



PRIO

Women's Legal Mobilisation in a Violent Context

Lessons from internally displaced women's organisations in Colombia

PRIO Gender, Peace
and Security Update

Issue 2 2015

The PRIO Gender Peace and Security Update is an electronic newsletter launched by PRIO's Gender Research Group in response to growing interest among the public for information about women, peace and security issues. The newsletter will keep readers informed of the latest developments both internationally and in Norway in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions.



Associate Professor of Law at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá and PRIO Global Fellow Julieta Lemaitre. Photo: Laura Rico Piñeres, La Silla Vacía.

As a result of the internal conflict between guerrilla groups, government forces and paramilitary groups, Colombia is facing a humanitarian crisis. Between 3.5 and 5.4 million people have been displaced, and the majority of these are women. Grassroots organisations comprised of internally displaced women are mobilising through the use of law to achieve human rights and long-term peaceful resettlement of displaced women in Colombia. For example, through legal mobilisation they advocate for the implementation of existing laws and regulations to achieve their goals. However, in the violent context of Colombia, these women's organisations are facing acute insecurities.

Julieta Lemaitre, Associate Professor of Law at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá and PRIO Global Fellow, and Kristin Sandvik, PRIO Senior Researcher, have recently finished a three-year project studying the political and legal mobilisation of these women's organisations. Julie Marie Hansen talked to

Julieta Lemaitre to learn more.

Can you briefly introduce the background to the study?

Over three years, between 2010 and 2013, we followed internally displaced women in Colombia in a variety of settings and using a variety of methods. We did five case studies. Three of these were of small NGOs that worked close to the ground with internally displaced women. These cases studies were shorter and we co-wrote them with the activists from the NGOs. Here, we were interested in how the NGOs navigated changes in legal regimes while at the same time staying close to the grassroots women they were working with.

The other two cases studies were extended case studies of women's grassroots organisations, the *Liga de Mujeres* and *Mesa de Víctimas de Mocoa*. We spent over a year with both of these organisations in different parts of the

country. We collected a lot of information, including household surveys that we designed, applied and interpreted in collaboration with the organisations.

Besides the five case studies, we also followed different participatory spaces where the government engaged with internally displaced women leaders. These spaces included consultations on the Colombian Victims Law, attending meetings between leaders and government officials, and visiting Congress and the courts.

What has been the output from your project?

Based on the material we collected, we came to a series of conclusions that are spread out in different publications. One output that I am very proud of is that we have put out four booklets in Spanish that were co-written both with graduate students who helped in the project, and with activists from the NGOs. The booklets are written as clearly as possible so that they would be accessible to anyone with at least a high school education. They will be distributed among the organisations we worked with in Colombia.

We have also published three journal articles. One article is entitled 'Internally Displaced Women as Knowledge Producers and Users in Humanitarian Action: The View from Colombia'. It looks at internally displaced women as producers and users of knowledge in evidence-based action to address humanitarian crises. It shows how beneficiaries of humanitarian relief – and not only humanitarian actors – can produce and use knowledge to address their own situation. Another article entitled 'Beyond Sexual Violence in Transitional Justice: Political Insecurity as a Gendered Harm' shows how political insecurity is a gendered harm, and that gendered political insecurity threatens peace.

The third article deals with legal mobilisation among internally displaced women and how violence affects their legal mobilisation. The conclusion we came to in this article was that the role of law has to be understood as law in a violent context. And in that context, violence places important constraints on the way grassroots organisations and their NGO allies use the rights, laws and bureaucracies that are on paper at their disposal to claim rights.

How does a violent context constrain the legal mobilisation of the women's grassroots organisations?

We found that every single aspect necessary for legal mobilisation – frames, resources and political opportunities – was affected by violence in different ways. Resources such as networks are an important factor in mobilising, and organisations garner supporters and allies through adapting the frames they use for mobilising, such as human rights. And there need to be certain political opportunities, and a perception that the system is open for change. But the impact of violence means that these aspects of legal mobilisation may instead be referred to as shifting frames, vanishing resources and dangerous political opportunities.

In terms of shifting frames, we found that the law changed a lot and people had to adapt to these changes. The changes were pressured by violence, because if laws are hard to implement on the ground – especially laws that guarantee rights – generally the strategy of the government is to adopt new laws when the old ones fail to guarantee people's rights or to solve problems.

There is also the issue of international pressure as fashions shift. Law also follows international interest: first focusing on internally displaced people and now on transitional justice. These fashions also respond to violence, in the sense that it is violence that is attracting

the interest.

These shifting frames also affects resources. The resources follow the shifts in law and fashion, in the sense that there used to be money for a certain programme but now that there is a new law the money is moved to another programme. Organisations then have to adapt.

Also more literally, violence destroys these organisations' resources through arson and theft, and also because social movements are targeted with threats and harassment. The whole climate of insecurity affects resources, especially since networks are another important resource – people get scared and do not want to participate anymore.

Finally, in terms of political opportunities, we found a general perception that organising was dangerous; that although the system was open to change, there were security risks. But women devised strategies to manage the risk. For example, they would insist on their gender. In Colombia, women are seen to be less political and less targeted for political violence. The women would mobilise as mothers or as women of the community, because there was the perception that when women organised as mothers for the community it is not really politically dangerous.

In looking at the role of internally displaced women in grassroots organisations, the project as a whole highlights women in forced displacement as active agents in dealing with their situation. Can you say more about the levels of agency involved?

Firstly, their agency is implicit in the idea of legal mobilisation because we are looking at the mobilisers. We wanted to look at the way they are using law, and in that it is also implicit that these are women who have some degree of agency.

Some of the women had less involvement in the organisations, and others were amazing leaders. Some were very altruistic and others were focused on obtaining benefits for themselves and their immediate families. Some of the women in the organisations are genuinely altruistic people, and others are just ordinary people trying to make ends meet. So when you say agency, people imagine a Joan of Arc figure, but it is also just somebody who is looking after her children and just trying to find food.

more often framed as something awful that should not happen.

However, we did find that in the relatively rare occasion when women leaders were targeted for oppression, the oppression and threats were sexualised. Part of the anger seemed to be towards the perception that women were violating traditional gender roles by being leaders.

as political violence takes the focus away from violence by the state, which is something that can more easily be tackled with human rights.

The women in our research also talked about other forms of repression, like angry husbands, or husbands who would leave them because they thought the women were not doing their jobs as wives because they were engaged in their organisation. Some mentioned the difficulty of finding a boyfriend when you are community leader because no one feels secure being around you. In the general scheme of violence, this does not seem like such a terrible thing but it is important in the lived everyday life of the women. ■



From a meeting at 'Ciudad de Mujeres', one of the NGOs that took part in the study. Photo: Julieta Lemaitre.

Another main finding from the project is that women in the grassroots organisations face gendered political insecurities, such as forms of violence due to their engagement in the organisations. How does this affect the work they do?

It limits their work but it also protects them. They are mostly older women, between 30 and 50 years old. Many of them play the card that they are mothers, which offers a measure of protection. There is a cultural rejection of violence against mothers. It happens, but it is

There is also another type of violence that does not reveal itself as political violence. Women would say that they would be targeted for domestic violence because of their leadership position. Some thought it counted as political violence. But I am unconvinced, as it is a grey area. In my opinion, we are talking about different actors of violence in cases like this; they are not armed actors but fathers, boyfriends, husbands. Even though it is probably related to the general atmosphere in Colombia of uncertainty and poverty, I think counting this kind of violence against women leaders

Heidi Hudson visits PRIO

In early June, Heidi Hudson travelled from South Africa to spend one week at PRIO. Hudson was appointed a PRIO Global Fellow in 2014, and works in collaboration with the Gender Research Group. She is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Hudson began her visit by presenting her paper 'Untangling the Security-Development Nexus in Security Sector Reform' to the Gender Research Group. In her paper, Heidi takes a closer look at the link between security and development by considering the gendered consequences of making simplistic connections in the area of security sector reform. The paper was published earlier this year as a chapter in the Handbook of International Security and Development, edited by Paul Jackson.

Hudson also attended the summer meeting of the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security. At the meeting, she gave a presentation on her

latest work dealing with gender, security and everyday theory in Africa. The paper is entitled 'Subversion of an Ordinary Kind: Gender, Security and Everyday Theory in Africa' and will be published as a book chapter later this year.

Hudson is currently working on a book series on Discourse and Materiality in relation to gender and peacebuilding issues. In this work she hopes to find ways to make the discourse on gender and peacebuilding more meaningful for realities on the ground. ■



PRIO Global Fellow and Professor in International Relations Heidi Hudson. Photo: Martin Tegnander, PRIO.

Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security Summer Meeting

On 2 June, the Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security came together for their summer meeting. Participants included members of PRIO,

NUPI, FAFO, NOREF and the Norwegian Defence University College, as well as independent researchers and PhD and MA students. The meeting was a chance for members to catch-up on each other's latest activities, present new projects and share research findings.

PRIO Global Fellow Heidi Hudson, visiting from South Africa, presented her recent work on gender, security and everyday theory in Africa. Using a gender lens, Hudson seeks to explain the undervaluing of contributions from African scholarly work to the field of international relations. Moreover, Hudson suggests that the hidden contributions to theory taken from everyday realities can be revealed "making feminist sense" of international relations theory in Africa. Her paper is entitled 'Subversion of an Ordinary Kind: Gender, Security and Everyday Theory in Africa' and will be published as a book chapter later this year.

Nina Rones, from the School of Sports Sciences at the Norwegian Defence University College, also attended the meeting to share research findings from her PhD thesis. The thesis, entitled 'The Struggle over Military Identity – A Multi-Sited Ethnography on Gender, Fitness and "the Right Attitudes" in the Military Profession/Field', looks at masculinity in the Norwegian military and the struggle for who can participate in the military.

Rones' work reveals what women and men in the military consider to be the right skills and characteristics to participate, and who they consider possesses these requirements. The thesis shows that women in the military, especially those seen as "cute and petite", embody skills and characteristics that contradict military requirements, and Rones concludes that as a result of this, these women put "the classification of the military profession as masculine, tough and physically demanding at stake."

Inger Skjelsbæk, Deputy Director at

PRIO, joined the meeting to introduce network members to PRIO's new project 'Equal Peace? Women's Empowerment and Multicultural Challenged in War-to-Peace Transitions' (featured in the previous issue).

The network is led by PRIO Senior Researcher Torunn L. Tryggstad, and allows those interested in gender, peace and security issues the opportunity to present and get feedback on published or draft work and new projects. ■

Research for Peace Conference, Stockholm

On 7-9 June, The Folke Bernadotte Academy held a conference in Stockholm on 'Research for Peace'. The conference marked 10 years of the Academy's work promoting research on peace, security and development. The Academy believes that in light of recent increases in war and armed conflict, research is especially important today in understanding best practices to create sustainable peace.

Around one hundred researchers attended the conference from all over the world. Among them were research professor Henrik Urdal and senior researcher Ragnhild Nordås from PRIO, who joined the UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security working group to present papers.

Urdal presented a paper on maternal health care during armed conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. The paper is entitled 'Armed conflict and maternal health care: Micro-level evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa' and co-authored by Gudrun Østby, Henrik Urdal, Andreas Forø Tollefsen, Ragnhild Belbo, Christin Ormhaug and Siri Rustad. Urdal also



Panel on *Feminist Foreign Policy in Practice* at the ‘Research for Peace’ conference at the Folke Bernadotte Academy. Photo: Sabrina Karim.

sat on a panel to discuss feminist foreign policy in practice.

At the launch of a new book on gender, peace and security, Nordås presented her chapter ‘Assessing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers’, co-written by PRIO senior researcher Siri Rustad. The book, entitled ‘Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325’, looks at efforts to translate UNSCR 1325 policy commitments into action. It focuses on three areas of the Resolution: women’s participation in peace operations and peace processes, women’s protection during conflict, and gender mainstreaming of security and development. The book is edited by Louise Olsson and Ismene Gizelis, and includes contributions from several PRIO researchers. ■

PRIO Seminar about Srebrenica Genocide

On 4 June, PRIO co-organized a seminar with the Bosnia Hercegovina Association in Norway focusing on the 20 year anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 where over 8000 men and boys were killed over the course of only a few days in July that year. On 11 July 1995, Srebrenica was taken over by Serb Military forces and men and women were separated. Many women endured sexual violence during their flight to Muslim-held territories and the men were killed en masse. The international failure to protect the people who had sought refuge in Srebrenica has blemished the United Nations, as well as the Dutch, French and Canadian governments.

The survivors of the genocide are mostly women. At the PRIO seminar, Dr. Lara Nettelfield from the Royal Holloway University of London talked about these women and their significance in the 20 years that have passed. Her talk was based on her book *Srebrenica in the Af-*

termath of *Genocide* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). This book reveals how interactions between local, national and international interventions - from refugee return and resettlement to commemorations, war crimes trials, immigration proceedings and election reform - have led to subtle, positive effects of social repair, despite persistent attempts at denial.

At the seminar, we also heard from Amor Masovic, Chairman of the Bosnian Federal Commission for Missing Persons, about the difficult process identifying the remains of those who were killed. Zumra Zehomerovic (pictured), who founded the organization ‘Mothers of the enclaves Srebrenica and Zepa’, talked about how it is to survive and live on after genocide.

The event was followed by a cultural marking of the genocide with Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg and Prime Minister of Bosnia Denis Zvizdić present at Gamle Logen in Oslo. ■



Zumra Zehomerovic, founder of ‘Mothers of the enclaves Srebrenica and Zepa’. Photo: Maria Warsinski Varsi.

International News

UN Women India and Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping in India launched the pilot project **Special Female Military Officers' Training Course**, which took place between March and April in New Delhi and trains female military officers from around the world in preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict.

106 civil society organisations endorsed a high level advocacy letter in April in advance of the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), calling on member states to develop more effective and sustained strategies for implementing the WPS agenda. Read the letter [here](#).

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) marked its 100th anniversary with a conference themed 'Women's Power to Stop War' in The Hague, 27-29 April 2015. Read the summary from the conference [here](#).

Päivi Kannisto from Finland was appointed Chief of the Peace and Security Unit of UN Women in May, and will take up the post in early September.

AIDs-Free World launched a global campaign in May called Code Blue, which aims to end immunity for sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers.

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations delivered its report to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on 16 June. An [information note](#) has been made public which summarizes the key recommendations of the panel.

The United Nations General Assembly approved by consensus a [new resolution](#) to

commemorate 19 June as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict hosted by William Hague and Angelina Jolie in London in 2014, [has received criticism](#) for being a "costly failure". Reportedly, the money Britain spent hosting a global summit was five times higher than the entire confirmed budget the UK has dedicated to tackling rape in war zones this year. ■

News from Norway

NOREF and swisspeace organised an event on 20 May in Oslo to launch a joint report on 'Norm pushers or deal brokers? The role of norms in international peace mediation'. Read the full report [here](#).

A seminar with Carol Cohn, Director of the Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights and professor at the University of Massachusetts, titled 'Towards a Transformative Women, Peace and Security Agenda' was hosted by NOREF and NUPI on 17 June in Oslo.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a civil society consultation on the topic of women's participation and the integration of gender perspectives in peace negotiations and peace processes in Oslo on 23 June. ■

News from PRIO

Ashild Kolås participated in a roundtable event 'Women and Peacebuilding: A

Policy Dialogue' in New Delhi, 21-22 February 2015, co-organised by WISCOMP (Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace) and the PRIO project 'Making Women Count for Peace: Gender, Empowerment and Conflict and South Asia'.

The PRIO/OSCE study on National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in the OSCE Area was presented by Christin Ormhaug on a panel on Afghanistan and their newly adopted NAP on UNSCR 1325. The panel was organized by FOKUS as part of the Afghanistan week 2015 on 24 March. Ormhaug also presented the study at the annual meeting for OSCE's gender focal points on 5-6 May 2015.

Gudrun Østby and Henrik Urdal presented the project 'Armed Conflict and Maternal Health in Sub-Saharan Africa' at Norad's Global Health Section on 30 April. Østby and Urdal also held a breakfast seminar on 25 March at the Norwegian MFA on 'Development post-MDG: Conflict, maternal health and women's education' as part of PRIO's Conflict Trends project.

Torunn L. Tryggestad attended the first 2015 meeting of the Advisory Group of the UN Peacebuilding Fund in New York in April. Tryggestad was appointed to the group on 2 February 2015.

Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), PRIO, and UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) co-organised the Sixth High-Level Seminar on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Processes in Helsinki on 19-21 May.

Heidi Hudson, PRIO Global Fellow and Professor in International Relations and Director of the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa, visited PRIO from 1-5 June (see separate story).

The PRIO Gender Research Group met

on 1 June. The meeting was chaired by Torunn L. Tryggestad (see separate story).

The Research Network on Gender, Peace and Security had its 2015 summer meeting at PRIO on 2 June (see separate story).

A seminar on ‘The Srebrenica Genocide’s Lasting Legacy’ took place at PRIO on 4 June (see separate story).

Henrik Urdal and Ragnhild Nordås presented papers and participated in panel discussions at the conference ‘Research for Peace’ (R4P2015) at the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Stockholm, 7-9 June (see separate story).

The PRIO project ‘Equal Peace? Women’s Empowerment and Multicultural Challenges in War-to-Peace Transitions’ (EPP) has recruited a doctoral researcher, Jenny K. Lorentzen, and MA student, Elin Martine Doeland.

Inger Skjelsbæk has gained Research Professor competence through an evaluation by an external academic committee based on her long-standing research on the effects of war on women and the use of sexual violence in conflict. ■

Kolås, Åshild (2015) *Women’s Empowerment in India: From Participation to Political Agency*. PRIO Policy Brief, 06-2015.

Lemaitre, Julieta & Sandvik, Kristin (2015) *Shifting Frames, Vanishing Resources, and Dangerous Political Opportunities: Legal Mobilisation among Displaced Women in Colombia*. *Law & Society Review* 49(1): 5-38. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lasr.12119/abstract>

Nordås, Ragnhild & Siri Rustad (2015) ‘Assessing sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers’ in Olsson, L. & Gizelis, T. (eds.) (2015), *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*. Routledge.

Tryggestad, Torunn L. (2015) *FN som normspredner: Kvinner, fred og sikkerhet* [The UN and Norm Diffusion: Women, Peace and Security]. *Internasjonal Politikk*, 73(2) NUPI.

Urdal, Henrik & Primus Chi Che (2015) ‘War and gender inequalities in health’ in Olsson, L. & Gizelis, T. (eds.) (2015), *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*. Routledge.

Hellmüller, Sara, Palmiano Federer, Julia & Zeller, Mathias (2015) *The role of norms in international peace mediation*. NOREF Policy Brief.

Karim, Sabrina & Kyle Beardsley (2015) *An assessment of United Nations efforts to include women and counter sexual abuse in peacekeeping*. Key findings, Scholar Strategy Network.

Olsson, Louise & Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (2015) *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*. Routledge.

O’Reilly, Marie, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, & Thania Paffenholz (2015) *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes*. International Peace Institute (IPI).

Paffenholz, Thania, Potter Prentice, Antonia & Buchanan, Cate (2015) *Fresh insights on the Quantity and Quality of Women’s Inclusion in Peace Processes* Crisis Management Initiative & the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

Rones, Nina (2015) *The Struggle over Military Identity: A Multi-Sited Ethnography on Gender, Fitness and “The Right Attitudes” in the Military Profession/Field*. PhD thesis, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences.

Recent PRIO Publications

Hudson, Heidi (2015) *Untangling the security-development nexus in Security Sector Reform*. In Jackson, Paul (ed.), *Handbook of International Security and Development*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Other Recent Publications

El Said, Maha, Lena Meari & Nicola Pratt (2015) *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World*. Zed Books.



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