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Rethinking Failure: Feminist Peacebuilding and the Peace Continuum in Violent and Illiberal "Post-Conflict" Settings

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This article introduces the special forum, "Feminism in the Face of Failure: Peacebuilding in Violent and Illiberal 'Post-Conflict Settings,'" by exploring feminist responses to the shortcomings of both liberal and illiberal peacebuilding models in fragile post-conflict environments. We introduce the concept of a "peace continuum," challenging traditional binary approaches to peace and conflict. Our framework highlights how grassroots feminist activists, often excluded from formal peace processes, persist in their peacebuilding efforts even amidst renewed violence, authoritarianism, and failed peace agreements. Drawing on examples from countries such as Colombia, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, the forum showcases how women are leading nonmilitarized, inclusive, and locally grounded peace efforts despite the collapse of formal peace processes. The articles collectively emphasize the resilience, intentionality, and ongoing activism of women in reshaping peace, advocating for gender equality, and addressing structural violence in their societies. The issue calls for broader recognition and support for these crucial, often overlooked, feminist peacebuilding efforts, even in situations deemed "failures."

Este artículo presenta el foro especial, ≪Feminismo frente al fracaso: construcción de la paz en contextos violentos e iliberales en situación de posconflicto≫. Para ello, este artículo estudia las respuestas feministas a las deficiencias de los modelos de construcción de la paz, tanto liberales como iliberales, en entornos frágiles de posconflicto. Presentamos el concepto de un ≪continuo de paz≫, que desafía los enfoques binarios tradicionales en materia de la paz y el conflicto. Nuestro marco destaca cómo los activistas feministas de base, los cuales se encuentran, con frecuencia, excluidos de los procesos formales de paz, persisten en sus esfuerzos de construcción de la paz incluso en medio de un clima de renovada violencia, autoritarismo y acuerdos de paz fallidos. El foro parte de los ejemplos de países como Colombia, Afganistán y Myanmar, y demuestra cómo las mujeres están liderando esfuerzos de paz no militarizados, inclusivos y con raíces locales, incluso cuando fallan los procesos de paz formales. Los artículos enfatizan, de forma colectiva, la resiliencia, la intencionalidad y el activismo continuo de las mujeres con respecto a la remodelación de la paz, a la defensa de la igualdad de género y a la lucha contra la violencia estructural presente en sus sociedades. Esta publicación reivindica un mayor reconocimiento y apoyo a estos esfuerzos feministas cruciales en materia de consolidación de la paz, los cuales, a menudo, se pasan por alto, incluso en situaciones consideradas ≪fracasos≫.

Cet article introduit le forum spécial ≪ Feminism in the Face of Failure: Peacebuilding in Violent and Illiberal Post-Conflict Settings ≫ (Le féminisme confronté à l'échec : pacification dans des environnements illibéraux et violents après un conflit), en s'intéressant aux réponses féministes aux défauts des modèles de pacification libérale et illibérale dans des environnements fragilisés par un conflit. Nous présentons le concept de ≪ continuum de paix ≫, qui remet en cause les approches binaires traditionnelles de la paix et du conflit. Notre cadre met en lumière que les militantes féministes locales, souvent exclues des processus de paix formels, persistent dans leurs efforts de pacification, même face à une recrudescence de la violence, à l'autoritarisme et à un échec des accords de paix. Se fondant sur des exemples issus de pays comme la Colombie, l'Afghanistan et le Myanmar, le forum montre comment les femmes coordonnent des efforts de paix non militarisés, inclusifs et ancrés au niveau local, malgré l'effondrement des processus de paix formels. Ensemble, les articles soulignent la résilience, l'intentionnalité et le militantisme continu des femmes lorsqu'il s'agit de refaçonner la paix, de défendre l'égalité des genres et de s'attaquer à la violence structurelle au sein de leur société. La question requiert une reconnaissance et un soutien plus larges vis-à-vis de ces efforts de pacification féministes cruciaux, mais souvent négligés, même dans des situations perçues comme des ≪ échec ≫.

Introduction

Peace agreements are meant to guarantee an end to war and to usher in a new era of stability and security. Yet, in many "post-conflict" settings, peace remains fragile: both new and familiar forms of violence emerge, democratic efforts give way to illiberal agendas, and the promises of peace go unfulfilled. Unfortunately, over 40 percent of civil war peace agreements fail within 5 years (Druckman and Wagner 2019,

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288). For many, these outcomes signify a failure of the liberal peacebuilding model—a framework that, despite its aspirations, has repeatedly fallen short of delivering genuine, lasting peace. Many attribute this failure to states' inability to rebuild themselves—or a failure of state-building. Others, however, point to the inherent flaws in the liberal peace paradigm itself. More recently, there has been increasing discussion about the resurgence of authoritarian global powers who reject liberal peacebuilding practices and instead rely on illiberal methods of peace and security.

Most of the debates concentrate on global frameworks and national models of liberal and illiberal peacebuilding to understand these failures. Consequently, they overlook feminist peacebuilders who, primarily operating at the grassroots level, continue to build peace even where broader efforts have failed. Hence, this special forum challenges definitions of, and disrupts the central debates about, the failures and deficits of liberal and illiberal peacebuilding. We show how grassroots women, guided by their own experiences and expertise, are actively shaping new forms of peace that are rooted in inclusivity, resilience, and their local contexts. By proposing the concept of the peace continuum, we argue that these peacebuilding efforts happen *despite* the failures of liberal peace to deliver stability and security, *and* in the face of authoritarian modes of conflict management. More importantly, they bring specific expertise in nonmilitarized solutions, despite their knowledge often being omitted from the dominant narrative. Their efforts aim not just to mitigate, control, or prevent conflict but, instead, are based on demilitarized strategies that seek a *permanent* end to war. To quote Shepherd (2021):

> Listening to women—paying close attention to women's knowledge claims, of all kinds—is essential to efforts at ending war. Listening to women ensures a peace that is inclusive and expansive, a peace that is attuned to the operation of power. A gender-blind, exclusionary, narrow vision of peace and security is a thin and meager vision indeed.

This special forum calls on scholars to listen to women and take seriously their knowledge, strategies, and expertise in peacebuilding, especially in contexts of failed liberal and illiberal peace. But to do so, we must first challenge what we consider to be "failed peace." As the articles here show, even when countries revert to armed conflict or authoritarian rule after a peace agreement, women persist in their peace work—often in un- or under-appreciated ways. Recognizing this work allows us to see progress in even the most challenging contexts; and thus, we encourage scholars to relentlessly pursue those cracks where the light gets through.

To do this, we propose studying peacebuilding through the lens of a "peace continuum." From this perspective, peace is not confined to formal processes or "post-conflict" environments but is a fluid, ongoing process that can emerge and persist even without formal war or peace negotiations. This lens reveals critical mechanisms of peace that might otherwise be missed, particularly in high-risk, militarized settings where peacebuilding continues despite the absence of formal processes. Though its origins are feminist, the continuum of peace applies broadly to diverse peacebuilding efforts. By focusing on demilitarization, human security, and intentionality, it offers a crucial framework for understanding how peace can emerge and endure where formal models have failed. In other words, it captures peace efforts that state-centric approaches to peace, conflict, and security might overlook.

This article is organized as follows: first, we review the existing literature on various peacebuilding frameworks that have informed our framework, including liberal, illiberal, everyday, perpetual, and feminist peace. We then introduce the concept of a "peace continuum" to unite these theories and offer a broader understanding of how and where peace occurs. In the final two sections, we review the eight articles included in this special forum and discuss the conference from which this concept and issue emerged.

This peace continuum framework, and the discussions that underpin this special forum, emerged from a conference held at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City in August 2023. Feminist scholars, activists, government representatives, and members of the military came together to address the intersection of feminist peacebuilding and the growing global threats of rising violence, authoritarianism, and illiberal governance. These discussions were grounded in the recognition that while liberal models of peacebuilding often fail, particularly for women, feminist peacebuilders continue their work, even in hostile and repressive political environments (Berry 2018; Anderson and Eskandari 2023; Wood 2008; Zulver 2022). We especially welcomed contributions from scholars based in, or studying, the Global South, as well as collaborations between activists and academics. A key feature of the event was its peer-mentoring format, which provided space for participants to brainstorm, write, and edit together. Although the concept of the peace continuum developed after the articles were written and reviewed, it provides a valuable lens through which we can understand the themes explored in this forum.

The key questions motivating both the conference and this forum are as follows: What happens when women who emerge as leaders during or after armed conflict are faced with renewed violence, repression, or authoritarianism after a peace agreement is signed? How are feminists writing the next chapter of their activism in contexts where actors actively seek to dismantle their hard-won gains?

The following eight articles of this forum explore women's grassroots peace efforts in Colombia, Afghanistan, Israel, Myanmar, Mexico, Nepal, Mali, and Nigeria. These articles examine how women navigate these challenges and continue their activism in the face of failed peace. While their peacebuilding efforts may not always fit neatly into a "liberal/illiberal" framework—and while the individuals and groups themselves may not always publicly identify as *"feminists"*—they are undeniably feminist in nature, reflecting the resilience and ingenuity of women's peace work in diverse, high-risk environments.

Liberal Peace under Pressure

The liberal peacebuilding model, which has dominated international peace efforts since the 1990s, has come under tremendous pressure from policymakers, activists, and scholars alike for its shortfalls. The liberal peace framework rests on three interdependent core tenets: democracy, human rights, and globalized free-market economies, all of which must "operate together and only together" (Doyle 2005, 463). It assumes that these three pillars, when combined, will naturally and progressively lead to peace (Jahn 2018). It assumes that these three pillars, when combined, will naturally and progressively lead to peace via a predictable and fixed set of predetermined stages, which includes a ceasefire, pre- and formal peace negotiations, an agreed-upon peace treaty, and the implementation of that agreement (Paffenholz 2021). This process is expected to

lead to the establishment of liberal institutions and, ultimately, to peace. For many, however, it has failed to deliver on its promises.

In response to setbacks and failures, practitioners, policymakers, and scholars have sought to "problem-solve" and improve upon the existing approaches, while others have critiqued the very foundations on which liberal peace rests (Cox 1981; Lemay-Hébert 2013; Pugh 2024). Skeptics of the liberal peacebuilding model point to a range of issues for the failure of liberal peacebuilding. Such criticism highlights an overemphasis on the state's failure to rebuild itself, rather than recognizing the inherent flaws within the liberal peace paradigm itself (Chandler 2010; Philipsen 2014). Others contend that the liberal peace model does not align with the complex and tumultuous realities in conflict-affected areas (Jahn 2018; Philipsen 2014), and as a result, we frequently see clashes between international and domestic practices (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Hellmüller 2013; Verkoren and Van Leeuwen 2013). Critics also emphasize that the model reinforces problematic binaries between local/international, West and the non-West, victim/perpetrator, ally/enemy, insider/outsider, etc. (Hudson 2015; Hunt 2017; Polat 2021; Richmond 2006; Tadjbakhsh 2011), each of which in their own way, reinforce hegemonic hierarchies while also oversimplifying the complex reality of conflict settings and the solutions to peace. Moreover, the liberal peacebuilding model is challenged on the basis of false teleological assumptions of linearity (Chandler 2010; Paffenholz 2021), which overlooks the complexities and nonlinear realities of conflict-affected societies, where, as Paffenholz (2021, 368) notes "there is no end-point to peacebuilding" because "it is an inherently dynamic process with a potential multiplicity of strands and entry-points." Finally, the liberal peacebuilding model comes under scrutiny for perpetuating hegemonic forces such as colonialism, masculinity, whiteness, and Western values (Cárdenas 2023; Jabri 2013; O'Reilly 2024; Polat 2021), and thus replicating and reinforcing patterns of domination and oppression that undermine peace.

In response to these failures, there have been attempts to reimagine a liberal peace model. The hybrid-peace paradigm[1], for example, has sought to rethink ways in which the dominant liberal framework can interact, cooperate, and coexist with local, Indigenous, and grassroots peace practices (Belloni 2012; Jarstad and Belloni 2012; Mac Ginty 2010, 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2011; Uesugi, Deekeling, and Umeyama 2021). While not without its flaws and limitations (see Nadarajah and Rampton 2015; Richmond 2015), the hybrid peace model aspires to envision a peace that is more inclusive, adaptable, and reflective of the diverse realities on the ground. Yet, this model remains state-centric in that it is dependent on the presence of the state and, therefore, does not account for instances where the state has collapsed or has been simply absent. It also assumes a level of cooperation and tolerance between government elites and local actors, which may not accurately reflect the realities where authoritarian governments attempt peace through illiberal means.

[1]Hybrid peacebuilding is a concept that seeks to explain peace outcomes by examining the interactions between top–down, externally driven approaches and those that are considered bottom–up, local, and grassroots. This model highlights the coexistence and negotiated interactions between formal institutional processes and informal, localized peace practices. This approach involves elite and civil society actors with varying degrees of power, authority, and legitimacy. While hybrid peace may sound promising, it can result in complex, contradictory, and sometimes deleterious outcomes (Mac Ginty 2010).

Our special forum, along with the concept of a peace continuum, fills this gap by exploring how peacebuilding efforts persist in contexts where the state is absent, collapsed, or authoritarian, focusing on the diverse ways in which women's groups contribute to peace beyond state-centric frameworks.

Shifting Geo-Political Order and Rising Threats of "Authoritarian Peace"

Adding to the debates surrounding the failures of liberal peacebuilding discussed above, a new wave of literature is emerging, calling for us to consider the failure of peace within the context of today's shifting international geopolitical landscape—one where powerful, authoritarian, and distinctly illiberal regimes exert far more influence than they did in the post-Cold War era of the 1990s and early 2000s (Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018; Kuchling 2020; Mitchell 2024). This shift is not just about the West facing increased geo-political competition, however. It is also because the liberal peacebuilding model is not—nor ever has been—the prevailing nor preferred approach to conflict resolution in many parts of the world (Owen et al. 2018). In populist and authoritarian regimes, illiberal models of achieving peace have been commonplace, especially in regions where Western approaches have either failed or been rejected outright.

Whether conceptualized as "authoritarian peace" (Grief 2023), "illiberal peace" (Mitchell 2024; De Oliveira 2011), or "authoritarian conflict management" (Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018), these approaches are united in their attempt to achieve stability and security through "the preservation of a political and economic status quo, through a combination of suppression, manipulation, and obfuscation, accompanied by cries for 'Law and Order'" (Mitchell 2024, 32). Unlike liberal peace—which emphasizes democracy, human rights, and economic liberalization—illiberal approaches to peace present the state as the sole authority and solution for achieving stability, often prioritizing regime control and order over political freedoms and inclusivity (Heathershaw and Owen 2019, De Oliveira 2011, Subedi 2022). As a result, they often eschew outside intervention—whether from the international or from below—in the name of protecting domestic political order and national sovereignty (Lefort-Rieu 2024; De Oliveira 2011). Moreover, they fail to incorporate civil society into formal peace processes (Dilek 2024; Lewis 2022). The limited participation of civil society, combined with the prioritization of state security, negative peace, and militarism (Kuchling 2020), perpetuates a narrow and limited understanding of peace. This approach also neglects to address the deeper, structural causes of these conflicts, leaving underlying grievances unresolved and inhibiting the possibility of sustainable peace (Lefort-Rieu 2024). In other words, conflict is essentially managed rather than resolved, and in the process, peace becomes synonymous with maintaining the authoritarian regime's power.

While it may seem intuitive that these critiques are state-centered, given the nature of authoritarianism and the hyper-emphasis on the state's ability to bring about peace without outside interference, the literature has yet to look beyond formal mechanisms of civil society inclusion (or the lack thereof). To date, it has not yet addressed grassroots peacebuilding efforts that persist even under oppressive and restrictive regimes. Existing scholarship thus far has focused predominantly on state actors, their methods of political

and economic control, and the prioritization of regime stability over human security. Yet, by doing so, it risks falling into the same trap as critics of liberal peacebuilding by becoming overly concerned with state activity and failing to examine the crucial peacebuilding efforts taking place outside of the state's direct purview. This special forum aims to highlight the work of women's groups in such environments, challenging the assumption that civil society is not engaged in peacebuilding under authoritarian leadership.

Everyday and Perpetual Peace

To identify and understand how peace happens in both liberal and illiberal contexts—whether or not the state is involved—we turn to Mac Ginty's (2021) concept of "everyday peace" and Paffenholz's (2021) idea of "perpetual peace." Together, these approaches help us see peace as a dynamic, ongoing process that occurs through local, often informal actions, even in the most restrictive environments. According to Mac Ginty (2021), "everyday peace" encompasses the micro-acts of peace that take place daily—those small gestures and practices that create the potential for a ripple effect, gradually moving communities closer to reconciliation. Such acts can be split-second decision-making on the battlefield to not fire a weapon at an enemy combatant, or when soldiers voluntarily decide to protect civilians against government attacks. Yet, everyday peace extends well beyond the battlefield and into civil society, where communities are regularly tasked with forgiving ex-combatants, or when people must share workplaces, marketplaces, and living spaces with those from "the other side" after sectarian violence. While this special forum focuses on larger group actions of women peacebuilders, Mac Ginty's work provides important foundations for the importance of looking outside of the state's purview for acts of peace.

More recently, Paffenholz (2021) has put forth the concept of "perpetual peacebuilding" in an effort to challenge the misleading and inaccurate myth of peace as a linear process. Instead, she asserts that peacebuilding is best conceived as a nonsequential and ongoing process of negotiation and renegotiation within society and that the path to peace is "marked by opportunities, setbacks, catalysts, friction, and resistance" (Paffenholz 2021, 368). Drawing from Kenya as a case study, Paffenholz highlights the multiple peace efforts that emerged after election violence in 2007, ultimately showing the "messiness" of peacebuilding in an ongoing, perpetual process without an end.

Feminist Visions for Peace

Feminist conceptions of peace tend to be more comprehensive, transformative, and stable than traditional notions of peace (Paarlberg-Kvam 2019). These approaches place gender equality at their core, recognizing that gender relations and structural transformations are not only intimately linked but essential for achieving sustainable peace (Cárdenas 2023). Moreover, feminist perspectives emphasize that patriarchal gender relations are not merely a consequence of war but serve as drivers of militarization and armed conflict (Cockburn 2010).

Feminists actively challenge core ideas embedded in both liberal and illiberal peacebuilding models, including the prioritization of state security over human security, the myth of a war/peace binary, and the imperial and colonial legacies deeply embedded in these frameworks.

Unlike traditional models, feminist visions of peace go beyond the absence of war by centering human security and focusing on the needs of vulnerable individuals. Feminist peacebuilding emphasizes securing positive rights and freedoms (Confortini 2006), while also challenging systems of oppression, hierarchy, patriarchal power, and addressing gender-based violence (Sapiano and True 2022).

One example of this feminist critique is the rejection of the war/peace binary, which tends to privilege forms of violence that affect men while overlooking the everyday, nonspectacular threats more relevant to women. These include the threats of violence women face in their homes and communities, even during so-called times of peace. Cockburn (2004) introduces the concept of a "continuum of violence," recognizing that violence against women is part of a broader spectrum of normalized, everyday aggression rooted in patriarchal norms. This violence spans from direct physical harm to structural and symbolic forms and neither begins with war nor ends with a peace agreement. By recognizing that violence does not simply begin with war nor end with a peace agreement, Cockburn's framework pushes for a more expansive and continuous version of peace, demanding that we pay attention to the underlying systems of inequality and oppression that perpetuate harm in everyday life in peacebuilding work, even when it is not explicitly related to the battlefield.

Indeed, recent scholarship has reinforced the ongoing relevance and utility of Cockburn's framework. While some scholars have explored how conflict, despite its inherent violence, can foster social networks that reshape gender norms, eventually leading to empowerment gains (Berry 2018; Anderson and Valade 2023; Wood 2008), others have highlighted that the sustainability of these gains is uncertain. One analysis reveals that women's empowerment achieved during conflict often fades in "post-conflict" settings, with many of these gains lost within 10–15 years (Webster, Chen, and Beardsley 2019). Moreover, women engaged in "post-conflict" reconstruction, particularly in fragile security contexts, often face violent backlash because their empowerment is perceived as a challenge to entrenched gender norms (Berry 2017; Zulver 2021). From the fall of Kabul in Afghanistan, to the repression of protesters in Myanmar, to the erosion of presidential term limits in Burundi, women who have committed their lives to peace and gender rights now face renewed threats—yet they continue to engage in their activism.

Building on Cockburn's concept, Anderson and Eskandari (2023) developed the term "continuum of activism," which recognizes that peace activism, particularly by women, occurs before, during, and after conflict across multiple spaces and scales, addressing a range of structural, direct, and symbolic threats. Understanding that the war/peace binary tends to draw attention to spectacular events, such as the Liberian women's activism in Accra, featured in the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (Disney 2008), which captures only a part of women's ongoing peace work, Anderson and Eskandari seek to highlight the less headline-grabbing challenges that are equally important—like the hardships faced by refugee populations during crises such as COVID-19.

The continuum of activism is also reflected in Martin Del Almagro's (2022)work on feminist peace efforts in Liberia. Her analysis underscores that while high-profile peace agreements often garner the most attention, feminist peacebuilding frequently takes place in everyday, less visible spaces of policy implementation and social transformation. This includes areas like care work, where women, often at the forefront, care for those affected by war and actively seek resources for humanitarian assistance. Other

examples include Protestant and Catholic women during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, who established civil society organizations to address challenges such as unemployment, imprisonment, and the loss of community members (Anderson 2016). Similarly, women have played a key role in supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Quatrochi et al. 2019). Failing to recognize these contributions as peacebuilding not only marginalizes women's roles in sustaining communities and building peace from the ground up but also overlooks the presence of peace in contexts where it is often assumed there is none.

Additionally, the UN's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has faced criticism for its colonial and imperialist framing of the Global South. While it was initially spearheaded by African women, its implementation often portrays the Global South as inherently unstable and in need of external intervention (Pratt 2013; Parashar 2019). Such framings position Global South women as "the other," devaluing their local knowledge while simultaneously erasing their significant contributions to peacebuilding. Even within feminist peace literature, these dynamics are present. Scholars such as Basu (2016)highlight how Global South actors have played an active role in "writing" the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 through both implementation and resistance, underscoring the local work that often goes unnoticed in these critiques. Similarly, Shepherd (2021) reminds us that the African women who spearheaded UNSCR 1325 are rarely acknowledged, pointing to the erasure of their contributions from the dominant narratives surrounding the WPS agenda.

Peace Continuum

Building upon these debates and contributions—from liberal peacebuilding and authoritarian conflict management to everyday, perpetual, and feminist peace—we propose the concept of a "peace continuum." This is inspired by the groundbreaking feminist "continuum of violence" (Cockburn 2004) and "continuum of activism" (Anderson and Eskandari 2023) frameworks that are discussed above.

Expanding on these two concepts, we propose a third concept—the "peace continuum." This concept draws from MacGinty's (2021) everyday peace, Paffenholz's (2021) perpetual peace, and feminist peace, while also integrating ideas from continuums of violence and activism. By bringing together these frameworks, the peace continuum capitalizes on their strengths but also seeks to address some of their limitations.

For instance, Paffenholz highlights the misnomer that peace processes follow a linear path[2], emphasizing instead the dynamic, ongoing, and multidirectional nature of peacebuilding—an idea our concept draws on. However, the peace continuum moves beyond formal peace processes and includes contexts where, from a liberal or illiberal model, it may be perceived that no official war or peace process is taking place, yet from a feminist perspective, peacebuilding is actively occurring.

While Mac Ginty's concept of everyday peace captures informal, often unintentional acts of peace, such as a soldier opting not to fire at an enemy, our concept emphasizes the intentionality behind much of women's peace work. Unlike the spontaneous moments described by Mac Ginty, feminist peacebuilding involves deliberate, organized efforts to challenge violence and transform societies. This intentionality is central to women's peace activism, which often mobilizes strategically to foster peace in high-risk, militarized environments. By focusing on conscious acts of peacebuilding, we argue that these efforts bring a distinct, purposeful dimension to the broader peace continuum.

This intentional approach to peacebuilding, particularly in high-risk settings, also reveals that peace is not solely dependent on the presence or absence of formal conflict, as mentioned above. Drawing from the continuum of violence, we acknowledge that formal conflict does not need to be present for peacebuilding to occur—just as the existence of institutional mechanisms, like peace agreements, does not mean that people are necessarily living in peace, even if the state is deemed to be at peace. In this sense, we recognize the systemic and deeply embedded forms of violence that are embedded in social and political structures, even during so-called "peacetime."

Similarly, Anderson's continuum of activism informs our understanding of peace activism as a process that occurs across space, time, and modalities. Peacebuilding, like activism, is not confined to a single moment or formal process; it happens across different contexts and levels. However, while Anderson's focus is on activism, our concept encompasses a broader, more fluid understanding of peace, including but not limited to activism. In other words, activism is one dimension of many within our framework.

Finally, the peace continuum is inherently feminist because it purports a specific understanding of peace—one that challenges oppressive masculinist systems, overcomes the war/peace binary, and focuses on human security. Moreover, it allows us to recognize the resilience of women's peace efforts in high-risk and violent settings, which might otherwise remain unseen through other frameworks.

Yet, while the peace continuum originates from women's peace work and the resilience and ingenuity of feminist movements, it is equally applicable to a wide range of peacebuilding efforts that are not necessarily or primarily feminist. In other words, this concept offers a critical lens for scholars examining the failures of liberal peace and the dynamics of illiberal conflict management, as it allows us to unearth critical mechanisms of peace that might otherwise be overlooked. Specifically, we invite those studying these areas to consider how peace can emerge and persist in spaces where formal models have failed and how alternative approaches rooted in human security and demilitarization can reshape our understanding of sustainable peace.

Summary of Articles

In addition to this Introduction, the special forum comprises eight articles that explore various forms of failed peace and feminist activists' responses to such failures in Afghanistan, Colombia, Israel, the Sahel (Mali and Nigeria), Mexico, Myanmar, and Nepal. Collectively, they elucidate failures such as the militarized security strategies that exacerbate violence against women (Mexico), the erosion of women's rights under Taliban rule following the withdrawal of international forces (Afghanistan), the failure and termination of UN peacekeeping missions and continued insurgencies in Mali and Northern Nigeria, and the failure of the 1993 Oslo peace accord to end violence between Israel and Palestine, which was marked by the ongoing exclusion of women's voices in decision-making. These articles also address the slow and uneven implementation of peace agree-

[2]Gómez-Suárez further adds the concept of reconciliation after conflict being "present-oriented" rather than something that exists in the future, and that it "cannot be produced through long-term planning and measured in log-frames, but instead requires unleashing the human brain's capacity for wonder and awe" (see Gómez-Suárez 2023).

ments, particularly of provisions relevant to gender equality (Colombia), the rollback of women's rights under military rule (Myanmar), and the entrenchment of patriarchal norms despite gender quotas (Nepal).

In all cases, feminist activists have organized and, often with minimal resources and out of the spotlight, they have fought to promote a feminist peace by addressing systemic inequalities, advocating for women's rights, and challenging patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence and discrimination. Their efforts encompass a range of strategies, including public advocacy, legal action, grassroots organizing and mediating, and international lobbying, all aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable societies.

In "The Antimilitarist Feminist Network: Addressing Mexico's Security Failures," Daniela Philipson Garcia describes how the Antimilitarist Feminist Network in Mexico responds to the failure of the militarized security strategy to curb violence, particularly femicides. Since 2006, Mexico has faced a security crisis fueled by militarized policies to combat organized crime, which feminist activists argue have exacerbated violence against women. Organizations like Intersecta and GIRE mobilize through public advocacy, data-driven campaigns, and legal action to critique state militarization, linking it to rising gender-based violence. These feminist activists promote nonmilitarized security policies, focusing on gender justice and demilitarization, aiming to reduce violence against women and hold the state accountable for human rights abuses.

Although there is no formal peace agreement (or indeed, conflict) in this case, the persistent failure to resolve violence despite significant attempts mirrors the dynamics of "post-conflict" societies where violence returns or continues after peace is supposed to have been achieved. This article underscores the importance of including nontraditional contexts such as Mexico in discussions about the failure of peacebuilding and the return of violence, as it further illustrates how militarized approaches fail to create sustainable peace, particularly for women.

Since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban's return to power, women and girls have faced the elimination of virtually all previously held rights. In "Geopolitical Narratives of Withdrawal and the Counter-Narrative of Women's Rights Activism in Afghanistan," Jacqui True and Farkondeh Akbari illustrate how Afghan feminist activists, both inside Afghanistan and in exile, respond to international actors' abandonment of Afghan women. Key Afghan women along with grassroots activists focus on exposing the Taliban's "gender apartheid" through international advocacy, online campaigns, and protests. These feminists aim to restore Afghan women's access to education, employment, and political participation while pressuring the international community for accountability. The activists are fighting on two fronts: against Taliban oppression of women in Afghanistan and towards building a counter-narrative to the international one that has painted Afghan society as backward and fundamentally unwilling to implement women's rights.

"'We Are Always Each Other's Keeper': Transformative Dimensions of Women's Local Peacebuilding in Africa," by Aili Tripp, Awa Maiga, and Yahi Maina recounts the work of feminist activists since the start of insurgencies in northern Nigeria (2009) and the Mali conflict (2012) in responding to increased violence and the failure of peace processes to protect women. The article explores how feminist activists in the Sahel, including local women's groups, respond to these failures. Activists such as Sambala and Maryam build bridges across religious and ethnic divides, negotiate with insurgents, and lead grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. Their strategies include economic empowerment, community mobilization, and advocating for women's political representation. They aim to transform gender relations and rebuild community cohesion by addressing violence, poverty, and exclusion.

Following the military coup of February 2021, Myanmar's feminist activists face a new authoritarian regime that has undermined previous gains for women's rights. In "New Opportunities, Rising Constraints: Feminist Peacebuilding in Myanmar," Rebecca Haines discusses how feminist activists, particularly women's rights organizations, are responding to the rollback of these rights. Activists within the National Unity Government and in exile continue to push for gender quotas, humanitarian aid for displaced communities, and international support. Their goal is to institutionalize gender equality in Myanmar's future governance and ensure accountability for sexual violence and human rights abuses under the military regime. The work of these activists spans lobbying for international support, resisting the junta, pushing gender-sensitive change in the country, and fostering feminist principles within the anticoup movement itself.

In the wake of the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women in Chocó continue to face violence and displacement, despite the gender provisions within the peace accord. In "Aspirational 'Total Peace': Feminism in the Face of Resurging Violence in Chocó, Colombia," Miyerlandy Cabanzo Valencia, Rebecca Gindele, and Julia Zulver explore how gender equality activists respond to the failures of the peace agreement to improve security and gender equality. Women's organizations such as Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres engage in political education, build local networks, and advocate for gender-sensitive policies in local governance. Their activism focuses on addressing human insecurity that is created by both racial and gendered violence and pushing for full implementation of the Peace Agreement's gender provisions in Chocó.

The following article by Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos—"Taking Peace into Our Own Hands: Colombian Feminists Use Local Politics to Advance Their Agenda for Peace"—also addresses the challenges that another part of Colombia, the Cauca and Puerto Tejada regions, are facing despite the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement. Both territories remain mired in violence, with incomplete implementation of the Accord's gender provisions. Feminist activists here, through women's networks, engage in norm localization, advocating for women's participation in local development plans. They build alliances with local authorities to implement gender-responsive policies, aiming to protect women's rights, ensure accountability for gender-based violence, and transform local governance to reflect gender equality in conflict-affected areas.

Since the failure of the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, Israel/Palestine has remained in conflict, with women's perspectives excluded from peace processes. In "'Smaller Goals Were Achieved': Feminist Peace Archives in Israel and Communal Methods of Repair," Sarai Aharoni, Hedva Eyal, and Ruth Preser explore how feminist peace activists, including Women in Black and Palestinian–Israeli feminist groups, are responding to the failures of formal peace processes and militarization. Activists ground their action in archiving-as-activism as the basis for a counternarrative to the failure of the Oslo Peace process and the abandonment by other sides of the complex process as a result of that very failure. They also support this core activity with public protests and grassroots dialogues to challenge Israeli occupation and militarized state violence. By preserving the history

of feminist resistance and advocating for gender justice, they aim to redefine peace negotiations to include women's perspectives.

Since the 2006 peace process and the introduction of quotas in the 2015 constitution, Nepalese women have gained increased political representation, yet patriarchal norms persist in politics. In "Patriarchy, Peace, and Politics in Post-Conflict Nepal: The Struggle for Women's Inclusion," Luna examines how feminist activists, particularly women politicians, are confronting these patriarchal structures. Based in districts such as Kathmandu and Chitwan, these women face male-dominated political spaces. Some challenge patriarchal norms directly, while others cooperate or disengage. Their tactics include lobbying for gender equality, organizing in women's caucuses, and pushing against sexist practices in local and national governance. They aim to secure genuine political power and representation for women, ensuring the full implementation of gender quotas and challenging entrenched patriarchal structures in Nepalese politics. This piece stands out in that these women participated in formal politics as a result of the agreements. Yet, it becomes clear that even with formalized rights, changing entrenched norms remains a slow and long process.

Conclusion

The eight cases in this special forum illuminate the work of feminist peacebuilders. In these cases, feminist activists respond to failed peace processes (Israel), the failure of peacekeeping missions (the Sahel), the slow implementation of gender provisions in peace agreements (Colombia-Cauca and Puerto Tejada; Colombia-Chocó), violence and insecurity despite the conclusion of peace negotiations (Colombia-Chocó), the rollback of women's rights following the coming to power of authoritarian governments (Afghanistan and Myanmar), and increasing militarism (Mexico). In the case of Nepal, in which Luna explores the experiences of post-war women parliamentarians, she demonstrates that despite formal progress in achieving descriptive representation, these women still face backlash, and use a set of strategies to navigate patriarchal power. Collectively, the cases reveal the persistent, intricate, and holistic work of feminist activists in illiberal, violent, and insecure environments.

There are several policy implications of this project. It is clear that feminist peace activists operate in an exceptionally resource-poor environment. Due to neoliberal policies coupled with the destruction wrought by war, the activists may be said to be operating within a two-sided vise. On the one hand, the war/peace binary presents a definitional problem, where spectacular events such as armed conflict and peace negotiations garner the attention of the media, international organizations, and editorial boards. This means that the work of feminist peace activists outside of these high-profile events goes largely unnoticed and consequently unsupported.

The other side of the vise is the overburden of care where feminist activists are engaged with addressing violence and insecurities along all four dimensions of the continuum of violence. The major policy recommendations, then, are concerned with securing greater resources for these women. Whereas feminist peacebuilding occurs at the local level, it requires multiple layers of support from national, international, and transnational actors. These can span flexible, long-term funding for grassroots organizations to better international monitoring of illiberal states. Some concrete initiatives that could be considered are quicker extraction and placement of at-risk activists; greater attention to feminist activists' counter-narratives used to draw attention to human rights and antidemocratic regimes; and the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and in smaller, more localized decision-making bodies.

Such initiatives will only be effective if tackled with a truly feminist lens. We propose the application of the "continuum of activism" where we recognize the broad nature of peacework. It may be conceived of as occurring along four dimensions: time, space, scale, and type. As this special forum shows, women are working before, during, and after the war. They are addressing violence and insecurity in multiple spaces from the home, to the refugee camp, to the battlefield. They seek partnerships within their home communities, to transnational friends and allies across borders, lobbying local officials, international NGOs, national governments, and international organizations in their quest to gain resources and rectify injustices. Finally, they address direct, indirect, and symbolic forms of violence. Understanding the breadth and complexity of feminist work should not only result in their receiving greater international support, but in actors at all other levels, taking seriously the types of violence and insecurity that feminist activists seek to address. In so doing, we would hope that a much broader coalition than just local activists can come together, prioritizing the well-being and security of vulnerable populations.

We recognize that by defining this special forum as peacebuilding in "violent and illiberal 'post-conflict'" environments, we negate many cases in the Global North. Canada, for example, has a colonial legacy that contributes to structural violence against Indigenous peoples. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women campaign highlights the disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls who go missing and the inadequacy of state resources deployed to protect them. Future research might be broadened to explore cases of settler colonialism where activists continue their advocacy efforts in states where liberal and democratic norms are often applied and experienced unevenly.

Future research prompted by this special forum should seek to add new cases and refine the use of these concepts. Scholars often choose high-profile cases for examination rather than "failed" cases (Anderson and Golan 2023). We call for scholars to consider the work of feminist peacebuilders in seemingly intractable cases. Second, research is needed to determine the experiences of feminist peace activists at levels beyond the local. What are the mechanisms that serve to invisibilize local feminist peace activism? Using gender as an analytic category that considers how issues, practices, and individuals are gendered may be a fruitful way in which to begin interrogating this question (McAuliff 2022).

We hope, then, that this Special Forum serves to complicate our understanding of failure, by focusing on who continues to dedicate themselves to peacebuilding—and how—even in contexts that are written off as unsuccessful attempts at guaranteeing peace. We have highlighted eight cases where feminist peacebuilders adopted creative, flexible, present-oriented (Gómez-Suárez 2023), and aspirational approaches to their activism, as a way to illustrate the continuum of peace in practice. In so doing, we have listened to women, focused on an inclusive and expansive vision of peace, and attuned ourselves to the operation of power (Shepherd 2021). And, ultimately, we hope that by focusing on the continuum of peace—and the feminist peacebuilders who recognize and work in this liminal space—we can find more enduring solutions to end the war.

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