

Ireland's history has been steeped in conflict and its various forms. This has brought about experiences of conflict resolution, peace-keeping and post-conflict society, which influence how we undertake our work on a global scale through Ireland's UN peacekeeping missions and mediation.

This is even more important to highlight as Ireland places a bid for a seat on the UN's Security Council. For this to be a successful bid and to make the most of this privilege and opportunity, Ireland must be at the forefront of the best practices of conflict resolution as a whole and strive to fully incorporate the Women, Peace and Security agenda in both policy and practice. If we note that the resolutions created by the Security Council on the Women, Peace and Security agenda are not legally binding, but instead remain a form of 'soft power,' then those who wish to lead by example must take these resolutions from policy into practice (Swaine, 2009: 409).

While it cannot be denied that Ireland has begun to do this through its two previous National Action Plans, there is still a gap in the framing of women, which is consistent with the Women, Peace and Security agenda as a whole. This comes through the language used in the resolutions of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which consistently places women in the role of the victim of violence in all its forms. Although I do not aim to dispute that women are victims of many forms of violence, one must also account for the occasions when women are the perpetrators of political violence. As conflicts change from what has been described as "old wars" to "new wars," and can no longer be restricted to the confines of a battlefield, our approaches to how one counters these conflicts must also be altered. (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013) This includes terrorism and counterterrorism programmes, as women from all parts of the world increasingly are the targets of recruitment programmes for radical groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram.

Although the UN Security Council created the Counterterrorism Committee as a reaction to the post 9/11 atmosphere of tackling the growing concern for terrorism, groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS also saw a turning point from 9/11 (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015: 58). As the UN member states attempted to create policies and legislation to deter all attempts of terrorist attacks, the turning point for terrorist groups saw a rise in the use of women as suicide bombers as they were able to cross check-points without suspicion. Through the Counter Terrorism Committee, the UN introduced Resolution 1373 (2001) which called upon all member states to create a National Action Plan to counter terrorism and radicalisation both domestically and in their foreign policy. Ireland also has the obligation of the Lisbon Treaty to monitor and neutralise any possible threats to the security of the other member states of the European Union. This is where there is currently a gap in Irish foreign policy as the women, peace and security agenda still fails to recognise women as actors of violence. Not only is this a reductionist and essentialist view of women in conflict, it also does not accept the realities of the conflicts, which Ireland attempts to end through peacekeeping missions, or the reducing of radicalisation in Ireland.

Despite Ireland continuing to highlight the role of women in peace building and keeping in a means to empower women, this image of women as inherently peaceful can be harmful in terms of reducing women's lives to a homogenous group. Perhaps, this labelling of women as peacebuilders is due to the association between "femininity and passivity, empathy, caring and emotion" (Chinkin & Kaldor, 2013: 167). Taking S/RES/2242 (2015) as one example of the rhetoric perpetuated by intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, one sees that the language used in this resolution limits the role of women recognised. Through, "recognizing the differential impact on the human rights of women and girls of terrorism and violent

extremism, including in the context of their health, education, and participation in public life, and that they are often directly targeted by terrorist groups,” the UN Security Council places women and girls into the role of victim rather than agent (S/RES/2242, 2015: 2). This rhetoric is not broken throughout the resolution and hence, the placing and viewing of women and girls as only victims in policy cannot be broken.

Even though there is a long history around the world of women perpetrating political violence, including Ireland’s own history of political violence in the past century, the tendency still remains to ignore such women (Bloom, 2007: 94). Hence, our perceptions of women in conflict fall under the guise of “wives’, ‘camp followers,’ or ‘sex slaves’” (MacKenzie, 2009: 243). Essentially, they are only permitted by society to attach themselves to conflict as a “Mother, Monster and Whore” as labelled by Gentry and Sjoberg (2007). Although women who perpetrate political violence “talk more often about politics than about love and children,” through the discourse surrounding them, “often their political discourse is downplayed in the media” (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2015: 74). This does not allow for the examination of the ways in which women are taking active roles in today’s conflicts such as “using their bodies as human detonators for explosive material strapped around their waist” in suicide bombings (Bloom, 2007: 94).

The WPS agenda seeks to accurately represent the realities of women’s lives in conflict and post-conflict settings in both policy and practice, yet through the rhetoric of resolutions such as S/RES/2242 (2015) women are relegated to the role of victims of violence and inherently peaceful. While the S/RES/2242 (2015) does not incorporate clauses that acknowledge the possibility of violent women, it instead notes “the substantial link between women’s meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict” (S/RES/2242,

2015: 1). The reductionist language employed throughout the resolution only allows for women to be portrayed as, “wicked purveyors of extremist violence or virtuous saviours of sons, husbands and communities” (Ní Aoláin, 2016: 282). Yet perpetrators of such violence must be represented in policies in order to successfully implement counterterrorism programmes to prevent women from threatening international security and putting into effect DDR programmes that include female combatants.

It is not enough, however, to simply recognise internationally that women enter extremist organisations. To create counterterrorism programmes that are going to make a difference, one must understand that women enter such groups in the same ways that we account for with men. The contributing factors vary from geographical, political and cultural difference, amongst many others.

In the review of the 2015-2018 National Action Plan, the lack of a link between the lessons learned from our shared history with Northern Ireland is critiqued and is something that can only be improved in moving forward with our next Action Plan. Therefore, we must use our Women, Peace and Security Action Plan to influence our Counter Terrorism Action Plan if the agenda is to fully be incorporated into our foreign and domestic policies. Taking for example, that despite women in Northern Ireland playing active roles not only in the conflict but also in the demands for a peace process through the IRA and the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, they lacked any presence in the peace talks and their issues were ignored as “women’s issues” (Ní Aoláin, 2013: 1097). This can also derive as a result of the victim/agent dichotomy in which women are placed. Consequently, women decide not to be present in post-conflict negotiations. (Ní Aoláin, 2013: 1096). This is a lesson from which we must learn in order to improve and strengthen the WPS agenda in Ireland and abroad.

Recently, the Minister for Justice stated that “our history on this island means that regrettably we have been engaged in counter-terrorism work for decades and the arrangements currently in place have served the Irish people well in countering threats to the security of the State” (Irish Times, 21st November 2018). These counterterrorism policies have had some success while others have led to the terrible consequences of countering violence, such as that described by Prof. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “In Ireland, the use of exceptional courts (Diplock courts and the Special Criminal Court) made exceptional trial process normal, and enabled and supported a broader system of rights negation in the criminal justice context” (Irish Times, 21st November 2018). Hence, Ireland should take its experience in counterterrorism that has been implemented on both sides of the border to broaden our scope of who is capable of being radicalised for many different reasons from a political stance, age, race, religion and that gender is not a factor that prevents this radicalisation.

Despite our history which is steeped in counterterrorism programmes, that failed and allowed for the radicalisation of many that would have otherwise remained peaceful, we still have not managed to learn. Previously the radicalised have been both male and female yet, the language of the Women, Peace and Security agenda still places women in the role of victim which spreads into counterterrorism programmes. Ireland must lead in changing this as we bid for the Security Council seat. The acknowledgement of women as perpetrators of violence and not only victims of violence is crucial to several of the pillars of the agenda; such as, empowerment as women are begun to be seen as whole beings rather than a homogenous group, and influences attempts to prevent violence and conflict which affects women. This also has a significant impact on the relief and recovery pillar of the agenda as without recognising the reality of the lives of women who use violence for various reasons and the variations in their lives, the

agenda can allow for the improvement of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes that allow for women to participate.

Nor is there a change in the emphasis of women's role of peacekeeper in previous National Action Plans created by Ireland, through the use of quotations by female peacekeepers. While of course the contributions of these women who work to foster peace in conflicts is not something to be dismissed, the over-emphasis as this being the sole role of women in conflict can be dangerous and alienating to many women. Through creating something of the 'Other' or 'non-female' for women who commit violence in conflict, there is a raised risk that these women will not participate in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes that are already viewed by many as carrying a stigma or as not meant for women.

In the context of DDR programmes, women continue to be excluded for many reasons. Research by MacKenzie (2009: 250) shows that these include; the belief that the programmes are not relevant to women, the requirement of handing in arms of which they do not have, the social stigma that derives from such programmes for women, the lack of recognition of women as combatants or that they had been victims of forced involvement and therefore treated as victims and ignoring the realities of the violence they committed, forced or otherwise.

Through working towards improving the Women, Peace and Security agenda so that it fully represents the realities of the lives of the of women in conflict, the agenda can be altered to recognise women as individuals rather than a homogenous group. This can help in creating a link between the domestic and foreign policies of the women, peace and security agenda for Ireland as we improve our National Action Plan to acknowledge the real possibility of the

radicalisation of women in our counterterrorism programmes. This must be done in both our domestic and foreign policy and as a result, highlight the importance of the agenda at home.

One can only hope that the agenda will become more of a household term as Ireland moves forward with its third national action plan and with the possibility of having even more influence on the agenda through the Security Council seat.