



BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE:

The Fight for Women’s Rights After World War I

May 25, 2019

Table of Contents

1. “Introduction: Women and a New World Order,” by Elisa Massimino
2. “Paris 1919 from Women’s Perspectives,” by Heather Marie Stur
3. “Let Us in for the World’s Sake,” by Lauren Bean Buitta
4. “Beyond Suffrage: The Importance of Centering Peace in Histories of International Interwar Feminism,” by Nova Robinson

1. Introduction: Women and a New World Order

By Elisa Massimino

Last October, the United Nations marked the 20th anniversary of a groundbreaking Security Council Resolution that enshrined the essential role of women in securing and sustaining global peace. Adopted on Oct. 31, 2000, Resolution 1325 was the culmination of a years-long campaign to make explicit the inextricable link between respect for women's rights and the maintenance of global peace and security.¹

Building on past advances, including the revolutionary truth that rang out from the 1995 Beijing Conference that “[w]omen’s rights are human rights,”² Resolution 1325 launched an effort to operationalize the theory that advancing women’s rights and prioritizing women’s participation in conflict resolution make a positive difference in securing and sustaining peace. The resolution called on all actors — the secretary general, the security council, member states, and all parties to armed conflict — to take concrete and measurable steps to protect women and girls in conflict situations and to increase and elevate women’s participation in peace negotiations. Doing so, the resolution argued, is not only important for women in their own right but is also essential to fulfilling the purpose of the U.N. Charter.

That effort has produced important results. In his 20th anniversary review of this agenda last fall, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres noted that Resolution 1325 has spurred a number of promising changes in how the United Nations operates, where it invests resources, and whom it turns to for expertise.³ Over the two decades since the resolution

¹ “Resolution 1325 (2000),” United Nations Security Council, Oct. 31, 2000, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SC_ResolutionWomenPeaceSecurity_SRES1325%282000%29%28english_o.pdf.

² “Read Hillary Rodham Clinton’s ‘Women’s Rights’ Speech from 1995,” Speech at United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 1995, accessed at *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/09/read-hillary-rodham-clintons-womens-rights-speech/615733/>

³ “Women and Peace and Security,” Report of the Secretary General, United Nations, Sept. 25, 2020, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_822.pdf.

was adopted, representation of women in national parliaments has inched upward (especially in states that have instituted quotas), more women are serving in peacekeeping and police forces, bilateral aid to support gender equality efforts has increased, and more states have developed national action plans to implement the women, peace, and security agenda (though only a small percentage of those have budgeted for that implementation). This is progress, to be sure. But for an agenda so vital to the realization of global peace and security, it has, Guterres warned, been way too incremental, painfully slow, and dangerously reversible.

The risk that this marginal progress will be stalled — or even reversed — is particularly acute right now. The global pandemic, alongside the need to reckon with structural racism and inequality, has underscored the urgency of building more inclusive, resilient, and equitable societies. At the same time, it poses a particular threat to the tenuous progress toward these goals. Women, who have played such a central role during the COVID-19 crisis, including as caregivers and front-line healthcare workers, are likely to suffer more profoundly from the economic devastation wrought by the pandemic, which has exacerbated the inequalities that women face, produced spikes in violence against women, and diverted vital resources away from efforts to advance women’s rights.⁴ In other words, the failure to make more significant and durable progress in protecting women’s rights and promoting women’s roles in peacebuilding and security has left societies weaker and more vulnerable to the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Twenty years after transnational feminist movements successfully pushed for resolution 1325,” Guterres exhorted, “it is time to realize their transformative vision and build just and sustainable peace for all people based on inclusive power structures that underpin our economies, our political systems and peace processes.”⁵

Amen to that. The past 20 years have only strengthened the argument for centering women and respect for women’s rights in strategies for peace and security. But the roots of this

⁴ “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women,” United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>.

⁵ United Nations, “Women and Peace and Security,” 35–36.

transformative vision go much further back — more than a century, in fact — than the campaign for Resolution 1325. Women have been at this for a very long time.

Who's That Knocking at the Door?

Just over 100 years ago, when a devastated world was picking up the pieces after “the war to end all war,”⁶ “mustached and bespectacled men in starched collars and neckties” were gathering in Paris “to hammer out the fate of the world.”⁷ Where were the women? Locked out of the formal peace negotiations yet undeterred, they were reaching across lines of race, class, culture, religion, and national identity, and mobilizing to build a transnational movement grounded in the belief that the world would never be “safe for democracy” unless women’s rights were fully respected.

This is where Mona Siegel picks up the thread, mining a vein that has largely been ignored in the inter-war historical canon. Her illuminating work, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women’s Rights After the First World War*, charts a pivotal year in which women from all over the world, forged by their own experiences of the war and the victors’ promise of a new world order, took the lofty rhetoric of universal human dignity and democratic governance seriously and sought to make it true.

These women, many of them experienced activists in the labor movement or the campaign for women’s suffrage, understood that the period following a conflict is a window of opportunity, not only to determine whether violence will recur, but to secure women’s meaningful participation in a post-conflict society — and thereby, secure the peace. While their quest for a seat at the peace negotiation table was largely unsuccessful (as, not coincidentally, was the peace negotiated by the men at that table), their efforts to

⁶ Rick Hampson, “World War I Was Not the ‘War to End All War,’ but It Was the Beginning of the End,” *USA Today*, Nov. 11, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/11/11/world-war-100th-anniversary-armistice-trump-france/1766101002/>.

⁷ Mona L. Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women’s Rights After the First World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 2.

reconceive of peace not as the absence of war but as the presence of justice galvanized a movement for women's rights, including full participation in political life and questions of war and peace, that continues today and is reflected in efforts such as Resolution 1325.

Siegel's rich and engaging narrative raises four interrelated questions that each of our reviewers grapples with from different perspectives.

Who Gets to Tell the Story?

Narrative is power. Our understanding of history shapes not only how we view the past but also how we envision our future. When women are excluded from historical narratives, the consequences for society as a whole can be lasting and profound. As Lauren Buitta observes, these consequences extend even into the field of literature. The extensive works of American and British female suffrage poets during World War I have been largely excluded from anthologies, robbing generations of the visceral feel for what it was like for women in the early 20th century. Books like Siegel's not only fill in some of these gaps, but they also rearrange our understanding of the past and, in so doing, can be a way of claiming rights. Siegel's account offers a window into the intersection of women's concerns across a wide range of differences — race, class, nationality, religion — and underscores how much we still don't know about women's experiences — and thus, about history as a whole — during this period. One of the benefits of Siegel's work is that it highlights the gaps that remain and generates a hunger for more data to fill them. One cannot read Siegel's book without gaining a greater awareness of the implications of who gets to tell the story and how those biases have shaped contemporary views of the global struggle for women's rights.

How Does Centering the Perspectives of Non-White Women Shift Our Understanding of the Struggle for Rights?

Siegel's decision to look beyond the West and at the intersecting objectives of women in their own cultural contexts is a key feature of her book and a major contribution to understanding the goals and strategies of women activists in the inter-war period. Feminist activists articulated a global vision of the universality of women's rights that, while formed

Book Review Roundtable: The Fight for Women's Rights After World War I

<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-fight-for-womens-rights-after-world-war-i/>

in specific national contexts, cut across national and cultural boundaries. Nova Robinson situates Siegel's approach in a relatively new historiographical trend related to women's movements before and after World War I that is transnational and transregional. Robinson rightly lauds Siegel for producing a comprehensive study of women's transnational activism centered around a single issue. Indeed, Siegel's profiles of African-American activists Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt, who fought for racial justice in the United States and abroad; Egyptian feminist Hoda Shaarawi, a leader in the Egyptian independence movement; and Soumay Tchong, the only woman who served as part of an official delegation to the Paris negotiations, inform a multi-dimensional narrative of transnational feminism that is more complex and dynamic than previously understood.

What Else Are We Missing?

The detailed and moving narratives of women profiled in Siegel's book hint at a rich and largely unexplored territory of the roles that women play in wartime — not only as activists and peacemakers, but as strategists, combatants, intelligence gatherers, negotiators, and leaders. We need to hear those stories, too, not only to understand what women were doing but, as Heather Stur notes in her review, to understand fully the history of the period. Today, women, including one contributor to this roundtable, are leading efforts to broaden women's participation in national security decision-making through organizations like Girl Security, #NatSecGirlSquad, and the Leadership Council for Women in National Security. If Resolution 1325, which calls for more women in all of these national security roles, is more fully implemented, there will be more of these stories to tell.

Can We Envision an Alternative Future?

Although Siegel's story is framed around the fight for women's rights, the fact that it unfolds in the context of negotiations designed to rebuild the post-World War I world and a failed effort to prevent further conflict underscores the wisdom at the heart of Resolution 1325: that respect for women's rights as human rights is inextricably linked to global peace and security. Today, violent conflict is on the rise. More countries experienced violent conflict in 2016 than at any point in nearly 30 years, and these conflicts have become longer,

more protracted, and less responsive to traditional forms of resolution.⁸ Women are still being sidelined in conflict resolution efforts, and sustainable peace proves elusive.⁹ What does this mean for the women, peace, and security agenda? Beyond suffrage and basic rights, how can enhanced participation for women change conflict outcomes? If women had been successful in inserting their views into the Paris negotiations in 1919, how different would the post-war international system have been? What are we missing today by continuing to exclude women?

Conclusion

When the women of 1919 knocked at the door of the Paris negotiations, they were armed with the conviction that women’s participation would strengthen the peace. Today, we have more than conviction — we have data. When women are included at the negotiation table, peace agreements are more likely to be reached and more likely to last.¹⁰

Today’s challenges to the global order — rising nationalism, persistent inequality, the threat of climate change — are different than they were 100 years ago. But the centrality of women — as rights-holders, as peacemakers, as workers, as leaders — to the solution is clearer than ever.

As we search for a new, more sustainable model of global order, we would do well to remember the words of women’s suffrage activist Alice Paul: “There will never be a new world order until women are part of it.”¹¹

⁸ “A New Era of Conflict and Violence,” United Nations, accessed March 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>.

⁹ United Nations, “Women and Peace and Security.”

¹⁰ “Women’s Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political,” in *UN Women, Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, United Nations, 2015, chap. 3, <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>.

¹¹ Jane Ganahl, “HBO Film a Powerful Rallying Cry for Women to Vote,” *SFGate*, Oct. 24, 2004, <https://www.sfgate.com/living/article/HBO-film-a-powerful-rallying-cry-for-women-to-vote-2679444.php>.

Elisa Massimino is the Robert F. Drinan, S.J., Chair in Human Rights at Georgetown University Law Center and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Previously, she spent 27 years — the last decade as president and CEO — at Human Rights First, one of the nation’s leading human rights advocacy organizations. Massimino has a distinguished record of human rights advocacy in Washington. During her leadership at Human Rights First, The Hill consistently named her one of the most effective public advocates in the country. She holds a law degree from the University of Michigan, a master’s degree in philosophy from Johns Hopkins University, and is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Trinity University.



2. Paris 1919 from Women’s Perspectives

By Heather Marie Stur

Woodrow Wilson may be the man who disappointed the most people in the 20th century. At the end of World War I, he inspired oppressed and colonized subjects throughout the world with his ideas about self-determination, freedom, and peace. He arrived in Paris in January 1919 and joined other heads of state and diplomats to hammer out a peace agreement to end the Great War. Observers including Ho Chi Minh, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Carrie Chapman Catt waited with hopeful anticipation for word that Wilsonian ideals applied to individuals like them. He let them down, and they realized that it would take hard work to insert themselves into the new postwar order.

The French suffragists who met with Wilson in Paris’ stylish Hotel Murat on a January evening in 1919 were among the disenchanteds. Hoping that Wilson would include women’s enfranchisement in the post-World War I peace settlement, French feminist Marguerite de Witt Schlumberger wrote a letter to the American president and requested an audience with him for members of the French Union for Women’s Suffrage. Wilson accepted the

Book Review Roundtable: The Fight for Women’s Rights After World War I

<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-fight-for-womens-rights-after-world-war-i/>

invitation. When he entered the room where the delegates eagerly awaited him, they told him of the hope he instilled in French women. Yet, before they could shift the conversation to suffrage, Wilson addressed the topic. Women's right to vote was a domestic issue, he told them, and thus out of the scope of international peace negotiations. Wilson's assertion paralleled what he had told African American activists who implored him to enact anti-lynching legislation: It was up to the states to deal with racial violence, he had concluded, washing his hands of the problem.¹²

Schlumberger was undeterred. Although Wilson was unwilling to address women's rights when crafting the postwar order, surely he would not turn his back on human rights. He had called World War I a "people's war" and said that the peace must be a "people's peace." When Schlumberger met with Wilson a second time, she framed women's issues as people's issues. No peace agreement would be complete if it ignored half the world's population, she reasoned.¹³ Spun this way, women's issues were global, not local.

Mona Siegel's lively and compelling examination of the fight for women's rights after World War I illustrates how sisters did it for themselves. White men articulated ideas and made promises, and women did the work to put the ideas into practice. To do so, they had to debunk the idea that "women's issues" were separate from "real politics."¹⁴ This is what Siegel does, by illustrating how the stories of feminist activism were also stories about modernization, nationalism, colonialism, race, and diplomacy. It's not that women's history isn't important in its own right. The brilliance of Siegel's book is that it doesn't choose between women's history and the other histories it investigates. It is confidently a women's history *and* an early-20th-century international history in which the main actors are women. We may know the general themes of the post-World War I era, but not from the perspectives that Siegel emphasizes.

¹² Mona L. Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights After the First World War* (New York: Columbia, 2020) 23.

¹³ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 25.

¹⁴ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 14.

Making Their Voices Heard

The conventional narrative of the Paris Peace Conference privileges the vantage point of the “Big Four”: Wilson, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister George Clemenceau, and Italian Premier Vittorio Orlando. Narrowly focused on the negotiating table at Versailles, this view obscures the political activism that took place at the same time, in Paris and elsewhere in the world. Self-determination and nationalism were among the causes of World War I, and the conflict had inspired hope in those seeking freedom and full rights of citizenship.¹⁵ If the goal of the Paris Peace Conference was to make the world safe for democracy, then the new world order it set out to create might recognize that much of the world’s population did not have access to civil rights. Male leaders did not offer women seats at the peace talks, but that did not stop women from making their voices heard.

Siegel presents the Paris Peace Conference from the perspectives of an international cast of elite, educated women who saw their fights for suffrage and equality as central to a world made safe for democracy. They had done their part for the war effort, and they wanted a role in the postwar planning. Suffragists and other activists realized early on that international coalitions gave them power in the face of national governments that refused to respond to their demands for rights. While the delegates to the peace conference emphasized national rights within international relations, women such as Schlumberger argued that individual rights must also be secure. Though the notion that women are peacemakers by nature is essentialist, suffragists asserted that enfranchising women would help them avoid falling victim to war and could even prevent war from happening. Women’s rights are human rights, and women’s access to political decision-making would benefit humankind.¹⁶

¹⁵ Important works on the Paris Peace Conference include Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford, 2009); and Michael Neiberg, *The Treaty of Versailles: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford, 2017).

¹⁶ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 35.

Because most of Siegel’s characters are upper-class women, they had access to power and places the majority of women did not. Elite status got Schlumberger a meeting with Wilson and earned Jane Addams the presidency of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt were members of the “talented tenth,” upper-class educated African Americans who subscribed to the Progressive Era notions of respectability and racial uplift. Hunt married a diplomat, William “Billy” Hunt, and when her husband was posted to Madagascar in 1904, Hunt lived *la vie large coloniale* — the colonial good life. She managed a household that included three live-in servants, including a French chef, and she could see the ocean from her balcony. Despite the luxuries and the palm trees, Hunt was not oblivious to the suffering of Africans living under colonial rule. When the Hunts moved to France in 1907 for a new diplomatic assignment, Ida Gibbs Hunt connected with French suffragists. These were not ordinary women, but nor were the men who signed the Versailles Treaty.¹⁷

East Meets West

Nationalist women in the colonized world linked gender equality with independence. Egypt’s feminists had been part of a cultural movement known as “women’s awakening,” which challenged traditional ideas about marriage, family, education, work, and fashion, including the veil. Hoda Shaarawi represented Egypt’s “revolutionary gentlewomen” who took to the streets of Cairo and Alexandria in 1919, demanding independence from Britain. They hoped their nationalist brethren would reward women’s commitment to independence with full political rights, but the men disappointed them. Egypt’s new constitution, established in 1923, banned women from voting and holding political office. Shaarawi and other feminists responded by forming the Egyptian Feminist Union and reaching out to the leaders of international women’s organizations. Carrie Chapman Catt invited the Egyptians to send a delegation to the ninth annual meeting of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.¹⁸

¹⁷ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 54–64.

¹⁸ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 100–25.

It isn't surprising to read that, despite the promise of bridging cultures, the meetings between Eastern and Western women were fraught. British members of the International Alliance refused to allow a conference to be held in Cairo. French and British feminists bristled when Middle Eastern women called for Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine to be freed from the League of Nations mandate system. Even though these women shared the common ground of suffrage, Arab women remained subjects of European colonialism. Antagonisms lurked just beneath the pleasantries and praise that Eastern and Western women bestowed upon one another. Western and Eastern women faced some of the same issues, such as marital subjugation and sexual servitude, but colonialism and racism compounded the problems for Eastern women.¹⁹

Siegel uses this tension as a segue into the development of pan-Arab feminism. Damascus and Tehran hosted women's conferences in the early 1930s, and in 1944, Shaarawi founded the Arab Feminist Union, dedicated to supporting nationalist and feminist activism in the Arab world. The social modernization that occurred alongside the rise of Egyptian nationalism also took hold in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the region. One of the most visible symbols of the Middle East's modernity was the unveiling of women. When Shaarawi and her close friend, Saiza Nabarawi, returned to Cairo after attending the women's suffrage conference in Rome, they stepped off the train with their faces uncovered. The crowd waiting for them at the station quieted in surprise, but then applause erupted, and some of the women removed their veils, too. Unveiling was a women's issue, a modernity issue, and a nationalist issue all at once.²⁰

A Global Movement

There was one woman who had official diplomatic status at the Paris Peace Conference, and she wasn't American or French or British. She was a Chinese woman named Soumay Tcheng. Like her counterparts in the global feminist movement, she came from an elite family and had the privilege of an education. When Tcheng was a teenager, she got caught up in the republican fervor that swept through China, and she joined Sun Yat-sen's

¹⁹ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 126.

²⁰ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 127–28.

Revolutionary Alliance, working as a bomb smuggler. After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1912, Tcheng and other revolutionary women assumed that their commitment to republicanism would ensure their full citizenship in the new China. President Yuan Shikai dashed their hopes. His government disbanded female armies and prohibited women from voting or holding public office.²¹ As had been the case in Egypt, Chinese women fought along with their male counterparts under a common banner only to be left with their second-class citizen status.

An assassination attempt on Tcheng convinced her family that she would be safer in exile, so she set off for France and studied law at the Sorbonne. Tcheng returned to China in 1917 to find competing powers vying for control of the country. The Nationalists had established a government in Guangzhou to compete with the ruling body in Beijing, but both sides agreed to select delegates to the Paris conference as a show of unity. Tcheng's reputation as a revolutionary, as well as her knowledge of French and France, earned her a spot on the Chinese delegation.²² While in Paris, Tcheng tried to arrange a meeting with Wilson, hoping that he would promise to treat China as an equal during the negotiations. Wilson sent his regrets, disappointing the hopeful Chinese representatives.²³

These slights and disappointments did not dissuade women from continuing to fight for suffrage and equality. By the time the Ninth Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance convened in Rome in 1923, the organization had become global in scope, with more members from Latin America, the Middle East, and East Asia. The membership reflected the independence and modernization that had shaped those regions in the first two decades of the 20th century. Women's enfranchisement remained an important issue, and India, Ecuador, and Brazil beat France by more than 10 years in expanding the vote to women. It wasn't until 1945, at the end of World War II, that Italian women could vote. Mussolini had canceled elections, reasserted male dominance, and sent women back to the home.²⁴ Dictatorships are not modern.

²¹ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 164–70.

²² Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 171–74.

²³ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 180.

²⁴ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 238–44.

Nor are Communist states. Fearing imprisonment, Tcheng and her husband fled to Taiwan in 1949 after Mao's Chinese Communist Party took power on the mainland. In the party's worldview, only the communist apparatus, not women themselves, could achieve gender equality and freedom.²⁵ Even then, it would have been a stretch to call Chinese women's political status "free" under Mao. The same could be said for Chinese men. Individual rights were at the heart of the democratic modernity that the women of Siegel's book fought for after World War I. Totalitarian regimes viewed individual rights as unnecessary, if not dangerous. Russian women did not make the cut in Siegel's book, but it would be interesting to know how their rights fared under the Bolsheviks.²⁶ As Siegel shows readers, studying women's rights, or the lack thereof, sheds light on what men were doing, saying, and experiencing. Because, after all, women's rights are human rights.

The Spirit of 1919

There are few male voices in Siegel's book, but their absence doesn't detract from the narrative. In fact, a reader might not even notice it. Siegel's storytelling is fast paced and engaging, and her characters include the staples of any blockbuster — the revolutionary bomber, the eloquent activist, the conflicted leader. This is not to say that male voices don't matter, but rather to emphasize that Siegel's book challenges the myth that women's history has nothing to teach us beyond what women were doing in a given era. With women doing most of the talking, Siegel offers a clear discussion of international political activism in the aftermath of World War I.

Although Wilson was the source of much of the disappointment that afflicted activist women in Paris 1919, he wasn't alone. Women disappointed each other once their prejudices and stubbornness broke through the niceties. Nationalist men disappointed their female counterparts by dismissing women once they had secured their country's

²⁵ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 198.

²⁶ On the Russian Revolution, see Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985); Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (New York: Oxford, 1980); and Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

independence. It is possible that no reality could ever have lived up to the hope that hung over 1919. The progressive spirit was willing, but human nature was weak.

Yet, despite the disappointment that some feminists experienced after World War I, they forged ahead. That makes them even more impressive than if they had immediately received everything they wanted. The weight of racism that pressed down on Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt didn't drive them out of the public sphere. They just shifted their energies. Hunt helped plan several meetings of the Pan-African Congress, and Terrell founded the International Council of Women of the Darker Races.²⁷ When the peace delegates decided to give the Chinese port city of Shandong to Japan, Tcheng convinced her fellow Chinese representatives not to sign the Versailles Treaty. It wasn't a women's issue, unless national pride and honor are women's issues. They were to Tcheng and to China, where "emancipated womanhood" was key to the country's image as a modern nation. Ultimately, Tcheng's emancipation allowed her to change the diplomatic relationship between China and the West.²⁸

Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe has spent much of her career seeking answers to this question: In international relations and war, "Where are the women?"²⁹ Siegel shows us that, in the aftermath of World War I, women were meeting with presidents and prime ministers, marching for gender equality, speaking out against racism and colonialism, and extending an olive branch to former enemies. None of this was women's work, and men were often involved in the activities. Although women's issues such as suffrage motivated some of the postwar activism, the concerns were tied to broader interests including independence, racial justice, and world peace. As Siegel presents it, women's history is world history. It will be a watershed moment in the history of gender equality when we no longer need to distinguish between the two.

²⁷ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 241.

²⁸ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 178–79.

²⁹ This is a recurring theme in Enloe's work, especially *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Heather Marie Stur, Ph.D., is professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi and senior fellow in the Dale Center for the Study of War & Society. She is the author of Saigon at War: South Vietnam and the Global Sixties (Cambridge 2020), The U.S. Military and Civil Rights Since World War II (ABC-CLIO 2019), and Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era (Cambridge 2011). She is also co-editor of Integrating the U.S. Military: Race, Gender, and Sexuality Since World War II (Johns Hopkins 2017). Dr. Stur is the author of numerous articles, which have been published in the New York Times, Washington Post, BBC, National Interest, Orange County Register, Diplomatic History, and other journals and newspapers. In 2013-14, Dr. Stur was a Fulbright scholar in Vietnam, where she was a visiting professor on the Faculty of International Relations at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City. She is currently writing a book about the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.



3. Let Us in for the World's Sake

By Lauren Bean Buitta

Women have wielded the pen throughout history's most important and tumultuous periods. And yet, their work is often overlooked or excluded from modern discourse about such events, including politics and war. Mona Siegel's expansive *Peace on Our Terms* is an important contribution to the body of work on women's suffrage: It offers a cohesive global perspective of what surely was an imperfect social movement throughout World War I and the interwar years and unearths for the reader the struggles of women of color, both in the United States and throughout the world. *Peace on our Terms* arrives just in time to remind us that writing and reading women's history is both an act of rebellion against the tendency to diminish women's voices on politics and war and an instructive guide to women around the world forging a new understanding of today's "women's movement" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and other national security threats that have distinct gendered and

Book Review Roundtable: The Fight for Women's Rights After World War I

<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-fight-for-womens-rights-after-world-war-i/>

racist impacts.³⁰ As the United States assesses its national security priorities and considers approaches to diversifying the national security workforce — see, for example, the Biden administration’s Interim National Security Strategy³¹ — *Peace on Our Terms* reminds us that equity is more than giving women and other underrepresented communities a seat at the table.

Women’s literature can provide an important source of insight and instruction during uncertain and transitional times. In my own study of national security, conflict, and global politics, I have found women’s war poetry more grounding for my understanding than most academic or non-fiction texts. Poetry possesses a unique candor and an ability to offer readers infinitely interpretable expressions of women’s experiences. Unfortunately, the extensive works of American and British female suffrage poets during World War I — the focal period of *Peace on Our Terms* — have been, until recently, largely excluded from anthologies.³² These works offer a visceral feel for what it was like for women in the early 20th century who were excluded from politics and war but were fighting for their rights. While Amy Lowell’s “Dream in War Time,” written in 1921, explored the impact of World War I at home, her first stanza captures the experience of being a girl and woman drawn to interests, activities, and professions — like national security — that have long been dominated by men:

I wandered through a house of many rooms.
It grew darker and darker,
Until, at last, I could only find my way
By passing my fingers along the wall.
Suddenly my hand shot through an open window,
And the thorn of a rose I could not see

³⁰ Nina Jankowicz, et al., *Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies Are Weaponized Against Women Online*, Wilson Center, Science and Technology Innovation Program, January 2021, 1, 18, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>.

³¹ *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, The White House, March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

³² See Tim Kendall, ed., *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Pricked it so sharply
That I cried aloud.³³

Thankfully, the history of women’s suffrage has become significantly richer since the early 20th century, and even more so with the publication of Mona Siegel’s *Peace on Our Terms*. Siegel captures how World War I bolstered women’s suffrage globally and served as the impetus for their participation in international politics. She also establishes how women remained excluded from political participation at many levels, and, in doing so, helps to contextualize the struggle for equality that still endures today across political realms, especially in national security.

Trying to Break In

While Siegel’s league of women was waging its intercontinental suffrage movement leading up to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the ideals that would come to shape 20th-century U.S. national security were being forged. These ideals included protecting U.S. interests at home through the pursuit of power and absolute security abroad through military preparedness and, if required, foreign intervention.³⁴ For a small, but influential, subset that included Theodore Roosevelt and S. Stanwood Menken, founder of the National Security League — one of the first national security institutions — peace and security were not only incongruous but also conflicting.³⁵ As Siegel’s expansive narrative describes, although women were major contributors to the democratic peace movement, they were not always pacifists. But National Security League propaganda and media of the times nevertheless pigeonholed women as the embodiment of pacifism.³⁶ The implication of such campaigns was that the gendered ideals of pacifism were deemed unfit for an evolving political paradigm based on the pursuit of security through military preparedness. The stark way in

³³ Amy Lowell, *Pictures of a Floating World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921).

³⁴ Robert D. Ward, “The Origin and Activities of the National Security League, 1914-1919,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (June 1960): 51–65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1891278>.

³⁵ “Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to S. Stanwood Menken,” Theodore Roosevelt Collection, MS Am 1785.2 (107), Harvard College Library, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=0280589>.

³⁶ *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), <https://web.stanford.edu/~gdegroat/NT/oldreviews/bcop.htm>. See also, *Womanhood, the Glory of a Nation* (1917), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0008787/mediaviewer/rm2389650432/>.

which this false dichotomy was perceived at such a pivotal moment in America’s history contributed to its institutionalization in ways that still endure today.

Women’s poetry during this period can illuminate how widely varied women’s experiences and perspectives really were when it came to war and peace, as well as the pursuit of gender equality. Prior to World War I, American suffragists pursued equal rights through participation in politics.³⁷ And much of the early suffrage poetry echoed suffragist and abolitionist Sarah Grimke’s now famous quotation: “All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright.”³⁸ Margaret Widdemer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, wrote, “Let us in through the guarded gate, Let us in for the world’s sake!”³⁹ “Woman’s right is woman’s duty! For our share in life we call!” wrote Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a poet and humanist who advanced a call for women’s economic independence.⁴⁰ Certainly, the idea that men were, by nature, warring and that women were inherently peaceable was widely treated by poet-suffragists (see Alice Duer Miller’s poem, “Why We Oppose Votes for Men”⁴¹). But, when the Great War came, it ruptured women’s suffrage efforts as women were called to serve.

As Siegel tells us, women’s contributions during the Great War grounded their commitment to enfranchisement. Their contribution to the war effort helped make American women feel that they were finally part of a national effort — regardless of whether they supported the

³⁷ See also *The Revolution, 1868–1872*. *The Revolution* was the official publication of the National Woman Suffrage Association formed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Parker Pillsbury. It was published weekly as a newsletter that advocated for women’s enfranchisement. The official slogans of the publication included: “Principle, not Policy—Individual Rights and Responsibility”; and “The True Republic - Men, Their Rights and Nothing More: Women, Their Rights and Nothing Less.” The Lewis & Clark Special Collections and Archives (Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR) <http://digitalcollections.lclark.edu/items/browse?collection=21>;

<http://digitalcollections.lclark.edu/items/show/9833>

³⁸ Angelina Emily Grimké and Sarah Moore Grimké, *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings, 1835–1839*, ed. Larry Ceplair, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

³⁹ Margaret Widdemer, *The Women’s Litany*, 1917, accessed at the Academy of American Poets, Aug. 23, 2020, <https://poets.org/poem/womens-litany>.

⁴⁰ Gary Scharnhorst and Denise D. Knight, eds., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “In This Our World” and Uncollected Poems* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

⁴¹ “Why We Oppose Votes For Men,” *New York Times*, Aug. 26, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/26/archives/why-we-oppose-votes-for-men.html>.

war itself — and they hoped their war work might be a catalyst for deeper engagement on the political stage in the future. The poetry of female American and British authors reflects the experience of women’s work during this time as nurses, clerical staff, and skilled labor in munitions factories. Jessie Pope’s “War Girls” captures the masculine roles girls and women assumed at that time: “There’s the girl who cries, ‘All fares, please!’ like a man, And the girl who whistles taxis up the street.”⁴² Additionally, several poets explore the complex experiences of women and war for those who desired to fight (“Oh it’s you that have the luck, out there in blood and muck. You were born beneath a kindly star”⁴³) and those who struggled with America’s participation in a war that claimed U.S. lives (“Their hands should minister unto the flame of life...But now their hands, their fingers, are coarsened in munitions factories”⁴⁴).

Disappointed Hopes

In the end, women’s participation in the war effort did not produce the results they hoped.⁴⁵ Just as Roosevelt, Menken, and film producer J. Stuart Blackton responded to President Woodrow Wilson’s post-war neutrality sentiment by organizing military preparedness propaganda and a proposed War Council as a rejoinder to pacifist ideologies, so too did suffragists respond by seeking a pathway to broader enfranchisement by adopting and promoting Wilson’s vision for a new world order defined by unity, peace, transparency, and self-determination as articulated in his Fourteen Points speech prior to the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁶ Although Wilson would eventually capitulate to suffragists and push through the 19th Amendment in 1919, as Siegel establishes, women were never part of Wilsonianism. Moreover, Wilson defaulted on those measures that could have placed women’s

⁴² Jessie Pope, *War Girls*, 1915, Poetry Foundation, accessed Aug. 24, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57296/war-girls>.

⁴³ Dominic Hibberd and John Onions, eds., *The Winter of the World: Poems of the Great War* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2007), 26.

⁴⁴ Mary Gabrielle Collins, *Branches Unto the Sea* (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1916).

⁴⁵ “The Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Rejection of the Treaty of Versailles,” The National WWI Museum and Memorial, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/peace/fourteen-points>.

⁴⁶ Andrew Preston, “Monsters Everywhere: A Genealogy of National Security,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (June 2014): 477–500 <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhu018>.

enfranchisement at the forefront of his vision, including giving women a seat at the table of domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making.

Just as Wilson defaulted on his promises to white Western suffragists, so too did he default on his promises to African American suffragists and activists, whom he referred to as an “ignorant and inferior race.”⁴⁷ The concept of “intersectionality,” defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects,” did not exist during the 20th century, but the dynamics it describes most certainly did. *Peace on Our Terms* advances our understanding of these dynamics and of the current discourse about the need to recognize the duality — or intersectionality — of African American women’s experiences.⁴⁸ As Siegel writes, “racial justice and gender equality was African American women’s ‘dual battle cry.’”⁴⁹ They sought not only to forge a democracy “worthy of its name,”⁵⁰ but one that railed against the racist ideals upon which slavery was based. Their burden was frustratingly similar to that of black women today: They were constantly trying to educate others about the “race problem” and were consistently marginalized in their efforts.

Much of the poetry written by African American women before and throughout the war conveys the duality of black women’s experiences and the devastation of slavery. African American women knew neither freedom, nor freedom from fear, and yet they cultivated a powerful and vast body of poetry and prose that still serves as a testament to their will. Prior to World War I, Francis Ellen Harper Watkins — an African American abolitionist, activist, and poet — wrote in her poem “Lines”:

⁴⁷ David A. Shannon, “Woodrow Wilson’s Youth and Personality: An Essay Review,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (October 1967): 205–07, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40488433>.

⁴⁸ “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” interview with Kimberlé Crenshaw, Columbia Law School, accessed Aug. 24, 2020, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>. See also, Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* no. 8 (1989), <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

⁴⁹ Mona Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women’s Rights After the First World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 54.

⁵⁰ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 53.

And from many a throbbing bosom

Came the words in fear and gloom,
Tell us, Oh! Thou coming Crisis,
What shall be our country's doom?

Shall the wings of dark destruction

Brood and hover o'er our land,
Till we trace the steps of ruin
By their blight, from strand to strand?⁵¹

Conclusion

Peace on Our Terms compels the reader to reflect on the flawed but fundamental campaign for female political participation following the war. Its prose also feels for the connective tissue to carry forward a righteous cause. As the strands of systemic sexism, racism, and discrimination begin to unravel in America and women and men are once again mobilizing in an effort to advance progress, how might we shape a 21st-century cause that is reflective of the times? Perhaps the more complex question relates to the legacies of sexism and racism. How do we reshape institutions founded on the ideals of racism and misogyny,⁵² if those in positions of authority fail to see or choose not to acknowledge their enduring effects, or simply do not believe such effects exist?

National security — both its outmoded ideals and institutions — is ripe for change, but, as *Peace on Our Terms* reveals, change takes time. Despite the exhaustive efforts of women suffragists, women remain underrepresented in government,⁵³ subject to worsening levels of violence,⁵⁴ and, in the aftermath of the pandemic, may lose critical gains in their pursuit

⁵¹ Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, *Lines*, Poetry Foundation, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51979/lines-56d2301888d64>.

⁵² Dick Lehr, “The Racist Legacy of Woodrow Wilson,” *Atlantic*, Nov. 27, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/wilson-legacy-racism/417549/>; Sarah Grimké, “Letters on Equality of the Sexes,” addressed to Mary S. Parker, 1837, accessed April 13, 2021, [http://www.worldculture.org/articles/12-Grimke Letters, 1-3.pdf](http://www.worldculture.org/articles/12-Grimke%20Letters,%201-3.pdf).

⁵³ “Fact and Figures: Women’s Leadership and Political Participation,” *U.N. Women*, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

⁵⁴ *Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019/2020, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>.

of economic security.⁵⁵ One hundred years ago, gendered norms around the respective roles of men and women in war and politics — two overlapping arenas which we now refer to as “national security” — took shape. Women were excluded then and have remained excluded. According to a 2018 report, women made up less than 40 percent of the U.S. State Department’s leadership and 26 percent at the Pentagon.⁵⁶ While the Biden administration’s high-level appointments reflect a more diverse national security leadership, it remains to be seen whether those appointments will reflect a wider diversity throughout the national security workforce. We should also consider diversity in private industry, upon which the federal government continues to rely more heavily for its national security operations. Limited data exists on those entities. In addition, numbers only tell part of the story. Actual diversity requires equity, and equity is only achieved when institutions and the ideals by which they are guided, as well as the laws and policies that result from their missions, reflect the needs and experiences of impacted constituencies.

National security is a most important common cause, one that must — once and for all — be unencumbered by the gendered ideals of the past. As the United States and the world confront a series of diffuse and pervasive security challenges, it is unquestionable that the contributions of many are far more valuable than those of a few. Today, women represent more than half the population,⁵⁷ societal views on gender and racial equality are more evolved,⁵⁸ and several key social movements are publicly fighting for gender and racial equality, including the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. As a woman who has the benefit of hindsight and a modicum of foresight, I feel a responsibility to girls today —

⁵⁵ Nicole Bateman and Martha Ross, “Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?” *Brookings*, October 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>.

⁵⁶ Heather Hurlbert, Elizabeth Weingarten, and Elena Souris, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Gender,” *New America Foundation*, Dec. 11, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/national-security-what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-gender/>.

⁵⁷ “Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1920,” United States Census Bureau, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1921/compendia/statab/43ed.html>.

⁵⁸ Amanda Barroso, “Key Takeaways on Americans’ Views on Gender Equality a Century After Women Gained the Right to Vote,” Pew Research, Aug. 13, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/13/key-takeaways-on-americans-views-on-gender-equality-a-century-after-u-s-women-gained-the-right-to-vote/>.

and those living a century from now — to dispel the illusion that national security is no place for women. Call off the guard, and let us in for the world’s sake.

Lauren Bean Buitta is founder and CEO of Girl Security, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization preparing girls, women, and non-binary individuals for national security through learning, college-to-career training, and mentoring. Prior to launching Girl Security, Lauren managed the largest whistleblower lawsuit ever filed against the City of Chicago for civil rights violations through a consulting firm she founded while attending law school. Formerly, Lauren served as a national security analyst with a Chicago-based think tank, where she specialized in national security law, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity. Lauren is a former fellow with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2003), Truman National Security Project (2006), American Bar Association Standing Committee on Law and National Security (2012), and Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2017). She has authored articles, reports, and book chapters on national security, foreign policy, and public policy.



4. Beyond Suffrage: The Importance of Centering Peace in Histories of International Interwar Feminism

By Nova Robinson

In her now-classic *Worlds of Women: The Making of An International Women’s Movement*, Leila Rupp pioneered studying the international women’s movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This early “international” women’s movement was led by a cadre of elite women from the United States and Western and Northern Europe who were primarily interested in working across borders to help each other secure citizenship protections and

Book Review Roundtable: The Fight for Women’s Rights After World War I

<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-fight-for-womens-rights-after-world-war-i/>

the right to vote.⁵⁹ In this context, “international” should not be conflated with “global.” Instead, it indicates women who were organizing across political boundaries and engaging with national governments and international governing bodies. Rupp, who wrote primarily from the archives of the “big three” international women’s organizations — the International Council on Women, the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom — presented women from the colonized world as peripheral actors. And, for the most part, women from the colonized world were peripheralized because of the racist prejudices of the leaders of the international women’s movement, who saw women in the colonized world as less developed.

Scholarship on the international women’s movement fell out of vogue in the early 2000s because of what you might call “suffrage fatigue” and due to the literature’s prevailing emphasis on white women from the United States and from Western and Northern Europe. However, the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women in the United States the right to vote (though only white, U.S.-born women had unencumbered access to the ballot), has given rise to many recent books about the international women’s movement in the 1910s and 1920s. Recent scholarship on women’s social and political organizing before and after World War I is more global than earlier scholarship. With its emphasis on women’s peace advocacy around the world, Mona L. Siegel’s *Peace on Our Terms* reflects this new historiographical trend. It is an exciting new addition to the growing scholarship on global women’s organizing in the early 20th century.

Siegel defines “global feminism,” as “the common struggle for female emancipation around the globe.” She adds, “I deliberately frame the manifestations of this struggle in the plural, in recognition of the multiple and conflicting priorities that national, international, and transnational movements have developed in pursuit of this shared goal.”⁶⁰ Siegel’s work

⁵⁹ Bonnie S. Anderson asserts that the international women’s movement actually began in the 1830s. See *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ Mona Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women’s Rights after WWI* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), FN 13, 263.

provides an excellent example of how to produce a globally comprehensive study of women's activism around a single issue. Her pioneering book finally gives the women's global peace movement the attention that it deserves.

Emphasizing Women's Peace Activism

Peace on Our Terms is an important corrective to the focus on suffrage found in some recent scholarship on women's organizing in the early 20th century.⁶¹ Indeed, suffrage was not the only issue bringing women together across borders at that time. As Siegel's work shows us, women from many parts of the world came together to advocate for peace in Paris in 1919. As such, her book is a beautiful rejoinder to Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-Colonial Nationalism*.⁶² Manela's book largely ignored the role of women in the peace negotiations in Versailles after World War I or in the anti-colonial nationalist movements that he chronicles. Manela attributes much of the era's anticolonialism to Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination, rather than viewing it as a natural outgrowth of frustration with the injustice and depravity of the colonial system, which had been on full display during World War I. When Siegel asserts that "[m]ale statesmen's shortsightedness [in 1919] perpetuated the belief that democracy could be built in women's absence and that gender equality is somehow peripheral to global stability," she makes excluding women from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 relevant to contemporary debates about the importance of including women in peacemaking processes.⁶³

Siegel expertly shows women coming together across borders to advocate for peace before, during, and after World War I. But what did "peace" mean to the activists who Siegel

⁶¹ There is a deep literature on the global women's suffrage movement and on women's suffrage campaigns on the national level. There is an article- or monograph-length history of women's suffrage organizing in almost every country. Many of these histories are written in ways that foreground the experiences of women from the U.S., British, and French empires. See June Purvis and June Hannam, eds. *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign: National and International Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2020). For Siegel's engagement with this literature see FN 13 on page 263.

⁶² Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶³ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 9.

profiles? Did it mean the same thing to black feminists Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt, labor feminists in the United States, Chinese peace activists, and Egyptian feminists fighting against colonization? Did “peace” come to mean more than the absence of war and the freedom from conflict? For some activists in Southwest Asia, who are not profiled in the book, by the mid-1920s calling for “peace” became a coded call for ending colonial rule, especially in Palestine.⁶⁴ Did some of the activists who Siegel profiles use “peace” in this way?

Siegel also emphasizes that there were power imbalances in the global women’s movement. She states that after 1919 many elite activists realized that “women were stronger when they banded together, even if this meant negotiating difficult ideological differences and continually challenging power imbalances that made some women’s voices carry more loudly than others.”⁶⁵ Did some activists in the colonized world use “peace” to try to enter international fora forums from which they would have been excluded otherwise due to their colonial status or because of racism? Further interrogation of what “peace” meant to the variety of activists she profiled may have further illuminated some of the tensions that Siegel identified in the global peace movement that was led by elite, white women from Western and Northern Europe and the United States.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Global Histories of Women’s Organizing

Some global histories lose sight of individual actors, but not this book. Siegel’s use of brief biographies to insert individual actors into the global history of women’s peace advocacy makes the activists and the issues they champion come alive in their complexities. Each chapter of the text presents a snapshot of women’s peace activism around the world throughout the 1919 calendar year. As readers move through the chapters of the text, they are introduced to French feminists, black feminists from the United States, Egyptian feminists, the leaders of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Chinese feminists, and white labor feminists from the United States, who are all struggling in their own way for peace and women’s rights. Presenting episodes of women’s peace activism

⁶⁴ See Nova Robinson, *Truly Sisters: Arab Women and International Women’s Rights*, chap. 4 (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 11.

from around the world in parallel reveals a shared struggle for peace and women's rights that unites activists across world regions. Many of the other recent or forthcoming books on transnational feminism in the early 20th century foreground women's networks emanating from a single world region, such as Central and South America, South Asia, Southwest Asia, and East Asia.⁶⁶ Siegel presents a more globally comprehensive narrative of women organizing for peace and women's rights at end of the Great War. The weakness of this spin-of-the-globe structure, however, is that it occasionally obscures connections and tensions between the different activist episodes detailed in the book.

Inserting women from the global south into the dominant narratives of the global women's movement in the early 20th century, as Siegel does in the two chapters that focus on Egypt and China, forces scholars to reconceptualize the history of the early global women's movement, which tends to peripheralize actors from the colonized world.⁶⁷ Siegel's work demonstrates that women from the global north and the global south saw the potential in coming together to effect change. As Siegel asserts when describing the precedent set by activists in 1919, "they demonstrated that international treaties and bodies could be powerful tools in pressing recalcitrant nations to alter laws and practices restricting women's choices and freedoms."⁶⁸ However, women in colonized nations did not have the same access to this activist outlet. For international laws and protections to be relevant, a nation needed to be free from colonial rule. For women in places colonized by the United States and Europe, was calling for "women's rights" inherently anti-colonial?

⁶⁶ For example, see Katherine M. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Rumi Yasutake, *Transnational Women's Activism: The United States, Japan, and Japanese Immigrant Communities in California, 1859-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2004). See also Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: Identity and Sisterhood Between the World Wars*. (London: IB Tauris, 2015). There are several excellent edited collections that address women's transnational organizing in the early 20th century. See, for example, Eileen Boris, Sandra Dawson, and Barbara Molony, eds. *Engendering Transnational Transgressions: From the Intimate to the Global* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁶⁷ Very few histories of the global women's movement in the pre-World War I moment tell the story of women's organizing from the perspective of women in the colonized world. The histories listed in the previous footnote are breaking this trend.

⁶⁸ Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, 248.

Global histories of women's organizing in the early 20th century need to fully contend with the forces that made it impossible for some women to participate in the early international women's movement as equals, including colonialism and racism. In 1919, just as the world was shaped by racist colonial hierarchies, so too was the international women's movement. Despite the attempts of women from the colonized world to participate as equals, the early international women's movement was not inclusive. Yes, some women, like Egyptian Hoda Shaarawi or Brazilian Bertha Lutz, were able to break into international activist circles, but these women were the exception, not the norm.⁶⁹ When Syro-Lebanese feminist activist Nour Hamada tried gallantly to get the League of Nations to recognize various conceptualizations of women's rights, she was ignored by white feminists and by league officials.⁷⁰ Were her ideas too radical? Was she not sufficiently cosmopolitan (i.e., Europeanized) to be welcomed into the circle of international feminists? We do not know why Hamada was excluded, but it is nonetheless important to address her exclusion so we can better understand the racism and coloniality, or power dynamics that reflected the colonial world order, of the early international women's movement. Siegel touches on the racism of the early international women's peace movement, but could have gone further in addressing it as an impediment to women's peace and rights advocacy in each chapter.

Excluding Hamada, and other activists, from discussions about international women's rights during and after World War I was not an innocuous act. It had consequences and, in many ways, the international women's rights system that we live with today was shaped by these exclusions. Hamada and other activists called for a collective, maternalist construction of women's rights, which countered the individualist construction of women's rights circulating in international women's conferences, such as the Zurich Congress, which Siegel features.⁷¹ Siegel's work shows points of commonality between the women in different countries as they struggled for peace in a world engulfed in or recovering from

⁶⁹ On the life and activism of Hoda Shaarawi see Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, chap. 3, and the many biographies on her life, including Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), chap. 3. On Bertha Lutz's activism and transnational connections see Katherine M. Marino, "Transnational Pan-American Feminism: The Friendship of Bertha Lutz and Mary Wilhelmine Williams, 1926-1944," *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 2 (2014): 63-87, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2014.0034>.

⁷⁰ See Robinson, *Truly Sisters*, chap. 5.

⁷¹ See Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, chap. 4 .

war. Just as inspiring as the women coming together for peace were the women from the colonized world who pushed against the international governing system being established. They saw the system for what it was — an extension of colonialism and of liberal democratic practices that emphasized the individual at the expense of the collective — and had the courage to imagine an alternative future, albeit one that never came to pass.

Correcting the Narrative of the Origins of Transnational Feminist Organizing from the Global South

Some scholars and activists have identified the U.N. Decade for Women (1975–1985) as the beginning of transnational feminist organizing from the global south.⁷² Siegel’s work, along with the scholarship of Katherine Marino and Sumita Mukherjee, among others, hopefully puts to bed, once and for all, the idea that transnational feminism based in the global south is a relatively new activist practice.⁷³ In reality, women have been joining forces across borders to address a range of issues for almost 150 years, since the first international women’s conferences in the 1880s. Presenting transnational feminist organizing from the global south as a more recent phenomenon denies contemporary feminist activists from the global south a history that they can evoke in their efforts to gain recognition for their demands for rights today. It is therefore highly important to recognize that elite women’s rights activists from the global south have been fighting alongside — and sometimes in opposition to — white Euro-American women since the early 1900s.

Rather than being peripheral actors or following their white “sisters” from the United States and Western Europe, as some earlier histories suggest, women from the colonized world were active in organizing across borders from the very start of the international

⁷² See for example, *Journal of Women’s History*, Special Issue: Human Rights, Global Conferences, and the Making of Postwar Transnational Feminisms, 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012). Jocelyn Olcott’s pathbreaking book *International Women’s Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) inserts more women from the global south into the narrative of the international women’s year than had previously been featured.

⁷³ Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*; and Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes*.

women's movement.⁷⁴ There was no staggered awakening to the fact that women needed rights and that collective organizing across borders could be an essential tool in securing those rights. In Siegel's more comprehensive treatment of the history of transnational women's organizing for peace, women from the global south were not slow to recognize the power of international and transnational solidarity networks in shaping their status as women. Instead, as Siegel notes, Chinese and Egyptian women were among the first to pioneer this activist strategy.⁷⁵

Unfortunately, the history Siegel presents is not yet the dominant narrative. To the extent that the global dimensions of first-wave feminism are remembered, histories tend to emphasize the presence of elite white women from Western and Northern Europe and the United States, especially the industrialized cities of the northeast.⁷⁶ The erasure of women from the colonized world from the (limited) popular awareness of the early global women's movement perpetuates a narrative that women from the colonized world were slower to demand rights on the national and international levels.

Global Women's History Today

Perhaps one of the greatest attributes of a global history, like the one Siegel presents, is that it shines a light on the state of the field(s) it is contributing to, in this case the field of global women's history. In addition to original primary source research, Siegel draws on existing histories of the international women's movement, including women's labor activism, which

⁷⁴ See for example, Charlotte Weber, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congresses of 1930 and 1932," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 83-106, <https://doi.org/10.2979/MEW.2008.4.1.83>.

⁷⁵ See Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms*, chaps. 3 and 5.

⁷⁶ Some of this emphasis is changing thanks to recent scholarship, but the first wave of scholarship on international women's organizing (1980-2000), due in part to the sources that were used, focused predominantly on elite, white women from colonizing nations. Over the last 20 years, scholars have worked to write more histories that address global women's organizing from a non-European or U.S. center and some of that work is just being published, filling in some of the historiographical holes. Siegel's work is definitely in this vein with her emphasis on women in China and Egypt and on peace advocacy. Many promising graduate student dissertation projects focus on south-south global solidarity networks in the interwar period. Their work will contribute to a more comprehensive picture of global feminist networks in the interwar period.

has often been treated separately from elite women's internationalism. Uniting the historiographies of women's labor activism and elite women's political activism is one of the many important historiographical interventions of Siegel's book. Siegel also utilizes histories of women's activism in the nation-states under study (the United States, France, China, and Egypt). In presenting the history of women's organizing in Egypt in 1919, Siegel relies heavily on Margot Badran's excellent book, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*.⁷⁷ However, Siegel could have gone further in diversifying the secondary literature she referenced with regard to women's roles in the 1919 revolution in Egypt.⁷⁸ That said, she does incorporate some wonderful new primary source images that showcase Egyptian feminists in the streets during the revolution.

Synthetic global histories are shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of the historiographies that they borrow from and build on. South Asian and South American women's global feminist activism has recently received scholarly attention and Siegel references this new scholarship.⁷⁹ Notably absent from the existing English-language literature on women's organizing in the early 20th century, however, is any emphasis on Russian feminists or feminist activists from Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia. Siegel is to be commended for working within an imperfect English language historiography. But, it is still worth emphasizing the limits of the sources she was working with.

Due to the presence of colonial governments and foreign missionaries, some elite women from Sub-Saharan Africa were likely aware of the emerging international women's movement in Europe and the United States and worked to access it and shape it for their

⁷⁷ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ There are more histories in English on the Egyptian women's movement in the early 20th century than any other movement in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. Most of them address women's role in the 1919 revolution in some way. Siegel cites Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), but Baron's *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), would have been especially relevant to Siegel's chapter.

⁷⁹ Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*; and Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes*.

benefit.⁸⁰ However, Sub-Saharan African women are largely absent from the existing literature on the early international women's movement. Siegel inserts Africa into her global history through the activism and advocacy of black women from the United States in Africa. It is an important perspective, but it does not fill the existing historiographical hole regarding African women's international activism in the interwar period. Given that women in British and French colonies in East Asia, South Asia, and Southwest Asia tried to break into discussions about women's rights, it seems likely that women from East, West, Central, and Southern Africa did the same. And if they did not, it is worth probing into why that was. Histories that chronicle internationally oriented feminists from Sub-Saharan African during the interwar era are so very needed, as are histories that foreground the experiences of international feminists from Southeast Asia or other world regions not yet studied.

Histories of the global women's movement have come a long way since Rupp pioneered the subject almost a quarter of a century ago. Siegel has shown us how advocating for peace and other non-suffrage issues, like labor rights, brought women together across borders. Today, activists from the colonized world are no longer as peripheralized in histories of women's organizing in the early 20th century. Indeed, Siegel presents activists from Egypt and China alongside those from France and the United States. However, as the field of global women's history continues to develop, scholars of international women's history and transnational feminism need to more fully contend with the challenges that feminist activists from the colonized world faced as they tried to enter discussions of women's rights in the early 20th century. Scholars should explicitly name the structural causes that prevented women from many parts of Africa, and other parts of the colonized world, from joining the conversation about women's rights in the early 20th century.

Without proactive efforts to fill holes in the literature about women's organizing in the interwar period, the field of global women's history will continue to (inadvertently) fuel the

⁸⁰ Keisha N. Blain importantly inserts black women from the United States and the Caribbean into the early international women's movement. See Keisha N. Blain's *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Keisha N. Blain and Tiffany M. Gill's *To Turn the World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019) edited collection brilliantly reconstructs black feminist international networks, but they privilege the experiences of black women from the United States abroad.

narrative that women from the colonized world were slow to insert themselves into discussions about women's rights on the international level. Historians can follow Siegel's lead and empower contemporary feminists in all world regions, and especially in the global south, by writing histories that are inclusive and truly globally representative. Giving contemporary feminists in all world regions a history they can cite aids contemporary activism for peace and women's rights. Because history is a powerful tool for claiming rights, absences have contemporary consequences.

Nova Robinson is an associate professor of History and International Studies at Seattle University. Her forthcoming book is titled Truly Sisters: Arab Women and International Women's Rights. She is also co-editor of the Routledge Global History of Feminism.

