

Hell hath no fury: Gender dynamics in the Ukraine conflict

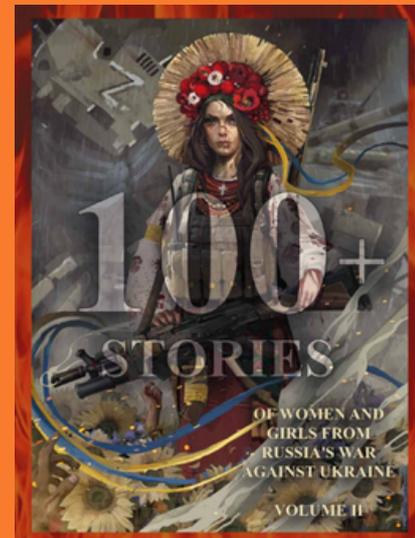


NARRATIVES OF GENDER IN CONFLICT

- Women and girls suffer disproportionately from the effects of conflict. The traditional risks they face of exploitation, sexual and domestic violence all increase in times and places of instability due to breakdowns in accountability and systematic campaigns of terror by malign actors. At the same time, lack of basic equity and equality can leave women disadvantaged in the aftermath of conflicts and areas of persistent instability. But women are not just victims. There is evidence of women playing critical roles in state development, regime stability and wartime commanding roles throughout history.
- The past century of women's movements and growing involvement in political discourse has led to a strengthening school of Feminist thought in International Relations as well as its application to conflict and peacebuilding.
- In light of the above, and in solidarity with the UN's "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence", this article looks at gender dynamics and female roles in the Kremlin's war of aggression against Ukraine.

GENDER ROLES IN UKRAINE'S KINETIC CONFLICT

- Since the Kremlin launched its invasion, women have fully embraced their role as equal defenders of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Some previously involved in the fashion industry changed to making camouflage gear while others stood alongside their male counterparts in constructing Kyiv's defences and tending to the wounded. According to Ukrainian MP Halyna Yanchenko, 17% of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are female.
- As the war has progressed, most men are prohibited from leaving Ukraine, meaning the women in their families who have fled abroad have had to take on dual roles as mothers and bread winners while women at home have also played a pivotal role in the agricultural sector that supplies much of the Global South with life-saving grain.
- Women have also played a critical role in the information conflict; with images of their interactions with Russians going viral and encapsulating the narrative of the country's defiant spirit. Among them, an old age pensioner who distributed sunflower seeds to Russian soldiers 'so that flowers will grow where they dropped dead' and a young girl who raised the morale of an entire shelter with her rendition of Frozen's 'Let it Go'.
- Follow the links to read more stories of Women's role in the resistance against Kremlin aggression



100 Stories of Women and Girls from Russia's War Against Ukraine
See also: Invisible battalion : Women's participation in Military Actions in the Donbas

GENDER IN THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

- Just as Ukrainian women have formed a core part of Ukraine's domestic resistance to the Kremlin's aggression, they have also made their mark in Ukraine's international efforts to cultivate support and broadcast its narrative.
 - Veronika Boyko has founded the company YouControl; an online tool that allows private sector companies to track which front companies support the Russian war effort. In doing so private companies can avoid doing business with them and states can more easily track and sanction them.
 - On 11th April, Kateryna Cherepakha, president CSO "La Strada-Ukraine", spoke before the UN Security Council to increase awareness of the threats to women against the conflict and the need for women to be involved in the peace process.
 - On 19th May, Olena Tregub and Halyna Yanchenko attended the International Peace Institute to deliver a panel discussion on the role of women in Ukraine. They persuasively argued for continued female participation in Ukrainian political and military processes, but also focused the panel's discussion on countering Russian aggression as "the priority for Ukraine's survival".
 - On 20th July, Olena Zelensky, first lady of Ukraine, delivered an address to the US Congress to provide more defence equipment to Ukraine. She has continued to give press interviews in support of Ukraine.
- Political resistance in the conflict by women is not constrained to Ukraine. In Russia, local women and mothers are at the forefront of resisting the Kremlin's so-called 'partial mobilisation' and demanding accurate information regarding casualties in Ukraine.
 - This mirrors the 'Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' in the Soviet Afghan War (1979-89), who played a critical role in breaking the Kremlin enforced silence regarding the large-scale casualties in the conflict and abuses within the military (which continue to this day) that put pressure on the Kremlin to end the war. Putin's recent statement to Russian mothers that he "feels their pain" indicates his awareness, and fear, of losing their support.
 - Establishing information and communications channels into Russia will be critical to undermining the Kremlin's narrative and empowering Russian women to potentially shift the domestic narrative.

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GENDER IN THE PEACE PROCESS: STUDIES FROM COLOMBIA, MALI AND SOMALIA

- The Kremlin's war of aggression in Ukraine is far from over, and there remains an animated debate as to when negotiations should take place. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting the critical role women can play in the peace process.
 - Although this article has focused on Ukraine, the role of women described is mirrored in conflict zones and fragile states across the World.
 - A 2020 study of peace processes in Colombia, Mali, and other conflict zones, shows that a progressive inclusion of women's groups often does not work. It fails to adequately address their interests or translate their aspirations into constructive contributions to the peace process or the post-war society. For this to happen, women must be included from the start.
 - Female contributions in public forums and gender sub-commissions held across Colombia during the agenda-setting phase of the Government-FARC peace process helped to build popular trust and a sense of legitimacy around the negotiations and helped prepare the ground for the government and FARC to invite civil society delegations to Havana during the formal talks.
 - Likewise, Albany's work in Somalia has indicated that including women in the security processes in newly liberated areas increases perceptions of security and participation; thereby increasing trust in the government and security forces that contributes to overall stability.
 - By contrast, the Mali Algiers Accord of 2015 had minimal to no female participation. Neither the negotiation parties nor the primary mediators (first Burkina Faso, then Algeria) favored broadening participation at the table. Women's rights groups were excluded from the early cease-fire talks and played no meaningful roles during the negotiations, where armed belligerency was the sole criterion for meaningful inclusion. The exclusion of women and broad parts of society resulted in mass-based popular resistance against the accord in the capital, Bamako, and surrounding regions, which has arguably contributed to the deteriorating security situation and Mali's August 2020 military coup.
 - Other studies reveal that gender-inclusive peace initiatives create a 35% more enduring peace.



What Colombia's Peace Process Can Teach the World – Involvement of Women + Giving Victims a Voice. Source: [Women's UN Report Network](#)



[Albany's Women 2 Women Project](#)

Despite evidence of the value of female contribution to the peace process, between 1992 and 2018, women were only 13 per cent of negotiators, 3 per cent of mediators and only 4 per cent of signatories in major peace processes. Albany is committed to continuing to make gender and social inclusion a key component of its programs.