

Women, Peace Building and Political Inclusion: A Case Study from Solomon Islands

Introduction

Despite the crucial activities women fulfilled during the conflict in Solomon Islands they were overlooked and excluded in the peace negotiations and are yet to be sufficiently represented in national level politics. This article examines why, despite the active roles women undertook in peace-building activities in Solomon Islands during the 1998–2000 ethnic tensions, their activities were not translated into greater political representation in the post-conflict period. The inclusion of women in peace negotiations was necessary for sustainable peace and development in Solomon Islands, yet their inability to break the boundaries of feminine stereotypes and challenge traditional power hierarchies left them relegated to the sidelines and excluded from the political forum. We argue that it was because women's activities were based on gendered stereotypes that they were unable to challenge the traditional power imbalances that exist in Solomon Islands politics. Prior to and since Independence, the public arena and politics in Solomon Islands have traditionally been a male domain, yet the conflict within the country, commonly referred to as the 'tensions', resulted in changes to some social roles and increased women's sphere of influence. Others have written in detail about the conflict and women's agency; however we wish to explore why greater changes in areas of women's political participation were not sustained by women in Solomon Islands. To understand why this was the case, we apply three arguments drawn from feminist critiques of international relations to the domestic politics of Solomon Islands: first, that women's experiences and voices are often excluded and ignored in politics and conflict, with men's experiences promoted as 'real' in international relations theory and practice; second, that the myth that the state provides protection for vulnerable populations, such as women and children, in times of conflict needs critical examination; and third, that unreflectively linking women and peace can have negative consequences.

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other women's non-government organisations in and around Honiara. Whilst not conducting personal research Katherine stayed with a Solomon Island family and had the opportunity to informally discuss, with a variety of women and men, issues relating to the tensions, women's agency, and their attempts at running for Parliament. Although a graduate in peace and conflict studies, this experience opened her eyes to the realities of conflict and the significant and positive impact women can have during times of instability. She was also inspired by case studies from other countries emerging from post-conflict situations where women had taken a commanding position. Through discussions with Helen Johnson they inquired as to why this was not the case in Solomon Islands and worked to understand what happened; what changed; why changes occurred or why they did not.

Women's peace-building activities and international relations theory

Conflicts are occurring in many societies around the world and they inflict significant hardship, pain and suffering on individuals, communities and nations. They destroy economies and set back economic and social development through destruction of infrastructure and social capital, and loss of life, and they divert funds away from essential services towards conflict activities.¹ However, the phoenix is beginning to rise from the ashes of conflict in the form of social and political changes with women becoming more politically visible, speaking out, and taking their seats in Parliament next to their male counterparts, as has been witnessed in Liberia, Timor-Leste and Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. After fourteen years of civil and regional conflict, Sierra Leone elected their first female president, Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson. She has been in power since 2006 and has appointed females to key ministerial posts such as finance and police.² Closer to home in Timor-Leste, after 24 years of Indonesian military occupation and the loss of one third of the population, 23 women were elected in the 88-seat Constituent Assembly in 2001.³ After the 2007 elections, women constituted 29% of the national elected representatives.⁴ Similarly, women in Bougainville were active in providing emergency assistance and were vocal against the use of violence during ten years of civil conflict, which led to the inclusion of 50 women in the Lincoln Peace Agreement and the reservation of three seats in the 41-seat parliament.⁵ These are examples of how women's contribution to peace-building has been acknowledged and their inclusion embraced in politics at the national level. Yet such social transformation has not been replicated in Solomon Islands where women were involved in

pivotal roles to bring about the conditions for peace but were excluded from peace negotiations and subsequently from Parliament.

International relations (IR) theory and practice is typically male dominated and 'devoid of women and of interest in issues of concern to women.'⁶ International relations theory addresses war, security and the state because, as an independent theory, it grew out of the documented actions of men in World War One and World War Two. At these times conflict was between states, and states were the main actors; they were controlled by men, and only male citizens were perceived to have participated in wars.⁷ IR's focus was on the actions and motivations of men, and the public realm of political action was closed to women. 'Wars were fought by men, resolved by men and chronicled by men,' leaving no role for women in security or politics.⁸ J.A. Tickner describes how, 'when women speak or write about national security, they are often dismissed as being naïve or unrealistic' as their experiences are not acknowledged by the mainstream as being valuable.⁹ The centrality of the role of the state in IR theory devalues other potential actors in creating or disrupting security.¹⁰ Feminist critiques challenge IR's assumptions and assertions, and present alternative realities for inclusion in the IR discourse. They support the inclusion of women's experiences and discussion of their activities and, through such support, promotion and awareness, validate and legitimise women in the IR context.

Furthermore, the myth that the state can and does provide protection for its citizens, especially women, is being challenged with the targeting of civilians in conflict and the rise of civilian deaths in conflict. There has also been an increase in discussions of human security compared to the traditional dialogue on security of the state.¹¹ The traditional concept of security focuses on the integrity of the state, which is maintained, and occasionally threatened, by national security forces. Human security expands the traditional concept of security to include factors affecting the security of individuals. The extended definition incorporates feminist concerns by addressing the differences experienced by women and men and broadens ideas about threats to security as well as the actors and means of countering the threats.¹² Feminist critiques of IR and security theory also question the unreflective link between women and peace, ignoring the other roles women undertake in a conflict situation; such a link has been proven to perpetuate power imbalances.¹³ These challenges offered feminist by critiques to current dominant IR theories also apply in the case of the domestic politics of Solomon Islands, as illustrated below.

Tradition, the church, colonial administrators, power and politics

Since independence the political arena in Solomon Islands has been a traditionally male domain, with only one woman elected to the national parliament. S. Whittington *et al*, in their diagnosis of women's participation in politics, argue that barriers to women's inclusion are both 'systemic and systematic, with a traditional belief in 'big man' leadership resulting in the national realm of public decision-making being regarded as exclusively male, with women relegated to the domestic sphere.'¹⁴ Current barriers are influenced, in part, by the gender roles created by the missionaries and colonial administrators who established gendered stereotypes that promote the male as "natural" decision-maker at the macro level, and which now disadvantage women who aspire to national leadership. Stereotypical gender roles for women are generally categorised into reproductive activities, productive work and community management.¹⁵ By contrast, stereotyped gender roles for men focus on their breadwinning and activities associated with being the head of the household.¹⁶ Yet these social roles are interconnected, as women cannot complete their roles without the support of men's roles, and men cannot complete their roles without women supporting them. Gendered roles are based on the cultural, social, religious or biological assumption that men and women have different capacities, and this makes them suited to particular tasks and responsibilities.¹⁷ 'The greater association of women with the tasks of caring for the young, the sick, and the elderly both within the household and within the state and market institutions is often explained in terms of their 'natural' maternal instincts.'¹⁸ If women are associated with 'natural' maternal skills, caring work is seen as effortless and can be undervalued or ignored.¹⁹ In discussing gender roles in Solomon Islands, Whittington *et al* state that 'the fact that [gender roles] can and do change is a very sensitive issue because of their impact on personal identity and, ultimately, on power relations.'²⁰ The dynamic nature of gender roles is demonstrated in the examples provided below.

The church and colonial administration were significant institutions that changed traditional customs and gender roles for men and women, and created the dominant gender roles and stereotypes that are still widely accepted today. Many of the early missions were headed by male missionaries, who were often unmarried priests and brothers. They provided opportunities to local men to take primary roles in the running and administration of the churches.²¹ Although the organisation and well-being of families was the responsibility of women, the churches promoted the 'nuclear family unit under men's authority', thereby undermining women's control of the household.²² The colonial administrators were also

male and 'recruited and trained men to be leaders while women remained in the villages.'²³ Through 'access to new technologies, training in technical skills, and an academic education to men, the colonial government and the missions bestowed on men the means to gain status in the modern sector of the economy.'²⁴ Men were also provided with all the opportunities to take control of the government upon Independence. The systems and norms thus created remain largely in place today.

Whilst men have been groomed for political decision-making, women have been socialised for the domestic sphere. Pre-colonial women had separate domains from those of men, and these included responsibility for agricultural work, passing on cultural heritage, and binding families.²⁵ These traditional roles entitled them to equivalent intrinsic worth to that of men.²⁶ Moore reports that in 40% of the communities in Solomon Islands, land inheritance is matrilineal, and this provided women with status within their communities and control over decisions relating to land.²⁷ Yet women's traditional work was devalued by the missionaries and colonisers. For example, gardening was a source of status and self-esteem for women, but the early missionaries' horror at women's heavy workloads led them to design educational programs aimed at confining women to the domestic sphere, as if their involvement in productive activities were demeaning.²⁸ Wives of missionaries and female missionaries focused on the introduction of 'sewing, new methods of cooking, improved childcare practices, and other home economics subjects.'²⁹ Through the establishment of schools for girls and women's groups, women were offered a 'a service-oriented philosophy that stressed working for the congregation and caring for people, especially the needy, the disabled, and the elderly, and promoted Christian models of parenthood and family relationships.'³⁰ Today, women's organizations are still strongly linked with the church and their gendered service-oriented philosophy continues. The British Solomon Island Protectorate perpetuated the service-oriented philosophy by establishing the 'Women's Interest' section that travelled to the provinces and conducted short courses on home economics subjects.³¹ These activities reinforced feminine gender roles for women, confining them to the home and women's groups, and not encouraging women's inclusion in national or provincial politics. The Women's Interest section evolved into the Women's Development Division which currently acts as the government focal point for women and is currently situated in the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs.³² The mandate of the Division has been expanded to include policy development and research alongside training and capacity building; due to limited staff, funding and capacity, however, the primary role of the Division continues to be

training. The focus on developing the skills of women based on their domestic roles exemplifies the welfare approach to development.³³ It 'poses women as passive beneficiaries rather than active agents of change', and does not attempt to overcome women's subordinate social position by challenging men's realms of power.³⁴ The welfare approach does not address inequalities in power relations between women and men. These inequalities do exist in Solomon Islands, are identified by local women, and are expressed in government documents such as the National Women's Policy,³⁵ and the MWYCA corporate plan.³⁶

As established gender roles for men and women do not support the involvement of women in the political arena and push women to remain in the domestic sphere, Scheyvens argues that men have generally resisted the decolonisation of women with respect to the arena of leadership responsibilities.³⁷ Although women have aspired to national leadership, as evidenced by running for elections, Enloe asserts that 'social process and structures ... have been created and sustained over the generations — sometimes coercively — to keep most women out of any political position.'³⁸ These social processes and structures have reinforced the domestic role of women which, despite changes in their educational and economic status, is still regarded primarily as that of nurturer, caregiver, and supporter, and have made the sphere of politics accessible only to men.³⁹ Pollard states:

Objections to the participation of women in the public arena [have been made] on the grounds that it is the men's domain, while the place of women is the garden, the home, and the kitchen. The engagement of women in public spheres was also seen as a challenge and a threat to decision-makers in key positions, who are mostly men.⁴⁰

Like the field of IR, the domination of Solomon Islands politics by men is due to the establishment of structural barriers and the devaluation of women's activities and experiences.

The establishment of women's organizations has provided *fora* for women to build self-esteem, develop skills in leadership and management positions, and opportunities to travel to regions beyond their usual sphere to influence and express ideas and voice opinions in a safe environment.⁴¹ Pollard states that although the potential exists for 'women to engage in male-dominated arenas' it requires sustained outside funding and support.⁴² Women's skills have positioned them to be able to participate in national politics if the barriers to their inclusion can be overcome.

The tensions and the distortion of power

The tensions erupted towards the end of 1998 with the formation of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army, which later became known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), by Gualese men.⁴³ They reacted to what they saw as a lack of action by the centralised national government on two previous occasions to address issues surrounding land rights, migration and economic development. Gualese people felt that Guadalcanal's land and resources were being exploited for the use of the country, not enough development was occurring in the Province, and they were against the migration of people from other provinces to settle on their land. The first demand in 1988, the 'Petition by the Indigenous People of Guadalcanal,' was motivated by the 'brutal killings of the innocent indigenous people of Guadalcanal.'⁴⁴ The second, in February 1999, was the 'Demands by the Bona Fide and Indigenous People of Guadalcanal,' that asserted there had been a lack of action by the central government, and reiterated the demands in the first petition.⁴⁵ The IFM violently evicted settlers from their homes on Guadalcanal. In response the Malaita Eagle Forces (MEF) was formed and conflict ensued, centred on Honiara. The MEF was supported by some prominent male Malaitan politicians and the Royal Solomon Islands Police.⁴⁶ Police officers were implicated in crimes against civilians including intimidation and rape.⁴⁷ Both factions are reported to have raided police armouries to obtain high-powered weapons; it is estimated that between 400–1000 were stolen, were in use during the conflict by the IFM and MEF, and subsequently used against civilians.⁴⁸

With the disintegration of law and order, power was in the hands of whoever had access to weapons. Weapon ownership and use undermined the traditional governance structures and processes in place across villages in Guadalcanal and Malaita, and led to the alienation of village chiefs and community leaders who previously maintained law and order.⁴⁹ Weapons facilitated the perpetration of violence against civilians and the destruction of property, and instilled a fear (that continues), in the civilian population.⁵⁰ The government was unable to provide services or security during this time to any Province, and it is documented that the Royal Solomon Islands Police committed atrocities against civilians.⁵¹

Motivation for weapon ownership was varied and included self-defence but also social status.⁵² Howley discusses the rise of the 'Rambo' image in Papua New Guinea society and the resulting violence in Bougainville.⁵³ His discussion can be transferred to Solomon Islands as similarities between their conflicts, history and Melanesian cultures exist. The availability in the Pacific of Hollywood movies glorifying violence has led to 'the growing acceptability of sexual violence and the glorification of the 'Rambo' gun-toting,

macho image as a role model for young men.⁵⁴ Mediated violence and hyper-masculine stereotypes add another layer of complexity to the gendered roles of men and women in Solomon Islands. To be a man, he must display masculine traits, which include violence against women. Fraenkel describes how custom and power was manipulated by politicians and militants alike at the national level.⁵⁵ He documents the constant demand for compensation in its variety of forms by all sides of the conflict, yet compensation rarely reached those most affected. It is through the deliberate political distortion of a traditional custom that he discusses the power relations between men in Solomon Islands during the tensions, but in his meticulous detailing of events he excludes women and their activities, except on one page (92) where he describes a women's peace rally in three lines.

Impact of conflict on women

While males were more likely to be reported as gunshot victims during Solomon Islands tensions,⁵⁶ different forms of gender-based violence were perpetrated against women, including domestic abuse, verbal abuse, being forced to marry militants, rape, and unwanted pregnancies.⁵⁷ Rape has been reported by Amnesty International as a salient feature of the conflict in Solomon Islands.⁵⁸ Enloe describes how reporting rape within war shocks people, yet rape has a long history in warfare, and is rarely adequately addressed in the post-conflict political environment.⁵⁹ Rape during wartime is neither a personal sexual crime nor a random act; it is about power and is very complex to unravel.⁶⁰ Enloe lists different motivations for and situations of rape that are perpetrated against women during conflict; in nearly all cases women who are victimised remain faceless and their stories are silenced, and this is yet another example of how women's experiences are unheard and the male dominated perception of conflict is perpetuated.⁶¹ Grossman encountered difficulties, when researching the rape of German women by occupying soldiers in World War Two, in broaching the subject and unravelling the full complexity of rape situations.⁶² When interviewing survivors of rape she found that 'the situations in which the rapes occurred were diverse and occasionally, in the women's own minds, came confusingly close to prostitution or even consensual sex.'⁶³ Such was also the case in Solomon Islands with some women unable to verbalise the violations against them, but rather using vocabulary that suggested a voluntary relationship. Instead of the use of the word rape it was phrased as 'he used me as his wife' or 'I was selected or appointed ... to be his wife, at gun point. While we have sexual affairs, my husband would [be made to] stay and watch.'⁶⁴ There is little analysis of the impact of the forced marriages of women and girls to militants during the conflict in Solomon Islands.

Furthermore, there is also the possibility that the perpetrators continue to remain in close proximity after the end of conflict and to continue to threaten women, as has been documented in Bougainville.⁶⁵ However, studies have shown that rape, and other forms of gender based violence, can lead to trauma and, once identified as a survivor, a woman is at a greater risk of being raped again and stigmatised by her community.⁶⁶

Frequently in conflict situations there is a willingness to discuss the violence that was perpetrated against men, such as torture or killings, yet not the sexual violence that occurs against women. The silencing of atrocities against women results in a suppression of women's experiences, leaving their stories untold and resulting in the perpetuation of the myth that war is men's business, in which women are for the most part absent.⁶⁷ Examples of this suppression were evidenced by those conducting interviews for the Amnesty International report:

In Guadalcanal, many men caught up in the fighting were willing to discuss the torture of other men, but not the rape of their daughters and wives in villages used as militant camps. Many women were also reluctant to talk about any sexual violence, while acknowledging other forms of violence which occurred in the context of such sexual assault.⁶⁸

As Tickner explains, war is constructed as 'an experience to which women are exterior; men have inhabited the world of war in a way that women have not. The history of international politics is therefore a history from which women are, for the most part absent.'⁶⁹ When war is conceptualised as men's business, women are seen as exterior and often associated with an idealised version of peace, as passive victims in need of protection,⁷⁰ leading in turn to an idealised image of masculinity where men protect the 'fragile' and 'pure' women of the nation.⁷¹ Both the stereotypes of heroic men and passive women relegate women to the sidelines in conflict resolution and politics, and fail to acknowledge the realities of conflict in which women are often made victims by those who are, in theory, protecting them,⁷² and in which women take an active role in peace-building.

In response to the violence occurring during the tensions, women in Solomon Islands, as in many other countries experiencing conflict around the world, chose to use non-violent methods of peace-building and subsequently were integral to national conflict resolution and peace-building. The women drew on maternal imagery to relay their message to the militants, politicians and public.⁷³ Women were involved in coordinating their efforts, including across cultural and identity boundaries, and establishing organisations that advocated for peace. Peace-building activities included forming prayer groups; the collection and distribution of food, medicine,

clothing and other essential items to displaced families providing assistance when it was needed; mediating between militants; visiting other women's groups; and counselling.⁷⁴ The activities occurred when male political leaders were unable or unwilling to do so.⁷⁵ As stated by the previous Permanent Secretary for Peace, Ethel Sigimanu, women had 'a pivotal role in bridging the divide between the warring factions.'⁷⁶ They did so through crossing armed militant checkpoints and travelling in insecure territory to hold meetings with militants and militant leaders, urging them to lay down their weapons and discuss peace. They built trust and confidence with militant groups and often brought food and clothing with them.⁷⁷ Without women's efforts the conditions that enabled the militant groups to meet and discuss the terms of the peace agreement would not have been possible. Sigimanu describes women's work as 'the real story of courage, of bravery, of hope and care.'⁷⁸ Post-conflict, women's organisations have taken on the role in assisting victims and are attempting to heal survivors of gender-related violence. Leslie and Boso report that the work 'has been reportedly successful in both empowering women and rebuilding a sense of community', and it is through such activities that women expanded their traditional gender roles to include peace-building activities.⁷⁹

Women drew on their traditions, church beliefs and maternal responsibilities to create recognition and authority, and to identify themselves as different from men in the peace-building and conflict resolution processes. Pollard traces the origins of the activities by women to 'their hands-on skills and traditional knowledge, to biblical doctrines regarding responses to conflict, and to their love for their nation.'⁸⁰ Ruddick argues that there is a contradiction between fulfilling maternal work and war, or in this case conflict, and an affiliation between maternal thinking, based on maternal work, and non-violence action.⁸¹ Maternal work, regardless of whether it is completed by a female or male, is taking on the 'responsibility of child care' and making its 'work a regular and substantive part of one's working life.'⁸² Such work includes responding to the three demands of children, and the society in which the mother belongs: the preservation of life; emotional and intellectual growth; and social acceptability. Responding to these three demands of maternal work required that mothers 'think out the necessary strategies,' creating the discipline of maternal thinking.⁸³ The discipline of maternal thinking requires mothers to make decisions and choices as to what activities are needed to be completed to fulfil maternal work. Ruddick asserts that these are incompatible with war, as 'all of women's work — sheltering, nursing, feeding, kind work, teaching of the very young, tending the frail elderly — is threatened by violence.'⁸⁴ Militaries and, in Solomon Islands case, militants, justify organised and deliberate

deaths — the antithesis of preserving life. To counteract the war-mongering activities ‘mothers engage in non-violent techniques: prayer, persuasion, appeasement, self-suffering, negotiation, bribery, invocation of authority, ridicule and many other sorts of psychological manipulation.’⁸⁵ The maternal thinking framework has been drawn upon by women to explain their role in conflict resolution in Solomon Islands.

While positive representations of women’s ways of thinking in conflict situations, and references to maternal instinct and the traditional roles and responsibilities of women act to emphasise the association of women with peace and men with war, they can reinforce dominant gender hierarchies that devalue women and women’s activities.⁸⁶ It has been documented that women not only engaged in peace-building activities during the tensions but, as Muggah and Moser have reported, women were influential in fuelling and continuing conflict through gossip and urging men to take up weapons.⁸⁷ Their reports illustrate that women are not inherently peaceful. Rather, when women do respond to conflict by choosing to use non-violent methods of peace-building, theirs is not a natural act, but a calculated activity designed to achieve peace.

However, it was the conceptualisation of women’s activities as those of mothers, and not of active citizens, that led to their exclusion from the peace processes, as they failed to challenge the dominant definitions and constructions of power and security, leaving in place the male dominated political structure. Their failure to elicit change is evidenced in their exclusion from the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) negotiations. Leading up to the signing of the TPA, ‘leaders of the MEF and IFM met aboard HMAS Manoora in late June and again aboard HMAS Tobruk in late July, along with women’s groups, church leaders, chiefs and provincial leaders.’⁸⁸ At the second meeting the women’s organisations were included, alongside a wider variety of stakeholders, not just the leaders from the militant groups. However, as Fraenkel contends, ‘the increasingly vociferous civil society groups were eventually excluded from the talks, at MEF behest.’⁸⁹ To negotiate the terms of the TPA 143, men representing the national government, the Malaita Provincial Council, Guadalcanal Provincial Council, the Malaita Eagle Forces/Police Field Force Joint Operation, Isatabu Freedom Movement, Marau Sound Region and Premiers from the remaining provinces were flown to Townsville.⁹⁰ They were given three days, later extended to four, to discuss the terms of a peace agreement and agree on the wording. The final agreement included a renunciation of violence, the surrendering of weapons, and an amnesty for crimes committed during 1998–2000 related to the tensions. Yet Fraenkel concedes that ‘the TPA is a deeply flawed document, a militant charter, and its implementation

quickly revealed that the deal was fraught with loopholes.⁹¹ After the signing of the TPA, the MEF and IFM were disbanded, and the tensions putatively ended, but the agreement led to a period of lawlessness that abated only when RAMSI arrived in 2003. Because women were not included, their needs and demands were excluded and the talks' focus was solely on the war makers, not the peace-builders. Although women's organisations were originally represented, at the request of the militants they were excluded from further participation, despite their efforts to create bridges between the two militant groups.

Allowing and encouraging women to voice their experiences of conflict and aspirations for peace allows for a broadening of the national debate on issues relating to peace and conflict.⁹² Utilising their identity as mothers, women can provide a different voice and perspective to the conflict which can contribute globally to the debate on security. Women's contributions are based on different lived experiences to those of men. Tickner, in her discussion about how feminist theory can contribute to IR theory and practice, states that the current

gendered depictions of political man, the state, and the international system generate a national security discourse that privileges conflict and war and silences other ways of thinking about security; moving away from valorising human characteristics that are associated with the risking of life, towards an affirmation of life-giving qualities, allows us to envisage alternative conceptions of national security.⁹³

Women's definitions of security 'are needed to draw attention to the extent to which gender hierarchies themselves are a source of domination and thus an obstacle to a truly comprehensive definition of security.'⁹⁴ The experiences and voices of women in Solomon Islands need to be utilised to create a new 'positive-sum' notion of security which is inspired by peaceful activism, not domination, or power-imbalances.⁹⁵ Such an innovative notion of security would involve a reconstructive process, such as the one described by Peterson whereby security, knowledge and power are redefined to include women's perspectives.⁹⁶

The post-conflict period is a crucial window for women to consolidate social and political gains made during the period of conflict and offers opportunities to establish new norms and rules, engage new leaders, and build new institutions in the reconstruction process. Each of the processes offers an opportunity to focus on women's rights and their active inclusion.⁹⁷ In each of the examples presented at the beginning of this article, women and women's organisations made political and social gains throughout the conflict that challenged the dominant male hierarchy and then consolidated

the gains made during the turmoil to create positive social change. Yet sustainable peace requires a more 'permanent transformation of social norms relating to violence, gender, and power, and ... for transformative approaches to achieve gender equality premised on more gender-equitable relationships.'⁹⁸ The need for transformation has been acknowledged within Solomon Islands; as Sigimanu states, 'it is only when women are equal partners can the foundations for enduring peace be laid.'⁹⁹ There is, therefore, a need to value equitable partnerships that are based upon non-hierarchical power relationships.¹⁰⁰ The perpetuation of unequal power relations needs to be addressed to facilitate the full inclusion of women in building sustainable peace.

Conclusion

Women in Solomon Islands possess the ability and the motivation to be involved in national politics, yet structural barriers exist that prevent their full inclusion. These structural barriers need to be challenged to allow the inclusion and recognition of women and their ideas and experiences in national politics. While contemporary structural barriers were partially created by the opportunities given to men by colonial administrators and the Church, the conflict between 1998 and 2000 led to a distortion in power and a manipulation of social roles that increased weapons ownership and violence — though it also increased the sphere of influence of women as they were able to initiate peace-building activities. Although women were specifically targeted in some cases, especially for sexual and gender-based violence, women took upon themselves new leadership roles in creating peace between warring factions. The activities undertaken by women were described as 'maternal' and were based on gendered norms; they were accordingly perceived as 'natural' and did not challenge the traditional power imbalances that exist in Solomon Islands politics. Such a perception resulted in their exclusion from the peace negotiations, and women's experiences and needs were not incorporated into the peace agreement; an exclusion that has had subsequent ramifications for its implementation and effectiveness, and the achievement of a sustainable peace. There are parallels between the challenges facing women's involvement in Solomon Islands national politics and the inclusion of feminist critiques in IR theory and practice. In IR, women's realities and experiences in discourse on war and conflict are often excluded; the myth that the state can protect civilians, specifically women, is perpetuated, and linking women with peace reinforces male-female stereotypes. These three limitations of IR also exist in Solomon Islands and lead to the perpetuation of male dominance in politics, thereby making it more difficult to include women's perspectives.

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Notes

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- ³ M. Pires, 'Enhancing women's participation in electoral processes in post conflict countries: Experiences from East Timor', paper presented at the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI) Expert Group Meeting on *Enhancing Women's Participation In Electoral Processes In Post Conflict Countries*, New York, January 19–22, 2004, p.8.
- ⁴ In comparison women make up 26% and 33% of women elected to the lower houses of Parliament in Australia and New Zealand respectively. Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 30 April 2008*, accessed 26 May 2008 at <<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>>
- ⁵ H. Hakena, 'Strengthening Communities for Peace in Bougainville', *Development Bulletin*, 53, 2000, pp.17–19; C. Nelson, 'Women and Disarmament: What can be learnt from conflicts in Solomon Islands, Bougainville and PNG?' paper presented at the *in the right hands seminar*, Christchurch, 21–24 February 2006.
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- ⁷ R. Grant, 'The Quagmire of Gender and International Security', in V.S. Peterson (ed.), *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992, p.85.
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- ¹⁷ N. Kabeer, 1992.
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- ¹⁹ N. Kabeer, 1992, p.8.
- ²⁰ S. Whittington et al., 2006, p.9.
- ²¹ A. Pollard, 'Women's Organisations, Voluntarism, and Self-Financing in Solomon Islands: A Participant Perspective', *Oceania*, 74, 2003, pp. 44–60.
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- 76 E. Sigimanu, 2005, p.2.
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- 80 A. Pollard, 2000, p.44.
- 81 S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking – Towards a Politics of Peace*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1995.
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- ⁸⁸ J. Fraenkel, 2004, p.96.
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- ⁹⁰ J. Fraenkel, 2004, p.98.
- ⁹¹ J. Fraenkel, 2004, p.101.
- ⁹² The women's media organisation, Vois Blong Mere, is currently facilitating the process through a women's radio show which is broadcast nationally and through the publication of a newsletter.
- ⁹³ J. A. Tickner, 1992, p.51.
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Dr Paul Millar of the University of Canterbury and Associate Professors Jane Stafford and Mark Williams of Victoria University of Wellington, have edited three special issues of the refereed on-line journal *Kotare: New Zealand Notes and Queries*, published through the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre.

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