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Countering 'Malestreaming'

Integrating the Gender, Peace and Security Agenda in Peace Operations in Africa

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Summary

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) was hailed as a pioneering step in acknowledging the varied roles of women in conflict and promoting their participation in peace processes and in peace-building. Both before and after this resolution there has been pressure for integrating ***gender*** perspectives in all UN activities. This policy brief takes a critical look at the inclusion and exclusion of Resolution 1325 and the agenda of integrating gender perspectives in peace operations in Africa.

'Gender perspectives' are usually taken to mean adding women in these operations. Peace operations in Africa are indeed male-dominated, with on average 3% women in uniform (police and military), and about 29% international and 17% local women among the civilian staff. However, focusing solely on the number of women in peace operations is not sufficient.

This brief takes up some of the more qualitative aspects of gender perspectives in these operations: gender mainstreaming and gender units. There is a potential for ensuring gender-mainstreamed approaches through these units, as well as challenges entailed by creating separate units that are ***de facto*** 'in charge of' gender perspectives. Rather than gender-mainstreaming, these operations often tend toward gender ***malestreaming***: the male and masculine dominate the areas of security sector reform, including the army, strengthening of state institutions and rule of law.

Gender mainstreaming is often viewed as a process that should fit in with existing structures or institutions, rather than challenging these structures which have ignored gender issues in the first place. This brief argues that the masculine discourses within such institutions (army and other state-building aspects), combined with the dilemmas of insecurity in the operative context, are central to the analysis of and bottlenecks to gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive approaches. Gender mainstreaming and implementation of UNSC Res. 1325 will remain at the rhetorical level unless major changes are made in the masculine, militarized architecture of peace operations.

It is recommended that the UN peace operations devote more time to gender mainstreaming the institution of the United Nations, as this may be the first step towards reform.

Introduction

Women are as much a part of the war and conflict situations as men, but their inclusion has traditionally been limited if not neglected in security assessments and in formal peace-building processes at the national and regional level. Not only does this mean that important gendered security problems are excluded (e.g., how women, men and young people are targeted differently according to their role in society): progress toward longer-term stability in conflict/post-conflict areas can be seriously obstructed when only half of the population is consulted.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) was hailed as a pioneering step in acknowledging the varied roles of women in conflict and promoting their participation in peace processes and in peacebuilding.[1] As noted by Kari Karamé: 'The ultimate goal of all peace efforts is a lasting, sustainable peace, and the use of a gender perspective represents a means to this end.'[2]

This policy brief discusses the inclusion and limitations of not just women's representation in peace operations but the topic of gender perspectives in peace and security matters more broadly. First, we inquire into the distribution of women and men in various parts of UN operations in Africa. Many policy reports and indicators have focused on having women represented alongside men in various aspects of defining peace and security. Secondly, this perspective is then problematized in the section on the limitations of such perspectives, hereunder certain essentialist assumptions of women as 'innately peaceful'. Thirdly, we turn to the issue of 'gender mainstreaming' and the use of gender units to ensure that gender perspectives

1 Olonisakin, F., K. Barnes, & E. Ikpe (2011) *Women, Peace and Security: Translating Policy into Practice*. London: Routledge

2 Karamé, K. (2006). *The Gender Perspective in Norwegian Peace Efforts*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

are included in the execution of the peace operation mandate. Finally, there is focus on the core mandate of these operations, namely military presence and state restoration in war-torn countries, and how these areas are largely perceived as non-gendered whereas they are in fact male-dominated fields. In many ways, there is a tendency toward *male*streaming and not gender *main*streaming. The policy brief then concludes with a few recommendations.

Brief background on UNSC Resolution 1325

The adoption of 1325 came about through a combination of international process, in particular the 'Beijing platform,' and international activists from North and South who were excluded from high-level, male-dominated negotiations and yet had to experience the full brunt of impacts from war and post-conflict situations. There had been previous successes, like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, which was seen as a breakthrough for women's rights. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was launched, which declared that '[w]omen's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace' and that '[w]omen's rights are human rights'.[3]

Four interrelated components of 1325
- Participation
- Protection
- Prevention
- Relief and Recovery

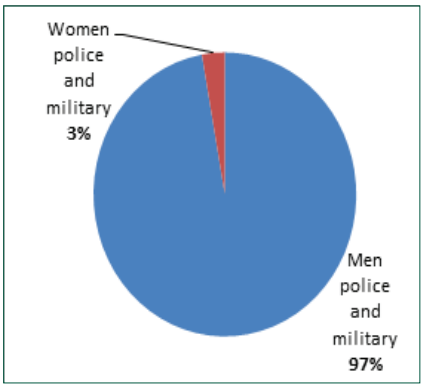
Finally, in 2000, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, later followed up by UNSC Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010). Resolution 1325 shifted the focus from women's rights in general to recognizing women as being at the core of global security matters. It was also the first UNSC resolution ever passed on the topic of women's security concerns and right to participation.

Resolution 1325 has four interrelated components (see box). First is *participation*: Ensuring that women are included at all levels of decision-making: local, national, regional and international participation. This includes as police, soldiers, and state actors in peace operations, in peace negotiations and as UN special representatives. Secondly, *protection*: ensuring that women and girls are protected from sexual and gender-based violence in emergency situations, as in refugee camps. Thirdly *prevention*: Preventing violence through contributing to stronger international and national laws and rights for women, and supporting the participation of women in peace and conflict-prevention initiatives. And fourthly, *relief and recovery*: Responding to international emergency crises with gender-nuanced perspectives, so that measures taken that benefit women *and* men, girls *and* boys.

However, many of the follow-up resolutions to UNSCR 1325 focus on the aspect of women as victims of war and conflict and their need for protection. This is a set-back, many would argue, since the initial conventions, declarations and plans of action were specifically aimed at addressing the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and ensuring their participation at all institutional levels, in the public and private spheres. The earlier documents had stressed the equal status of women and men and the active inclusion of both genders in decision-making processes. By placing women solely in the category of vulnerable people in conflict situations, the international community may fail to address the root causes of this vulnerability, or provide approaches to prevent this situation in the first place.

Gender perspectives in UN peace operations: A numbers game?

The recruitment of women in peace operations is one of the more easily measurable tasks in the overall gender mainstreaming measures in the UN. In this section we first look at some of the 'hard facts' as to the numbers of female peacekeepers (police and military), and then move on discuss some of the essentialist assumptions inherent in such approaches and the overall potential for gender mainstreaming more broadly. Gender-disaggregated data collection by the UN started only as recently as in 2006 for military personnel, and then in 2009 for police.



The data show that an average of only 3% women in uniform (military and police) in UN-based peace operations in Africa.[4] When it comes to civilian staff, gender-disaggregated statistics are more limited. According to the UN, female civilian staff at the peacekeeping operation and special political mission level are esti-

3 Original document of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, downloaded 25 March 2013 at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf

4 Summarized from figures available for 2006–2013 and compiled through the official UN Peacekeeping Mission webpage, downloaded 1 December 2013 at http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/women/womeninpk.shtml

mated to comprise only 29% of international and 17% of national staff in 2012.[5] In 2013, there were five women Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) of the 17 UN missions around the world.

Focusing solely on increasing the number of women in security forces is what many would dismiss as an 'add women and stir' phenomenon. The assumptions around increasing number of women in both international and national forces may in the policy literature understood as an immediate step towards gender equality and generally a professionalization of the military or police. However, UNSC Resolution 1325 is solidly based on the idea of participation and empowerment of women: thus it is important to know *what types of opportunities* women have in UN missions and what may be blocking their access to decision-making roles. Assembling such data is more challenging, but should provide information far more relevant for understanding the challenges to and potentials in gender mainstreaming in the UN.

Gender mainstreaming and gender units in missions

Resolution 1325 established a 'language' for taking gender perspectives into peace and security matters and formed a normative universe and an imagined community of shared ideas. However, moving from ideas to practice in the UN bureaucratic universe is another thing. As regards the operational side of integrating 1325 in peace operations, a central term has been *gender mainstreaming*, emphasized in particular in the UN declaration of 31 May 2000, *The Namibia Plan of Action on 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations*.[6] Gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions involves identifying the various impacts of conflict on the lives of women and men, and on that basis proposing practical solutions to respond to the specific rights and needs of all.

As an attempt to push gender mainstreaming into all activities, the UN has established gender units and included gender advisors in several missions. The Namibia Plan of Action argues: '[a] gender affairs unit is crucial for effective gender mainstreaming and should be a standard component of all missions. It should be adequately funded and staffed at appropriate levels and should have direct access to senior decision-makers.'[7]

However, on the one hand, such good intentions may in effect serve as a way of keeping organizations working on 'women's issues' separate from the 'real' political and security concern of the UN operation. On the other hand, if there were no gender units in place, gender mainstreaming might not form a significant part of anyone's daily agenda in the mission. Moreover, in view of staff limitations and insufficient funding, we should ask whether gender units and gender advisors ought to devote all their attention to the country where they are working and their national/local representatives, or if they should work on sensitizing the UN institution as such. From a research perspective, the limitations of gender mainstreaming within the various UN sections in missions may be the first step of reform.

An important criticism concerning gender mainstreaming is that it is a seen as a process that should fit in with the existing structures or institutions, rather than challenging these structures that have kept silent on gender in the first place. As many feminist authors would argue, it is important to challenge, for instance, state-centred peace operations and the masculine ways of conflict resolution and peace-building, i.e. *malestreaming*.[8] In the next section, we take a closer look at this malestreaming in conflict-resolution and security measures in international peace operations.

Militarization, state restoration and masculinity: Gender perspectives at the core of UN mandates?

Peace operations usually involve military and police forces, and state restoration or state-building, as key dimensions. In the UN system, male voices and masculine values are largely seen as 'non-gendered' norms, and form the key power structures within missions. In practice, then, the UN's gender perspective is largely a malestreamed approach to peace operations.

Looking at the discourse of gender in UN documents and peace operation practice, we quickly see that men are either not specifically mentioned, or figure as the implicit background – not as 'gendered agents'. These policy documents often operate on the unstated understanding that men in general are the power-holders (the advantaged group), or potentially the perpetrators of violence against women.[9] Representing all males in this general way makes it difficult to engage in a gendered discourse on dealing with the problems, interests and differences that exist among men and boys in any given country. Superficial interpretation of 'gender' also limits the potential of radical changes to power and inequality in a system. This over-simplified understanding of 'gender' fails to engage with the construct and reproduction of masculine state institu-

5 Ibid.

6 DPKO. (2000). Namibia Plan of Action on 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/windhoek_declaration.pdf

7 Ibid.

8 Sjoberg, L. & C. Gentry (2007) use this term in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books.

9 Connell, R. W. (2005). Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena. Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 30(3),pp. 1085–86.

tions such as the army and the police that are in focus in most peace operations.

Furthermore, it is evident that UN policy documents place men and women in rather fixed categories rather than using the UN's own definition of gender as something socially constructed, differentiated from biological sex, and changing over time and place. The language of confusing gender with women and the 'special protection' for women against sexual violence constrains women into being defined by their female bodies: the exact opposite of the conceptual understanding of gender constructions. This dichotomous and fixed category of men and women 'reproduces a long history of gendered hierarchies that resist complexity, problematization, or modification', as McMahon has pointed out.[10]

'Gender' will need to be liberated from conventional ideas of differences between men and women, such as women as (the sole) victims of sexual violence and men as 'always' on the more powerful end of the gender inequality equation. It is rarely the case that gender mainstreaming in UN operations entails a critical attempt to deconstruct for instance the patterns of gender inequality and subordination in the country of operation, or within the mission for that matter.[10]

In conclusion, it is important to reflect on the gendered aspects of peace operations as a space representing significant emphasis on the protection of women (and children) against insecurity and the inclusion of women in restoring the country, in conjunction with the fact that it is foreign, male-dominated institutions that are meant to interpret and ensure security and protection. Without deeper reflection on the masculine, militarized architecture of peace operations, gender mainstreaming and implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 will remain at the rhetorical level.

Recommendations

To the research community:

- There is a need for more qualitative data in tracking Resolution 1325 on participation and empowerment of women, with regard also to what types of opportunities women and men have in the mission and what may be blocking their access to decision-making roles.

To UN peace operations:

- Gender mainstreaming means to challenge the existing structures or institutions that have ignored gender in the first place. UN peace operations should devote more time to gender mainstreaming the UN institution, as this may be the first step of reform.

10 McMahon, J. (2013). "Depoliticization, Essentialization or Transformation? UN Women's Representation of Men and Masculinity." Paper prepared for International Studies Association Annual Convention 3-6 April, San Francisco , p. 20.

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About the Author

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