

Women, Peace and Security

Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity
EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



The Peace and Social Change
Workshop Report **2018**

Spaces for Strategizing and Shared Learning:
The Peace and Social Change Workshop
Women, Peace and Security Program, Columbia University
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Introduction

On May 21-22, 2018, activists, practitioners and academics from across the United States came together at Columbia University at the Peace and Social Change Workshop to strategize with one another and build bridges across a wide range of social movements and organizations. The intensive workshop aimed to generate knowledge, build skills, strengthen relationships and exchange strategies amongst front-line advocates and organizers working within the United States on issues of racial and gender justice, social change, and more broadly, genuine security for all people.

Workshop participants were chosen from applicants across the country and represented diverse movements and ideologies. Participants are all organizers working on the frontlines of their communities and contributing to gender, racial, environmental, and economic equity through grassroots activism. This report highlights key themes that emerged and underscores the importance of cross-learning and shared space amongst frontline women mobilized across different issues.

Participant Profiles

Many of the participants in the Peace and Social Change Workshop work on issues not typically deemed “peace and security” topics. They are self-described “water protectors”, “radical mothers”, “environmental stewards”, and more. Participants were geographically and generationally diverse, bringing with them distinct perspectives based on their careers as organizers and thought leaders. All identified as working at the intersection of social justice concerns, including but not limited to: immigrant rights, reproductive health, gun violence, political representation, violence against women, environmental justice and police brutality.

Given the current global social and political climate, their work and the conversations over the two days made visible the need to deepen the category and understanding of “security.” Solidarity and social change movements in the United States and beyond- ranging from anti-violence against women (e.g. #metoo, Billion Women Rising, and Ni Una Menos) to the Movement for Black Lives and the Poor People’s Campaign—are sending clear messages on the importance of understanding peace and security beyond contexts of armed conflict and war. Fundamentally, workshop participants underscored how notions of security should also include struggles for sustainable collective and individual livelihoods, dignity and respect for all persons and social groups, and protection from avoidable harm to people and the environment.

Some participants came representing organizations that provide direct services, while others focused more on political advocacy and movement building. For example, Stephanie Guilloud of Project South describes her organization as “a thirty-year-old civil rights institution based in Atlanta. We do work around building, supporting and cultivating social movements. So we organize on the frontlines of Black young people in schools, immigration frontlines, and global Islamophobia frontlines. We do legal advocacy work, political education, and movement building across the 13 states of the U.S.

South.” Fatima Rahmati, from Women for Afghan Women, noted that while her organization does participate in advocacy, they also provide direct services like case management and legal support to their clients. She states, “our New York Community Center services the community, women and families, by providing pro-bono, holistic support, including: case management counseling and assistance with immigration, housing, public benefits, education, employment, and physical and mental health, domestic violence services, adult empowerment classes in ESL, United States citizenship test preparation and N.Y. written driving test preparation, a support group for women, and wellness workshops on topics such as safety, parenting, health, and domestic violence.”

Workshop Pedagogy

Participants shaped the two days together based on their distinct perspectives and areas of expertise. The workshop agenda was created based on initial survey data as well as tailored interviews with each participant leading up to the workshop about their respective organizations, current challenges they face, what tools or learning would be most useful to gain from one another, and expectations.



Workshop co-facilitator Margo Okazawa-Rey from the School of Leadership Studies at Fielding Graduate University. Photo by Luz Zamora

WPS program staff worked alongside co-facilitators Margo Okazawa-Rey from the School of Leadership Studies at Fielding Graduate University and María Elena Torre from the Public Science Project at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York to facilitate a pedagogical model for peer-to-peer exchange rooted in each activist’s unique experiences and priorities utilizing an adult-education model known as popular education, pioneered by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. During the workshop, participants and facilitators guided the direction of the conversations collaboratively, following the themes, topics, and priorities that emerged organically.

Central to the process was an exploration of what peace and security means to participants in the current global political context of heightened attacks on women, immigrants, communities of color, and the LGBTQIA community. Participants spoke to this by sharing their own interpretations of peace and security in the context of their organizing.

For example, Monalisa Smith, from Mothers for Justice and Equality, shared, “peace and security align with our mission at Mothers for Justice and Equality. Our vision is a world where it is not normal or acceptable for children to be murdered and incarcerated. Peace and security means we no longer have school to prison pipelines and that we nurture our young people.”

For Shikha Bhatnagar of the South Asian Network, peace and security means “that an individual in our community is able to live without fear. Without fear of being deported, discrimination, going bankrupt, or getting sick and not being able to afford healthcare.”

Participant Guerline Jozef of the Haitian Bridge Alliance works with immigrants in California and explained: “We understand that without peace and security, people are displaced and forced to migrate

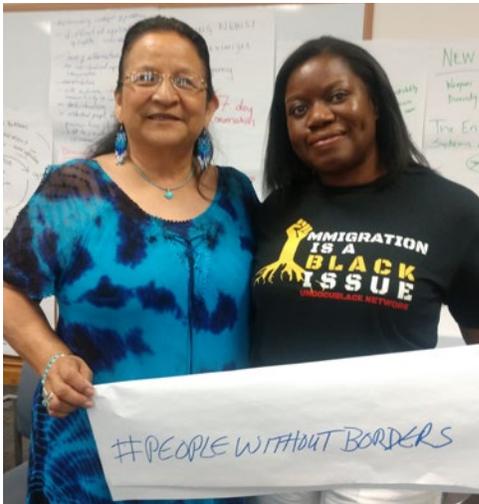
in search of a better life. So we look at peace and security as a way to protect people and give them an avenue to express themselves...without the fear of being deported or the fear of not being seen.

”Zakiyah Ansari from New York Statewide Alliance for Quality Education framed it this way: “Peace and security ensures that children will not have to worry about the cradle to prison pipeline; immigrant parents who are monolingual (in their own native language) will not have to worry about going to a meeting and receiving information in a language they don’t speak or understand; and that parents, especially brown parents, will be looked at as equals.”



Zakiyah Ansari from the New York State Alliance for Quality Education. Photo by Luz Zamora

Susana Almanza from PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources) noted: “Peace and security means human rights—it means having the right to shelter, having the right to health, having access to education and access to food.”



Participants Susana Almanza from PODER and Guerline Jozef from Haitian Bridge Alliance. Photo by Meredith Smith

Co-facilitator Margo Okazawa-Rey reflected: “Security, to me, means a sustainable environment and guaranteed livelihoods so that all human beings have everything they need not just to survive, but to thrive...Unless there’s justice for women, there’s never going to be justice for the community, or for the nation, or for the globe.”

Jessica Peñaranda of the Sex Workers Project stated: “What’s important is to see sex working people as humans deserving of their rights. Peace and security means individuals and communities embracing their power and existing without fear. Security and peace have to be centered around rights and enforcing access and community-building.”

Against a pedagogical commitment of wide and broad imaginings of the categories of peace and security, including within the United States, some key themes emerged from

the workshop: 1) The shrinking spaces for collaborative, intersectional work amongst frontline organizers within the United States and the undermining of possibilities for such work; 2) The need for increased documentation to showcase and make visible the work they are already doing; 3) The need for solidarity across siloed movements.

Key Themes to Emerge from Workshop Participants

THEME ONE:

The shrinking spaces for collaborative work amongst frontline organizers within the United States and the undermining of possibilities for such work

Many attendees expressed a desire for more opportunities for collaboration and identified externally-imposed pressures as contributing to siloed movements and isolation. More specifically, some participants argued that the competitive dynamics of the non-profit world, wherein organizers must compete over resources and media attention, limits knowledge-sharing among potential community partners within the United States. One participant, leading up to the workshop, shared with the WPS team that they feel “alienated from building collaboratively with other organizations because I know we are all seeking the same resources and that allocation of funding and attention is limited.”



Participants Ann Marie Goetz from the NYU School of Professional Studies Center for Global Affairs, Jessica Peñaranda from The Sex Workers Project, and Chardee Bryant from Beyond the Bars. Photo by Luz Zamora

Approximately two-thirds of participants mentioned that they seek more opportunities to connect with other grassroots practitioners but due to limited funding and time constraints rarely have the opportunity to do so. Participants were clear in their call for the need for collaborative, intersectional spaces of cross-learning, and in the investment in spaces for dialogue across movements and social justice organizations.

THEME TWO

The need for increased documentation to showcase and make visible the work they are already doing

While much of the workshop was about participants sharing insights and strategies for promoting secure communities, a common challenge discussed was the way in which many feel their contributions to the field are rarely taken seriously by large-scale, formal institutions. Not only are grassroots activists excluded from conversations about peace and security, but their contributions to the field often go undocumented. A significant part of the second day of the workshop was spent brainstorming ideas about how to best make visible the contributions of individuals in the room and the organizations they represent. In addition to limiting organizers from sharing their work and strategies with one another, lack of documentation also inhibits grassroots organizations from sharing their impact and attracting funders.

THEME THREE

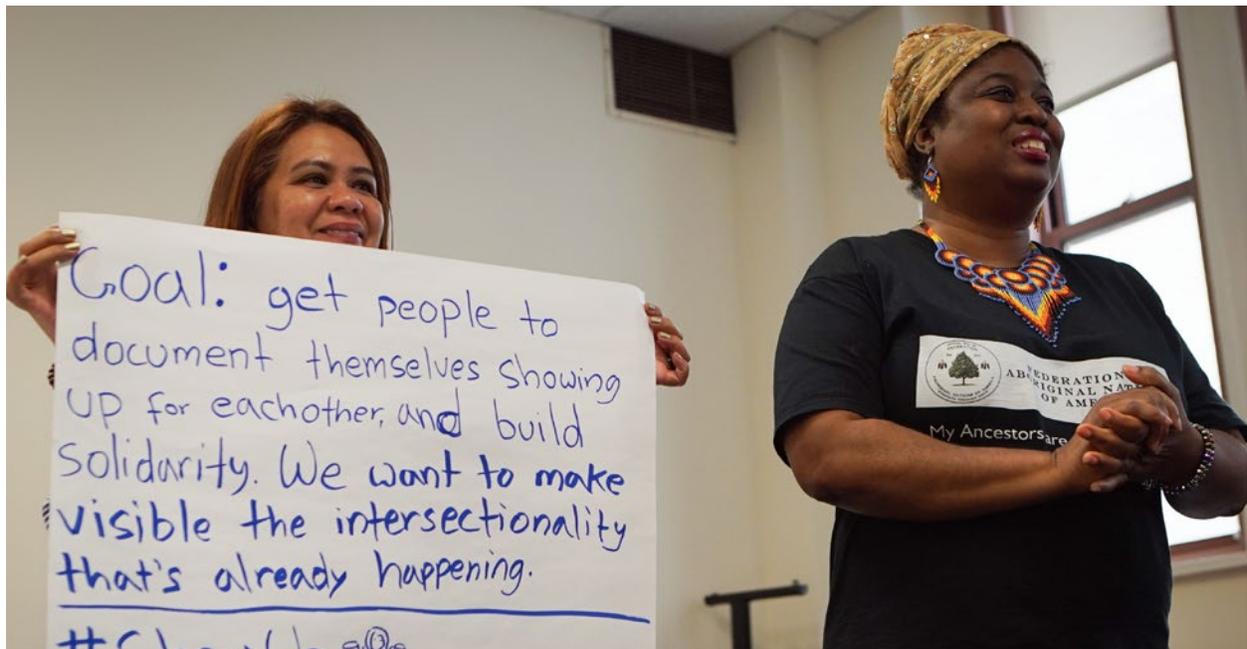
The need for solidarity across siloed movements in the face of inequality and limited resources

Although their work and interpretations of peace and security are distinct, workshop attendees identified many synergies across their areas of focus. The need for, and importance of, sharing space and identifying commonalities with one another was a central theme throughout the two days. Throughout the workshop, many participants recalled personal and intergenerational stories of structural inequality that affronted them, but also inspired their commitment to their communities and social justice. Through these conversations around shared experiences, participants were able to develop meaningful connections with one another across siloed movements.

Co-facilitators encouraged participants to think of these relationships as valuable resources and encouraged the group to not only see themselves as part of larger movements within the United States, but also in relationship with frontline communities beyond borders. WPS Executive Director Leymah Gbowee and co-facilitator Margo Okazawa-Rey shared their experiences of global movement-building and their organizing histories, providing perspectives beyond just the United States context.

María Elena Torre from the Public Science Project and Cheryl Wilkins from the Center for Justice at Columbia University led a discussion around ethical and creative solidarity, the relationship between activism and academia, and strategic uses of documentation and research in social justice organizing. This conversation helped blur the lines between academia and grassroots organizing, opening up new possibilities for radical solidarity.

Looking Forward



Participants Jessica Casanova from The Association to Benefit Children and Phyllis Utley from Greenfaith. Photo by Luz Zamora

The two days ended with a renewed sense of urgency, commitment, and energy. Jessica Peñaranda of the Sex Workers Project shared that the workshop “has been incredible and more than I could have

imagined. There was so much beauty, passion, and fire. I left feeling a real sense of community.” Margo Okazawa-Rey further elaborated this sentiment, stating that the workshop “reinforces my belief that sustaining change is about strong relationships, love, respect, and a willingness to confront differences and creative conflicts so that together we can envision the possibility of a world that is truly secure and just.” Reflecting upon her experience, Cheyenne Reynoso from Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples said, “I returned home feeling refreshed and rejuvenated—excited to get to work, but also re-grounded from the insight and support I felt from our group. I am energized and excited for how we will transform moving forward.”

The Peace and Social Change workshop made clear how imperative it is to prioritize shared learning among grassroots activists who intimately understand the consequences of—and strategic responses to—structural inequality. The existence of siloed movements is a result not of frontline activists’ unwillingness to work cooperatively, but rather, it emerges as a result of the aforementioned pressures and burdens placed on frontline activists due to scarce resources, delegitimization, and competing priorities. When given the opportunity to shape convenings based on their interests and expertise, women peace activists generate new knowledge that is grounded not only in their own but also others’ experiences, political frameworks, and ideologies. In other words, participants leave with more collective understanding of problems across contexts, shared challenges, and a sense of possibility and hope.

Universities and large-scale institutions committed to women, peace and security must take seriously the contributions of frontline activists by recognizing the importance of providing resources and spaces for them to learn from and with one another. Such processes are critical for collective theorizing and producing new knowledge surrounding organizing and systemic injustices. And also, perhaps most importantly, they are key to deepening relationships and connectivity among practitioners working on a wide range of interconnected—yet distinct—social movements.



Participants (left to right) Stephanie Guilloud, Cheryl Wilkins, Hannah Yore, Monalisa Smith, Guerline Jozef, and Margo Okazawa-Rey. Photo by Meredith Smith



Activists, practitioners and academics at the Peace and Social Change workshop. Photo by Meredith Smith

Peace and Social Change Workshop Attendees¹

Moumita Ahmed, Millennials for Revolution

Susana Almanza, PODER (People Organized in Defense of the Earth and her Resources)

Zakiyah Ansari, New York State Alliance for Quality Education

Shikha Bhatnagar, South Asian Network

Chardee Bryant, Beyond the Bars

Jessica Casanova, Association to Benefit Children

Leymah Gbowee, Women, Peace and Security Program, Columbia University

Anne Marie Goetz, NYU School of Professional Studies Center for Global Affairs (CGA)

Stephanie Guilloud, Project South

Sarah Jewell, Gbowee Peace Foundation

Guerline Jozef, Haitian Bridge Alliance

Haley Kottler, Trust Women

Marina Kumskova, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Mikaela Luttrell-Rowland, Women Peace and Security Program, Columbia University

Tamar Manasseh, Mothers Against Senseless Killings

Janessa Marquette, Women's March Minnesota

Ruth Messinger, American Jewish World Service

Margo Okazawa-Rey, School of Leadership Studies at Fielding Graduate University

Jessica Peñaranda, Sex Workers Project at The Urban Justice Center

Fatima Rahmati, Women for Afghan Women

Cheyenne Reynoso, Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples

Monalisa Smith, Mothers for Justice and Equality

Melissa Tanis, Beyond the Bars

Justina Trim, SisterSong

María Elena Torre, Public Science Project, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Phyllis Utley, Green Faith

JoAnna Wall, Take Root Conference

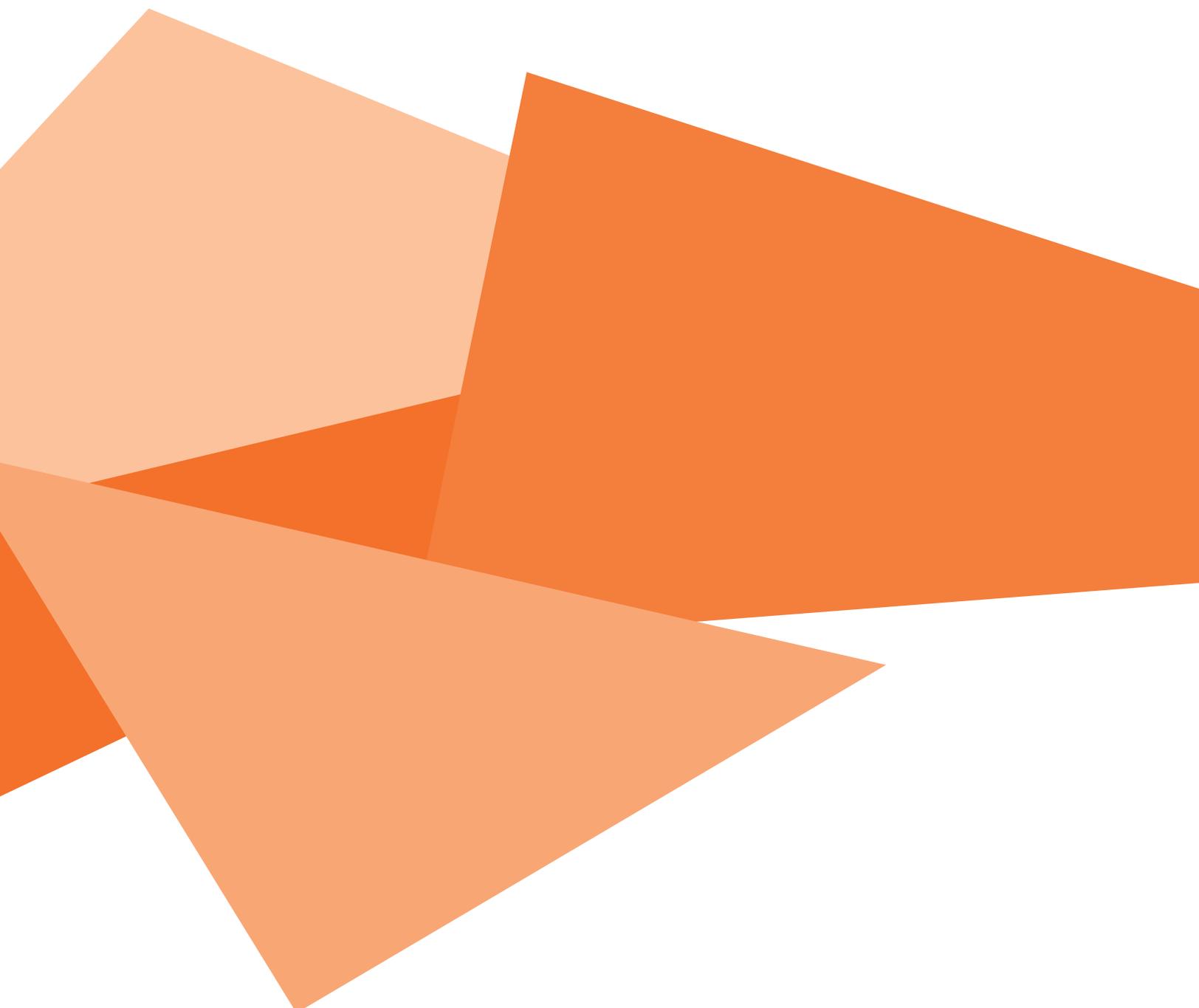
Cheryl Wilkins, Center for Justice, Columbia University

Hannah Yore, Women, Peace and Security Program, Columbia University

The Women, Peace and Security Program

The Earth Institute's Women, Peace and Security Program, directed by Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee at the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity (AC4), Columbia University, is guided by four principles that inform the program's mission and execution: 1) Grassroots women peacebuilders and frontline activists around the globe employ a diverse range of strategies and practices to forward and sustain justice in their communities. Often, such work is not recognized or named as peace work. 2) Security is more than armed conflict and war. It includes issues of every day safety like access to clean water, affordable housing, and bodily autonomy. 3) Expanded recognition of peace and security requires that we must not look only to war zones, but also to a range of contexts, places, and spaces—including the United States. 4) New analytical tools are needed to understand what "counts" as women's participation in peace activism across the globe.

¹ This list of participants and their organizational affiliation as of May 2018.



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