

The future of peacekeeping: UN missions, women, and the need for a rethink in strategy.

The Inquiry.

The way we view the consequences of conflict is changing. This change is partly driven by several new dynamic thinkers, who are contributing to our understanding of the nature of conflicts, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. One of these new thinkers in post-conflict reconstruction research is Dr Ismene Gizelis. Gizelis's research aims to connect the gaps between her academics research findings on conflict and post-conflict studies and the practical work done by NGO's and stakeholders in the field. Other parts of her research compare the provision of healthcare by governments with different accumulation of wealth: why states with low incomes, i.e. Uganda, seem to provide better health care services than wealthier nations, such as Nigeria.

Her recent publications have queried the nature of peacekeeping operations and the deployment of UN peacekeepers. Gizelis's examinations try to understand whether 'UN deployment/missions increases conflicts situation; whether this deployment really makes a difference and if gender (women's status within a country) and equality within the peacebuilding process matters'. Crucially her research provokes a rethink in our understanding of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction and addresses the issues of inequality within conflicts. I sat down with Dr. Theodora Ismene Gizelis to discuss her research findings on UN missions and post-conflict reconstruction.

Women's overlooked contributions.

Gizelis's research finds that in countries where 'women are doing relatively better; UN missions tend to be more successful'. This means that 'the status of women is a precondition' which has serious implications especially for women who live in countries with lower social, economically and political rights. Put another way, in countries where women's social status is low UN missions might not be as successful as others where these 'precondition are firmly rooted' before the conflict. If we expand Gizelis's notion and findings to countries like Afghanistan and Nepal (where women have limited rights) then the future of post-conflict reconstruction looks grim. Gizelis also adds that this will 'depend on other factors like the regional dynamics and the capacity of surrounding countries and their agencies'. Her research is important for INGO's and NGO's like the United Nations, the Security Council, and the UNDP as these organisations are often the bodies who deploy staff, and peacekeepers to deal with post-conflict reconstruction and capacity building.

Gizelis's research is ultimately trying to understand how INGO's, NGO's and civil society can deliver better solutions. However Gizelis warns against 'quick fix solutions' and argues that her findings, which might be seen as full blown solutions for policy makers, need time to develop, particularly when it comes to foreign aid and outside donors who expect rapid outcomes. Ultimately the

key for Gizelis is a balance between these two components: Gizelis believes that 'slow but progressive' policies are needed and warns against over dependency on INGO's and NGO's support.

For Gizelis, it is important that agencies understand the 'local context and the significance of women's engagement at the domestic level' for them to be able to conceptualise the needs of any mission. Gizelis see women's organisations and their engagement in post-conflict reconstruction as a way of dealing with some of the issues that arise during these periods. For the most part 'women's organisations tend to combine groups from different ethnic backgrounds and religions'. Women's organisations are also better placed, and have the capacity, to deal with the repatriation of displaced people. This will help to start and address the reconstruction processes, while combating some of 'the sociological and psychological components' of a conflict. For Gizelis, these elements are the foundations to the peace process and any peace process 'must take these domestic issues into account'. This then raises fundamental questions like what political systems the organisation will have, who will represent whom once a peace deal has been formed, and whether these groups within the country have a voice.

Power, local leaders, elite's and a rethink in strategy.

Gizelis also addresses the interplay between elitist groups and organisations like the UN and the Africa Union. For Gizelis 'the problem with many of these peace and post-conflict agreements' arises when the majority of negotiations are dealt with at the 'elite level'. These negotiations tend to not focus on talking and negotiating with the domestic and 'grass root civil society members'. For the most part, this level is where women's organisations, smaller charities and NGO's tend to operate. This interplay might later contribute to dissatisfaction and discontent amongst the different groups. This creates a dilemma for many missions and peace envoys where on the one side 'elites are easier to address and identifiable.' whereas trying to identify local level leaders and agents requires 'time, flexibility and knowledge of the local condition' which most peacekeepers do not have during the post-conflict reconstruction period.

For Gizelis, this has implications on the way the UN negotiates, organises and deploys peacekeepers now and in the future. She asserts that 'UN agencies will need to be more aware of these factors as it is the UN and its offshoot departments who are engaged in peace and capacity building.' This is partly because the UN organisation have 'the mandate and to some extent the resources' to deal with capacity building and reconstruction. For Gizelis UN missions will now need to rethink their strategy and focus more on the local conditions in order to deliver 'the desirable outcome to end a conflict.' This reduces the capacity for conflicts to re-emerge two-three years later. Despite this, Gizelis admits that the UN is tasked with a massive mandate, and this can often be difficult when trying to establish who the local level representatives are after a conflict ends.

Where do we go from here?

Gizelis raises two additional concerns for the future of peacekeeping missions: the first is whether most of the current academic research is being 'accessed, initiated and implemented' by many of the key workers who oversee peacekeeping (especially when it comes to gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping). Gizelis also interrogates INGO's and NGO's avoidance of contemporary research findings provided by social scientists and academics, whose outputs are more refined, specialized and professional and ready for utilisation in the field. In comparison, previous research was too wide and tended to explain 'everything and nothing.' However most of the research today has become more 'innovative and incremental in its delivery of how we view the world.' Academics are now in a better position to explain some of the occurrences which we see in our world today. This has allowed most research to identify more condition, and allowed researchers to provide specific solutions to address these gaps in our knowledge. This means that organisations should now be accessing more of the information that academics now provide and reconsidering the methods they currently use.

The second area of concern for Gizelis is the nature of peacekeeping missions. Gizelis believes that future missions will change but not drastically. However, what we might see from future missions is 'what occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when UN forces were allowed to use force against rebels groups.' This selective use of force to reduce overall violence will happen more often in the future missions, Gizelis predicts. Gizelis draws similarities with observation made by French troops when they intervened in Central African Republic domestic conflict in 2013. For Gizelis 'force will be used to exhibit control and restraint over small spoiler groups who may use violence against civilians'. This is because the governments in these countries are often weak and unable to control these groups. For Gizelis the future of peacekeeping and post conflict reconstruction will not drastically change but might involve more rapid responses to emergency's that arise. This might involve agencies like the UN providing quicker and swifter responses to conflict situations.

Profile: Dr. Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (BA University of La Verne, CA, USA; MA & PhD Claremont Graduate University, CA, USA) is a Reader in the Department of Government at the University of Essex. Her main research interest is in conflict dynamics, peacekeeping, gender equality and post-conflict reconstruction, and communicable diseases. She is the author of *Globalization, Integration, and the Future of European Welfare States* (Manchester University Press, 2010) and articles in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Political Geography*, *International Interactions*, *Journal of Economic Development and Cultural Change*, and *Conflict and Cooperation*. She was the guest co-editor (together with Louise Olsson) of *International Interactions* (2013) on "A Systematic Understanding of Gender, Peace and Security – Implementing UNSCR 1325."