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Gender in War and Peace

The Colombian Peace Agreement of 2016 which ended a 60-year-long armed conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) and the state, marked a watershed moment in the history of peace agreements, as for the first time it aimed to redress the disparate impact of armed conflict on women and LGBTQ+. 130 out of its 578 stipulations had a gender focus, covering five areas: 1) comprehensive rural reform for gender equality; 2) participation of women/LGBTQ+ in the peace implementation; 3) gender-specific guarantees for security; 4) gender-sensitive reincorporation of ex-combatants; and 5) promotion of victims' rights (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2020). However, implementation of these provisions has been slow-moving and uneven, and the experiences of the communities most affected by armed conflicts have often been overlooked.

This special issue of *Revista CS* "Gender in War and Peace" emerged from our ongoing research "Peace and Gender (In)Equality: Lessons from the Colombian Peace Agreement of 2016."¹ This research, by adopting a bottom-up approach, aimed to contribute to the scholarship on inequality, which has paid inadequate attention to the impact of the conflict-settings on the structures reproducing socioeconomic inequalities and, more concretely, on gender-specific inequalities. Recent studies acknowledge that armed conflicts are not gender-neutral (CNRR-Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2011), and produce differentiated impacts on men and women (Meertens, 2016). While building on this recognition, this project draws on the growing assertion in feminist studies on the intersecting oppressions of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientations and their role in the exacerbation of gender inequalities (Andersen; Collins, 2020). In the context of this affirmation of intersectionality, in this issue we have tried to explore how intersecting inequalities are manifested and addressed in post-conflict situations.

To analyse the intersecting inequalities and their redressal, research has focused on gender and rural reforms, and reincorporation of the female ex-combatants. Although land reform has been extensively studied in Colombia, analyses often overlook its gender dimensions. Historically, rural women have

1. This project is supported by the Atlantic Equity Challenge (AEQ) Fellowship funded by the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) programme based at the International Inequalities Institute at the London School of Economics (LSE) and carried out in collaboration with the Observatory for Women's Equality at Icesi University, Cali (Colombia).

faced severe obstacles to claiming proprietorship over land, which traditionally remained under the control of men (Deere; León, 2000; Meertens, 2016). Colombia is the first country in Latin America where land and gender issues have been explicitly addressed in a peace agreement (Meertens, 2016). Shortcomings in research regarding women's rural land ownership and management have resulted in inadequate policies to secure economic and political autonomy for women and LGBTQ+ collectives.

Similarly, women have generally been marginalised during the disarmament and reintegration processes, mainly for two reasons: first, only men were being considered as combatants (Mendia, 2010); second, it has been alleged that their combatant life experience makes them transgressors of feminine roles (Farr, 2002). As women, they are socially expected to reassume traditional gender roles when returning to civil life. Gender-sensitive FARC reincorporation in Colombia provides an opportunity for pioneering research in this field (Theidon, 2009). In this issue, we discuss the gender dimensions of reincorporation, its outcomes and the experience of female ex-combatants and their ongoing efforts towards achieving greater social equality in post-conflict contexts. We believe findings will signal paths not only to promote their effective reintegration, but also to broaden their participation in labour market and political activities beyond duties of care.

Our work primarily draws on the insights from two theoretical paradigms, namely the Feminist Standpoint theory, and Johan Galtung's concept of Positive Peace. The central thesis of the Feminist Standpoint theory relevant to this discussion is that the lived experience of women should constitute the starting point of social enquiry and policy reform (Harding, 2004). Their social locations within the structures of oppression make them better positioned to develop the knowledge of oppressive relations and the ways of addressing them, which the dominant groups are either unaware of or strive to suppress (Harding, 2004). Women's social location and their collective struggles are central to this research. Furthermore, the Black Feminist Standpoint theorist Patricia Hill Collins' call to engage with the 'historically shared, group-based experiences' (1997: 375), offers insights to focus on the specific experiences of Afro-Colombian and indigenous women, and LGBTQ+ population. Accordingly, the inquiry into the intersecting inequalities of race, class, gender, and sexuality that shape their everyday experiences and collective mobilisations in the context of the Peace Agreement are central to this research.

The application of the insights from the Feminist Standpoint theory is further enriched by Galtung's concept of Positive Peace. Galtung's ideas of peace are developed around his categorisation of violence into 'direct violence' and

‘structural violence’ (Galtung, 1996). The former refers to armed conflicts and war, and the latter denotes persisting inequalities manifested in poverty, discrimination, and various other social injustices. For Galtung, the end of direct violence constitutes Negative Peace. Whereas Positive Peace refers to the transformation of unequal structures and integration of excluded communities, with the emphasis on removing the causes of violence which are deeply embedded in the societal structures. Galtung’s concept of Positive Peace informs our analysis of peacebuilding in Colombia, whose success is contingent on tackling structural inequalities. However, this research also addresses a major lacuna in Galtung’s work which pays insufficient attention to gender-specific structural violence and remedial action (Confortini, 2006). Grounded on the theoretical principle that there is ‘no act of violence that does not intersect with gender’ (Shaw, 2017: 1), our application of the Positive Peace concept is guided therefore by the Feminist Standpoint, which not only views structural violence through a gendered lens, but also prioritises gender equality as the essential criterion for durable peace.

Our research findings, however, revealed that the implementation of gender-related provisions in the Final Peace Agreement has faced significant challenges, which is evident in the various articles included in this special issue. Regarding reincorporation, our research found that gender mainstreaming has been weak, which has led to various problems. These include insufficient land access for women, lack of economic autonomy for female peace signatories, and continuous stigmatisation of women undergoing the reincorporation process.

Although the reincorporation process intended to reinforce equitable gender relations, many of the signatories grew pessimistic as they realised that the equal distribution of workload that was possible during their time in the guerrilla had turned into an increasingly unequal division of labor in civilian life. When they moved into new specially designated peace settlements (Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación – ETCR), many signatories took on the roles of motherhood and domestic life, which resulted in an overwhelming amount of care work. This, in turn, reduced their opportunities to study, pursue a new career path, and for some, even continue their political leadership activities.

As a rare ray of hope, our investigation revealed, the thriving efforts of local LGBTQ+ organizations in Cauca and how they collaborate with national, regional, and local struggles. This joint enterprise is significant and should be highlighted in future peace policy construction scenarios that focus on gender and sexuality as a basis for social mobilisation. Remarkably, in Cauca, LGBTQ+ activists with indigenous backgrounds challenged the implementation of peace policy in rural reform and political participation, bridging ethnic and LGBTQ+ platforms.

One point of focus that is addressed in both our research and this special issue is the importance of considering peacebuilding as a process influenced by the worldviews, identities, and political commitments of the different groups working towards this objective. As we mentioned earlier in this foreword, essential to this understanding is the development of a situated and intersectional gaze that brings to the fore the complex relationship between peace, gender, and inequality. Possible areas to explore in this sense have to do with developing a sharper gender analysis of what would a successful implementation at the territorial level mean, the generation of appropriate performance indicators, and the possibilities of a fully participatory view of the implementation of peace programmes.

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