values, styles, and norms that prevent women from achieving descriptive and substantive representation inside fundamental secret negotiation spaces. This article adds to the developing literature on back-channel negotiations and helps us better understand how and why women and their interests are regularly excluded from peace processes despite the global prominence of the United Nations' Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Las negociaciones por vía extraoficial son habituales en las negociaciones de paz y pueden servir como mecanismos cruciales para llegar a acuerdos. Si bien durante las últimas dos décadas ha habido un aumento moderado en el número de trabajos académicos que estudian las negociaciones extraoficiales, ninguno de estos estudios ha indagado en la naturaleza de género de estos espacios. Este artículo analiza cómo y por qué las negociaciones extraoficiales son procesos altamente basados en el género y por qué su naturaleza de género resulta importante para una paz sostenible. Comenzamos llevando a cabo una revisión de la literatura actual sobre las negociaciones extraoficiales y debatimos cómo y por qué son

mecanismos críticos en los procesos de negociación y en los acuerdos de paz. A continuación, mostramos cómo la inclusión de las mujeres en las negociaciones de paz y en las prácticas de los acuerdos resulta importante para una paz sostenible. Posteriormente, debatimos cómo los espacios secretos de negociación están impregnados de poder de género y de lógicas masculinas de guerra y paz. Argumentamos que tres de las características clave de las negociaciones extraoficiales (secretismo, incertidumbre y confianza limitada) se unen para amplificar las ideas, así como los valores, estilos y normas, en materia de hipermasculinidad, las cuales impiden que las mujeres logren una representación descriptiva y sustantiva dentro de los espacios de negociación secretos fundamentales. Este artículo se suma a la literatura, aún en desarrollo, sobre las negociaciones extraoficiales y nos ayuda a comprender mejor cómo y por qué las mujeres, y sus intereses, son regularmente excluidas de los procesos de paz, a pesar de la prominencia mundial de la agenda Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad de la ONU.

Les négociations informelles sont courantes dans les négociations de paix et peuvent constituer des mécanismes essentiels pour obtenir un accord. Bien que les travaux de recherche s'intéressent aux négociations informelles augmentent quelque peu ces deux dernières décennies, aucun n'a examiné la nature genrée de ces espaces. Cet article analyse comment et pourquoi les négociations informelles sont des processus extrêmement genrés et pourquoi leur nature genrée importe pour la durabilité de la paix. Nous commençons par un passage en revue de la littérature actuelle sur les négociations informelles, puis cherchons à savoir comment et pourquoi il s'agit de mécanismes cruciaux dans les négociations de paix et les processus menant à un accord. Ensuite, nous montrons pourquoi l'inclusion des femmes dans les négociations de paix et les pratiques menant à un accord importe pour la durabilité de la paix. Puis, nous traitons de la prévalence de la puissance genrée et de la logique masculine de guerre et de paix dans les espaces de négociation secrets. Nous affirmons que trois caractéristiques clés des négociations informelles (secret, incertitude et confiance limitée) s'unissent pour créer une ritournelle d'idées, de valeurs, de styles et de normes hypermasculines qui empêchent les femmes d'obtenir une représentation descriptive et importante dans les espaces de négociation secrets fondamentaux. Cet article vient enrichir la littérature émergente sur les négociations informelles. Il nous permet de mieux comprendre comment et pourquoi les femmes et leurs intérêts se retrouvent régulièrement exclus des processus de paix, malgré la prévalence mondiale du programme Femmes, paix et sécurité de l'ONU.

Keywords: back-channel peace negotiations, women, peace, security, gender

Palabras clave: negociaciones de paz, Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad, género

Mots clés: négociations de paix informelles, Femmes, paix et sécurité, genre

Introduction

Back-channel negotiations (BCNs)—or “officially sanctioned negotiations conducted in secret between the parties to a dispute” (Wanis-St. John 2006)—are commonplace in peace negotiations and can serve as crucial mechanisms for reaching peace agreements. They have been used throughout history to break through deadlocks enmeshed in conflict, violence, and polarization, helping enemies to find cooperative solutions. In the 1970s, the Nixon Administration engaged in multiple BCNs with Russia and Vietnam as it navigated the Cold War. Nelson Mandela

famously held secret talks with South African leaders and politicians throughout the 1980s and 1990s, laying the foundations for the end of Apartheid. BCNs were crucial to signing the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord between the PLO and the Israeli government, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland in 1998, and the 2016 Colombian peace agreement with the FARC.¹ Yet, because BCNs operate discreetly, they receive less attention than front-channel negotiations (FCNs), which are publicly known talks. Thus, we have little information about BCNs' complex roles in inter- and intrastate peace negotiations.

While there has been a moderate increase in scholarship examining BCNs in the last two decades, the gendered nature of these furtive spaces has yet to be explored.² On the flip side, there has been a surge of research on the intersections of gender and peace negotiations and agreements. Yet, this body of literature seemingly overlooks BCNs and focuses almost exclusively on FCNs. This article is, therefore, the first considerable attempt to understand how and why BCNs are highly gendered processes and why they matter for sustainable peace.

We begin with a discussion of BCNs to demonstrate that these occurrences remain commonplace in peace negotiations and are critical mechanisms in peacemaking processes. While back-channel talks take place in many settings where official deal-making is happening—such as in a legislature, a corporation, a union, a hostage crisis, etc.—this article is primarily concerned with BCNs about peace processes. Therefore, all mentions of BCNs refer to official peace negotiations between warring parties involved in intra- and interstate conflict.

Next, we review how and why peace processes are gendered practices. We examine the dearth of both women's descriptive and substantive representation in peace negotiations and agreements and discuss the implications of their exclusion. We address the misconception that "gendering" peace processes are simply about adding women. We discuss how the practice of "gendering" these spaces focuses on challenging foundational masculine logics that inhibit durable peace.³

Finally, we bring these two bodies of literature into conversation with each other. Focusing on three prominent and interrelated attributes of BCNs—secrecy, role congruency, and trust—we illustrate how secret peace negotiations constitute an echo chamber of hypermasculinist ideas, values, styles, and norms that preclude women's descriptive and substantive representation.⁴ We argue that the omission of "women representing women" in these BCNs constrains women's influence within and beyond the secret negotiations, which ultimately risks producing narrow and insufficient peace agreements.

This article contributes to our understanding of peace negotiations in the following ways. First, it furthers our understanding of how BCNs are important causal mechanisms in peace processes. Second, it expands upon the existing knowledge about BCNs by underscoring the gendered nature of these spaces. Finally, it shows how these gendered considerations have long-term consequences for sustainable and lasting peace beyond signing a peace agreement.

¹The PLO stands for the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The FARC-EP stands for *las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo*, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army.

²An exception is Aharoni (2018), exploring some of the gendered implications of the 1948 secret negotiations between Golda Meir and King Abdullah and the 1993 secret negotiations between the Israelis and PLO in Oslo.

³We fully acknowledge that gender is only one of many social identities that govern our worlds. While we are focused solely on gender for the purposes of this discussion, we recognize that gender operates alongside and intersects with other social identities, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, and nationality, all of which also have major implications for the continuance of war and the possibilities for peace.

⁴In this article, we use "descriptive representation" to refer to the idea that leaders and decision-makers should reflect the demographics of their designated community. Because women make up between 50 and 51 percent of the population, women's groups have repeatedly called and pushed for 50 percent representation of women in politics. Women's substantive representation moves beyond the physical presence of women in politics and refers to the ways in which political leaders and decision-makers respond to women's needs, concerns, desires, and ideas.

Back-Channel Negotiations*Definition and Scope*

FCNs are talks that the public has knowledge of. While the public is aware that such discussions are taking place, FCNs do not necessarily mean that the public is privy to content, logistics, or other specifics of the negotiations since much of these processes remain highly confidential (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018). Nonetheless, because of FCNs' visibility, they comprise the bulk of our understanding of peace negotiations.

BCNs, on the other hand—which occur without the public's knowledge—happen off-grid, and, consequently, the content of the negotiations and the fact that the talks are even taking place go undisclosed (Wanis-St. John 2006, 2011). Back-channel peace negotiations are distinct from secret diplomacy and secret Track Two negotiations.⁵ Secret—or back-channel diplomacy—comprises “any communication taking place on a back channel, whether or not to negotiate, building trust before a negotiation, or addressing a specific issue unrelated to negotiation” (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018, 306). Unlike BCNs, secret diplomacy covers all covert activity, including espionage (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018). On the other hand, back-channel peace negotiations are “off-the-record” communications between warring parties specifically to discuss potential or actual peace negotiations. Like back-channel diplomacy, Track Two diplomacy, which “brings together unofficial representatives on both sides, with no government participation” (Staats, Walsh, and Tucci 2019), can occur secretly. This often involves civil society groups and other nonstate actors, including but not limited to academics, experts, former diplomats, and civil society representatives. Even though these processes can happen behind the scenes, they are not considered official BCNs as they are not officially sanctioned activities between the warring parties (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018).

Timing and Structure

BCNs are common in the preliminary stages of peace talks, known as “prenegotiations” or “talks before talks” (Anderlini 2004; Wanis-St. John 2011). Prenegotiations emerge before formal peace negotiations when one or more parties in a conflict are interested in exploring the possibility of entering into talks. This intention is then communicated to the adversary(ies), often (but not always) through a third-party intermediary. These discrete communications ultimately allow parties to move away from unilateral, conflict-based approaches to a political problem and engage in a mutual exploration of their options before the start of formal peace talks (Zartman 1989). In other words, prenegotiations aim to move the parties closer to initiating formal talks (Doyle and Hegele 2021). In Colombia, President Juan Manuel Santos and leaders of the FARC-EP engaged in BCNs via a trusted intermediary and eventual face-to-face meetings for two whole years before initiating public talks.

Yet, BCNs do not only occur at the start of negotiations—they can take place at any stage of a peace negotiation process. BCNs can emerge before, during, or in lieu of FCNs (Wanis-St. John 2011). In Northern Ireland, BCNs transpired over decades between the Irish Republican Army and the British government, while other aspects of the negotiations were made public. Finally, BCNs may emerge if FCNs stall or fail. For example, BCNs have been crucial in bargaining between Israeli and Palestinian leaders when public-facing talks have been delayed, and/or leaders have sought preconditions to FCNs.

⁵Track Two diplomacy refers to unofficial and informal diplomatic efforts involving nonstate actors. These efforts take place alongside traditional official negotiation channels and can be a primary mechanism for engaging civil society in peace negotiation processes.

BCNs involve a limited number of participants, including leaders of the warring parties, other high-ranking officials, and/or intermediaries, all of whom have the leaders' trust (Wanis-St. John 2011). Sometimes, direct communication between top leaders or their official representatives drives BCNs. Conversely, leaders may use third-party intermediaries to transmit messages between parties to facilitate the negotiations. The third-party intermediary must have the trust of all parties involved, as they not only share highly confidential information but are being relied upon for their discretion and accuracy in messaging (Ó Dochartaigh 2011). As Pruitt (2008, 46) notes, "[e]ffective intermediaries understand and are understood by, respect and are respected by, trust and are trusted by the parties on either side of them in a chain." At times, the communication chain may be short, where there are few, if any, intermediaries between leaders and their representatives. Other times, BCNs may involve a long chain of indirect communication, whereby messages are sent via multiple intermediaries or confidants (Pruitt 2008). Finally, BCNs may expand to include international overseers, providing oversight and neutral accountability to the parties.

Benefits and Drawbacks

The ubiquity and utility of BCNs reside in their secrecy. Peace negotiations are incredibly high risk and fragile because there is much at stake for warring parties and civil society. Before and throughout peace talks, adversarial leaders must navigate tremendous uncertainty in considering whether or not a peace agreement is feasible and beneficial (Wanis-St. John 2011). Will leaders appear weak to their enemy or the public by agreeing to negotiate? Will initiating peace talks provoke spoilers who will discredit the process and incite more violence? Will the interests of political parties be jeopardized in the process? If the peace talks collapse, will this escalate violence and/or delegitimize the political leaders involved in the negotiations?

BCNs allow conflict leaders to explore these questions and engage in negotiations while sidestepping public pressure. In FCNs, leaders often come under intense pressure and scrutiny from the voters, the media, government officials, and the international community (Wanis-St. John 2011). Back-channel talks, however, operate in the shadows and out of the public eye, allowing warring parties to entertain multiple ways to broker peace, build trust with their opposition, and/or address specific issues in highly secured spaces without international or domestic oversight (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018). This is especially true when considering whether or not to engage in official peace talks since verbalizing a commitment to a peace process is rarely enough to move to formal negotiations. In the prenegotiation stage, back-channel negotiating allows high-ranking leaders to iron out logistics, build trust, and ensure feasibility. Parties can explore multiple highly sensitive issues without public scrutiny or political pressure. The clandestine nature of these "talks before talks" offers political cover for warring parties to entertain ideas and work through logistics without having to make any formal commitments, without provoking potential spoilers, and without having to lose public face (Zartman 1989; Pruitt 2008). In other words, the risks incurred by initiating peace negotiations are minimized, as are the costs to leaders if such negotiations fail. For example, warring parties must agree to the location of talks, security for each party, participants, time frame, and negotiation goals (Anderlini 2004). The goal-setting process may create an agenda for the official negotiations, which may require prerequisites such as ceasefires, amnesty for negotiators, agreement to future power sharing, etc., before formal talks can begin (Bell 2018).

In sum, the strength of BCNs is that they serve as a proverbial black market of negotiation, providing separate and isolated spaces where negotiators can bargain in

the shadows without succumbing to the pressures of the public, thereby increasing the possibility of reaching an agreement (Wanis-St. John 2006).

Yet, their secrecy is also their greatest liability. Because BCNs often rely on short and long chains of communication involving intermediaries, information may get distorted as it passes through the communication chain (Pruitt 2008; Ó Dochartaigh 2011; Maley 2022). Furthermore, as Maley (2022, 57) notes, “In certain circumstances official secrecy can encourage the flourishing of rumors, amongst both elites and masses. . . The problem with rumors is that baseless claims can obtain traction and contribute to the emergence of ‘information cascades’ that can fundamentally reshape political behavior.” Finally, there is always the chance that secret talks are prematurely made public. If this happens, negotiations are at risk of collapse as parties may lose trust in the adversaries in the process and/or may be forced to sever communication and “retreat into their fortresses” (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018, 304).

Even when BCNs successfully carry out their work behind closed doors, the lack of transparency and limited input can severely narrow the negotiators’ purview. For example, negotiations without overseers can eclipse diplomatic experience and lessons previously learned to be effective in such negotiations (Maley 2022). Additionally, too few viewpoints can mean that significant issues—including causes of the conflict—get overlooked or ignored in the negotiations, leading to “flimsy agreements that are too narrowly based or fail to deal with major issues” (Pruitt 2008, 37).

Secrecy can also hinder the legitimacy of BCNs, as such negotiations, once made public, may foster distrust among stakeholders and the public at large (Mukharji and Zeckhauser 2018). While a complicated factor in peace negotiations, general support is critical to ensuring sustainable peace. For peace agreements to be viable, the public needs to not only trust the deal but also see it as binding (Wanis-St. John 2006; Pruitt 2008); otherwise, there is the risk that spoilers will either attempt to return to conflict or, at the very least, prevent the implementation of the agreement (Pruitt 2008; Maley 2022). Moreover, a peace agreement that is too narrow in scope could be challenging to implement “precisely because important constituencies have been excluded” (Ó Dochartaigh 2011, 768–9).

Paucity of and Deficits in BCN Literature

BCNs have received relatively little scholarly attention compared to front-channel peace negotiations. Due to their secret nature, they draw less attention than do public talks and accordingly less information is available to researchers about them. As a result, accessing data about secret negotiations can be extremely difficult for multiple reasons. To start, a researcher must verify the actual existence of the talks, which may not be readily available (Wanis-St. John 2008). Even when researchers confirm that secret negotiations have occurred, they may only have access to the information necessary to conduct their investigation since BCNs operate in the shadows. Further compounding this is that the available data may be biased and/or incomplete, given the informal and clandestine way communication is handled in such situations. The lack of transparency and independent verification can, therefore, make it difficult to substantiate the accuracy of the data.

Despite such barriers, some scholars have successfully accessed these highly secretive spaces, elucidating how and why BCNs serve as critical causal mechanisms that lead to and/or thwart peace agreements. Through interviews, document analysis, and historical analysis, Anthony Wanis-St. John (2011) tracks how top-level PLO and Israeli government officials repeatedly resorted to BCNs when FCNs stalled or collapsed. At times, the PLO–Israeli BCNs have resulted in important breakthroughs, while others have sowed greater distrust and breakdown of communication.

Similarly, Niall Ó Dochartaigh (2011) traces BCNs between leaders of the Irish Republican Army and the British government over the course of 20 years, arguing that recurring secret communication increased predictability and trust among the opposing leaders, ultimately paving the way for the 1993 ceasefire agreement. Wanis-St. John and Ó Dochartaigh show that, while challenging to study, BCNs warrant greater attention and analysis if we want to fully understand peace negotiations' outcomes.

Feminist IR scholarship, however, has yet to study BCNs. This is likely because women are rarely included in such spaces. After all, BCNs typically do not include “women representing women.”⁶ The absence of substantive women's representation in BCNs, however, does not—nor should not—imply that secret peace negotiations are gender-neutral. As we show in the subsequent sections, gender is a significant causal factor in back-channel talks and their outcomes.

The Gender Dynamics of Peace Negotiations and Agreements

Women's Inclusion in Peace Negotiations and Agreements

Gender is a social and political force that shapes how we understand ourselves and how we interpret and understand the world (Cohn and Ruddick 2004). It influences our way of thinking, how we organize, and what we believe. Not only are individuals gendered, but so too are institutions, organizations, norms, ideas, and states (Waylen 2014b; Krook and Mackay 2015; Sjoberg 2018). Each of these arenas is inescapably infused with gendered assumptions, practices, and hierarchies. War, peace, and security sectors are no exception.

Feminist scholars have long shown how war is a gendered practice emanating from and sustained by logics rooted in militarized masculinities, which elicit highly masculine responses and solutions that either marginalize or outright ignore women. Gender norms influence all aspects of war, including prewar conditions, the war itself, peace negotiations, disarmament, reintegration of former combatants, transitional justice, and peace (Cockburn 2004). This is because gender is “first, fundamentally social; second, an expression of power; and third, an organizing principle for war specifically and politics and political thought generally” (Sjoberg 2013, 47). War may affect gender roles, propelling women into public leadership positions following the end of armed conflict (Tripp 2015; Webster, Chen, and Beardsley 2019; Berry and Lake 2021). As Carol Cohn (2013, 1) states, “One cannot understand either women's relation to war or war itself without understanding gender.”

Responding to the call for greater recognition of the fundamental role that gender plays in fomenting, sustaining, and ending war, the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in the year 2000 (UNSCR 1325). The resolution stipulates that women must be included at all levels of decision-making and that a gender perspective should be mainstreamed in all peace and security policies, including peace negotiations and agreements.⁷

⁶While information is limited on BCNs, we are confident in asserting that women are rarely brought into these processes. The most comprehensive dataset coding for women's participation in official (nonsecret) peace negotiations between 1989 and 2013 finds that only 25 percent of negotiations include at least one female participant (Anderson, Urlacher, and Swiss 2023). Furthermore, as the various cases discussed throughout this article show, women wishing to represent women at peace talks generally face resistance, which they can only sometimes overcome through persistent lobbying and allyships with more powerful actors (often international mediators and women's international NGOs) from the outside. We have yet to see a case of peace negotiations where lead negotiators organically bring in women's agendas without outside pressure. From this, we can surmise that women are rarely invited into the most clandestine aspects of peace negotiations—the secret talks—since (1) participation is limited to only a few key decision-makers and players; (2) women rarely, if ever, hold the highest level of decision-making in warring parties; and (3) women are unable to exert pressure from the outside since they are not privy to the fact that such talks are being held.

Ensuring descriptive and substantive representation of women in peace negotiations is highly beneficial. When women participate in negotiations, peace agreements are more likely to include gender provisions (True and Riveros-Morales 2019). Moreover, peace agreements with female signatories are more likely to have provisions that seek necessary political reforms and are more likely to be implemented (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018). Such agreements are also more durable and less likely to collapse. Much of this can be attributed to linkages between elite women and women's civil society groups (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018). Finally, women's inclusion in peace negotiations and agreements can net positive results for women's rights and participation in postconflict settings, strengthening democratic norms and the propensity for durable peace (Anderson and Swiss 2014; Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018; Bakken and Buhaug 2021; Reid 2021; Anderson and Valade 2023). To exert such influence, however, not only do women need access to the peace process itself, but there must also be an explicit women's agenda and advocacy within the process (Ellerby 2016). Yet women peace delegates are often highly constrained in how they participate in negotiations. To start, women are typically forced to influence the process through informal channels, such as through public protests or lobbying male delegates, since they do not often hold decision-making positions within peace negotiations (Dayal and Christien 2020). However, when they are brought into the process, they can get caught between the expectations of national and international gatekeepers (Schneiker 2021) and risk being seen as illegitimate by their communities when selected by UN officials (Zahar 2023).

Despite ample evidence that women's descriptive and substantive participation positively impacts the quality and duration of peace, peace negotiation and agreement processes at large have been slow to catch up to the aspirations of UNSCR 1325. Descriptively, the Council of Foreign Relations (2022) reports that between 1992 and 2019, only 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in "major" peace processes were women. Yet, as Anderson, Urlacher, and Swiss (2023) note, these numbers are likely much lower given that these statistics are limited to peace processes that coders deemed "major" and to those in which agreements were known to have been reached. Given that only 40 percent of negotiations result in peace agreements (Anderson, Urlacher, and Swiss 2023), many negotiation processes are not counted in these findings. Finally, of the major peace processes that resulted in an agreement, the Council on Foreign Relations (2022) found that 70 percent failed to include female mediators, negotiators, or signatories. In other words, in most instances, women are completely absent from official talks.

Substantively, UNSCR 1325 mandates have not fared any better. As of 2015, only 27 percent of 504 peace agreements contained specific language referencing women (Bell 2015; UN Security Council 2015). While it is true that there has been an increase in substantive policy language addressing women in peace agreements, much of this has been done in a piecemeal fashion, and most lack a robust gender analysis. As a result, much of the language either essentializes women, reinforces adverse stereotypes, or fails to address the immediate and long-term needs of women adequately. Some mentions of women in peace agreements have even worked directly against the spirit of UNSCR 1325 by placing more significant restrictions on women in areas such as reproductive rights (Bell and O'Rourke 2010; Hudson 2010; Aroussi 2015; Bell 2015, 2018).

⁷The UN's ECOSOC defines mainstreaming gender perspective as ". . .the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (UN Women).

While there have been outliers in a few peace processes, such as in the Philippines in 2014 and Colombia in 2016, where women participated in greater numbers as negotiators and whose final peace agreement had more substantive recognition of gender than in previous decades, there is little evidence that such cases have marked the beginning of a new trend. Many had hoped that these peace processes would set precedents for and influence the direction of future peace talks; however, recent negotiations in Afghanistan and Ukraine remind us that they remain the exception rather than the norm.

Adequate descriptive and substantive representation of women has profound consequences for peace negotiations and ensuing agreements. First, women disproportionately bear some of the greatest burdens of war—including but not limited to sexual violence, displacement, economic loss, and death. Women are also responsible for perpetuating war, as they, too, play key roles in supporting and fighting on behalf of legal and illegal armed groups. Yet to assume their experiences as victims and perpetrators of war are akin to their male counterparts is grossly inaccurate, as has been demonstrated by decades of feminist International Relations (IR) scholarship and centuries of women's global and local activism. Because women can speak to the ills of war in ways that men are unable to, given their social position and distinct perspectives, they should have significant representation. For this to happen, however, leaders of warring parties and key leading decision-makers and influencers would need to take women's positionality, experiences, and knowledge of war and peace seriously, and it is precisely here where the breakdown occurs. More often than not, acknowledging and addressing the gender dynamics of war is discounted and, at times, outright ignored due to apathy, contempt, and/or ignorance. In most cases, including women or grappling with the gendered implications of their work is not even on the radars of negotiation teams.

When negotiators do receive pressure to include women in negotiations, there is often pushback. Some fear that women's presence will jeopardize the negotiations. Other reasons for excluding women from peace talks include but are not limited to inaccurate beliefs that women are not representative of the broader population; women are not involved in the fighting and therefore are not knowledgeable enough on the issue; gender equality is an issue for "later" and as opposed to being essential for resolving more immediate crisis of warfare; and negotiations and their subsequent agreements deal with women's problems indirectly by addressing justice and human rights—which is inclusive of everyone (Anderlini 2004).

Ultimately, the absence of women and feminist perspectives in these processes means that peace will be brokered on an incomplete narrative dominated by masculine logics.

Gendered Power and Logics in Peace Negotiations and Agreements

In peace negotiations, accounting for where women are—and where they are not—provides important data about who has access and influence in these spaces. Yet, solely focusing on the numbers can reinforce the misleading narrative that "gender" is synonymous with "women" and that the process of "gendering" simply means "to add" women to an existing framework rather than reworking it from the inside. This oversimplification obscures the fact that "gendering" peace and security spaces is not just about the inclusion of women but also about how gender as a logic and a social force influences decision-making. As Chappell and Mackay (2017, 29–30) note in their work on gendering informal institutions, such logics

have two key effects. First, they prescribe (as well as proscribe) "acceptable" masculine and feminine forms of behaviour within institutional arenas. At the heart of gendered logics of appropriateness in political life is the coding of public authority, and political presence and agency as culturally masculine. Because men tend to be associated

with masculine codes and women with feminine ones, the gendered logic of appropriateness maintains dominant categories of men in powerful positions and keeps women (and men from marginalised categories) in the role of the “other”, viewed as “space invaders” (Puwar 2004) in the political realm.

Peace negotiations are themselves “products of gender power struggles and contestation,” even when women are absent (Waylen 2014a, 496). When women and their experiences are excluded, hypermasculine and militarized logics drive meaning-making processes. This includes, but is not limited to, ascribing meaning to the genesis of the conflict at hand, what issues emerged from and have sustained the war, what kinds of violence are deemed legitimate and worthy of redress, and what it will take to achieve peace (McAuliff 2023). These meaning-making processes ultimately influence the decisions about who gets to be at the table and what issues make it into the peace agreement. Thus, when feminists call for “women’s inclusion,” they are not only asking for symbolic gendered representation but also aiming to dismantle prevailing logics of masculinity and supplement them with more nuanced reasonings that speak to and for gender equality. In other words, they aim to shift the organizational culture and the informal norms embedded in these spaces to advance gender equality (Waylen 2014a, 2014b; Chappell and Mackay 2017). In short, “gendering peace negotiations and agreements” is not simply about accounting for women as a social group; rather, “gendering” refers to the process of challenging and deconstructing the default operational standards in peacemaking, which are rooted in a hierarchy that prioritizes hypermasculine and militarization approaches that limit the potential and sustainability of peace (McAuliff 2023).

These logics, however, are slow to change. Recent literature has shown that despite ample evidence that women’s inclusion in peace negotiations leads to more sustainable outcomes—such as the longer duration of peace agreements and higher implementation rates (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018), higher post-war women empowerment (Bakken and Buhaug 2021; Reid 2021), and adoption of pro-women legislation (Anderson and Swiss 2014)—as discussed above, women’s influence within these spaces is often stifled, co-opted, and/or sidelined. In Colombia, while women were included in recent peace talks with the FARC and were tasked with implementing a gender perspective in the 2016 peace agreement, traditional masculine logics by and large governed the negotiations. As a result, women were continually underestimated and marginalized, and their work was often underresourced and relegated to “low politics” (Humanas Colombia and CIASE 2017; Corredor 2023). This was even though women in the Colombian peace negotiations were negotiators in both the government and FARC’s delegations and representatives from Colombian civil society (Mendes 2022; Phelan and True 2022). This is a common experience for gender experts brought into high-level negotiation processes. Gender experts are consistently underresourced and frustrated with other negotiators’ perceptions that their work is solely about including women instead of challenging prevailing logics about war and peace more broadly (Sapiano et al. 2023). Thus, even in cases where women are included, overt and obscured gendered logics that rest on hypermasculine assumptions about war and militarism dominate peace negotiations and their subsequent agreements. Such approaches beget incomplete and biased peacemaking and postconflict reconstruction, all of which threaten the viability and sustainability of peace. As we will argue in the next section, nowhere is this more evident than in peace negotiations that happen in secret.

The Gender Dynamics of BCNs

As the above discussion shows, gendering peace negotiations is not simply about the embodied inclusion of women but also about the gendered hierarchies implicit in peace negotiations (Waylen 2014a; Anderson and Golan 2023; Corredor 2023;

McAuliff 2023). In this section, we argue that BCNs are highly gendered spaces and that the lack of feminist perspectives within these secretive exchanges begets an echo chamber of a hypermilitarized form of masculinity that works against the spirit of UNSCR 1325 and the goals of sustainable peace. To make our point, we examine three prominent and overlapping attributes foundational to deciding whom to include and exclude in BCNs. These include secrecy, role congruency, and trust. Because it is impossible to unpack every gendered facet of clandestine negotiations here, we have selected these three because of their centrality to BCNs. We also acknowledge that these attributes are essential for front-channel talks; however, we argue that the lack of transparency and accountability inherent to BCNs amplifies the importance and gendered effects of secrecy, role congruence, and trust.

Secrecy

The first significant attribute lying at the heart of BCNs is secrecy. Secrecy is also a driving reason women advocates cannot access these spaces. As discussed above, operating in the shadows allows the parties to engage in dialogue without navigating public opinion or backlash. It also provides negotiators space to deal with highly sensitive and classified information that could jeopardize national security if made public. To ensure that BCNs remain a secret, however, only a select group of highly trusted people participate. Because warring leaders are almost exclusively male, so too are the cadres invited into secret negotiations. This was the case, for example, in the secret negotiations between the Turkish government led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Öcalan's Kurdish Workers' Party. Despite the Kurdish resistance having a robust feminist ethos (Al-Ali and Käser 2022), all negotiators were men (Kadioğlu 2019).

In the rare cases where women have been included in back-channel talks, they have not been there to promote feminist agendas but rather, like their male counterparts, are typically high-ranking officials who are loyal to and working on behalf of the masculinist project of war. Since the start of secret talks between the Colombian government and FARC rebels, for example, FARC women had been involved in the negotiations. In early 2010, Sandra Ramirez, the widow of a former FARC leader, participated as a negotiator in the BCNs. Similarly, then-President Santos had a female colleague sit in on early exploratory talks with a third-party intermediary (Corredor 2023). Neither of these women, however, was selected because she represented women's interests, reminding us that not all women automatically come to the table with feminist agendas, nor should the burden solely be on women to broach these subjects.

Secrecy depends on limiting the number of actors involved to safeguard the talks and to curtail the number of opinions and preferences that need to be considered. Fewer people enable more streamlined communication and trust-building between parties, ultimately increasing the probability and speed of reaching an agreement. Yet, limited players also mean more restricted expertise and standpoints, which can lead to inadequate solutions (Maley 2022).

As we know, women representing women are rarely, if ever, invited into peace negotiations voluntarily. Consequently, women's groups rely on pressure campaigns from the outside to gain access to peace talks and/or influence over peace agreements.⁸ We also know that women representing women are necessary for ensuring their substantive representation in negotiations and agreements, leading to better, more sustainable peace outcomes (Nilsson 2012; Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018; True and Riveros-Morales 2019; Thomas 2023). Yet, when negotiations

⁸Some of the most well-known cases include Burundi (Anderson 2016), Colombia (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018; Corredor 2023; Phelan and True 2022), Liberia (Adjei 2021), and Sierra Leone (Dyfan 2003).

happen without public knowledge, civil society groups, politicians, and international organizations cannot pressure negotiators to uphold their obligations under UNSCR 1325 to include women and more nuanced gender perspectives. As a result, hypermasculine logics go uncontested as negotiators pave the path to peace.

Colombia's 2010–2012 secret negotiations with the FARC are a prime example. During the 2 years of BCNs, negotiators did not discuss the gender dynamics of their work. Together, the warring parties drafted a negotiation agenda for FCNs entirely from their standpoint and ultimately failed to include a gender perspective that addressed women's subjective experiences. While they accounted for other power dynamics—such as class-based divisions and tensions between rural and urban communities—in their agenda, they failed to acknowledge how gender inequality was intimately intertwined with the causes of—and solutions to—the long-standing war. In 2012, the FCNs commenced with all male negotiating teams. In the first 2 years of the FCNs, the government and the FARC negotiated half of the peace agreement without mentioning women or a gender perspective. It was not until women mobilized from the outside and demanded inclusion that they were brought into the process (Céspedes-Báez and Jaramillo Ruiz 2018). Yet, since half of the agreement had already been decided upon, women had to “add” a gender perspective to an already existing text and were, therefore, unable to substantially influence the agreement from the inside, as intended by UNSCR 1325 (Corredor 2023).

The element of secrecy is also bound up with the logic of “crisis and emergency,” which characterizes war and peace in general (Aharoni 2018, 198). Crisis and emergency, in the context of war, may threaten the state's continued existence. In other words, they are tied to state sovereignty. Because the stakes are high, decision-makers operate implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, on the premise that rules must be suspended for the greater good of state sovereignty. Crisis and emergencies provide the grounds for breaking norms, such as transparency and scrutiny sacrificed for secrecy.

Secrecy, in general, is not a gendered concept; however, in the case of secret negotiations, frequently legitimated by a crisis relating to sovereignty, it is. Both feminist and realist IR scholars, coming from different normative perspectives, would agree that sovereignty ranks at the top of the hierarchies of state concern. However, issues about women's rights are often seen as peripheral to masculine notions of national security. Women's rights are, therefore, less likely to be taken seriously when issues of state sovereignty are deemed to be at stake.

Role Congruency

A second critical attribute that deeply affects BCNs is role congruency. In addition to being cloaked in secrecy, back-channel talks are fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty between and among parties. Leaders, therefore, rely on their mental schemas for cues about how to cautiously proceed with limited information—and social scripts of gender heavily influence these schemas. In all aspects of our lives, gender norms and stereotypes are a fundamental source of information about what to expect from others and ourselves (Bowles 2013). In their seminal work on role congruency theory, Eagly and Karau (2002) demonstrate that people are more likely to be perceived as competent or successful in a given role if they meet the gendered expectations of that particular role. Masculinity is primarily associated with agentic traits, such as pragmatism, assertiveness, steadfastness, and confidence, suggesting that men are more suited for positions that require leadership, discipline, aggression, and protection. Femininity, on the other hand, is typically associated with communal traits such as sensitivity, benevolence, and morality (Eagly and Karau 2002; Stuhlmacher and Poitras 2010), which are often assumed to be a hindrance due to the perilousness of peace talks. These scripts, in turn, limit women's ability to

participate in peace negotiations. Because war, peace, and security arenas are constituted and sustained by hypermasculine logics, men are more likely to be considered competent and trustworthy for BCN participation. Even in rare cases where negotiating teams have women they trust and believe are competent, leaders must also consider how their opponents will view women in these roles. In her interviews with leaders and participants of the secret talks between Israeli and PLO leaders that resulted in the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord, [Sarai Aharoni \(2014\)](#) suggests that Israeli leaders were reluctant to include women out of fear that their opponents would not take them seriously. As one intelligence officer noted, “There is a sense that women will have a harder time reaching them [Arab men], or that the men won’t relate to what they are saying” ([Aharoni 2014](#), 374). While this is likely a common stance in cross-cultural negotiations, Aharoni argues that this narrative simultaneously essentializes and “others” both women and Islam, underscoring how deeply embedded norms of cultural stereotypes and gender bias collide to exclude women from peace talks. Another instance in which negotiating with a woman was perceived to be a potential hindrance to their legitimacy and negotiating power was in 1948, when Golda Meir, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (1946–1948), held secret negotiations with King Abdullah of Jordan. The king had to “legitimize” conducting diplomacy with a woman, so their encounter was held secretly.

It was decided that Golda and her delegation would be invited for lunch at the house of one Mrs. Rutenberg while the king and his aides would attend lunch at Muhammed Zubeiti’s neighboring estate. Afterward, the king will stop for tea with Mrs. Rutenberg, where he will report a headache and be secretly led to meet Golda in a side room. ([Aharoni 2018](#), 201)

BCNs are sometimes sponsored by third parties who, in large part, determine which participants are invited. For example, the Oslo negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians were spearheaded by individuals in Norway’s foreign office, who initially recruited two male Israeli academics and two male members of the PLO to attend BCNs ([Watkins and Lundberg 1998](#)). In another example, the religious community of Sant’Egidio sponsored back-channel talks held in Rome between male members of the Burundian government and male members of a militant group ([McClintock and Nahimana 2008](#)). Because of the extent to which masculinity is embedded in war and peacemaking, it is reasonable to assume that even third-party actors who do not represent any of the warring parties bring implicit gender biases to their work and are also susceptible to selecting participants based on perceived ability and legitimacy. After all, diplomacy, militarism, and high politics are intricately connected with masculinity, regardless of where one lives ([Shepherd 2010](#); [Sjoberg 2010](#); [Aggestam and Towns 2017](#)).

In addition to participant selection, role congruency also applies to identifying and defining the issues to be discussed in negotiations. In other words, it is not only men who are asked to participate in these negotiations, but the issues deemed legitimate and urgent are themselves coded as masculine, and rarely prioritize gender equality ([McAuliff 2023](#)). In peace negotiations, issues such as conditions for a ceasefire, identifying what types of violence count as war crimes, and what issues are prioritized in postconflict reconstruction are often at the top of belligerent agendas. Feminist scholars have time and again demonstrated how each of these issues is gendered in nature. Yet, negotiators often fail to consider their gendered dynamics when drafting agreements on these issues and, as a result, are often sidelined in the process ([Deiana 2016](#); [Corredor 2023](#)).

Trust

A third, but just as important, attribute that sustains BCNs is the issue of trust. One of the great paradoxes of peace negotiations is that they require enemies—entangled in a dynamic of militarized struggle, animosity, and mistrust—to band together and seek peace. As Nelson Mandela famously said: “If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.” To do this, however, warring parties must build trust with their enemies. Trust implies some degree of goodwill and reciprocity and is based on perceptions of predictability and vulnerability: predictability because there is an expectation of cooperation and reliability and vulnerability because there are no guarantees that others will meet those expectations (Olekals and Smith 2011; Wheeler 2018). In other words, betrayal is always a possibility.

BCNs are initiated because there is some semblance of antecedent trust or expectation that the other party(ies) may respond favorably. This trust might derive from previous attempts at peace negotiations, contextual signals that peace is viable, or information from a reliable intermediary. While trust at the start of BCNs is typically relatively low, the secretive nature of BCNs may enhance cooperation prospects (Ó Dochartaigh 2011). With limited people involved and a lack of public pressure, BCNs can be conducive to more informal and personal interaction than FCNs. In turn, enemies “may begin seeing each other as fellow human beings rather than simply as members of an opposing group,” which “should reduce stereotyping and increase trust, respect, positive feelings, and empathy between the participants” (Pruitt 2008, 42). In his examination of the war in Northern Ireland, Ó Dochartaigh (2011) traces 20 years of back-channel communications between the British government and the Irish Republican Army via intermediary Brendan Duddy. Ó Dochartaigh argues that repeated contact between parties over the years provided predictability and trust, which gave rise to the 1993 ceasefire.

While trust between parties is often delicate, trust within parties is strong since teams are comprised people leaders deem loyal. Given the high stakes involved, leaders only involve their most trusted allies at this stage, if at all. Deciding who to bring into clandestine talks requires high antecedent trust to ensure high predictability. Leaders will, therefore, choose participants with credible histories and close working relationships, who are almost all males at this level of authority. They are also likely to select like-minded individuals who will support their agendas and not challenge their decision-making significantly, leaving little room for women’s substantive representation.

Trust is not solely about colocation, however. Regardless of where the trust lies—whether it be between parties, within parties, and/or between intermediaries and/or other third parties—it depends on one’s interpretation of the other’s integrity, competence, and motivations—all of which are significantly regulated by social scripts of gender and role congruency, as discussed above. The Arusha peace process in Burundi was initially hampered due to some parties’ lack of confidence in the mediator, Tanzanian President Nyerere, who was perceived by some as biased due to “his support for sanctions against the Buyoya-led government after the 1996 coup and the fact that Tanzania was host to the largest number of Burundian refugees,” most of whom were Hutu (McClintock and Nahimana 2008, 78). During the Colombian secret talks in 2010–2012, FARC negotiators grilled the Norwegian overseers on why they should be trusted given that Norway was part of NATO, had been involved in the bombing of Lybia, and were close allies with the United States (Anonymous Interview 2023). As these examples show, trust is not only about their work histories and relationships; it is also about perception, which, as discussed above, is heavily influenced by gender stereotypes and through the process of homosociality, or homophily.

Homosociality and homophily refer to the preference of individuals to build relationships or associate with those who are similar to them, including those with the same gender identity (Bird 1996; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Much of this literature has been developed within masculinity studies to help explain the persistent nature of patriarchy and the ways in which masculinities inform microlevel decisions in political and social life. Homosocial networks are also instrumental in formal politics, where decisions are often made informally—on the golf course or in a bar after working hours—among largely same-gender groups. Such informal groups, pejoratively called “old boys’ clubs,” frequently keep women out of power while marginalizing those who have ascended into decision-making positions (Janiak 2002; Stockemer, Wigginton, and Sundström 2021; Biggerstaff, Campbell, and Goldie 2023; Cullen and Perez-Truglia 2023).

Like role congruency, conscious and subconscious assumptions rooted in homosociality inevitably come into play in peace negotiations, as no space is off limits to this social phenomenon. Because peace negotiations—and more specifically, secret negotiations—are replete with uncertainty and unpredictability, some degree of “homosocial trust” (Chowdhury 2020) is likely, in part, to drive male leaders to bring other men into the secret talks. After all, “[s]ame-gender relationships are often perceived to be easier, more predictable, and based on shared interests, all of which help build trust and loyalty” (Paxton, Hughes, and Barnes 2021, 155).

Conclusion

BCNs are commonplace in peace negotiations and can impact front-channel peace talks and their negotiated settlements. Their secret and exclusionary nature enables oppositional parties to grapple with complex issues and explore multiple avenues to peace that may not be possible if they were in the public eye. The lack of formal structure in BCNs is also hailed as one of its greatest attributes, as it allows negotiators to operate with fewer constraints, approach their opposition in a more personal and perhaps convincing manner, and ultimately build the trust needed to negotiate peace. Yet, as Jo Freeman (1972) reminds us in her essay *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* informal settings are riddled with and thrive on power (mainly because decision-making processes are less visible), which is why formal constraints and transparency are needed. In peace negotiations, however, secret negotiations are often the only viable way out of war. The covert, informal, and restricted character of BCNs often enables peace negotiations that would not have otherwise happened. Nevertheless, these are also the same conditions that make BCNs a liability to sustainable peace in the long run. Without more diverse participation, accountability, or transparency, BCNs exist as a metaphorical bubble impenetrable to marginalized communities, international norms such as UNSCR 1325, and actors who could actively challenge traditional peacemaking logics. Without sustained challenge from feminist logics coming from civil society, politicians, and international organizations, BCNs devolve into an echo chamber of hypermasculine and militarized logics, which, in turn, drive meaning-making and decisions throughout negotiation processes. These meaning- and decision-making processes inevitably discount and/or suppress ideas, perspectives, and potential solutions that do not align with traditional masculine approaches to war, peace, and security. This, in turn, leads to incomplete and highly fallible peace deals.

The purpose of this article is not to propose solutions on how best to “regender” back-channel peace negotiations but rather to shed light on a complex paradox that has, thus far, remained unexamined. We have sought to make two contributions to this paper. First, we have chosen to examine the gendered nature of BCNs, a space that, to date, has received little to no attention regarding its importance in producing gender-inclusive peace negotiations. Second, we have interrogated gender as an analytical category as opposed to focusing on the embodied presence of women. We

have demonstrated that BCNs have gendered attributes that serve to work against the descriptive and substantive representation of women. We have focused on the attributes of secrecy, role congruency, and trust, illustrating that in the context of peace negotiations, these serve to exclude women and women's interests in BCNs and have negative consequences for sustainable and lasting peace. Although the gendered implications of BCNs have received minimal attention to date, we note that the Norwegian government's third National Action Plan for Women Peace and Security (2019, 18) identifies "informal processes where the parties have not yet come to the negotiating table" as opportunities to "*prepare the ground* for an inclusive process by [using BCNs to] rais[e] the parties' awareness" [bolding and emphasis in original]. Since Norway is a leading state in both peace mediation and the promotion of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, their calling attention to BCNs as opportunities to build the foundation for women's *later* inclusion in negotiations illustrates that they recognize the gendered implications of commitments made in BCNs. However, the National Action Plan's emphasis on solely laying the groundwork for later gender-inclusivity, suggests that the reports' drafters, too, recognize the difficulty of calling for women's substantive representation in BCNs.

More research on the role, the gendered implications, and the logics within back-channel peace negotiations is needed, as we cannot fully explain nor understand the outcomes of peace negotiations without acknowledging and understanding these furtive spaces. In closing, we offer some suggestions for a future research agenda. First, scholars must identify where and when BCNs have occurred. Anderson et al. (2023) produced a new dataset tracking women's participation in official negotiations (Track One and Track Two) between 1989 and 2013. Although this dataset does not include instances of back-channel talks, it lays the foundations for future research to determine instances of BCNs linked to official talks. Unearthing and comparing case studies will allow for exploring the constellation of instances that make up this case type.

Second, exploring the work and roles of individuals (and the gendered power dynamics ordering their relationships) who are not negotiators or mediators but key players such as advisors and support staff (including administrative staff, event planners, cooks, food servers, and cleaning staff) may shed more nuanced details that might otherwise be undiscoverable. As in Oslo, numerous women involved in negotiations served as advisors, supporters, or informal actors behind the scenes (Aharoni 2011). Understanding women's various roles in BCNs, beyond the traditional roles of negotiators or mediators, is crucial for a comprehensive analysis. As has been the case throughout history, due to role congruence, women are often placed in ancillary roles, as it is in supporting men that women are more likely to be perceived as successful and reliable. Yet support staff on all levels are privy to information, and details are not often uncovered when speaking only to lead decision-makers.

Third, it is necessary to go beyond exploring descriptive representation and carefully consider how gender—as an analytical category—influences BCNs regarding which issues are discussed, the type of violence of concern, the representatives selected, and the identified victims. Understanding the parameters of back-channel talks will provide a more nuanced understanding of how gender shapes the outcomes and processes of these negotiations.

Fourth, since these spaces operate around the most powerful men, it is necessary to interrogate the hegemonic masculine norms that govern secret negotiations. While scholars have focused extensively on women's mobilization and empowerment in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution processes, analyzing how masculinity operates within secret negotiations remains necessary. How do men on opposite sides of the table build trust? How do they display dominance, strength, and control? What emotions come to the forefront? What activities trigger bonding?

Finally, we suggest interrogating the decision-making of those who craft, organize, and execute BCNs. Does UNSCR 1325 factor into their decision-making? Do they consider the potential impact on women and gender equality in their attempts to reach clandestine agreements? Or do they think women representing women are superfluous to secret negotiations or even counterproductive?

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