

# Mapping Grassroot Women's Representations in Academic Research on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Global South

Piumi Denagamage<sup>1</sup>, Grace Amarachi Lekwauwa<sup>2\*</sup>, Adriana Mayela Hurtado-Bautista<sup>2</sup>

#### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Grassroots Women, WPS Agenda, Feminist Scholars, Peacebuilding, Critical Feminism

#### **ABSTRACT**

Several feminists and academic scholars have written extensively on implementing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and how it has been localized in conflict and post-conflict settings. In the same light, the rising inquiry on the connection of academic writing to empirical studies provides resolution to how WPS agenda could be localized. The objective of this paper is to conduct an exploratory mapping of existing literature on how grassroots women are represented in the academic literature on the localization of the WPS agenda in the Global South. Using a thematic method of analysis, this mapping exercise identified four recurring themes across the academic literature namely the multiple interpretations of 'grassroots women' in the Global South, grassroots women and discursive construction of "women participant" in the WPS agenda, hierarchy formation in the representation of grassroots women within CSOs, and gender essentialism and stereotypical portrayal of grassroots women. On the one hand, the discursive and institutional construction of women's participants identifies women as "non-participants" in the WPS agenda. On the other hand, they constitute the bottom layer of a participant hierarchy, making it difficult to reach meaningful participation. Beyond this institutional and discursive interpretation, we map women's representation in gender essentialist stereotypes portraying them in their reproductive and caregiver identities. Connecting with critical epistemologies and post-colonial feminisms, our results problematize the unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched as well as the participants themselves. We share concerns that the researchers' power to represent and interpret grassroots women and their engagement is often unchecked and unmitigated.

#### Cite this article as:

Denagamage, P., Lekwauwa, G. A., Hurtado-Bautista, A. M. (2024). Mapping Grassroot Women's Representations in Academic Research on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Global South. *Journal of Advanced Research in Women's Studies*, 2(1): 17-37. https://doi.org/10.33422/jarws.v2i1.660

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> MA Gender Studies University of Northern British Columbia

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> MA International Studies University of Northern British Columbia

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author E-mail address: lekwauwa@unbc.ca, gracelekwauwa@gmail.com

#### 1. Introduction

Decades of activism of feminists and women's civil society organizations around the world, building on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), resulted in the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in 2000 (Cohn, 2008; Pratt & Ritcher-Devroe, 2011; Kaptan, 2020). This was a remarkable achievement as it marked the first time the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a resolution specifically dedicated to enhancing women's empowerment and gender equality (Cohn, 2008). UNSCR 1325 consists of four pillars: (1) the role of women in conflict prevention, (2) women's participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding, (3) the protection of women's rights during and after conflict, and (4) women's specific needs during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction (United Nations, 2019). The connection created between the notion of gender and conflict resolution resulted in many international, governmental and non-governmental initiatives (Pratt & Ritcher-Devroe, 2011). Since its inception, 108 UN Member States have adopted a National Action Plan based on UNSCR 1325. Continuous advocacy and activism from civil society and activists paved way for addition 9 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). These ten resolutions create an umbrella for WPS international policy framework and are often grouped together in two categories: the first group of resolutions consists of UNSCR 1325 (2000), 1889 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2493 (2019) that promotes active and effective participation of women in peacebuilding, and the second group consists of UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019) that aims to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence (United Nations, 2019).

Beginning with UNSCR 1325, WPS policy framework works to go beyond the recognition of disproportionate impacts and diverse lived experiences that war and conflict bring on women but also recognizes the important role played by women in peace processes (Kaptan, 2020). By doing so, it challenged the popular narrative of identifying women as victims of war, to ensure the equal participation of women in all processes related to peace, security, and post-conflict reconstruction as one of its major pillars of action (K.C & Whetstone, 2022; Pratt & Ritcher-Devroe, 2011; Kaptan, 2020).

However, WPS agenda and UNSCR 1325 ability to ensure the participation and inclusion of women of diverse lived and living experiences during and post-war societies, ranging from Global North to Global South, from national to local, and from local to grassroots, within the traditional state-centered structures of the UNSC has been questioned since its inception. Basu (2016) centralized the inquiry on interests, voices and realities the WPS agenda's normative framework includes. Pratt and Ritcher-Devroe (2011) highlighted the need to explore the applicability of WPS conceptualization in multiple and diverse conflict scenarios, and therefore the applicability to widely diverging women's experiences. Moreover, Kaptan (2020) questioned the need to provide more meaningful inclusion and diversity to decision-making processes in the localization and implementation of WPS agenda.

In this sense, empirical research on the implementation and analysis of specific outcomes in post-conflict scenarios such as Nepal and Sri Lanka (K.C. & Whetstone, 2022), Colombia (Gutiérrez & Murphy, 2023) and Uganda (Anyeko, 2021) talk directly to the above-mentioned considerations and have demonstrated the necessity on questioning the correspondence between the normative level of the WPS agenda and grassroots women's realities in reintegration and post-conflict transitions. K.C. and Whetstone (2022) have pointed the gap in empirical research on the implementation of 1325, suggesting the necessity of moving beyond the extensively studied discursive approaches to women's participation in peacebuilding

scenarios and the potential benefits of understanding grassroots women's agency in this context.

Within this debate scholars and academic research have been playing the role of "active knowers" and producers of the conceptualizations and analysis surrounding the WPS, along with practitioners and policymakers (Luttrell-Rowland et al., 2023, p. 4). Particularly, academic research has played a role within the localization of the WPS agenda, centralizing local women as a source of information and objects of peacebuilding strategies and "policy prescriptions" (Luttrell-Rowland et al., 2023, p. 3; Martin de Almagro, 2018). Therefore, as argued by Farr (2011) exploring the connections, interpretations and understandings between academia and grassroots women relies as at the core of enhancing the potential of the UNSCR 1325 "as an effective tool for making women's voices heard" (Farr, 2011, p.539).

Consequently, our study aims to explore the interpretation of grassroots women in academic writings and how those various representations inform the way they participate in the WPS agenda as an avenue to contribute to finding pathways to enhance a more inclusive and less prescriptive WPS agenda that can act as a tool rather than a limitation of grassroots women agency. To do so, we conducted an exploratory mapping of existing literature of academic research that engages with the role of grassroots women in the localization of the WPS agenda and UNSCR 1325 in the Global South. This methodological approach was guided by the theoretical framework of post-colonial feminist and critical feminist perspectives to critically analyze the representations found in the literature reviewed. The findings emphasize the implications of such representations for grassroots women, and we finalize with suggestions on the relevance of this work towards the contribution of a more inclusive WPS agenda.

#### 2. Methods

This paper is a mapping exercise of existing literature, examining how grassroots women have been represented in academic writing in the localization of WPS principles in Global South to develop critical evaluations and analytic findings. We used search engines such as Google Scholar, Jstor, and the University of Northern British Columbia Library database, Web of Science, Academia, and Science Direct. Resourcefully they contained peer-reviewed literature, briefs, and online edited books written by scholars in the field. By doing this, we analyzed how academic scholars have approached the utility of addressing grassroots women's issues in the WPS agenda. The first stage of the search was guided by using the listed databases above and directly searching for papers that included the word concepts of grassroots and WPS in their title and abstract and that were relevant to evaluate how grassroots women have been represented in academic writing on WPS. The results of this first-stage search were limited. Despite the array of literature and academic work on women and the peace and security agenda, there were very few articles that included the terms Grassroots and WPS. Therefore, we expanded our search using the following keywords: women participation, women groups, women organizations, women in peacebuilding, local women, women's voices, women's narratives (as alternatives for grassroots women); peacebuilding, 1325, postwar, and post conflict (as alternatives to WPS agenda) and included a geographical focus on the Global South region to refine the results of our search. We collected over 40 academic articles and book chapters and executed a full-text screening to identify if the papers had an empirical approach and if there was a sort of conceptualization or effort to describe the role of grassroots women in participating in the WPS agenda. After applying these inclusion-exclusion criteria, we ended up with 15 articles.

Given that this was an exercise developed in the context of a graduate course assignment, this was only an exploratory mapping of literature review that could provide a preliminary analysis

or identification of the approaches taken in academic writing to engage with grassroots women participation in the context of the WPS agenda. By no means did we intend to apply a critical or systematic review of the literature, given the time frame and resource limitations. Therefore, we acknowledge that the methodological approach taken for this exploratory exercise could have yielded limited results in terms of the literature that was filtered out with the identified lists of search terms. There could be additional synonyms for grassroots women or WPS-related concepts that, having the resources and time to explore them, could have expanded the results. Additionally, this exercise focused on peer-reviewed literature, there may be a bias towards published works and a potential exclusion of valuable insights from unpublished sources, grey literature, or non-academic perspectives (e.g., reports from NGOs or grassroots organizations). And finally, we recognize that the English-language-only criteria applied to our search could have led to the exclusion of relevant literature published in other languages.

The selected academic writings/research were analyzed on their research questions, research methodologies, and methods, findings, and positionalities of researchers. In this paper, we focused on case examples of grassroot women in the Global South; specifically, from Africa (Ghana, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Rwanda) and South and East Asian regions (Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Vietnam). For our findings, we each saw that there were multiple interpretations of grassroots women and using thematic methods we identified four themes to help us evaluate and understand how the representation of grassroots women has impacted the participation of grassroots women using Postcolonial and Critical Feminist perspectives as a guide. A thematic method was used to inform a logical flow and clarity in our writing. The three themes include (1) multiple interpretations of "grassroots women" in Global South, (2) grassroots women's representation as non-participant of WPS, (3) hierarchy formation in the representation of grassroots women with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and then (4) grassroot women's representation in stereotypes and gender essentialization. Lastly, we used the findings on the perspectives of grassroots women to identify and recommend possible pathways for change in localizing the WPS agenda.

# 3. Theoretical Framework

This research applies critical feminist theory and is complimented by post-colonial feminist theory to scrutinize the epistemology of WPS knowledge creation in the localization of the WPS agenda through grassroots women's activism. This chapter introduces the theories and their application to guide our research question and objectives.

As feminist knowledge has derived from deep mistrust and skepticism of androcentric knowledge that claims to be "universal and objective" (Tickner, 2006, p. 21), a critical feminist theory is used by feminist scholars to uncover gendered hierarchies of power and explore oppression including in their own epistemologies (Ackerly & True, 2008; Tickner, 2006). Ackerly and True (2008, p. 693) ask, "How can we study power and identify ways to mitigate its abuse in the real world when we, as researchers, also participate in the projection of power through knowledge claims?". Critical feminist theory scrutinizes the power structures embedded in the processes of knowledge production, including the different ways of knowing, who has expertise, different boundaries (e.g., private and public spheres, state and non-state, etc.), power differences among *research subjects* and relationships, researcher's authority over *research subjects*, and their own positionalities (Ackerly & True, 2008). Based on critical feminist epistemology, Luttrell-Rowland et al. (2023) reveal the problems of knowledge production on peacebuilding and WPS due to the exploitation of power hierarchies where (1) the relationships between academics and *research subjects* are extractive and (2) academic knowledge is favored over lived experiences. They suggest committing to a critical feminist

epistemology that enables serious consideration of grassroots women's knowledge in peace and security studies rather than "prescribing their needs from above, interpreting their knowledge from the outside, and advising what problems to tackle and how to live" (Luttrell-Rowland et al., 2023, p.1).

Despite the production of UNSCR 1325 and a large body of literature on WPS that discusses the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding, security, and conflict resolution, Luttrell-Rowland et al. (2023) take a dig at the lack of constitutive knowledge produced through everyday lived experiences of women, and criticize that women are considered as objects of academic literature. They say that "rather than active producers of knowledge and innovation, they [women] become "practitioners" whose work is analyzed according to expert categories developed in disconnection from their lived realities" (Luttrell-Rowland et al., 2023, p.3). This provides us with a reason to map the academic representation of grassroots women to examine their role in knowledge production in the WPS discourse.

Similarly, post-colonial feminist theory probes the colonial power relations between the Global North and South in the power structures and social hierarchies (Mann, 2012). Bouka (2021, p. 126) highlights that the "epistemic hierarchies that were established or emerged as part of the colonial administration remain ingrained in current power relations". The imposition of Western codes and practices results in *epistemic violence* and *subjugated knowledge* where local cultures and knowledge systems are erased (Spivak, 1985 as cited by Mann, 2012) and superiority and dominance of the West is naturalized (Spivak, 1999 as cited by Kapoor, 2004). The post-colonial concept of *orientalism* (Said, 1978 as cited by Mann, 2012) reveals that knowledge production in the Third World is/was always entangled in the superiority of the Western ways of knowing, even when it seems like a mutual process between colonizers and colonized. These power structures complicate how we understand social realities (Mann, 2012). Post-colonial feminisms deeply examine the processes of knowledge creation to reveal the embedded colonial power imbalances and problematize the legitimacy of such knowledge that claims to be value-neutral and objective.

Laura Shepherd's (2008, p. 384) theorizing of the "author-ity", which symbolizes the power relations in authorship and ownership of UNSCR 1325, is crucial for us to position the WPS localization within the existing power dynamics. Spivak (1985, as cited by Mann, 2012) reminds us to question the discourses on the basis of who participates in knowledge production, how and when they participate, and in what capacity they participate. Shepherd (2008) reveals the problem of the UNSCR 1325's representation of "commonsense" that compliments the subscription of "globalization" by both the UN and NGOs and criticizes that the UNSCR reproduces top-down development and reconstruction models. Similarly, we problematize the academic representation of grassroots women in the localization of WPS to examine whether academia jumped into the wagon that reproduces these power structures in knowledge creation between researchers and participants. In doing so, we share post-colonial feminisms concerns on the portrayal of third-world women in gender essentialist terms (Mohanty, 1988) and the ability of feminists in the third world to represent their own communities (Kapoor, 2004).

#### 4. Findings and Discussion: Representations of Grassroots Women in Academic Writing

In this section, we adopt a thematic approach to discuss our findings, which are analyzed through a theoretical framework. We have identified four key themes: (1) multiple interpretations of 'grassroot women' in the Global South, (2) grassroots women and the construction of 'women participant' in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, (3) grassroots women's role in civil society in the context of WPS, and (4) gender essentialism in grassroots women's representation.

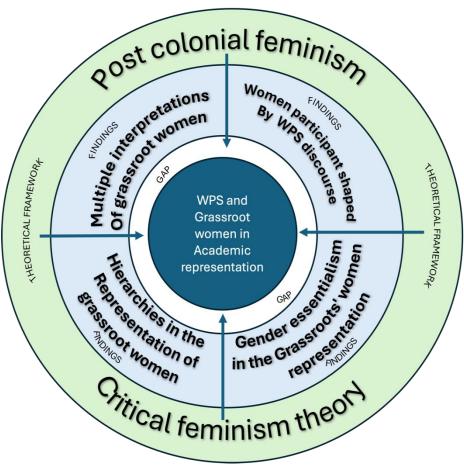


Figure 1. An overview of the findings

The graph provides an overview of our findings. It suggests a gap (represented by the white circle) in the representation of grassroots women in academia. We argue that this gap can be addressed through the application of theoretical frameworks such as critical feminist and post-colonial feminist theories. Such frameworks could facilitate more inclusive and transformative processes, potentially bridging the identified gap in representation.

Subsequent subsections will delve deeper into each theme from our findings, explaining their role in the representation gap of grassroots women in academic literature and how this gap affects the implementation of the WPS agenda. We also draw on insights from the theoretical framework to highlight issues with these representations and offer preliminary thoughts on overcoming these complexities.

#### 4.1. Multiple Interpretations of "Grassroots Women" in Global South

The interpretation of grassroots women in academia varies, especially when analyzing the localization of the WPS agenda in the Global South. The UNSCR 1325 and National Action Plans (NAPs) in advancing the WPS agenda has often been perceived and criticized as reproducing imperialist views and racial hierarchy in that, the WPS agenda was created by the Global North to be deployed in the Global South and used in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Basu, 2016; Whetstone & K.C, 2023). The result of this action influences the ways in which grassroots women are defined and makes invisible the significant work they do in advancing the WPS agenda at the local and international levels. While some researchers provided a definition of who grassroots women are (K.C. & Whetstone, 2022), others provided implied interpretations of grassroots women (Henshaw, 2017; Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018).

Different terminologies are used to identify grassroots women. While the use of the term 'grassroots women' is used in very few literature (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2017; K.C. & Whetstone, 2022; Whetstone & K.C., 2023), other academic writings make use of other terms like community women, grassroots women organizations, everyday women, local women groups or regionalizing to a particular country (e.g., 'Rwandese women or Sudanese women) and civil society organizations (Achilleos-Sarll & Chilmeran, 2020; Gizelis & Joseph, 2016; Madsen, 2018). These different terminologies are used in academic writings to interpret who grassroots women are, however, when assessing how the WPS agenda is implemented during conflict and post-conflict context in countries within the Global South, there appears to be a stratification of grassroots women. These findings demonstrate the lack of a common view of who 'the local' is. Just as, Achilleos-Sarll & Chilmeran (2020, p. 596) interrogate the interpretation of the locals in Iraq as lacking a common view, this various terminologies of grassroot women in academic research as highlighted in this section points to the need of a common concept.

The different terminologies of grassroots women in academic writing show some level of stratification when explaining the contributions of grassroots women. For example, Madsen (2018) in her study of what WPS agenda has done for local women in Rwanda, discovered different categories of grassroot women. Some of these categories of grassroot women include women's organizations who work at national or regional levels of government to local women groups (that is Rwandese women and community women groups) who run activities at the local communities.

In terms of geographical coverage, academic interpretations of the term "grassroots women" fluctuate in a spectrum of narrower and broader geographical range. Some literature identifies women to be representing grassroots if they belong to small groups in extremely localized settings such as church societies, refugee or displacement camps in a war-torn or post-conflict society, while others interpret it in large groups of women who spread across different regions and countries, e.g., Mano River Women Peace Network, Federation of African Women's Peace Networks, etc. (Samuel 2001; Gbowee, 2019; Synder 2000). This spectrum of geographical interpretation for grassroots women makes it difficult to narrow the representation of 'local women'. These studies could include national level political participation as well as extremely local everyday participation under the banner of 'grassroots women'.

Majority of the academic writings on WPS in Global South define grassroots women as women from a particular country or community who face discrimination or are marginalized based on their identity, socio-economic status, religion, class, or caste (Henshaw, 2017; K.C. & Whetstone, 2022; Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018). They are also often identified as victims of war/conflicts and as burdened by societal and household expectations. Those who are organized on the basis of their reproductive or caregiver roles as mothers or wives, do name themselves to reflect such roles, e.g., Mother's Front in Sri Lanka, Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka, and academic representation highly conform with the choice of such identification as well.

Another interpretation found in the academic literature of grassroots women is the one that analyses the subject of women participants that WPS discourse and its normative resolutions create. By doing so, academics engaged in this interpretation not necessarily to make a reference to the concept of grassroots women but indirectly build one by identifying them as those who end up being excluded from participation. In this case, the authors identify that grassroots women are left out of the normative activities and implementation of peace processes and actions and assign them a sort of dissident agency against what has been internationally identified as participatory peace processes (Martin de Almagro 2018, Paalo

2022 and Tamang 2020). This interpretation is supported by the idea that the WPS agenda, the UNSCR 1325 resolution and each localized NAP create a normative framework that legitimizes a type of agreement on necessary conditions to allow women's participation in peace processes (Martin de Almagro, 2018). When this framework is localized in conflict and post-conflict contexts via international interventions or local peace actions (Tamang, 2020), it creates an indirect, but at the same time direct, exclusion of women participants. Those who are left out of participating are often identified as grassroots women, and the characteristics assigned to them but also appropriated by them are usually related to sites of contestation, dissidence, and alternative appropriation of peace significance, as well as how participatory processes should be (Martin de Almagro, 2018).

# 4.2. Grassroots Women and the Construction of "Women Participant" in the WPS Agenda

In the following paragraphs, we analyze the conceptual structure and materialization of literature that identifies grassroots women based on their involvement in the formal processes derived from implementing 1325 resolution in conflict or post-conflict scenarios.

#### 4.2.1. Women Participant Shaped by WPS Discourse

Central to the literature identifying women participant and non-participant is the idea that the normative representation of the WPS agenda is a product of the particular values that the UN has towards the issue. Those ideas revolve around the narrative of achieving a bigger goal, that one of a conflict-free world, where global development will make a more positive and hopeful future (Gibbings, 2011). In turn, logics aligned with the potential of women as a resource to achieve those futures (gender essentialism), and therefore, as an agency in need of protection (victims) and equal representation, access, and participation are the ones framing the policy reality of WPS agenda (Shepherd, 2008).

As such, all the actions and processes derived from this policy framework also reproduce the initial values that allowed its definition, determining a more prescriptive dimension of who should be involved in those practices, what is necessary to implement them, and who should be leading their materialization (Martin de Almagro, 2018). In other words, for this group of academic researchers, UN values behind the policy framing of the UNSCR 1325 produce a particular subject of women in WPS, whose potential is backed up and enhanced by implementing the policy itself (Shepherd, 2008, p. 396).

Here, the emergence of the subject women concept in relation to WPS is what we have identified as central in the academic literature that categorizes grassroots women as non-participants. The shaping of subject women within this framework assigns particular roles and conditions necessary for women participants to enhance their potential to contribute to peacebuilding and development efforts. But, most importantly, the subject women's production limits the arrangements in which women's agency is allowed, ascribing them to internationally recognized conflict contexts and formal processes of peace negotiation (Martin de Almagro, 2018). Therefore, it essentializes the contribution of women to overcome those arrangements to a victim/mediator agency legitimated by the intervention of governmental or international institutions (Shepherd, 2016). The intersectionality of those two variables marginalizes any process or action and actors that do not subscribe to the mentioned possibilities.

# 4.2.2. Translating the Women Participant Discourse into Action

Within this central identification, researchers have dug into the actions that materialize the women subject inclusion/exclusion binary in different contexts. For Martin de Almagro (2018),

the NAPs play a central role in the mentioned participation dichotomy, providing guidelines to the institutional parts responsible for implementing the policy actions to comply with the WPS agenda. However, she identifies that subject participant production and exclusion through NAPs is guided by international actors financing WPS-related activities, emphasizing the prevalence of international institutions in this inclusion/exclusion process.

Through case studies of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Liberia, Almagro (2018) illustrates how NAPs create specific categories of women participants—women soldiers, women activists, and women mediators—while marginalizing others. For her women soldier participants in WPS agenda is approach in the three countries as the inclusion of more women into military instances to promote gender mainstream in militarized spaces. On the contrary, all three NAPs promote disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs that invisibilize the existence and specific needs and experiences of women soldiers ex-combatants. For instance, Burundi's "one combatant-one gun" UN-DDR principle excludes women members of the armed groups who carried on domestic labor. In DRC and Sierra Leona, limited alternatives given to women ex-combatants, such as joining the national military forces, leave out of the formal participation those ex-combatants who do not accept the only alternative given to them.

In terms of women mediator participants, Martin de Almagro (2018) uses the example of the Burundi and Libera NAPs, which establish capacity-building and training actions "for women who can be eligible for positions in negotiation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding jobs," creating a separation between them and the women that cannot be competent mediators because of their lack of training based in international values of conflict mediation. Finally, for the woman activist participant, attributing characteristics such as capacities to communicate in other languages, international recognition, and being trained to become a leader creates a breach between them and those women they claim to represent. As Martin de Almagro (2018) mentions, "these representations do not only construct the I/We versus the Other, but also the appropriate and inappropriate, the competent and incompetent Other, fabricating and regulating otherness at local, national and international levels" (Martin de Almagro, 2018, p. 401).

Taking a step back from participation in peacebuilding processes, Tamang (2020), focuses on analyzing how the WPS agenda also produces certain women who can be recognized and participate in conflict scenarios and negotiations. For her, the ideological framework of the UN as the institution that defines the concerns that give legitimacy to the WPS agenda (Cohn, 2008) also produces a legitimate understanding of what counts as conflict, leaving other "hidden" conflicts in the dark of WPS, and as well as multiple experiences and engagement that women have in those hidden conflicts.

That is the case for the ethnic-based conflicts in East India, in the regions of Darjeeling Heels and Nagaland, where the absence of recognition of a political identity-based conflict from the side of the Indian government has led to the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements in which women have been engaging and advocating, even confronting the militarized forms of conflict. Tamang explains that women's participation and support of these ethnic movements distance East Indian women advocates from the traditional role that WPS has assigned to the ideal women subject in peace-negotiation settings, understood only as inclusion and representation of women in the "high table" of institutions, complying with established quotas. Therefore, multiple and diversified forms of engagement that women have during peace negotiations, such as women's roles in sustaining political movements, ensuring mass participation, engaging in peace negotiation campaigns, and even contesting gender equality within the ethnic movements, are left behind by the globalized policy framework (Tamang,

2020) and are not being counted as relevant representation or even potential to generate policy changes.

Furthermore, Paalo (2022) identifies that in the discourse associated with the WPS agenda, particularly in peacebuilding literature on inclusive development (an approach framed within the institutional agency of the UN), the participation of young women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities remains somehow unaddressed, and undetermined. General discoursive mentions on what youth-peacebuilding processes mean without directly providing guidelines on what robust and quality-driven participation of young women means to pave the way to assumptions when implementing the discoursive framework that ends up living behind youth from the actual participation of peacebuilding processes (Aulin, 2019). This causes another condition to the checklist of women subject participants: "women but not young women" (Paalo, 2022, p. 3).

#### 4.2.3. WPS Women Participant Shaping Grassroots Women

Although the reviewed literature in this section does not necessarily assign the category of nonparticipant to grassroots women in a direct way, they do provide certain links that led us to identify grassroots women as the non-participants of the WPS agenda. From a critical feminist perspective, this identification is relevant in the sense that it provides evidence of how the implementation of the 1325 resolution is not necessarily promoting deeply enough changes that could reach the core representation of women impacted by conflict and violence in local contexts (Willett, 2010). Here, it is relevant to understand how even when the normative discourse of the WPS agenda promotes the involvement of women in conflict and peacebuilding resolution when examining the deepest levels of women impacted by war and conflict, the policy framework fails to reach, understand, and include women at the grassroots (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011). This reproduction of normative ideas of the desired women participant in the WPS context also reflects the insights of post-colonial feminist theory, which highlights how women's experiences of war and participation are mediated by a reality production of a legitimized formal institution, leaving as irrelevant or informal and therefore invalidating other forms of conceptualizing women's experiences in post-conflict settings, and more importantly, their considerations on what participation and visibilization could mean.

Grassroots women are not only those women participating in WPS but are the excluded youth from peacebuilding processes, the invisibilized ex-combatants who are struggling with reintegration in their communities, the women activists who do not speak a second language and who are not internationally included in a women's network, the women activist in ethnic conflicts that their own political party neglects and that will not have the decision-making power to promote institutional changes, the women mediator that has gained their knowledge from their every-day experiences rather than from international training and capacity building. As they also recognize themselves as the non-participant subjects of WPS, they keep building their sense of self-being with their contextualized and localized understandings of conflict and peacebuilding. They are not passive recipients of the WPS agenda but rather transformative agents (Tamang, 2020).

By mapping that grassroots women have been represented in academic research as non-participants, this finding could represent a touching base point to call for future research that goes beyond this binary identification and start asking questions about how to promote a less normative and discursive WPS agenda policy framing that could engage with all the different agencies and grassroots women advocacy in conflict and post-conflict scenarios.

### 4.3. Grassroots' Women Role in Civil Society in the Context of WPS

As we explore further into the mapping of the representation of grassroot women in academic research, this section will show how global gender norms and language embedded in WPS practices, reinforces savior politics and power imbalances.

# 4.3.1. Hierarchy Formation in the Representation of Grassroot Women within CSOs

Localization of WPS agenda draw attention to peacebuilding activities done in conflict affected communities at a national level; however, who are considered as key agents in this mission and how does this inform the way grassroot women participate in WPS activities. Scholars evaluate the work grassroots women do in advancing WPS agenda and state the continuous sidelining of grassroots women voices in the development and planning of NAPs (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2017; K.C. & Whetstone, 2022; Madsen, 2018; Wamai, 2010; Whetstone & K.C., 2023).

Privileged grassroot women working in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the global south or NGOs are often key actors in peace negotiation. As academic writing emphasizes the work of these women, underprivileged grassroot women who despite their status have been the frontiers in conflict management and post-conflict resolution continue to be invisible (K.C. & Whetstone, 2022). Also, the stratification of grassroots women as highlighted in the interpretation of grassroots women creates a hierarchy of power which position these privileged grassroot women as the 'Saviour' and the underprivileged grassroot women on the receiving end or even as least level agents in peace negotiations Whetstone & K.C. (2023, p.97). Drawing on critical feminist theory and postcolonial feminist theory, this section will show how hierarchy is formed within CSOs through position of power and perceived knowledge on grassroot women issues. It will take into consideration examples of the roles of CSOs and grassroot women in conflict and post-conflict cases in South Sudan, Liberia and Rwanda reflecting on how it affects their participation in WPS agenda.

The WPS agenda despite its framework as a global and universal principle is faced with challenges of localization. Haastrup & Hagen (2020) refers to how normative discourse of WPS portray postcolonial and racial hierarchies in that it privileges the White or women from the Global North. This point is also buttressed in Parashar (2019) writing which critics WPS agenda as an extended postcolonial ideology which positions the Global North as the producers and Global South as recipients of the norms. Despite these views, Basu (2016) provides evidence showing contribution from Global South and CSOs on the implementation of WPS agenda. She also mentioned how countries in the Global South especially South Asian countries – Afghanistan and Nepal have successfully implemented the WPS principles through NAPs (Basu, 2016, p. 368). Irrespective of these contributions, Scholars and WPS Practitioners still emphasis the gap in gendered global norms of WPS in addressing grassroot women issue in post-conflict development (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2017; K.C. & Whetstone, 2022; Madsen, 2018).

CSOs have been viewed by UNSCR 1325 advocates as major players of advancing women right, women empowerment and participation in conflict and post conflict contexts (Achilleos-Sarll & Chilmeran, 2020; Basu, 2016). On the other hand, (Gizelis & Joseph, 2016) maintain that reason CSOs and grassroots women efforts as key players are downplayed is due to the failure of external donors to consider local capabilities and initiatives of grassroot groups in peacebuilding and post-conflict transition. In this section, we refer to CSOs as Global South actors operating from a place of privilege (e.g. national women organizations and NGOs), but within this group are grassroot women (everyday women, ex-combatants, local women groups, women activists) who have been marginalized and stereotyped as performing passive roles in

advancing WPS principles. How then are grassroot women hierarchized CSOs in conflict and post-conflict context?

# 4.3.2. Power Imbalances and Global Gender Norms in the WPS Agenda

Grassroot women and CSOs have brought forward gendered views of peace-making and conflict management from women advocacy groups even before the adoption of resolution 1325 (Basu, 2016; Madsen, 2018, Cohn, 2008). With the creation of WPS principle, women networks can ensure their voice and perspectives on peace and conflict are being addressed at the global level. In applying a critical feminist perspective on WPS activities, most WPS scholars and academic literature argue that grassroots women voices are ignored by both Global South actors (that is, CSOs) and Global North actors and the need for grassroot women to take on leadership positions in post-conflict development in their communities (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2017; Henshaw, 2017; Madsen, 2018; Whetstone & K.C., 2023). Madsen (2018) opines that the Resolution 1325 despite highlighting the need for women participation in peace agreements, and for local and international women's group to be consulted to promote women right and protection, it does not make room for women activist. The UNSCR adopted this principle to be the guiding rule for UN peace field mission at the national level, as such peacebuilding activities take a top-down approach. However, the UNSCR 1325 is criticized for leaving gender mainstreaming to traditional actors such as UN peacekeepers and NGOs who define WPS agenda in the way that is sometimes is different from their local practices thereby marginalizing their efforts at the local level (Olonisakin et al., 2010). In the same light, hierarchy is formed in the way CSOs use these WPS principle to promote their organization values, showcasing themselves to be leaders or knowledge holders who understand the needs of grassroot women.

Moreover, case of Rwanda genocide in 1994 provides opportunity for the WPS principle to be tested (Madsen, 2018). National Women Organization in Rwanda used the WPS principles to anchor their values during and after the genocide. They act as 'localizing agents' and Co-opting agents by trying the legitimize WPS principle locally; majorly focusing on women equality and autonomy and carefully choosing which global norm could fit into their organization agenda (Madsen, 2018, p.72). The Pro-Femmes Twese, a CSOs in charge of the NAPs rely on the international community donors for funds to carry out their activities for localizing WPS at the local level; they work with victim of rape and widow who lost their husbands and children born out of rape. Even with the role CSOs play in localizing WPS principle, the evidence in Madsen (2018) showed that funds did not reach some women at the local level. Local women groups in Rwanda, however, had uneven views on the appropriation of global gender norm as it collided with traditional interpretations of gender (male and female) (Madsen, 2018). Madsen (2018) also points that most local women explained that they were overburdened with work as their husbands relented in carrying out their roles in the household due to how women's right advanced after the genocide. While the case of Rwanda shows CSOs are actively seeking ways to utilize the WPS agenda, local women continue to face obstruction from the community due to masculinity translation of gender. Also, the level at which grassroot women groups operate puts them in the position of always needing help from CSOs because their work is not considered as embodying formal WPS practices.

Academic scholars and WPS practitioners provide empirical data on the involvement of grassroot women in peacebuilding (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2017; Gbowee, 2019; K.C. & Whetstone, 2022; Whetstone & K.C., 2023). This paragraph will highlight the work of grassroot women during conflict and post-conflict and why they should be part of WPS post-conflict development. The Global South especially in African context has produced evidence to show the salient work of grassroot women and the need to include their contributions to

WPS principles. For example, Liberian faced 14 years of civil wars from 1989 to 2003 killing many women and displacing others (Gbowee, 2019). Liberian women summoned courage, and took advantage of the power of their number, and shared challenges of war to make their voice heard despite the lack of cooperation from international community actors who considered them to be 'marginal actors' (Gbowee, 2019, p. 14). During the civil war, Liberian women formed groups with other marginalized women in the community, they reached out to neighboring countries advocating and lobbying political leaders to intervene. In the hit of the violence, women from various status in the society rallied up, campaigning and creating awareness about the crimes happening in their countries. Drawing on their perseverance and commitment to change, they shared their experiences with the world, taking the lead in arranging peace talks until they reached a peace agreement.

Likewise, in the case of South Sudan, women and children suffered and endured great loss due to internal conflict over power; women regain full responsibility to cater for the family as their husband fought wars (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018). The authors show that women participated in the peace processes but tagged grassroot women involvement in the peacebuilding activities as 'informal' while the Bloc of Sudan, a civil society made of women in leadership position who monitored the peace agreements in 2015 engaged in the 'formal' peace processes (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018, pp. 3-4). Also, grassroot Sudanese women face challenges in mobilizing funds for peace because they have to be a registered organization; of which the process of becoming one is strenuous, so they have to stick to the conventional way they know such as civil protest and organized marches to challenge authoritarian leaders (Kezie-Nwoha & Were, 2018, p. 4). We contend with these categorizations of women involvement as 'formal' and 'informal' because it encourages saviorism that has been repeatedly criticized in the implementation of WPS, requesting that grassroot women be represent at multiple levels of peace negotiation and post-conflict development. As Adeogun & Muthuki, (2018) argued that while grassroot women activists utilize agency from bottom-up approach to echo their contributions to peace, evidence shows that such process is crucial to achieving sustainable peace and for this reason, grassroot women deserve to be recognized for the work they do.

While there are empirical studies on the contributions of Global South CSOs and grassroots women in the implementation of WPS agenda in conflict and post conflict transition, the common view is that grassroot women voices are not represented and this could be as a result of tensions in the global/local gender norms of WPS principles empowering CSOs with funds and authority to implement WPS principles at local level which places grassroot women on the receiving end. Therefore, rendering their work in peace making and peacebuilding processes as informal or marginal. This section has shown that grassroots women have remained resourceful in maximizing bottom-up approaches to attain peace in their communities. Examining the roles and operations of CSOs and grassroots women showed us how stratification of local actors in academic research breads hierarchies which restrict opportunities for grassroot women participation.

#### 4.4. Gender Essentialism in Grassroots Women's Representation

After discussing about implications of grassroots women in the WPS through discursive and institutional interpretations in the above sections, this section goes beyond the discourse and institutions to map the grassroots women's representation in gender essentialist and stereotypical portrayal, and its implications.

#### 4.4.1. Gender Essentialist and Stereotypical Portrayal of Grassroots Women

While war and conflicts are highly gendered ventures, in the binary of war and peace, men are predominantly identified on the side of war, and women are often regarded as peace-oriented (Samuel, 2001; Salla, 2001; Mbabazi et al., 2020; Skjelsbaek, 2001; Henty & Egglestone, 2018). Hence, grassroots women's activism in times of war and post war is also represented in its orientation toward peace (Aharoni, 2021; Samuel, 2001; Gbowee, 2019; Bulus et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2020; Kirk, 2019; Snyder, 2000) as if women's grassroots activism is always aimed towards achieving peace. To mention a few examples, Samuel (2001) explains how the Women's Action Committee (WAC) in Sri Lanka refused state-involved militarism and pushed for political negotiations in Sri Lanka's war. Similarly, during the 1990s, the Association of Women for Peace in Burundi advocated and encouraged women to take a stand against killing (Snyder, 2000). The President of the Adashe Savings Cooperative in Plateau State, Nigeria, says, "We are peace-loving women" (Bulus et al., 2020, p. 196). It is apparent that academic literature is rich in its capture of the notion of women's love for peace without providing any reason or questioning as to why as if it is "commonsense".

Motherhood, or women's role as mothers, is another significant representation of grassroots women in the academia on WPS and/or peacebuilding (See Bulus et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2020). Skjelsbaek (2001, p.61) identifies motherhood "as the most central aspect of femininity" and, therefore, emphasizes the importance of studying motherhood in war. In conjuncture with the gender essentialist notion of women as peacemakers, in many cases of grassroots women's representation, women's position and *power* as mothers and caregivers within a family as well as in society is identified to provide a unique pathway for women to contribute to peacebuilding (Bulus et al., 2020; Samuel, 2001; Mbabazi et al., 2020; Henty & Egglestone, 2018). By analyzing the interviews and focus discussions with women research participants, Bulus et al. (2020) claim that not only their role as women but also their agency in peacebuilding is primarily explained by the responsibilities as mothers or caregivers to inspire and generate peace, morality, and proper cultural values in their children. Samuel (2001) discusses that the Mother's Front in Sri Lanka was organized around the mother's role in their moral responsibility to protect the children. Confirming the saying that "it takes a community to raise a child", Bulus et al. (2020, p. 194) also claim that "mothers have the moral responsibility to discipline any child in the community". This socially constructed notion of mother's responsibility to protect their children and their obligation to discipline them lead to the recognition of mothers and women as peace educators (Reardon, 1993, as cited by Skjelsbaek, 2001).

In addition to capturing women as peace-loving mothers, they are also described in a bunch of other gender-essentialist stereotypes. For example, Mbabazi et al. (2020, p. 137) state that women are "oriented towards consensus building", encourage transparency and accountability, especially towards forced disappearances in war, and "foster constant communications among warring nations". Furthering the concept of care, some research claims that women bring emotional and social intelligence to peace processes more than men, explaining terms like empathetic, relational thinking (Mbabazi et al., 2020), highly skilled in negotiations, and calling for justice for humanity (Samuel, 2001; Salla, 2001). In some extreme cases, women are identified as gossipers; however, this is claimed as a positive trait to disseminate information at times of war (Bulus et al., 2020; Mbabazi et al., 2020).

This study is only aimed at mapping how grassroots women are represented in academic research. It does not aim to explore whether that representation is accurate and agrees with reality and how grassroots women want them to be portrayed in research. However, the current academic representation of grassroots women resonates with Mohanty's (1988, p. 56) Western portrayal of an "average third-world woman" who claims to be "tradition-bound, domestic,

family-oriented, and victimized". It could be interpreted as a practice of violent oppression of the heterogeneity of the 'subjects' (Mohanty, 1988). Compared to an 'average Third World woman', a Western women represent themselves as empowered (Mohanty, 1988) and Western feminists seek to rescue Third World women through application of progressive and modern strategies (Narayan, 1997 as cited by Mann, 2012). So, where do the academic writers stand in this conversation? Unfortunately, our analysis on the academic representation of grassroots women emphasizes that their portrayal of women in the Global South is closer to Mohanty's (1988) concerns of colonial homogenizing of Third World women.

Even though our argument is to highlight that the essentialist nature of academic representation of women conforms with Mohanty's (1988) analysis of homogenization of women in Global South, most of these academic writers are in fact from Global South. We bring Spivak's (1988 as cited by Kapoor, 2004, p.628) differentiation of the terms 'representation' and 'representation'; 'representation' indicates "speaking for, in the sense of political representation", but 're-presentation' is about "making a portrait". As such, our analysis is that academic representation is in fact a 're-presentation' rather than an actual 'speaking for'. Kapoor (2004, p. 628) asks "what are the ethico-political implications of our representations of the Third World, and especially for the subaltern groups that preoccupy a good part of our work? To what extent do our depictions and actions marginalize or silence these groups and mask our own complicities?". Unfortunately, Kapoor's (2004) concerns are our own concerns in this analysis on academic representation of grassroots women in WPS.

# 4.4.2. Implications of Gender Essentialist and Stereotypical Portrayal

Implications of women's representation in these gender essentialist stereotypes could be multifaceted. Academic representation of the political usage of motherhood has two faces; some assert that such usage can perpetuate the existing gender norms limiting the role of women in society (Haputhanthri, 2018), while others assert that in some cases, such usage has challenged existing gender norms and led to creating new gender norms (Whetstone & KC, 2023). Olena Nikolayenko (2020) discusses a typology for women's participation in revolutions. Accordingly, there are three types of women's participation: (1) the patriarchal model, which confirms the patriarchal gendered division of labor pushing women to assume their reproductive and caretaker roles; (2) the emancipatory model utilizes gender equality as the basis for their mass mobilization with opportunities of formal leadership positions for women; and (3) the hybrid model of women's participation captures diverse and fluid forms of participation including conforming with traditional gender norms, adopting "masculine forms of resistance", and mixing different forms (Nikolayenko, 2020, p.451).

Much research corresponds to Nikolayenko's (2020) patriarchal model of women's participation. For example, much research highlights the importance of the mother's caregiver role in peace-oriented socialization and education in children, which exacerbates and perpetuates the unbalanced burden of the reproductive and caregiver roles of women. Bulus et al. (2020) and Mbabazi et al. (2020) identify a mother's *authority* to correct and discipline children, especially male children, as a prominent way they could contribute to peacebuilding, and it is an extension of women's patriarchal gender norms. In Sri Lanka, Samuel (2001) writes that due to the Northern Mothers' Front's orientation toward their role as mothers, they never questioned or challenged the limitations of these stereotypes. Shouldering these gender essentialist and stereotypical notions can bring unwanted responsibilities and obligations on women to achieve peace, ironically without being included and recognized within formal peace processes. These notions that women can achieve peace through peace-oriented socialization of their male kids obfuscate the reality of systemic and institutional militarized masculinities and patriarchy. They also influence limiting women to their domestic caregiver roles, creating

a demarcation between public and private spheres. This demarcation feeds into the justification for pushing women to the private sphere while security decisions are made in the male-dominated public sphere. Haputhanthri (2018, p. 62), discussing grassroots women's movements in Sri Lanka during and aftermath of the war, says, "Women are still predominantly seen as domestic caregivers, and their roles in the private, domestic sphere are valued over their contribution in the public sphere".

There are other instances that conform with Nikolayenko's (2020) hybrid model of women's participation. Whetstone & KC (2023), discussing grassroots women's activism in Sri Lanka, reveal how the Mother's Front (the combination of Southern Mother's Front and Northern Mother's Front in Sri Lanka), Association of War Affected Women (AWAW) and Tamil Mothers of Disappeared challenged the existing gender norms of mothers or women as weak and passive contributors/receivers to/of peace/war through their consistent non-violent but active physical participation. In this instance, the notion of motherhood was appropriated as a strategy to join the political force around war and peace, but then they extended their activism beyond those gender norms and even contributed to creating new gender norms. But Samuel (2001), discussing about Sri Lanka, says that such appropriation of motherhood was not sustained to bring long-term empowerment.

Further, romanticizing the gender norm that women are inherently peace-loving, and mothers are passive could be treacherous as it could oversee women's involvement in war and extreme violence as perpetrators or contributors (Henshaw, 2017; Henty & Egglestone, 2018). For example, as war and peace are highly political in nature, these stereotypes and genderessentialist notions can be easily misused to gain political benefits. Skjelsbaek (2001) explains how women used traditional femininity and gendered division of labor to carry out warring tactics in the Vietnamese war. In one instance, a research participant in Skjelsbaek (2001) describes how they used their outlook as innocent women moving from urban to countryside due to war transported mines in their baskets to create explosions, which they identified as fighting in unexpected ways. Skjelsbaek (2001) also highlights that the stereotypical identification of mothers as peace lovers and peace educators is erroneous, as women and mothers push their husbands and sons to go to war. However, more than judging women for their actions in a war, the significant emphasis here is how researchers capture these incidents as avenues for women's own agency or usage of femininity for political reasons by an external force. Gendered identification of women as peace-oriented encourages violent extremist groups to recruit women as successful implementers of violent activities without bringing suspicious eyes (Henty & Egglestone, 2018). Samuel (2001) explains how the Southern Mother's Front (which appropriated the notions of motherhood) in Sri Lanka was convened by two male members of the then-opposition party and composed of women supporting the opposition party to rally against the ruling government. Samuel (2001, p. 192) writes that "the mothers had a single demand: calling for justice and accountability, they demanded the return of their children. The SLFP<sup>1</sup> clearly exploited this demand, not for the reinstatement of democracy and to see justice done, but more to overthrow the incumbent government and secure political power".

Stereotypes and gender essentialism result in homogenizing women's experiences and the ways in which they participate in war, post-conflict reintegration, or peacebuilding. For example, in Sri Lanka, the Mother's Front's demands are always attached to their caregiver role as mothers to return their sons. While undoubtedly, the demand to return the sons is highly political, very limited research discusses the political demands of grassroots women beyond their caregiver roles. This limited research includes the exclusion of female ex-combatants from the post-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was the then opposition party in Sri Lanka.

conflict peace and DDR processes who had fought for their own rights and liberation during the war (Whetstone & KC, 2023; Krystalli, 2021). For example, Krystalli (2021), focusing on female ex-combatants in Colombia, discusses that exercising women's agency as interlocuters of peace is barred due to the already existing recipes of participation as to how and on what topics of peacebuilding they are allowed to share their expertise. It suggests that women's involvement in war may provide avenues for them to challenge the stereotypes of femininity. However, post-war normality demands their performance of patriarchal gender norms (Whetstone & KC, 2023). It also concerns us that the stereotypical portrayal excludes the participation of women who do not conform with these qualities, men as an ally for WPS, and communities who identify themselves beyond the gender binary, especially 2SLGBTQIAA+communities, and as such, we problematize researcher's power to exclude and marginalize.

#### 5. Concluding Remarks

In turn, logics aligned with the potential of women as a resource to achieve those futures (gender essentialism), and therefore, as an agency in need of protection (victims) and equal representation, access, and participation are the ones framing the policy reality of WPS agenda (Shepherd, 2008).

In this study, we aimed to map how academic research on WPS represents grassroots women in the Global South and the implications of such representations. This mapping exercise identified four recurring themes across the academic literature we selected for the analysis: (1) Multiple interpretations of 'grassroots women' in the Global South, (2) Grassroots women and discursive construction of "women participant" in the WPS agenda, (3) Hierarchy formation in the representation of grassroots women within CSOs, and (4) Gender essentialism and stereotypical portrayal of grassroots women.

The scholars adopt no common definition or interpretation as to who belongs to the category of grassroots women, and we identified it depends on the context and interpretations adopted by the scholars or institutions in a given context. While there are many differences across academic writings in terms of different terminologies, geographical coverage, and institutional and normative interpretations, one common interpretation across was to identify them as a group of marginalized women due to their belonging to underprivileged identities and associated intersectionality, e.g., race, religion, caste, ethnicity, etc. We also mapped the discursive and institutional construction or interpretation of women's participants where we identified that, on the one hand, grassroots women are identified as "non-participants" in the WPS agenda guided by institutional forms of instrumentalizing gender essentialism and the participation of victims, which let them out of the idealization of peace. On the other hand, they constitute the bottom layer of a participant hierarchy, making it difficult to reach meaningful participation. Beyond this institutional and discursive interpretation, we have also mapped women's representation in gender essentialist stereotypes portraying them in their reproductive and caregiver identities. Connecting with critical feminist epistemologies and post-colonial feminisms, we problematize the unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched as well as the participants themselves. We share concerns that the researchers' power to represent and interpret grassroots women and their engagement is often unchecked and unmitigated.

While highlighting the importance of resolving such power imbalances to capture the grassroots women on their accord, we suggest two possible paths: (1) identifying and addressing the power differences/imbalances and researchers' own positionalities as a part of research methodology (Ackerly & True, 2008), and (2) adopting alternative ways of theorizing

to capture lived experiences of grassroots in their own interpretations of peace and security (Luttrell-Rowland, 2023).

# Acknowledgements

We respect and acknowledge that we conducted this mapping exercise as part of our course work at the UNBC Prince George campus situated on the unceded traditional territory of the Leidli T'enneh, part of the Dakelh First Nations, and we are grateful to live, work and grow on their traditional territory.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) for their generous financial support, which enabled us to attend and participate in the ICGSS.

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