

# Introduction

‘Is preparation for war the best means of preserving peace?’<sup>1</sup> This was the question posed to the Australian federal government in 1947 by Doris Blackburn, the second woman elected to the House of Representatives. It was a pertinent question. Australia had recently entered into an agreement with the British Government, the Long-Range Weapons Project, to begin testing rockets on Australian soil at Woomera in South Australia. Blackburn was worried over signs of postwar militarism. She was not alone in her concerns, but even so they were brushed aside as Cold War anxieties created bipartisan support for armaments. ‘We appear to be dominated by the military machine—and that is a hideous admission to make after we have fought two great wars to end war’, she lamented.<sup>2</sup>

Blackburn’s lone protest was prescient in expressing the potential long-term dangers of the project. The agreement saw the eventual testing of rockets and atomic bombs in the Australian outback during the 1950s and 1960s. Remote areas in South Australia, including Maralinga, were offered up for this purpose. Nine atomic explosions took place, cratering and contaminating the land and displacing the Anangu traditional owners of the Maralinga Tjarutja lands.<sup>3</sup> In 2021 a group of scientists, led by Monash University researchers, published a study looking into the lasting effects on the environment of plutonium (Pu) and toxic uranium (U) fallout.<sup>4</sup> Their findings established that the particles ‘are actually more complex and varied than previously thought’ and, far from being stable and inert,

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1 Doris Blackburn, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)* vol. 190, 1 May 1947, 1826–45 in *Great Words: Speeches That Stirred Australia*, ed. Michael Cathcart and Kate Darian-Smith (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 218.

2 Blackburn in *Great Words*, 218.

3 See *Maralinga Tjarutja*, directed by Larissa Behrendt, ABC Blackfella Films, 2020.

4 Megan Cook et al., ‘The Nature of Pu-Bearing Particles from the Maralinga Nuclear Testing Site, Australia’, *Scientific Reports* 11, no. 1 (May 21, 2021): 10698, doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-89757-5.

react to the harsh arid environment and continue to slowly release Pu into the environment. Despite the millions of dollars that have been spent over several decades to remediate radioactive fallout, lead researcher Megan Cook recently recognised that ‘the resulting radioactive contamination and cover-up continues to haunt us’.<sup>5</sup>

With such deleterious effects on the landscape and environment persisting for almost 70 years after the event, many have wondered how approval for the testing could have been so freely given and why there was such a broad consensus for the project among the political establishment. When the proposal for the Woomera Prohibited Area, which included Maralinga, was debated in parliament in 1946, it was in an environment of secrecy and fear created by the continuing scars of World War II and the emerging realities of Cold War politics. Seeking self-reliance, the British Government invested in a weapons program that was not dependent on information from the US.<sup>6</sup> In Australia, the Chifley Labor Government, concerned with Pacific strategic planning and wanting to affirm the bonds of empire, ‘did not quibble about money, materials and men’ and gave every support to the joint military project.<sup>7</sup> Though there were grumblings and ‘lukewarm dissent from Canberra’s party politicians’ on the issue, the party discipline characteristic of Australian politics, and the path dependence of decision-making once funding started to pour into the program combined to ensure that almost all parliamentarians supported the deal.<sup>8</sup> All except Doris Blackburn.

Elected in 1946 as an independent Labor candidate for the Melbourne seat of Bourke, formerly held by her late husband Maurice Blackburn, she stood apart. An independent unconstrained by party discipline, Blackburn possessed the opportunity and felt the concomitant responsibility to raise objections publicly to policy she disagreed with. Through her longstanding involvement with organisations in the women’s peace movement she had acquired the language and critical perspective to evaluate and challenge prevailing orthodoxies around war and militarism. Her first contribution

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5 Gillian Aeria and Evelyn Leckie, ‘Fallout from Nuclear Tests at Maralinga Worse than Previously Thought’, *ABC News*, 22 May 2021, accessed 11 April 2022, [www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-22/maralinga-nuclear-particles-more-reactive/100157478](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-22/maralinga-nuclear-particles-more-reactive/100157478).

6 Margaret Gowing, *Reflections on Atomic Energy History*, The Rede Lecture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 12.

7 LF Crisp, *Ben Chifley: A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1961), 282.

8 Deborah Wilson, ‘Different White People: Communists, Unionists and Aboriginal Rights 1946–1972’ (PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2013), 105.

to parliamentary debate was to question the rocket testing in Australia, articulating her concern that work had commenced without debate.<sup>9</sup> She moved a motion in March 1947 and gave two passionate speeches to the parliament elucidating the impact the testing of rockets would have on Aboriginal communities and lamenting the secrecy and militarisation of society in a time of peace.<sup>10</sup>

The major parties circumscribed debate and her motion was defeated. Yet without Blackburn's intervention the use of Australian territory as a laboratory for the detonation and subsequent study of irradiating weapons of mass destruction would have gone without scrutiny. The Australian parliament does not constitutionally have a defined role in approving military decisions; they can be unilaterally announced by the prime minister. Her opposition, though lonely, was insistent. When near the end of her term in 1949 rumours surfaced that the atomic bomb might soon be tested in Australia, she forthrightly asked if this was true, reminding the government that the defence minister had said in 1946 'reports that huge areas in central Australia will be blasted by explosives are highly coloured figments of the imagination.'<sup>11</sup> But the imaginary soon became real as an election saw policy priorities change, and the limited restraint of the Chifley Labor Government gave way to the imperial enthusiasm of the Menzies Coalition Government. Meanwhile, Blackburn had lost her seat after an electoral redistribution.

Blackburn's stand reminds us of the nuance, sophistication and resolution of opposition to militarism and war in Australian history. Far from being marginal, as many have characterised opposition groups, Blackburn made her protest in the parliament. Politicians had no defence of ignorance. Blackburn's actions are of a piece with the cohort of Australian women who embraced an internationalist perspective that oriented their values and priorities towards humanitarianism. Blackburn continued her activism on the issue through the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an organisation of which she had been president from 1928 to 1930, and which she again took leadership of during the 1950s.

9 Carolyn Rasmussen, *The Blackburns: Private Lives, Public Ambition* (South Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2019), 278.

10 Doris Blackburn, *CPD*, vol. 190, 1 May 1947, 1826–45 in Cathcart and Darian-Smith, *Great Words*, 218.

11 Doris Blackburn, 'Question Atomic Energy Speech', *CPD*, House of Representatives, Thursday, 6 October 1949, 1048. See also: J.L. Symonds, *A History of British Atomic Tests in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1985), 62.

She continued to hold public meetings about atomic weapons and used WILPF as an organisation to persist with her political activism. This book is a detailed history of the Australian branch of the WILPF. First established during the Great War, campaigning against militarism and particularly the development of nuclear weapons has been part of WILPF's agenda for action that has engaged many women over more than a century.

Throughout the twentieth century, the women of WILPF have challenged politicians, and the public more broadly, to consider a different path on issues of arms production, violence and war. Understanding the history of WILPF's activism against nuclear weapons remains relevant today, as a new generation of activists continue the campaign. In 2007 the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was established in Melbourne, becoming a key international coalition of lobby groups including representatives from WILPF.<sup>12</sup> ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its advocacy at the United Nations (UN). In October 2020 the aim of its campaign was realised when the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons became international law, entering into force in January 2021.<sup>13</sup> It was the first legally binding agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons globally.

While WILPF's international advocacy remains relevant, the story of WILPF in Australia is as much about its impact on individual lives as its effect on international law. This is a history of women, like Blackburn, who committed to local and international peace activism over extended periods. They gave their energy to promoting WILPF's message in a variety of forums and in disparate contexts as Australia's national identity and military allegiances shifted over time. Providing a place and a reason to encourage women to become active and take political leadership roles is a defining part of WILPF's legacy. Knowing about the tactics and activities of WILPF extends our understanding of women's place in politics over the twentieth century.

War, and its all-encompassing impact on society, led many women to consider political involvement, even at times when there was significant discrimination around the world against women's involvement in policymaking. While WILPF has not realised its foundational goal to abolish war, the organisation's persistence in promoting its message in the

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12 Ray Acheson, *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 57.

13 Acheson, *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy*, xxi.

face of many difficulties has been a defining aspect of its role and legacy. Since World War I it has provided something greater than an organisation for protesting the horrors of war: it became a network that encouraged women to consider their power in politics, at a time when they were often marginalised from the inner workings of power and policymaking. With a need to look once more at how to mediate conflicts across the world, understanding the history of WILPF may encourage us to ask what gender has to do with complex global problems and to revisit the solutions offered by women in the past.

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In Melbourne, in 1915, a small group of women came together to express their opposition to their country's rush towards militarist nationalism and imperialism. They questioned the legitimacy of the Great War and, perhaps, all war. Brought together in the liberal Australian Church, they formed the Sisterhood of International Peace (the Sisterhood). A few weeks later, the Women's Political Association (WPA) created the Women's Peace Army (the Peace Army) to similarly register their dissatisfaction and find a political space to express anti-war dissent. The two groups both collaborated and disagreed; their differences anticipated divisions to come.

The Sisterhood focused on education to change public opinion through reasoned argument and the provision of information. In their monthly newsletter, *Peacewards*, the Sisterhood wrote of their intention to 'unite Australian women among themselves, and with women throughout the world, in throwing the weight of Woman's influence into the scale of international goodwill.'<sup>14</sup> This meant creating a 'new international ideal and spirit', which they felt women were uniquely positioned to advocate, 'in the family, in the social circle, in the school, in shops and factories, in churches, on the platform, and at the polling-booth'.<sup>15</sup> Many of these Australian women found a spirit of kinship and support among women overseas, who had similarly turned their minds to organising internationally against war.

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14 'Annual Report of the Sisterhood of International Peace', *Peacewards*, published as a supplement to the Australian Church's *Commonweal*, 1 May 1916, State Library of Victoria (SLV), 13.

15 'Annual Report of the Sisterhood of International Peace', *Peacewards*, 1 May 1916, 13.

In the same year the Sisterhood and the Peace Army were established, a call went out to convene a Women's International Congress at The Hague, and over 1,200 women from neutral and belligerent nations made the difficult wartime journey to discuss ending the war. They formed the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP) and opened an office in Amsterdam.<sup>16</sup> In 1919, after the war had ended, they convened another conference in Zurich, where the organisation formally became known as WILPF. Their aims were to 'support movements to further peace, internationalism and the freedom of women', and to organise protest 'against the madness and the horror of war'.<sup>17</sup> Their method was to focus on international lobbying for peace by encouraging the new League of Nations to settle disputes through arbitration, conciliation and universal disarmament. The international bureau, later affectionately named the Maison Internationale, was established in Geneva specifically to be close to the new League of Nations headquarters.<sup>18</sup> It became the base for operations as well as a hostel and meeting place for women visiting from all over the world. The national sections of WILPF gained their funding from membership fees, journal subscriptions and fundraising. Each section then paid a yearly affiliation fee of 50 Swiss francs that contributed to the financial support of WILPF's international office. During the 1919 conference, the two Australian groups, the Sisterhood and the Peace Army, became affiliated and formed a cohesive national section of WILPF.

The inaugural president of WILPF International was Jane Addams (1860–1935), an American based in Chicago with a long and illustrious record as a Progressive-era social reformer committed to the welfare of the poor, the sick, women and children. Her fellow countrywoman Emily Greene Balch was elected the secretary general, moving to Geneva to establish the office. Both subsequently won Nobel Peace Prizes for their international work.<sup>19</sup>

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16 GC Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965). Information about the 1915 congress was published immediately after by Jane Addams, Emily G Balch and Alice Hamilton, *Women at The Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1915).

17 WILPF, Geneva Switzerland, 'Report of the Second International Congress of Women', Zurich 1919, accessed through database edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present*, 280.

18 'Report of the Second International Congress of Women', Zurich 1919, 287.

19 Laura Beers, 'Advocating for a Feminist Internationalism Between the Wars', in *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James (New York: Routledge, 2015), 202.

Every nation was eligible to create a national section. Though it was born international, WILPF ‘has never been a homogenous organisation, even within individual sections’ and the development of sections across the world has been distinctive, making branch histories different across the world.<sup>20</sup> An executive committee was elected at the international congress that met once a year, appointing subcommittees when necessary. A consultative committee was also formed, which consisted of two people from each national section who attended the executive committee meetings to keep all groups informed of the organisation’s progress.<sup>21</sup> The highest decision-making body was the international congress held every three years that elected the president and the executive committee. The first constitution gave each national section 20 delegates and 10 alternate delegates. In 1915, there were 13 national sections, increasing to 19 by 1919, when Australia became a national section.<sup>22</sup> In 2022 there were 52 national sections, the largest and most inclusive the organisation has been.<sup>23</sup> WILPF has held consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 1948, as well as with other international bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the UN Children’s fund in New York.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Rhona Ovedoff, WILPF profile in *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, ed. Barbara Caine (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), 522. Various national section histories have been completed on the US, Canada, UK and New Zealand such as: Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Carrie A Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–1946* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–1975* (Carbondale, Ill.; London: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); Melinda Plastas, *A Band of Noble Women: Racial Politics in the Women’s Peace Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Beverly Lynn Boutillier, ‘Educating for Peace and Co-Operation: The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in Canada, 1919–1929’ (MA thesis, Carleton University (Canada), 1988); Megan Hutching, ‘Turn Back this Tide of Barbarism: New Zealand Women who were Opposed to War, 1896–1919’ (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1990); Betty Holt, *Women for Peace and Freedom: A History of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in New Zealand* (Wellington: The League, 1985); Elise Locke, *Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992).

21 Ovedoff in Caine, *Australian Feminism*, 522.

22 Leila J Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 17, doi.org/10.1515/9780691221816.

23 ‘WILPF National Sections’, accessed 5 October 2020, wilpf.org/wilpf/sections/.

24 Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women’s Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 136, doi.org/10.5040/9781350220287.

There has been a considerable amount of historical research into WILPF's international office and activities, particularly on the way in which the international sphere offered space, experience and networks of support for women's voices and activism.<sup>25</sup> There has been less work on the Australian section. Though formed in the same year as the 'birth' of the Anzac legend, the history of the WILPF has been overshadowed by the increasing glorification of the Anzacs over the twentieth century. Indeed, military history has often trumped the history of anti-war and peace movements. The most wholehearted supporters of Anzac condemn challenges to its importance or its centrality to understanding modern 'Australian values'. Buoyed by massive funding from government and the private sector, in the past 20 years Anzac commemoration has militarised Australia's popular history—encouraging school children and communities more generally to honour the landing at Gallipoli in 1915 as the birthplace of the nation.<sup>26</sup> More recently, the Liberal/National federal government committed to investing \$500 million to expand the War Memorial in Canberra, turning the space into what some critics are calling a militarised 'Disneyland', where exhibits are sponsored by armaments manufacturers.<sup>27</sup>

Anzac Day parades and celebrations have historically struggled to incorporate uncomfortable truths about the realities of war. In the 1980s when women activists challenged commemorators to remember women

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25 For example see: Rupp, *Worlds of Women*; Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*; Catherine Foster, *Women For All Seasons: The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Linda K Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom before World War II* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), doi.org/10.1515/9781503623873; Catia Cecilia Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Feminist Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199845231.001.0001; Carol Miller, "'Geneva – the Key to Equality": Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations', *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 219–45, doi.org/10.1080/09612029400200051.

26 Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *What's Wrong With Anzac? The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010).

27 Paul Daley, 'We Demean our History When We Turn the Australian War Memorial into Disneyland', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2019, [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/postcolonial-blog/2019/sep/05/we-demean-our-history-when-we-turn-the-australian-war-memorial-into-disneyland](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/postcolonial-blog/2019/sep/05/we-demean-our-history-when-we-turn-the-australian-war-memorial-into-disneyland), accessed 6 September 2019. See also Paul Daley, 'An Australian War Memorial Sponsored by Weapons Dealers is No Place for Quiet Reflection on Anzac Day', *The Guardian*, 25 April 2022, accessed 26 April 2022, [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/postcolonial-blog/2022/apr/25/an-australian-war-memorial-sponsored-by-weapons-dealers-is-no-place-for-quiet-reflection-on-anzac-day](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/postcolonial-blog/2022/apr/25/an-australian-war-memorial-sponsored-by-weapons-dealers-is-no-place-for-quiet-reflection-on-anzac-day).



raped in war they were threatened with sexual violence and arrested.<sup>28</sup> In Canberra in 1981 the ‘threat’ to Anzac Day from protests by women led the Minister for the Capital Territory, Michael Hodgman, to amend the local traffic ordinance so that anyone ‘likely to give offense or cause insult’ to the ‘official’ commemorators could be charged. This prompted a debate about who had the right to participate.<sup>29</sup> Labor senator for the Australian Capital Territory, Susan Ryan, decried the move to ‘deny the rights of people to participate in the Anzac Day ceremony in the way they wished’ as a misguided objective and called out the ‘prejudice and viciousness’ of Hodgman’s ‘attack on the women’s movement—indeed on any women who do not happen to meet his peculiarly narrow and repressive view of what women ought to do.’<sup>30</sup> In such ways, Anzac Day was contested even while some sought to guard an authorised narrative through the exclusion of dissent.

In the immediate aftermath of World War I, Anzac Day was a more sombre and solemn occasion. The glorification of war was distasteful to many who were recovering from the trauma of wartime service and the loss of loved ones. It was also less common in 1919 to see Gallipoli as a defining moment in the making of the Australian nation.<sup>31</sup> Many wanted to recover and move on from the destruction of the war and Anzac Day was an occasion of mourning. WILPF women wrote of sending ‘sympathies ... to the many whose homes were on that day darkened, and whose hearts were torn’, noting that the commemoration should ‘impress on us more deeply the folly and crime of war, and stir us up to wage ceaseless war against it, as the enemy of mankind!’<sup>32</sup>

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28 Meredith Burgmann, ‘The Women Against Rape in War Collective’s Protests against ANZAC Day in Sydney, 1983 and 1984’, *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 6, no. 3 (2014): 4222, doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v6i3.4222. See also Amy Way, ‘Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial’, *Making History at Macquarie*, 18 November 2013, makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-anzac-myth-and-memorial/, accessed 20 October 2022. Adrian Howe, ‘Anzac Mythology and the Feminist Challenge’ in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 304. See also Sarah Dowse and Patricia Giles, ‘Australia: Women in a Warrior Society’, in *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology*, ed. Robin Morgan (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984).

29 Dowse and Giles, ‘Australia: Women in a Warrior Society’; Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global*, 113.

30 Senator Ryan, *CPD*, ‘Traffic (Amendment) Ordinance’, Senate, 8 September 1981, 520.

31 Carolyn Holbrook, *Anzac: The Unauthorised Biography* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2014), 211. Lake and Reynolds, *What’s Wrong With Anzac?*, 73.

32 ‘ANZAC DAY’, *Peacewards*, 1 May, 1918, Box 1731/6 Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.



**Women's march on Anzac Day in Canberra, Anzac Parade, 1981.**

Source: Photo courtesy of Margaret Bearlin.

If there is not a nuanced engagement with the history and commemoration of war in Australia, including understanding opposition to it, there are real world consequences. Excessive cultural veneration of the military that imbues national forces with 'moral and military exceptionalism', has facilitated war crimes and shielded perpetrators from investigation.<sup>33</sup> A disproportionate focus on military engagements in Australian history obscures how women, and organisations like WILPF in the peace movement, have engaged with and helped change Australian democracy over time. The meaning of warfare has until recently been understood by narrowly defining the contributions of men and women in traditional gender roles, where the idealised masculine attributes of soldiers and combatant men were given primary importance.<sup>34</sup> WILPF women at times reinforced the dichotomies, portraying women as in need of male protection, yet they always tried to articulate the different experiences women had of war and to determine whether this stemmed from innate characteristics or socialisation. Their willingness to question the

33 Mia Martin Hobbs, 'Why Soldiers Commit War Crimes—and What We Can Do About It', in *Lessons from History*, ed. Carolyn Holbrook, Lyndon Megarrity and David Lowe (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2022), 228, 236. Kevin Foster, 'The Diseased Orchard: Australia's Collective Moral Failures in Afghanistan', *Australian Book Review*, no. 446 (September 2022): 18.

34 Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 3.

gendered experiences of war and recognise power imbalances between the sexes complicates our understanding of women in wartime in Australia and provides a counterpoint to the prevailing narrative of sacrifice and mateship.

WILPF was defined, in an Australian context, by both its longevity and its internationalism. It occupies a significant place in the history of the Australian peace movement, in part, because it has endured. Undertaking its activities in war as well as peace has distinguished WILPF from other peace organisations that rose and fell in rhythm with the crises that instigated their birth. WILPF Australia is also significant historically because its professed internationalism often, though not invariably, set it at odds with national priorities and interests. An internationalist orientation, as well as networks and connections with the League of Nations and the UN, meant that WILPF women usually adopted a distinctive perspective on local politics and international relations. Moreover, being a women-only organisation allowed many women to take on leadership roles within the wider peace movement, which was otherwise dominated by men's organisations such as the Australian Peace Alliance (APA) and trade unions.

WILPF also supported and encouraged women to take leadership in society more generally. Many prominent female politicians have been members or supporters of the organisation. Despite higher ideals of internationalism, they recognised the need to institute change through domestic political forums and pioneered ways of doing so. In 1962, Lynda Heaven was the first Labor woman elected to the Tasmanian House of Assembly. After her term in office, she found an outlet for her political energy by becoming Tasmanian WILPF president in 1966. Federally, Doris Blackburn was elected as an independent Labor Member of the House of Representatives in 1946 and was president of WILPF both before and after. Carolyn Jakobsen was elected in the House of Representatives for the seat of Cowan in Western Australia (WA) for the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1984 until 1993, and served as the chair of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party while an active WILPF member.<sup>35</sup> Jakobsen, Elaine Darling and Margaret Reynolds refused to support military intervention in the Persian Gulf in 1991 leading to their censure by the ALP Caucus for dissenting against the government on the war. Margaret Reynolds was elected a senator for Queensland for the ALP in 1983, and she is currently (2023) serving as national president of the Australian WILPF section.

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35 Marian Sawyer, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 173.

With more women entering parliament around the world by the 1980s, an organisation called the World Women Parliamentarians for Peace (WWPP) was established in Stockholm in 1985 with 580 members from 63 countries.<sup>36</sup> Western Australian Senator Pat Giles, elected for the ALP in 1974, became the president of WWPP in 1988 and hosted the annual conference in Parliament House. Pacifist women were beginning to find electoral success in democratic institutions, insistent on having their voices heard in military decisions and creating global organisations to support feminist interventions in parliamentary debates. Yet despite hosting the event at Parliament House with elected representatives from around the world, their gathering was still considered 'unofficial'.<sup>37</sup> Giles was mentored by leading WILPF woman Irene Greenwood, and became a 'confirmed internationalist' when she attended the 1975 UN women's conference in Mexico City in Greenwood's place.<sup>38</sup> Other examples of female politicians being connected with WILPF include the senator for WA Jo Vallentine, elected in 1984 for the Nuclear Disarmament Party, and sitting from 1985 as an independent and later for the Greens WA; the senator for Queensland (QLD) Cheryl Kernot, first elected in 1990 for the Australian Democrats, later joining Labor; the senator for New South Wales (NSW) Irina Dunn, a Nuclear Disarmament Party candidate who would sit as an independent from 1988 until 1990 after filling a casual vacancy; and the senator for QLD Claire Moore, first elected 2001 for the ALP and retiring in 2019. The Labor senator for Tasmania (TAS), Lisa Singh, who was first elected in 2011, singled out WILPF out for the positivity many of their members brought into the cynical world of politics: 'despite all the atrocities going on in the world, they start their meetings by acknowledging all the good things, and the wins, however small, that have taken place in the name of peace'.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Senator Patricia Giles, 'World Women Parliamentarians for Peace', press release, 7 September 1990, accessed 11 April 2022, [parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HNC062015050919/upload\\_binary/HNC062015050919.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22world%20women%20parliamentarians%20for%20peace%22](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/HNC062015050919/upload_binary/HNC062015050919.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22world%20women%20parliamentarians%20for%20peace%22).

37 Department of the House of Representatives, *Annual Report 1988–89* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989), 18.

38 Leckie Hopkins and Lynn Roarty, *Among the Chosen: The Life Story of Pat Giles* (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2010), 42.

39 Senator Hon. Lisa Singh, 'Foreword', in *Prevailing for Peace: The History of the WILPF Tasmanian Branch 1920–2013*, ed. Linley Grant et al. (North Hobart: WILPF, 2015).



**Anti-Gulf War demonstration on lawns at Parliament House: Senator Jo Vallentine (Greens Party) talking to anti-war demonstrators, 31 January 1991.**

Source: Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: A13966, 910006.

Despite acknowledged gender bias in the nomination for Australia Day honours, prominent members have received honours for their work associated with WILPF. They include women such as Edith Waterworth OBE (1935), Lynda Heaven MBE (1968), Joyce Clague MBE (1977), Margaret Forte OAM (1986), Stella Cornelius AO (1987), Evelyn Rothfield OAM (1988), Elizabeth Mattick OAM (1993) and Margaret Holmes AM (2001), just to name a few. It is an impressive list, even if it pales compared with the numbers receiving military honours. Margot Roe was entered on the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women in 2005 to celebrate her commitment to human rights through WILPF activity.<sup>40</sup> Irene Greenwood AM (1975) even had a flagship of the WA state fleet named in her honour.<sup>41</sup>

The organisation provided a place for such women to have their words recorded and amplified when opportunities in public life were severely limited. It was therefore often a vehicle for political women to gain access to power and a platform to lobby throughout the twentieth century, whether they were committed life members, or transient activists utilising an organisation's reputation and strength. Exploring the extensive archives of WILPF illuminates both how Australian women engaged in international political action, and what the distinctive challenges of internationalism were throughout the century, as well as its promise and rewards. Engaging in international politics for most women was structurally different from official diplomatic forms of internationalism, usually dominated by men 'doing internationalism' as an extension of their official roles in national politics, requiring an immense personal commitment of funds and energy. Official internationalism was more exclusive, elite and well-funded by governments prioritising national interest in international arenas with carefully chosen delegates.<sup>42</sup> The lack of funding and insecurity of travel for non-state actors, particularly those representing women's organisations, meant their experiences were different, more self-conscious and potentially

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40 Linley Grant, Kay Binet and Alison Alexander, 'Margot Roe: An Appreciation', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 63, no. 2 (July 2016): 102.

41 Irene Greenwood, Australian Women's Register, accessed 16 May 2017, [www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0805b.htm](http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0805b.htm). See biography in Appendix.

42 Glenda Sluga has written extensively on internationalism as a political movement in Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), doi.org/10.9783/9780812207781. Glenda Sluga, 'Add Women and Stir: Gender and the History of International Politics', *Humanities Australia*, no. 5 (2014): 65–72; Marilyn Lake, 'Women's International Leadership', in *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ed. Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein and Mary Tomsic (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014): 71–90, doi.org/10.22459/DL.11.2014.04.



more personally transformative. They did not primarily see internationalism in terms of globalisation or imperialism, which they felt compelled to 'fight against'.<sup>43</sup> Rather, their understanding of the political ideal was focused on worldwide humanitarianism and democracy and could encompass constructive national patriotism. Australian democracy has changed dramatically over the last century, most significantly in the way women have been able to engage in the political process. This study looks at the women active in WILPF to observe their role in this transformation, questioning the boundaries of inclusion and the purposes for which democracy should be harnessed.

WILPF's international structure was tailored towards encouraging women to put aside national loyalties and find common identity in their condition and values as women.<sup>44</sup> They wished to reform the League of Nations rather than model their operation on its more formal traditional diplomatic style. Yet just as official delegations had difficulty considering international policy without taking national interests into account, WILPF women also found that the world of nation-states and national interests compromised and at times clashed with their commitment to international idealism. At the same time the practical experience of international politics often shaped approaches to national politics and policy. This work does not shy away from mapping the tensions and contradictions between international visions and national commitments, asking how the women dealt with them to shape a coherent political message and how this message changed over time.

Women's groups have always balanced interest in internationalism with the reality that many political decisions were made, and political action taken, at the national level. However, at times, the international sphere operated as a distinct arena where women could gain more power to implement their political ideas nationally. As WILPF was primarily interested in foreign policy and founded at a time when dominions such as Australia still deferred many decisions about international relations to the imperial government, internationalism offered a pathway for pressuring the network

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43 The *Woman Voter* would state in the header and footer of their paper that they were 'For Internationalism, Against Imperialism', 3 July 1919, 3.

44 For example, at international congresses, despite being elected by national sections, women were not 'expected to promote their interests of their own respective countries'. Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Women's History Review* 2, no. 1 (March 1993): 33, doi.org/10.1080/09612029300200021.

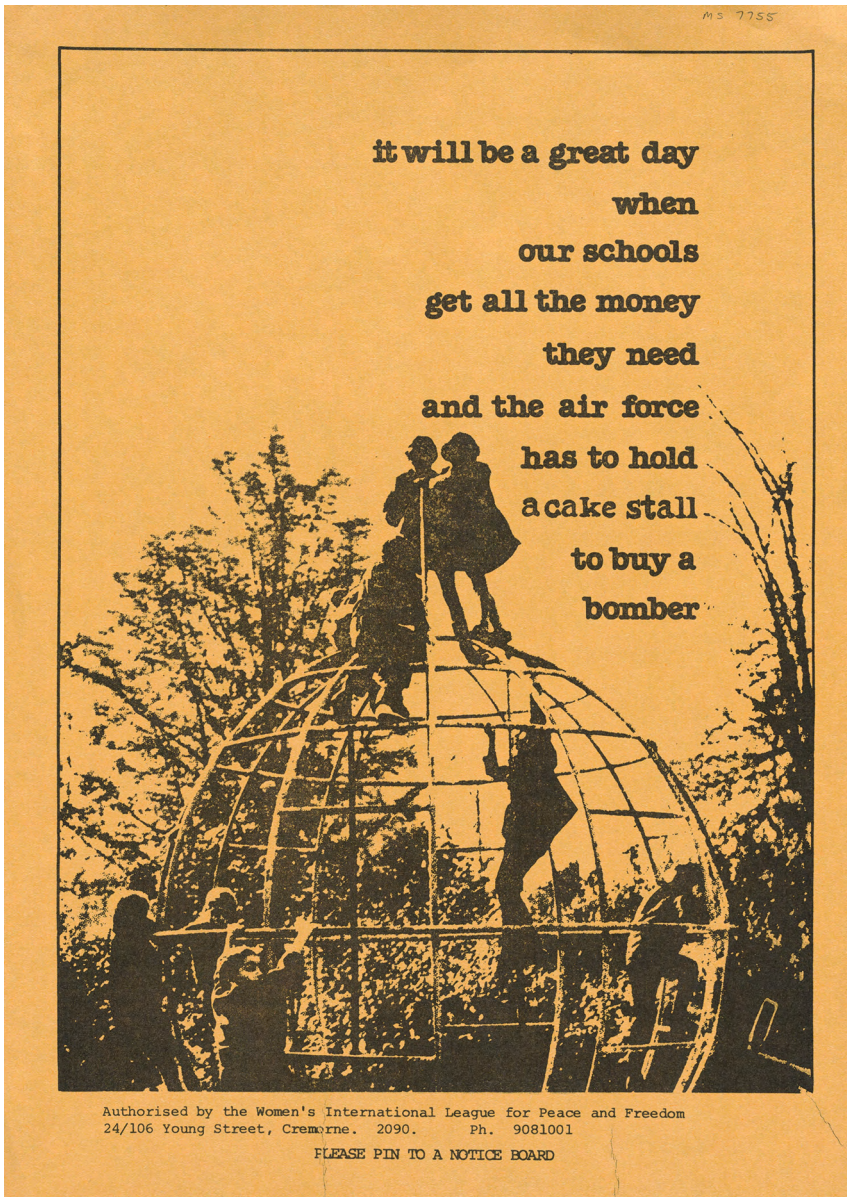
of British nations and for amplifying their collective voice in the world. While members joined for different reasons, and many did aspire to a cosmopolitanism they felt Australia lacked, this organisation was not about leaving Australia in search of culture overseas. It was organised politically to achieve national peace when wars were an international affair. This book takes their organisation seriously as a legitimate place of political action and activity. While few members were able to hold positions of influence and political power because of the structural barriers placed on their sex, they nonetheless contributed time, energy and thought to problems that confronted humanity in the twentieth century.

There is a large range of archival sources about WILPF available in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra as well as internationally. The central narrative of this work centres on activities in Melbourne and Sydney as women in these cities dominated most of the communication between the section branches and the international office. To balance the dominance of the eastern state members I have researched the activities and views of women from other states wherever possible. An investigation into the membership reveals how WILPF was influenced by dominant personalities who had the means to make a heavy commitment to its work. Researching WILPF across several decades shows the importance of family dynasties, with daughters, nieces, sisters-in-law all appearing in the archives, supporting an organisational structure almost matrilineal in nature. For instance the president of WILPF in the 1970s, Elspeth Christiansen, had aunts who were involved in the founding of the Sisterhood in 1915.<sup>45</sup> Margaret Holmes, Anna Vroland and Doris Blackburn all persuaded their family members to become office bearers. WILPF was an organisation fired by radical ambitions and attitudes, yet it drew on a profoundly domestic heritage.

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45 Elspeth Christiansen, WILPF personality profile, *Peace and Freedom* 22, no. 4, December 1985, Box 5/35 Meredith Stokes papers, NLA.





**WILPF Poster: 'It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the air force has to hold a cake stall to buy a bomber', undated, but likely authorised in the 1980s when Elizabeth Mattick was the branch president.**

Source: WILPF, Australian Section, 1943-2014 [manuscript] Box 8 Folder 57 MS 7755 NLA.

When it came to politics WILPF followed a broad-church approach, always aiming to bring people of different political persuasions together in the struggle for peace. As an organisation it was never absolutely pacifist, though many of its members were. Nor was it explicitly feminist, organising as a women's-only group because it articulated how women experienced war differently. This illustrated the complexities over the decades of the twentieth century with categorising and labelling women's political activity. Many women were wealthy, but even if they had to work they nonetheless were usually well educated and had the confidence to build networks and speak out about their ideas. Irene Greenwood acknowledged the criticism of their class composition in 1975:

I don't disguise the fact that they were middle class, nor apologise for it because they had the privilege to do these things. We were very effective in our time for this very reason. We served our purpose against our historical and class background at the time.<sup>46</sup>

Internationalism was an expensive exercise. While many self-funded trips overseas, their fundraising helped others to attend conferences. Each woman shared their experiences of her journey through lectures and speaking engagements, through which WILPF in its local incarnation helped to connect not just the travelling elite who could afford it, but the Australian-bound yet politically interested membership who were less mobile.

WILPF members were intensely productive, both nationally and internationally. They formulated positions on almost all conflicts in the world, with members writing papers, histories and letters, and delivering public talks on all sorts of topics. These archives reveal much about the issues that caught their imagination and the dynamics of the peace movement. The women who speak loudest through the records are those who wrote and signed letters. Undoubtedly, there were many more members who actively participated at several levels. Although WILPF remains an active political group today, I have not used oral histories as a main source for my study, deciding rather to research the texts that comprise the voluminous archives. The aim was primarily to write a political history rather than provide an exploration of contemporary memory. I have nevertheless been the beneficiary of much assistance from WILPF members who have facilitated my research efforts in unlikely places.

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46 Irene Greenwood, 'A Lifetime of Political Activity', *Women and Politics Conference Volume 1* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977), 60.

Activists meticulously documented their activities and archived their papers expecting, or hoping, that their work would one day be of interest. Eleanor Moore published a memoir of her experiences in the peace movement in 1948, utilising the vast archives of peace material she had amassed throughout her decades of involvement in the movement.<sup>47</sup> Moore's work was self-published, and is limited in many ways as a source—it did not have a wide release and arguably portrayed events as she hoped they had been, as she reflected on them years after. She had given the manuscript to fellow well-known pacifist Kenneth Rivett for comment but then proceeded to ignore all his recommended changes before publication.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, it remains a crucial source in understanding the history of WILPF, providing rare insight into Moore's thinking and, as she led the organisation for three decades, it lays out the progression of their activities throughout the early twentieth century.

In their lifelong commitments, which they considered 'as patriotic as [those] of the warriors on the battlefield', WILPF members believed they would receive appropriate historical recognition.<sup>49</sup> This book aims to offer such recognition and provide a critical assessment of the Australian section of WILPF's extensive commitment to anti-war activism. Existing studies of WILPF in Australia have been partial and missed the rich resources of its international archive.<sup>50</sup> There have been biographical studies of individual Australian members and WILPF has featured in various studies of the women's movement through its interaction with other organisations, but not as the focus of a separate study.<sup>51</sup>

47 Eleanor M Moore, *The Quest for Peace, As I Have Known It in Australia* (Melbourne, 1948).

48 Malcolm Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter: The Life and Thought of an Australian Pacifist: Eleanor May Moore 1875–1949* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1993), 351.

49 'Annual Report of the Sisterhood of International Peace', *Peacewards*, 1 May 1916, accessed SLV, 13.

50 Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter*; Malcolm Saunders, 'Are Women More Peaceful than Men? The Experience of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–39', *Interdisciplinary Peace Research* 3, no. 1 (1 May 1991): 45–61, doi.org/10.1080/14781159108412732; Malcolm Saunders, 'The Early Years of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: 1915–49', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 82, no. 2 (December 1996): 180–91; Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Summy, 'Odd Ones Out: The Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: 1919–41', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 40, no. 1 (7 April 2008): 83–97, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1994.tb00093.x.

51 Such as: Janet Morice, *Six-Bob-a-Day Tourist* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1985); Kay Murray, *Voice for Peace: The Spirit of Social Activist Irene Greenwood 1898–1992* (Bayswater, WA: Kay Murray Productions, 2005); Hilary Summy, *Peace Angel of World War I: Dissent of Margaret Thorp* ([Brisbane]: Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2006); Michelle Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes: The Life and Times of an Australian Peace Campaigner* (Sydney: New Holland, 2006). See also: Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824833428.001.0001; Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia 1896–2006* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015). Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999).

While WILPF women wanted their own activism known and understood, they also hoped for a more academic focus on peaceful strategies to resolve conflict. WILPF constantly advocated for peace research in universities, otherwise known as the study of irenology. In Australia the aptly named Irene Greenwood led a campaign to implement a Chair in Peace Studies at Murdoch University, for which she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the institution in 1981.<sup>52</sup> This political pressure around the world helped build the discipline of feminist international relations, pioneered by international scholars such as Ann Tickner and Cynthia Enloe who challenged international relations theorists to consider women, peace and security.<sup>53</sup> Tertiary institutions across the globe started to incorporate the women, peace and security agenda into departments and schools. WILPF established an academic network to encourage scholars working on gender and war to connect their research with interested activists and inform their campaigns.<sup>54</sup> Current members include Jacqui True, director of Monash University's Centre for Gender, Peace and Security and leading scholar of gender and international relations.

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Each chapter of this book chronicles a particular phase of WILPF's organising in Australia. Chapter 1 examines how WILPF formed in Australia during World War I and analyses its internationalist ideology, shaped by maternalist thinking that stressed gendered difference. Two peace groups in Melbourne, the Sisterhood of International Peace (the Sisterhood) and the Women's Peace Army (Peace Army), affiliated separately with the international council. Both were keen to join a network of women who provided support and disseminated information across borders in time of war. The organisations often clashed over different ideas about tactics and tone. Yet both were moved to question imperial loyalty and Australia's involvement in the war because of their commitment to international cooperation and goodwill—a significant departure from the dominant pro-empire sentiment promoted during wartime.

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52 Cora V Baldock, 'Irene Adelaide Greenwood 1992', *Australian Feminist Studies* 8, no. 17 (1 March 1993): 1–4, doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1993.9994672.

53 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: Pandora, 1989); Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

54 WILPF academic network accessed 26 September 2020, [www.wilpf.org/members/](http://www.wilpf.org/members/); Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199755929.001.0001.

Chapter 2 charts the journey of founding WILPF women Eleanor Moore, Vida Goldstein and Cecilia John from Melbourne to the women's congress in Zurich in 1919. Their voyages illustrate many of the challenges of travel for unaccompanied political women in the early twentieth century, especially in a world recovering from total war. Looking at the practical impediments and enabling factors that surrounded their journeys, such as the funding provided by other women and their organisations, extends our understanding of the personal investments made by these women in internationalism. It was a community-funded commitment built on collective support, quite different from the official forms of government-supported internationalism that were overwhelmingly dominated by men. At the conference, the women negotiated the demands of an international organisation trying to facilitate the cooperation of participants from different nations, language groups and cultures. Each participant tended to speak from a national perspective and prioritise national interests, as did the Australians who sat together as a national section. Yet the international organisation departed from the methods of similar institutions by encouraging participation separate from national affiliation. Despite the tensions between the national and the international, the women strove to arrive at a position that allowed coexistence of different identities and interests.

Chapter 3 analyses how WILPF in Australia inspired shifts in racial thought among its members, as cosmopolitan and liberalising encounters challenged assumptions about the rationale of White Australia. The internationalism of WILPF made many of these women reconsider the White Australia project. Their personal experiences made them alert to overt racism which they found increasingly distasteful. Yet the entangled policies of labour protectionism and racial exclusion left them unable to denounce the White Australia Policy (WAP) entirely. This chapter examines the efforts of Australian members, generally on the left of the political spectrum, to navigate the tension between the labour progressivism they admired and the racism that was so intertwined with its advancement through the WAP.

Chapter 4 brings the tension between national interests and international commitments into closer focus during the 1930s, when WILPF women were confronted by the fascist threat. At first they were buoyed by mainstream support for pacifism. The Kellogg–Briand Pact outlawed war and the League of Nations convened a World Disarmament Conference in Geneva that gave hope to millions that war could be avoided in future. But during the lead-up to the outbreak of World War II, the WILPF in Australia came close to rupturing over incompatible ideas and strategies as the rise



of fascism challenged many women's commitment to nonviolence. There were disagreements with the wider peace movement and, most damagingly, with the international head office. At this point the dominating personality of Eleanor Moore proved to be a real obstacle to recruitment. Membership dwindled and a core few prioritised absolute pacifism and purity over constructive engagement with anti-war campaigns that approved of violence. They persevered, leaving open a path for new members to tread after the war as they worked to reconstruct the national section.

For many women, internationalism as a political identity was attractive as they yearned for a more cosmopolitan and inclusive Australia and pursued experiences outside of the nation. Moore felt deeply Australia's 'insularity' when exposed to an international conference and its 'cosmopolitan atmosphere'.<sup>55</sup> Edith Abbott, when travelling in 1949, came to realise how 'isolated' Australia was and how important the 'few seeking souls' were who thought about world affairs.<sup>56</sup> Paradoxically, many members reasserted their Australian identity through their travels and were at pains to encourage a particularly Australian vision of international engagement. Moore also articulated how overseas travel heightened her love of country, and on returning from months abroad she noted how 'the burning blast of the north wind made the English people on board wonder what sort of an inferno they were coming to, but to me it was the breath of paradise regained'.<sup>57</sup> Greenwood similarly urged in 1975 that when histories of the women's movement were written, they should come:

from the struggles of the early women in Australia, and not [be] a derivative of the work of the suffragettes in England, though it greatly influenced it, nor the American suffragette movement into which the young new liberationist women are digging for their background.<sup>58</sup>

The foundations for such a story were 'our diaries, our history, our literature about women'.<sup>59</sup> The significant involvement of WILPF in campaigns for Aboriginal rights in the mid-twentieth century are an example of a specific Australian agenda to which WILPF members applied their technique of the international campaign.

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55 Moore, *Quest for Peace*, 97.

56 Edith M Abbott, report to the Australian Section of WILPF, 28 March 1950, Box 1728/3 Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

57 Moore, *Quest for Peace*, 64.

58 Greenwood, 'A Lifetime of Political Activity', *Women and Politics Conference Volume 1*, 63.

59 Greenwood, 'A Lifetime of Political Activity', *Women and Politics Conference Volume 1*, 63.

Chapter 5 examines how WILPF adapted to changes in the discourse of internationalism with the creation of the United Nations (UN). New definitions of human rights allowed WILPF members to reconceptualise their ideas on peace and security. That also created a tension between recognising group rights and collective identity in a context where rights were increasingly seen as universal. WILPF wanted an end to race-based discrimination, while grappling with the complexities of cultural difference. Significantly, WILPF in Australia used new international structures, conventions and norms to call for greater international attention to Aboriginal rights in Australia, making local concerns international as they raised them in the meeting rooms of New York. Anna Vroland, a Victorian teacher and advocate of Aboriginal rights, led this shift in emphasis when she became leader of the Melbourne group.

The twentieth century has seen the rise and strengthening of national security institutions. In Australia, the forerunner to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) was established during World War I, utilising the *War Precautions Act* of 1914 (Cth), while ASIO itself was founded in 1949. Passports and visas were introduced in a much more systematic way and border controls became more rigid. These governmental agencies, with increased funding and powers to conduct surveillance and record keeping of their citizens, increased the militarisation of civilian society, which allowed governments to justify prosecuting and spying on their national citizens. This new paradigm led to the criminalisation of activist activity, or at least the sense that participation in activism could be dangerous and lead to trouble with authorities. WILPF sought to resist these developments by working against this grain of the national security state.

Chapter 6 examines the new challenges posed by the Cold War and WILPF's negotiation of neutrality. New international women's groups, notably the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) changed the dynamics of the international women's sphere. WILPF became anxious, guarding its heritage and position for fear of being subsumed into groups with alleged 'communist sympathies'. During the 1950s and 1960s WILPF in Australia focused on campaigns against nuclear testing and US military bases in Australia, and were more inclined to work within mainstream structures, especially under the leadership of Blackburn. In campaigning against militarism in the 'atomic age', campaigns again aimed to acknowledge women's power and position within the family as caregivers and protectors. This was in part due to the material conditions of women activists, many

of whom were mothers concerned with their children's future. Some were only able to find the time to be politically active by bringing their children along to marches.

Chapter 7 charts the ways in which WILPF in Australia protested against the Vietnam War by using international connections that gave them detailed information ahead of national media. Organising during this time of renewed radicalism in Australian society forced WILPF to diversify in order to survive. The burgeoning women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s caused a paradigm shift in theorising women's oppression. New feminists did not just ignore WILPF's activism of earlier decades, they called it out as anti-feminist. This was confronting, but after engagement in the UN Decade for Women, WILPF's ideology was modified through connections with the wider feminist movement, other non-government organisations (NGOs), international civil servants and national delegations. WILPF absorbed the new language of women's liberation. The concept of 'patriarchy', popularised by feminist scholars such as Kate Millett, helped them to adapt and renew their radical critique. Rather than claim that women were more peaceful or maternal than men, they described how the 'patriarchy' deformed both sexes, conditioning men and women into performing traditional gender roles that were conducive to violence and war.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall WILPF had to adapt its campaign focus. Chapter 8 continues the discussion of WILPF and the UN Decade for Women. Although the decade had 'peace' as one of its three themes, the UN conferences failed in WILPF's eyes to adequately address the issues of women and war. Peace, however, was discussed in relation to the Arab–Israeli conflict, something that WILPF members themselves had divided opinions on. WILPF internationally continued to focus energy and funds on their relationship with the UN. In the 2000s it was central to lobbying efforts for the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which was the first resolution to focus on women and armed conflict, recognising gendered experiences of war and the need to have women contribute to the peacebuilding process.<sup>60</sup> National branches

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60 Australian WILPF member Felicity Hill was director of the WILPF office in New York during the lobbying of this resolution, and has written about promoting UNSCR 1325 in her Masters thesis: Felicity Hill, 'How and When Has Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security Impacted Negotiations Outside the Security Council?' (Masters thesis, Uppsala University Programme of International Studies, 2004).



took on the campaign to push governments to create National Action Plans for local implementation of 1325 goals, and continued to promote feminist foreign policy priorities.<sup>61</sup>

Trying to articulate the relationship between gender and peace was something WILPF constantly re-evaluated throughout its years of organising as a women-only group. War could have the effect of exacerbating the binary categories of gender roles, though modern campaigns for gender equality on the battlefield have complicated the strict gender roles of the combatant and those in need of protection.<sup>62</sup> By the 1970s WILPF desired to broaden its theoretical understanding of gender and peace, connecting issues of domestic violence and violence against women to the normalisation of militarism in society and broad acceptance of war. While women's liberation activists saw gender roles as something to be escaped from, WILPF connected its understanding of maternal citizenship to earlier ideas that saw care as the basis of a new social order. Australian member Stella Cornelius, who established a conflict resolution network, mused in 1975:

We're concerned about peace, between person and person and peace between group and group and peace between nation and nation, [and] we often wonder if there is any difference between them.<sup>63</sup>

WILPF's message was, and continues to be, to encourage the creation of a culture of peace rather than simply an absence of war.

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61 Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion*, 133.

62 Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Myriad Editions, 2017), 81, doi.org/10.1525/9780520969193.

63 Stella Cornelius, 'Women Peace and Politics', *Women and Politics Conference Volume 1*, 66.

This text is taken from *Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915–2015*, by Kate Laing, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.