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**‘Unpacking’ the gender perspective  
at UN Peacekeeping Operations:  
A case study of MINUSCA through a feminist lens**

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## List of Acronyms

AU	African Union
CAR	The Central African Republic
CLA	Community Liaison Assistant
DFS	United Nations Department of Field Support
DKPO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GA	General Assembly
MARA	Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements
MINUSCA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in The Central African Republic
MSF	<i>Medecins Sans Frontieres</i>
PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
QIP	Quick Impact Projects
SBGV	Sexual Based Gender Violence
SC	Security Council
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SOP	Standard Operation Process
SRSR	Special Representatives from the Secretary – General
UFDR	Union of Democratic Forces for Unity
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMIK	United Nations Missions in Kosovo
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

## **Abstract**

Since the approval of United Nations Resolution 1325 in 2000, gender perspectives have started to play a significant role in processes of peacebuilding and peace-transformation within UN peacekeeping. According to the United Nations, working towards gender equality is one of the keys to constructing a better and a just peace. The contribution of this perspective to Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) is to highlight different roles played by women and men in societies and the disproportional violence that women face, in conflict situations. The gender perspective points to the importance of incorporating women into the military and other components of PKOs, emphasizing the significance of women in decision-making. Resolution 1325 was implemented as part of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Under Brazilian Captain Márcia Braga, who worked as a gender adviser in the mission from 2018 to 2019, a gender perspective was implemented in all components of the mission: civilian, police and military. The focus of this research is to analyse, from a critical feminist perspective, the possibilities and limits of the gender perspective developed by the UN in PKOs and to examine the limits and possibilities of the role of a gender adviser. This will be done through the case study of MINUSCA.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This research intends to contribute to a better understanding of a gender-based approach to UN Peacekeeping and the role of gender issues in global politics. Through the case study of MINUSCA and the implementation of a gender perspective in the operation, the present research aims to deep the discussion of Women, Peace and Security and the feminist contribution to the field. Through a critical feminist theoretical lens, this research evaluates how the perspective was implemented in practice and shed light upon its weaknesses and strengths, thus contributing for unpacking the UN rationale while implementing a gender perspective in PKOs.

## **Keywords**

Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security, Peacekeeping Operations, Central African Republic, MINUSCA, Hybrid Missions, Feminism, Gender Mainstreaming

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of topic

Since their creation, in the post Second World War, UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) have been evolving according to social global changes and gradually extending their attributions beyond “use of force” responses (Kenkel 2013). Although late, gender was among the areas in which those changes were noted. From the mid-80’s on, the links between gender and conflicts became more and more present in the practice of international organizations. Within this context, a gender mainstreaming strategy – which will be thoroughly examined throughout this paper - was developed to raise awareness about the disproportional violence faced by women in armed conflicts, making the case as well for their incorporation in peace processes.

Allegations of sexual crimes committed in civil conflicts such as those in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and their trial at international *ad hoc* tribunals, contributed to turn women’s concerns into part of international discussions and to incorporate the issue into the agenda of global institutions (Carey 2001). The approval of the Beijing Platform for Action, in 1995, was a further step towards the development of a gender perspective in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, by claiming for the incorporation of a gender strategy in all levels of global institutions (Väyrynen 2004). The Platform pointed ‘12 areas of concern’ “considering the major obstacles to women’s advancement, including violence, the environment, institutional mechanisms, armed conflict, power and decision-making” (Porter 2003: 245).

As part of this process, the United Nations developed a gender approach for PKOs, in order to promote gender equality and enhance the participation of women in peacebuilding and peace transformation processes (United Nations 2000). Approved by the UN Security Council in 2000, Resolution 1325 was a landmark in the fight for equal relations between genders in PKOs, advocating for a more balanced distribution of women and men within UN operations and the implementation of a gender perspective within the PKOs (United Nations 2000). Several authors (Cohn 2008; True 2016; Olsson and Gizelis 2014) agree that Resolution 1325 constituted a milestone in the consolidation of a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the UN.

Twenty years after its approval, however, Resolution 1325 still have not been fully put into practice, with most PKOs failing to properly implement a gender perspective: currently, only 5% of all PKO’s personnel (military, police, judicial and correction) in field are women (United Nations Peacekeeping 2019). The United Nations performance while implementing a gender perspective in PKOs has also been severely criticized from a theoretical point of view (Heathcote 2014; True 2016), as well as its rationale regarding gender-related issues. The discussions are mainly raised by a critical feminist perspective on WPS and extends also to the gaps of UN norms addressing gender issues in its own structure.

The United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was created in 2014 via the Resolution 2149. It constitutes one of the few examples of PKOs which incorporated a gender perspective in its mandate since the beginning:

Requests MINUSCA to take fully into account gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the CAR Authorities in ensuring the full and effective participation, involvement and representation of women in all spheres and at all levels, including in stabilization activities, transitional justice, the work of the SCC and of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, SSR, DDR and DDR/R processes, as well as in the national political

dialogue and electoral processes, though, inter alia, the provision of gender advisers.(United Nations 2014: 12)

MINUSCA was put in place by the UN as an attempt to bring to an end a civil war that has been affecting the Central African Republic (CAR) for years. The conflict emerged in 2012 and is still ongoing, involving governmental forces, rebels of Séléka group (Muslims) and anti-balaka militias (Christians). The causes of the conflict are complex and involve not only religion, but also ethnic differences and power inequalities. An update from the Global Conflict Tracker (2020) shows that there are currently 2.9 million people in CAR in need of humanitarian assistance. As for gender-based violence, the country has high rates of inequality and violence against women. As showed in a recent MSF report, 4.260 people in the country were treated for sexual violence in 2019 (Medecins Sans Frontieres 2019). MINUSCA reported another 322 cases of sexual-related crimes that same year, of which 311 were committed against women and girls (United Nations 2020b). Accusations of violence against women also extends to UN troops in CAR. According to the United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit, in 2019 there were 41 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against UN personnel: 8 allegations of abuse, 30 of exploitation and 3 of both abuse and exploitation (UN Conduct and Discipline Unit 2020).

In 2018, the Brazilian captain Márcia Braga was designated to implement the perspective in the military component of MINUSCA. She later received a UN award for her work at MINUSCA and the implementation of Resolution 1325 (United Nations 2019). In MINUSCA, the gender perspective acquired a new role through the work of captain Braga, with the aim of increasing gender equality within the military component of the mission, supporting and protecting local women and children.

Braga's activities may also represent a turning point regarding Brazilian contributions in UN PKOs. The country has a long history of supporting UN operations: the first Brazilian peacekeepers were deployed in 1956 in one of the earliest missions under the UN Emergency Force to address the Suez crisis (United Nations n.d.). Since then, Brazil has had several important (male) generals heading missions. Currently, the country provides personnel for 8 UN missions around the globe, totaling 282 individuals (United Nations Peacekeeping 2020b), of which 61 are military troops. However, the disaggregated data shows that only 5 of those are women (Hamman, Giannini, Pereira 2019).

In light of the above, this research consists on a case study of the recent gender-related project implemented at MINUSCA by captain Márcia Braga in the 2018-2019 period. The analysis will be based on a critical feminist literature focusing on gender issues in PKOs (True 2016; Cohn 2008; Heathcote 2014). In this respect, the research aims to: i) briefly summarize the evolution of Peacekeeping Operations and the introduction of a gender perspective in their operations; ii) describe the implementation of a gender perspective in MINUSCA and iii) analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process through a critical feminist lens.

## 1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

### *Objectives*

- Understand how the gender perspective in PKOs developed by the UN was implemented in the military component of MINUSCA;
- Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the perspective's implementation;
- Analyse if there are limitations regarding the implementation and why;



- Analyse the level of autonomy of Captain Márcia Braga within the mission as a military gender adviser.

### ***Research Question***

To what degree did the incorporation of a military gender adviser contribute to a more substantive implementation of a gender perspective in the Peacekeeping Operation in Central African Republic?

### ***Research Sub-Question***

- How has Resolution 1325 contributed to the implementation of a gender perspective in the military component of MINUSCA?
- What are the main limitations and strengths of a military gender adviser implementing a gender perspective in PKOs?
- What is the role of a military gender adviser in the decision-making process of MINUSCA?

## **1.3 Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative approach and employ a case study methodology, with the aim of “studying elements of the social through comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation or case” (O’Leary 2017: 408). The case study selected follows a *typical-case/representative* approach, allowing for the analysis of a broader event over a single period in time (Gerring 2007). By doing so, this paper intends to look into social complexities in order to explore and understand interactions, processes, lived experiences, and beliefs systems that are part of individuals, institutions and cultural groups (O’Leary 2017: 272). The case study will rely on a variety of data, both primary and secondary. Institutional documents, such as United Nations’ Resolutions, were particularly important, as well as policy papers and reports of non-governmental organizations in the areas of human rights and gender. The information was collected by carrying out database survey and also interviewing people who work within the research field. The selection of the material focused on the subject of this paper: gender and peacekeeping operations. The first conversation with Captain Márcia Braga, whose work is the subject of this research, was a non-structured interview. Given the challenge of matching the time of the researcher and the interviewee, further interviews were conducted via the communication application WhatsApp and followed a structured questionnaire prepared in advance. The questions were developed according to the first conversation with Braga.

The research faced a number of ethical challenges: 1. understanding power relations between different groups, as well as their respective privileges; 2. the reliability and authenticity of the interviews, on which this research heavily depends; 3. work with appropriate indicators, in order to safeguard the credibility of the research; 4. managing subjectivities and other challenges that a social interview face in order to be precise and attentive to social complexities and 5. the difficulty of accessing specific institutional documents which are only available for a target public. Additional challenges were posed by the current COVID-19

breakdown. It interfered with the data collection, since field visits were no longer an option, and interfered with the results of interviews, which could not be conducted in person. Online conversations depend on several factors (internet connection, availability of the person, time difference), potentially affecting the quality of the conversations.

## **1.4 Chapter Outline**

This research is divided into seven chapters: 1) Introduction; 2) Contextual Background; 3) Context; 4) Critical Feminist Discussions on Women, Peace and Security; 5) Implementation of a Gender Perspective in MINUSCA; 6) Feminist Practices and Gender Perspectives in PKOs; and 7) Conclusion. In Chapter 2, the contextual background situates the key elements of the research and its background. These elements include the evolution of UN Peacekeeping Operations (until its fifth generation), the introduction of a gender perspective in UN PKOs and the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 at MINUSCA. The chapter also discusses a range of feminist perspectives on gender mainstreaming in the United Nations' PKOs. Chapter 3 describes the situation in the Central African Republic, the factors that led to its internal conflict and the country's current situation. This chapter also explains how MINUSCA was created and its operations so far, amidst widespread gender-based violence. Chapter 4 presents the analytical framework of the study, comprising a critical feminist literature about Women, Peace and Security. It focuses on the analysis of UN language on gender, the implementation of gender mainstreaming and the operations of UN peacekeepers in the field. Chapter 5 focuses on the processes of designing and implementing a gender perspective in the military component of MINUSCA. It details how the perspective was implemented by captain Márcia Braga (between 2018 and 2019), with due consideration to the challenges faced along the process. Chapter 6 presents the findings of the research, analysed through a critical feminist perception. Finally, Chapter 7 brings the concluding remarks. It identifies strengths and weaknesses of the gender mainstreaming implementation process, and make some modest recommendations that could enhance the design and the implementation of this perspective.

# Chapter 2: Contextual Background and Main Concepts

## 2.1 Introduction: Hybrid Missions

After the Second World War, humanitarian claims emerged and had a strong influence on the processes that led to the creation of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, which have first been established in the 1950's. Ever since, constant social changes, as well as discussions about the role of PKOs as part of multilateral interventions, have been playing a major role in global governance debates. Kenkel (2013) pointed the five generations that composed the so called *multidimensional peacekeeping operations* up to now:

- i) first-generation: traditional peacekeeping, based on following an (albeit potentially temporary) end to armed conflict through a truce or ceasefire;
- ii) second-generation: civilian tasks, assisting a political transition to peace;
- iii) third-generation: peace enforcement, using force to impose aims within the missions;
- iv) fourth-generation: peacebuilding, more “robust operations” that combine the use of military force with civilian tasks, increasing the local autonomy;
- v) fifth-generation: *hybrid missions*, that consists of different actors and mandates within the same mission, acting now in a way to “endorse the use of force” to guarantee humans rights and the protection of civilians. They also promote development, institutional building and poverty reduction, focusing on the “root causes” of the conflicts.

This research focuses on the fifth-generation of PKOs and their role on the global construction and maintenance of peace. As part of the “new generation” of UN missions, gender discussions (with an emphasis on women’s participation in peace operations, as well as on the stark numbers of gender violence in situations of conflict) started to play an important role.

## 2.2 Gender Mainstreaming at the UN

As part of this process, the idea of gender mainstreaming emerged, in the mid-1990s, as the main approach to incorporate gender<sup>1</sup> perspectives in international initiatives (Olsson and Gizelis 2004). According to the United Nations (2002), gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications of the roles of women and men in society with a view to developing legislation, policies or programs in a number of areas and levels. It is a strategy for the achievement of gender equality in all spheres: political, economic and societal (United Nations 2002). The goal of gender mainstreaming is achieving gender equality through “initiatives to enable women as well as men to formulate and express their views and participate in decision making across all issues” (Mukhopadhyay 2016: 77). The concept claims that gender is an issue because of fundamental inequalities between men and women. Such inequalities

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<sup>1</sup> At UN documents such as the resource package for Gender Equality and WPS (2020: 9), the Gender Responsive in PKOS (2018: 12) and the Policy Directive for Gender Equality in UN PKOs (United Nations 2006: 8), gender is defined as: “The social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender defines power relations in society and determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context”.

are manifested in different ways and sectors, but they are part of a general pattern that must be addressed and questioned (United Nations 2002: 5).

## 2.3 Gender Mainstreaming in PKOs: UN Resolution 1325

According to Väyrynen (2004), discussions regarding women and conflict had been around much earlier, in events such as the “Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” (1979), the “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women” (1993) and the “Declaration Platform for Action at Beijing” (1995). This path culminated in the approval of UN Resolution 1325 (2001) on Women, Peace and Security (Ibid). The Resolution is a “landmark”, since it incorporated women as an integral part of armed conflicts, not being reduced to victims or “vulnerable groups”. On the contrary, Resolution 1325 depicts women as protagonists in a number of stages of the peace-building process: decision-making, conflict prevention, resolution etc. (Cohn 2004). According to the Resolution itself:

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.(United Nations 2000)

The scope of the Resolution was designed by the UN Secretariat and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Each body was responsible for different documents with the objective of elaborating recommendations on the implementation of the Resolution 1325 as a guide for peacekeeping operations (Chinkin and Charlesworth 2006). According to Resolution 1325 itself, the adoption of a gender approach at UN Peacekeeping Operations can be understood as:

Recognizing the consequent impacts of armed conflict of women and children as the vast affected majority as well recognizing the impact on durable peace and reconciliation;

Reaffirming the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building processes as well as stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security;

The need to increase women’s role in decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution;

Reaffirming the need to fully implement international humanitarian and human rights laws to protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflict realities.(United Nations 2000: 2)

Through Resolution 1325 and others WPS mandates, the United Nations claimed for the incorporation of a gender perspective in Peacekeeping Operations in a way to enhance women’s participation in all levels of peacebuilding processes and to address concerns about the disproportional vulnerability of women and girls in post-conflict realities (United Nations 2000). The perspective is expressed not only by the increase in the number of women peacekeepers, but also by the inclusion of gender issues in all the PKO routine and operations: police, military and civil (United Nations 2018a).

Figure 2.1 - Checklist: Operational-Level Military Activities (United Nations 2010)

Checklist: Operational-Level Military Activities	
<b>Military Protection Activities</b>	
✓	Include in guidance on the protection of civilians (for tactical-level commanders), instructions for addressing the specific protection needs of women and girls, taking into account the evolving situation on the ground.
✓	Request that tactical-level military personnel who are directly approached by victims of sexual violence: ensure the physical safety of victims; respect the victim's right to confidentiality; and refer the victims to mission police or human rights components for follow-up.
✓	Deploy female military personnel to support activities to protect women and girls.
✓	Request that female UN police (UNPOL) and local police co-deploy with the military to protect women and girls, when the military has limited female officers available.
✓	Maintain a statistical record of the total number of sexual violence cases received by the military.
✓	Provide initial protection to victims and witnesses who report perpetrators of acts of sexual violence and refer such cases to UNPOL or human rights components of the mission for follow-up with the national authorities.
✓	Liaise with local women's organizations in the area of operation to enhance military activities related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
✓	Include in security plans for the protection of civilians and in evacuation planning guidance to improve protection of and support for women and children in internally displaced person (IDP) camps and centres hosting large civilian populations.
✓	Ensure that personnel with gender expertise form part of the essential staff in planning for evacuation.
✓	Uphold the highest standards of professional conduct and adhere to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation in executing tasks to protect civilians.
<b>Security Support Activities</b>	
DDR	
✓	During operational planning for DDR processes, ensure that sufficient numbers of female military observers are available to screen female ex-combatants.
✓	Provide separate living facilities for female ex-combatants in plans for cantonment sites, and ensure their adequate protection in the camps.
✓	Collaborate with the mission gender adviser on outreach activities to encourage women ex-combatants to come forward and participate in the DDR process.
✓	Consult women's organizations on planning for reintegration programmes.
✓	Obtain the support of the UN system and other partners when providing medical and psychosocial counselling support to male and female ex-combatants and women and girls associated with fighting forces, who may have been victims of sexual violence.
<b>Electoral Security</b>	
✓	Include in operational plans for electoral security, an assessment of the security risks that may impede the full participation of women or men in elections.
✓	Include in security plans for elections an assessment of the security risks that may confront women candidates and measures to ensure their protection.
✓	Deploy mixed teams of military personnel along routes that may hold protection dangers for women travelling to polling stations to register or vote.
✓	Ensure that pregnant women and women with babies are prioritised at polling stations, including specific queues for them.
<b>Support for the National Armed Forces of the Host Country</b>	
✓	Advise the host country's national armed forces on recruiting more women.
✓	Support national armed forces in undertaking a review of selection criteria aimed at removing any barriers and obstacles to the recruitment of women.
✓	Support national armed forces in aligning their defence policies with global and national commitments to gender equality and women's equal rights.
✓	Lead by example: deploy female military personnel who can mentor local women in the national armed forces of the host country and serve as role models.
✓	Uphold the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls.
✓	Include gender and human rights principles in training programmes for national security forces in the host country.
✓	Include guidance on preventing sexual violence and protecting women and girls from sexual violence in training support provided to national security forces.
✓	Encourage national security forces to establish a gender cell/unit to monitor and support the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and operational activities.
<b>Mission Support</b>	
✓	Plan for and provide separate accommodation and bathroom facilities within a convenient distance, and augment such facilities in proportion to increases in deployment.
✓	Consider the privacy needs of female and male military personnel when designing transit camps.
✓	Provide access to gynaecological services for female peacekeepers.
✓	Advocate with TCCs in order to provide female and male officers with equal opportunities to be nominated for mission support functions, including humanitarian, logistics, communications, and engineering functions.
<b>Monitoring and Verification Activities</b>	
✓	Consult with local women and women's organizations as part of information-gathering activities to construct a comprehensive overview of the security situation.
✓	Consult with women and ask them to contribute to the establishment of verification mechanisms and joint monitoring commissions, and invite them to serve on such commissions.
✓	Employ joint assessment teams to define patrolling routes, in consultation with local women, to ensure that routes popular with women are accorded adequate priority.
✓	Deploy mixed teams of military personnel for monitoring and verification activities.
✓	Deploy female uniformed personnel to support dissemination of non-sensitive information on planned operations and other military activities that specifically target local women.
✓	Include female interpreters in groups of local interpreters recruited to strengthen communication between the military and the local population.
✓	Use mixed teams of military investigators to enhance interaction with the local population.
✓	As part of information operations, consult with the mission gender adviser to identify specific security threats to women and girls.
✓	Appoint a gender adviser in the mission headquarters of the Office of the Force Commander and ensure that gender focal points are appointed at every level of deployment.
✓	Request that JOC and JMAC teams consult with local women as part of outreach to the local community.
✓	Include information on security threats to women and girls in reporting submissions at the operational and tactical levels.
✓	Use sex-disaggregated data in all reporting submissions, including situation reports and monthly and annual reports.
<b>Military Liaison Activities</b>	
✓	Provide guidance to tactical-level commanders to enable smooth coordination between military and police components during activities to protect women and girls.
✓	Extend military escort activities to humanitarian agencies providing services to victims of sexual violence.
✓	Consult with local women and the mission gender unit in order to identify QPs specifically targeted at women.
✓	Include female officers in military outreach teams for US-COHC activities.

The gender perspective implementation in the military component of PKOs consists in “supporting military personnel in recognizing and addressing the security priorities of all

sectors of the local population—women, men, boys and girls—in a peacekeeping context” (United Nations 2010). Peacekeepers have a direct interaction with local populations and their work interferes directly in the community. The activities, design and implementation of the perspective in the military component should address the checklist presented in the scheme below, developed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), as a guideline to integrate a gender perspective into the work of the PKOs (2010), as shown in Figure 2.1.

### **2.3.1 The role of a gender adviser**

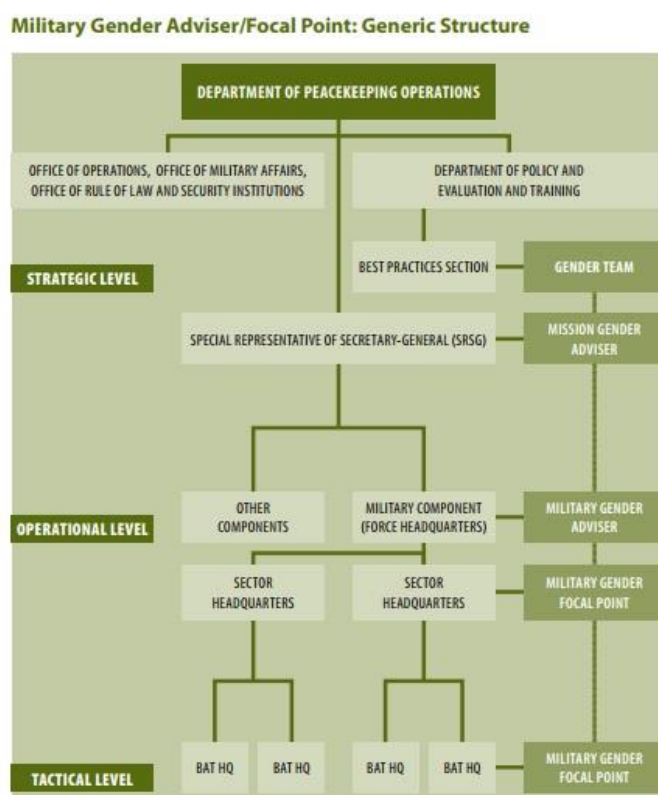
The activities described above are due to be carried out by the gender adviser of the PKO. The United Nations established the gender adviser officer through Resolution 1888 (2009), with the purposes of monitoring the implementation of Resolution 1325 (2000); promoting gender mainstreaming within the UN system; empowering women and promoting gender equality in UN missions (United Nations 2009). The gender adviser has the duty of creating a gender component within the mission in a way to ensure that women and girls are included in all its operations, promoting their political participation and providing their protection (United Nations Peacekeeping n.d.). The gender adviser is also responsible for providing a strategic guidance to support the implementation of the perspective in all components of the mission as well as supporting gender officers in the focal points and training personnel (United Nations 2010). As for the military component of a PKO, the specific tasks of a gender adviser, according to the DPKO Guideline (2010: 40) are the following:

- a) Provide advice to the Force Commander and senior military leadership on strategies for effective implementation of existing mandates on women, peace and security within the military component;
- b) Monitor the inclusion of the security priorities of both local women and men in information analysis and assessments, to inform planning and execution of tasks by the Force Commander in the area of operation;
- c) Monitor and support delivery of gender training for all military peacekeepers;
- d) Monitor and support gender-sensitive reporting activities and the use of gender-disaggregated data to facilitate planning for military operations;
- e) Collaborate with the Mission Gender Adviser to identify and support implementation of civil-military coordination (CIMIC) projects targeting women and girls;
- f) Establish and maintain contacts with women’s organizations in the area of operation to support military outreach activities, in conjunction with the Mission Gender Adviser;
- g) Monitor implementation of guidance on protection of women and girls from sexual violence by military peacekeepers in accordance with mission mandate;
- h) Oversee consolidation of good practice on implementation of existing mandates on women, peace and security by military peacekeepers;

- i) Represent the military component on the mission-level gender task force, as well as on relevant inter-agency working groups;
- j) Monitor and advise on operational requirements for female military personnel at the operational and tactical level.
- k) Provide guidance and support to Military Gender Focal Points at the tactical level

The gender adviser is a key element to provide and sustain a gender perspective within all the levels and spheres of a PKO. Regarding the military component of the PKO, its duty is designing the practice of the perspective and incorporating in the mission’s routines as well as advising the Force Commander and the leadership of the mission to incorporate the perspective in the strategies and processes of the mission. The scheme of the gender adviser role can be visualized as the figure above founded at the DPKO guideline to integrate a gender perspective into the work of the United Nations military in Peacekeeping Operations (2010), as shown in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2 Military Gender Adviser/Focal Point: Generic Structure (United Nations 2010)**



Captain Márcia Braga, member of the Brazilian navy, was designated to be a gender adviser at MINUSCA in 2018 to implement the perspective in its military component. In the table above, Braga is situated in the Military Gender Adviser role, which works together with the other components in the operational level as well as supporting the gender adviser’s mission and orientating the military gender focal points.

The above mentioned activities will be described by captain Márcia Braga in her work at MINUSCA in the fifth chapter of this research, traducing the UN guidelines and policies

in her daily routines and efforts to introduce the perspective at MINUSCA. Braga was designated to implement the perspective at the military component, localized at the headquarter forces and as well as supporting other components such police and civil.

### **2.3.2 Why focus on implementation?**

The choice of analysing the implementation process as the subject of this research was guided by the objective to better understand the impacts and practices of a gender perspective in UN Peacekeeping Operations. In this regard, the research aims to identify the challenges of the implementation of a gender perspective in the field and also understand how such process is translated in practice, that is, how the UN rationale has been converted in practice. At the United Nations documents regarding the implementation of the perspective, it could be noticed that there is not an action plan or guidance in terms of how implementing the perspective in practice. For instance, the United Nations Policy for Gender Responsive in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2018), the DPKO Directive for Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations (2006) and DPKO/DFS Guideline for Integrating a Gender Perspective into the work of the United Nations Military Peacekeeping Operations (2010) haven't described practical process about how to implement the perspective in the missions, it's more similar with checklists of which topics should be addressed in the implementation process or even explanations about the aims of implementing the perspective within PKOs.

Hereof, this research aims to understand the practice of a gender adviser to implement the perspective and to understand how the UN guidelines influenced in the practice of implementing the perspective. By analysing the practical experience of captain Márcia Braga as a gender adviser in the field, this research intends to identify what could be learned and what could be improved in the implementation process of a gender perspective in PKOs and what are the relevant contributions a critical feminist lens can provide to this process. Furthermore, the analysis of the implementation may also contribute to scrutinize the duties of a gender adviser and its autonomy while designing and implementing the perspective.

## **2.4 Feminist Perspectives on gender in PKOs**

Prominent scholars have challenged Resolution 1325 and criticized its principles and implementation, as well as the adoption of a gender mainstreaming perspective by the United Nations. Olsson and Gizelis (2014) discuss feminist discourse and its interactions with the implementation of peacekeeping operations from different perspectives. The authors argue that great progress was achieved since the approval of Resolution 1325. However, they also identified several limitations, which raise some questions about the understanding and execution of this perspective, such as: i) theory underdevelopment; ii) lack of data; iii) exclusion from mainstream research. The authors affirm that “the failure of empirical and feminist researchers to find common ground can further undermine the research agenda on gender equality and peacekeeping” (Olsson and Gizelis 2014: 526).

In addition, Carol Cohn (2008), argues that feminists face challenges both political and practical while engaging with global institutions: i) the prevalence of a liberal approach, by the UN, when addressing gender equality issues; ii) the UN understanding of peace as no more than the “absence of war”; iii) the rhetorical strategy of using “women in decision-making roles” as a convincing argument employed by Western women to justify “women’s monitoring” of peace agreements; and iv) dangers about the construction of women as peace-makers and the exclusion of race, class, religion, ethnicity discussions, “obscuring all parts of the war” (Cohn 2008). On the other hand, Cohn (2008) agreed that Resolution 1325



had important effects. Her work provides us with an alternative perspective to reflect upon the feminist's research roles and the challenges faced while working with global institutions, as well as problematizes its understandings and statements about the gender field.

Tarja Väyrynen (2004) focused her criticism on the binary discourse inherent to the gender mainstreaming perspective adopted by the United Nations, showing that contemporary events have limited this discourse. Väyrynen (2004) argues that the “post-Westphalian conflict and human security” opens space for gender lenses in peacekeeping operations but that it is not “fully” using its space. The UN still bases its discourse on a limited binary and neoliberal understanding of masculinity and femininity. In that sense, and also criticizing the UN discourse and the exclusion of fair arguments to incorporate more women in peacekeeping operations, Tamyá Rebelo (2013) argues that the organization needs to adjoin gender discussions beyond the binary division between masculinity and femininity. The author (2013) concludes that, by avoiding such discussion, the UN reinforces military structures that neglects the importance of gender discussions and the real meaning of “gender equity”.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Gender issues have been taking place in global politics and development for a long time, not only as a central preoccupation regarding gender inequalities but also bringing discussions about how and why a gender approach should be central in developments and global discussions. The role and performance of notorious global institutions such as United Nations in incorporate gender issues in its operations have been discussed mainly within the feminist literature. The construction of the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the UN and its Peacekeeping Operations influenced by the creation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, was a mark to gender studies, aiming to address women and men inequalities in all levels and all kinds of institutions. Nevertheless, after 20 years of the creation of this agenda and the Resolution 1325, a plenty of considerations and studies regarding the UN performance in PKOs are highlighted, addressing the gaps in the UN rationale and the implementation of a gender perspective within the missions (Limo, Davies and Bromley 2016). Some aspects of the practice of the perspective are still unclear and the gender mainstreaming strategy seems to no longer fulfil the complexities involving power relations and challenges of post-conflict realities. As pointed by Mukhopadhyay (2016: 77):

Making a case for gender and development, developing and implementing training programmes, frameworks, planning tools and even checklists, unpacking organizational development and change from a gender perspective, have all contributed to building technical capacity and pushed forward technical processes for the integration of gender equality concerns in development.

The necessity to unpack unclear institutional processes while implementing a gender approach in its operations shows indispensable to deepening the discussions of the role of a gender approach in development and global politics.

In this regard, the present research aims to unpack the gender perspective by the case study of MINUSCA, understanding how the UN rationale works in the field as well as understanding what is the role of a gender adviser in implement this perspective. With the collaboration of the captain Márcia Braga, this research reflects upon the design of the implementation created by the captain through a feminist critical lens. Through an analysis of the implementation of this perspective, the research aims to address the strengths and weaknesses of this perspective in practice, to unpack process that are unclear in the implementation practical process as well as providing reflection and/or recommendations to enhance the gender approach in UN PKOs.

## Chapter 3: The Context: The Central African Republic

### 3.1 Introduction

The latest conflict in Central African Republic emerged in 2012 and is still ongoing. The conflict involves governmental forces, rebels of Séléka group (Muslims) and anti-balaka militias (Christians). The causes of the conflict are complex and involve not only religious differences but also ethnic cleavages and power inequalities. Understanding the root causes and dynamics of the conflict is necessary to transform the current scenario. Efforts have been made to support the central government; neighbouring countries, local institutions and international actors have been supporting CAR in different manners. Among such initiatives was the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in CAR (MINUSCA), created in 2014 by the UN, and which succeeded a previous mission created in 2013 by the African Union called Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine (MISCA).

The gender perspective is a concern of MINUSCA since its creation. Its mandate includes topics such as the protection of women, the incorporation of female personnel within the mission and the incorporation of women in its decision-making process (United Nations 2014). At first, the perspective was implemented only within the police and civil components of the operation. Between 2018-2019, a Brazilian captain called Márcia Braga was designated to work as a gender adviser at MINUSCA and her work consisted in implementing the gender perspective within the military component of the mission.

### 3.2 Conflict in CAR

Since its independence from France in 1960 and the death of the important leader of the fight against the French colonialism Barthelemy Boganda, CAR coped with difficulties to consolidate state institutions and provide social, economic and political services to its population (Siradağ, 2016). The country has witnessed consecutive military coups and shifts in its leadership, increasing the centralization of power by few elite groups. Nowadays, CAR is considered a democracy, but according to Freedom House (2009), is not yet a free state - score 10/100; 04/40 of political civil rights and 5/60 civil rights. This scenario of chronic instability entailed the emergence of rebels and terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab, that have infiltrated in the country, internationalizing its internal conflicts and adding new layers of complexity to this already multifaceted situation (Knoope and Buchanan-Clarke 2017).

In 2003 started the so-called “Bush war”, involving the self-declared president François Bozize, rebels of the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) and other small rebel groups. The war stretched from 2007 to 2012, when several peace agreements were signed between rebel groups and the government. In December 2012, the conflict restarted against president Bozize, accused of disrespecting the peace agreement. In 2013, Séléka militias took the capital, leading Bozize to flee the country. Séléka leader Michel Djotodia then became the self-declared president of CAR (Martin-Isaacs, 2016: 26). Djotodia was later accused by the opposition parties of granting Séléka members’ important roles in the government. African leaders did not recognize Djotodia as leader of the Central African Republic and determined that new elections should take place (with Djotodia remaining as leader during the transitional process). In the same year, former president Bozize was indicted for crimes against humanity and genocide (Human Rights Watch 2019).

The country remains unstable and struggles with daily conflicts between the rebels and the government. Shifts in the leadership of the country come and go and several peace agreements were attempted between the government and armed groups. The latest agreement was signed in September 2019 between CAR's government and 14 armed groups, however, the truce was broken only a few months later and the environment remains unstable (Institute for Security Studies 2019).

Nowadays, around 60% of CAR's territory is occupied by the armed groups (World Bank 2019). As a direct consequence of this situation, 2.9 million people in the country are currently in need of humanitarian assistance (Global Conflict Tracker, 2020). According to the UNHCR (2020), the Central African Republic has approximately 623,400 refugees spreading in a number of countries such as Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Sudan, Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. Another 684,004 people are displaced inside CAR, according to the same report.

### **3.3 Creation of MINUSCA and its operations**

The first peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic was established by the African Union in December 2013 ("Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine", MISCA). One year later, as a response from the international community, UN Security Council Resolution 2149 (2014) established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which incorporated the responsibilities of MISCA, and is still in place.

MINUSCA is part of the fifth generation of United Nations' PKOs, the so-called *hybrid missions*, aiming at transforming conflict realities -post-conflict peacebuilding- and supporting national governments and local organizations. Hybrid missions have three main components, police, military and civil. They have a common mandate, yet each one of them follow an individual chain of command (Kenkel 2013: 135). This innovative composition impacts on the nature of the operation and its decision-making process. For these reasons, it is widely understood as a new model of PKO, designed by multiple actors that bring a mix of policy responses to the peacebuilding process. According to Tardy (2014) this hybrid operation may encourage other actors, such as civilians and regional organizations, to fill eventual gaps and challenges faced by regular UN peacekeeping operations.

MINUSCA's mandate comprise the following goals: protecting civilians during armed conflicts; supporting the implementation of the transition process in national and local levels; delivering humanitarian assistance; and promoting human rights (United Nations 2014).

### **3.4 Sexual and gender-based violence in CAR**

Gender-based violence (SGBV) is defined by the different forms of violence "against a person's ill and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships" (UNHCR n.d.). Such crimes are widespread in countries struck by conflicts, where women and children are disproportionately affected and suffer all kinds of violence.

As one of the consequences of its internal conflict, gender-based violence reaches huge numbers in the Central African Republic, where women are "bearing the brunt of the wars, as casualties, victims and survivors" (Limo, Davies and Bromley 2016). In 2019, MINUSCA reported 322 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 187 women, 124 girls, 6 females of unknown age, 3 men, 2 boys (United Nations 2020b).

The protection of women and children is among the goals of MINUSCA since its creation. Its mandate also includes topics such as the incorporation of female personnel within

the mission and the incorporation of women in its decision-making process (United Nations 2014). In 2017, United Nations Resolution 1172 reiterated the commitment to address sexual exploitation and efforts have been made at MINUSCA to cope with the situation. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the cases are still happening all over the country.

Cases of SGBV are not perpetrated only by local armed groups or individuals, but also by MINUSCA's troops. Allegations of sexual violence committed by peacekeepers are recurrent. According to the United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit website, in 2019 alone, 41 allegations of sexual violence were filed against MINUSCA's troops: 30 of sexual exploitation, 8 of sexual abuse and 3 comprising both violations. The UN is heavily criticised for not responding promptly to these allegations of sexual exploitation in CAR (The Guardian 2016). Thirty-five of the above mentioned allegations are still pending, 3 were identified as substantiated and 3 unsubstantiated. The UN took action against 2 of the substantiated allegations, converted in repatriation by side of United Nations or financial sanctions from the national government (United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit 2020).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

A clear context of the Central African Republic explains why MINUSCA was created and what are its main duties and functions in the Central African Republic. MINUSCA's mandate, as approved in 2014, recall all the resolutions (developed at the that time) on the issue of Women, Peace and Security (United Nations 2014). It comprises important topics such as the prevention of violations against women and children, the increase of female personnel in the mission and the inclusion of women in all levels of peace processes. Yet, as referred above, the mission is also part of the problem, since accusations of sexual violence against its own troops are widespread.

CAR's complex environment requires full attention and expertise to cope with the challenges, particularly when it comes to gender violence. Notwithstanding all its shortcomings, the incorporation of a gender perspective at MINUSCA is part of the efforts to attend the local population that suffers innumerable violations daily. The following chapters will more deeply analyse the implementation of a gender perspective at MINUSCA, with special attention to the work carried out by captain Márcia Braga.

# Chapter 4: Critical feminist discussions on WPS

## 4.1 Introduction

Peace Keeping Operations have been spreading around the globe since the end of the Cold War. Their mandates evolved beyond military purposes (Kenkel 2013), adopting a multidimensional character that incorporates different activities (prevention, peace enforcement, peacebuilding, peace-making and humanitarian assistance) through the missions' main components (military, police, civil, human rights etc.). While carrying out such activities, peacekeepers started to develop a closer relationship with local communities. Some of these activities required a greater presence of women, bringing about the question of gender balance in UN operations (Simic 2014). Alongside others factors already discussed in Chapter 1 – theoretical discussions, greater prominence of gender issues -, this situation led to the approval of Resolution 1325, which, for the first time, introduced a gender perspective at PKOs.

Notwithstanding its historical significance, Resolution 1325 has been heavily criticized, especially among feminist researchers (Cohn 2008, Heathcote 2014, True 2006 and Väyrynen 2004). They point out that the Resolution reproduces UN's binary understanding of gender and challenge this framework by emphasizing the multiple possible dynamics of gender related issues both in an institutional aspect and also applied to practical situations on the ground. The authors (Olsson and Gizelis 2014 and Simic 2014) also point the UN'S shortcomings while incorporating gender equality in the decision-making process of PKOs and in the norms and regulations of UN itself.

The following topics will rely on these critical feminist approaches in a manner to analyse and scrutinize the weaknesses, strengths and challenges of the implementation process of a gender perspective in PKOS.

## 4.2 Gender Mainstreaming: is it outdated?

The gender mainstreaming policy emerged in the context of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Actions (1995) and other international documents from the same period (Väyrynen 2004: 127).<sup>2</sup> The strategy is defined as “clearly essential for securing human rights and social justice for women and men”, with the purpose of leading changes in organizations to create organizational environments committed with gender equality (United Nations 2002). At the United Nations, the commitment with gender mainstreaming led to the adoption of the strategy in a number of projects. One major example was the above-mentioned Resolution 1325, the first to incorporate gender as a main concern of the institution in the context of peace processes and transformation (Väyrynen 2004). The Resolution highlights that women are among the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected people in armed conflicts. It also reaffirms the necessity of incorporating women in peacebuilding and peace transformation processes (United Nations 2000).

On the flipside, feminist critics (Dhamarpuri 2011, Hudson 2005 and Shepherd 2014) identify a number of shortcomings in the idea of gender mainstreaming and its application by the UN. This mainstream rationale focuses mainly on the social attributes, roles and opportunities of women and men in society, thus ignoring the complexity of gender relations

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the Windhoek Declaration and the UNTAG Namibia Plan of Action on ‘Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations’

within different contexts<sup>3</sup> and failing to address intersections between gender and other aspects related to privilege and marginalization (such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, physical ability and religion) which also play a significant role in post-conflict communities (Heathcote: 2014: 52). While clinging to their own gendered normative assumptions, international institutions – the UN in particular - fail to see women’s diversity within a community, so being unable to address the different ways women experience gender violence (Heathcote 2014).

The main difference between the mainstream approach and the critical feminist perspective lies in the understanding of the idea of gender and the way it operates in society, which for the latter goes far beyond the binary division between women and men. Without understanding that “gender is at once a noun, a verb and a logic, it is near impossible to understand that gender is a relational and dynamic construct that operates in and through other power relations” (Shepherd 2014: 105). According to Simic (2014: 186), true gender equality “demands transformative change in the way that gender has been conceived”. By failing to do so, the mainstreaming strategy goes only halfway: it includes gender issues in different initiatives, but does not put gender equality at the core of the processes of assessing, planning and evaluating initiatives (Cousis 2014: 133).

### 4.3 Structure Matters

This section analyses the challenges for changing the decision-making process of the United Nations and its PKOs. The debate is crucial to enhance the UN approach towards gender and the incorporation of women in its higher positions.

Feminists, NGOs and other actors orientate their efforts in a way to bring gender discussions to the UN Security Council, the primary UN decision-making body in the area of international peace and security and, as described by Cohn (2008: 3), also “an overwhelmingly male and masculinist domain, devoted to the ‘hardcore’ issue of military threats to international peace and security”. The UNSC plays a central role in the development of the most important UN resolutions, including those related to the WPS agenda. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned attempts to include gender aspects in the UN normative, changes in the culture and structure of the institution seem insufficient so far. Given its inability to understand that institutions operate within gendered normative parameters, the UN is also unable to properly address gender issues in post-conflict situations (Heathcote 2014).

In this same regard, a very debated aspect within the feminist literature is the lack of women in the process of designing gender mainstreaming operations. “Gender mainstreaming states and international security apparatus tends to silence women’s voices by bureaucratizing feminism” (True 2016: 463). The argument mentioned by True also takes into consideration the lack of partnership between governmental, non-governmental and local institutions, which interferes directly in the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming. As pointed by captain Márcia Braga (2020), many projects in CAR runs independently and could be more effective if carried out in partnership with NGOs and other actors. Resolution 1325 was not designed as an organizing tool for women’s movements, instead, it was shaped to regulate the intervention of global governance institutions. Therefore, its considerations are mostly related to actions to be taken by different actors within the UN system and its member states (Cohn 2008).

Gender advisers have a direct relationship with local communities while implementing the perspective (United Nations 2010) and feminists’ authors (Cohn 2008 and True 2016)

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<sup>3</sup> Concepts such as gender inequality, gender based and sexual violence are defined by the UN based solely on disparities between man and women, male and female (United Nations 2010, 2016 and 2018).

highlight the importance of such relationship on the ground, especially for the implementation of a gender perspective. Examples related to other conflict and post-conflict situations, such as DRC and Kosovo, also confirm how important it is to incorporate civil society in the implementation of Resolution 1325 (Cohn 2008 and True 2016):

After women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) heard about 1325 from UNIFEM, they wrote a memorandum to their government, telling them that as signatories to the resolution, they now needed to implement it! For two years, they lobbied extensively for 1325's implementation in the DRC, both nationally and internationally, including writing to the Security Council. When the UN peacekeeping mission arrived in the DRC in 2000 without a gender component, they lobbied the director of the mission for a gender office and perspective in the mission. Since a Gender Advisor became a part of the mission in March 2002, the women have been working closely with her (and later, the rest of the gender unit) on projects such as translating 1325 into the four official languages and strategies for inserting a gender perspective into all levels of the government;

Women in Kosovo/a have not only translated 1325 into local languages, but have also translated it out of "UN language" into more accessible terms. Among their many initiatives, they negotiated with a women's group in Italy and got some financial support from the UN to sponsor about 20 shows on TV explaining the resolution. They also organized several roundtables, not only in Kosovo but also in Macedonia and Albania, and built a network around the resolution. (Cohn 2008: 7)

Braga (2020) also mentioned that the direct relationship with the local community in CAR, and specially with women groups and their leaders, contributed to her efforts to design the perspective and orientate the mission. These meetings occurred often and the gender team was responsible for attending women's demands and incorporate their contributions to the mission operations and as consequences, bring also to other levels of MINUSCA.

Also regarding the structural discussion, some researches mention the "use-value" of women in decision-making process (Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2010). On the one hand, they strongly defend that women should take place in decision-making processes in a way to bring to the table assumptions and considerations that probably wouldn't be there otherwise. On the other hand, one must also question which women are included in the process (Muna *in* Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2010). In this regard, it is important to highlight once more the above-mentioned structural limitations of the UN and the lack of civil society participation. The UN might be claiming for enhanced women's participation in high level positions and processes, but who are the women that occupy these positions? (Cohn 2008). Muna also points that, if the discussion is about rights and power relations between genders, bringing more women to the process is not enough: one should also question why are so many men on the table (Muna *in* Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2010). Another criticism is that arguments emphasizing the necessity of bringing women to the table and increasing women's participation as peacemakers reinforce the stereotypes of women as pacifists while men are violent and war-makers, increasing the dualism that feminists are fighting to end once and for all (Harris and Kings 1989). As pointed by Cohn (2008), "if women are peaceful and men are warriors, will putting women in charge of a peace work?". Such dualism reinforces the binary gendered normative of global institutions and goes against the implementation of a gender perspective (Cohn 2008), since they do not "liberate women as equal participants in policy processes" (Kinsella 2008). By perpetuating the stereotype of women as non-violent

peacemakers and men as violent aggressors, it also obliterates the plurality of the groups in all levels (True 2016).

#### 4.4 Peacekeepers on the ground

This section highlights important aspects of the perspective in practice, such as discussion about increasing the number of women personnel in PKOs, being a peacekeeper on the ground, the masculine environment of a PKO as well as sexual crimes allegations against peacekeepers.

Discussions about women's representation in PKOs have been taking an important place in WPS debates. One of the aims of Resolution 1325 was the achievement of greater feminine representation in the missions as a way to increase women's participation in peace-building process. However, the situation has been changing very slowly: only 5% of all PKOs' personnel are women (United Nations Peacekeeping 2019). This pattern is also valid to MINUSCA: only 6% of the Mission's uniformed personnel and 28% of the civilian personnel are women (United Nations Peacekeeping 2020a). According to the UN Secretary General's report on the implementation of Resolution 1325 (2018), women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatories of major peace processes between 1990 and 2017 (United Nations 2018b). This situation raises questions on how effective is the UN's approach of increasing the number of women in PKOs and how it can positively influence peace missions' operations on the ground.

The mere presence of women peacekeepers will not, by itself, change the gender hierarchies and the macho culture deeply embedded in the military and policing cultures that dominates PKOs. What is needed are the political commitment and concrete policies to turn an agenda of gender balance into meaningful participation by women in transforming peacekeeping cultures, so that they become an exemplar of women's equality, including in their interactions with the communities they are sent to protect. (Simic 2014: 195)

Authors highlight the benefits of a greater participation of women in PKOs, which include the prevention of sexual offenses by peacekeepers and an enhancement of the missions' reputation amongst local communities (Bridges and Horsfall 2009). Braga (2020) also mentioned that increases in the participation of women in MINUSCA led to a raise in the number of reports of sexual offenses committed by male peacekeepers. On the other hand, Simic (2014) points out that increasing the number of women personnel does not seem to be enough to challenge the highly masculine structures within the UN system. In the specific case of PKOs, it can even reinforce stereotypes and put more responsibility on women peacekeepers than man.

Another important topic that must be addressed is Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) committed by UN peacekeepers. These allegations include crimes such as rape, forced prostitution, sexual abuse of children, trafficking and other forms of sexual violence (Burke 2014). SEA committed by peacekeepers is the exact opposite of what they were designated to do: protect the local community. It is not only a matter of moral outrage, but also a rupture of the relationship of trust with local population they were supposed to protect (Burke 2014). Once PKOs began to have a closer relationship with local communities, cases of sexual exploitation started to emerge (Simic 2012). A number of studies have discussed the causes for the perpetration of sexual crimes by peacekeepers as well as the difficulties to properly address the issue (Burke 2014, Gassama 2018, Limo and Simic 2012). Amongst the factors that may contribute to the perpetration of sexual crimes are: the lack of mechanisms to deliberate sexual and hold peacekeepers accountable, that creates a favorable environment for sexual



exploitation; lack of adequate social welfare, such as limited opportunity to rest; and the hyper masculine environment in international peacekeeping (Gassama 2018).

The UN has been taking some measures regarding the issue, such as the approval of Resolution 2272 - expressing concern about sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers (United Nations 2016) - the creation of the United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit (around 2005) and the implementation of a zero tolerance approach regarding sexual violence among peacekeepers. Nevertheless, cases of sexual exploitation and abuses remain. As in the case of CAR, as shown in the previous topics in this research, most allegations took place between 2013-2015 and a decline was noticed between 2017-2018 (Gassama 2018). According to Gassama (2018), situational factors contributed to increase local population's vulnerabilities, such as the absence of legal and physical protection; power relations between local population and peacekeepers, being the former in a subordinated position; deep-rooted inequalities; and sexual violence and routine activities that converged with the peacekeepers' routines.

In that sense, the UN is required to take proper actions to address SEA. Adding more women peacekeepers on the ground is a step in the right direction, yet such approach "leaves women's inequality unquestioned and unchallenged" (Simic 2014). One more time, the UN rationale reinforces stereotypes about women and men, depicting women as sensitive and caring (Simic 2014). The inclusion of women peacekeepers is a key factor in the implementation of a gender perspective in PKOs, but it needs to go further and make all peacekeepers (male and female) committed with gender efforts (Dhamarpuri 2011).

## 4.5 Conclusion

The present chapter discussed themes and topics in critical feminist literature regarding Resolution 1325; the gender perspective developed by the United Nations; and its incorporation into the practice of Peacekeeping Operations. Resolution 1325 is a landmark in discussions of gender. Being the first resolution with such active and constituent character, it inspired a number of panel discussions, Security Council's meetings and other efforts to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda (Cohn 2008). Nevertheless, after 20 years of its approval, concerns are still being raised, especially in relation to the superficial character of the gender perspective implemented by the UN in the field. These considerations point to a misguided and limited understanding of gender inequalities and to the multiple factors that involve different power relations not only in post-conflict realities but also within United Nations' and PKO's structures. In light of these critical considerations, the following chapters will analyse how captain Márcia Braga designed and implemented a gender perspective in the military component of MINUSCA. They will discuss how a feminist perspective could enhance the implementation process; reflect on its strengths and weaknesses; and highlight the divergences between a critical feminist approach and the United Nations' rationale on this issue.

# Chapter 5: Implementation of a Gender Perspective in MINUSCA

## 5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in previous chapters, concerns about the vulnerability of women and children in post-conflict realities and the necessity of incorporating more women in Peacekeeping Operations and peacebuilding/transformation processes started to take place in the UN agenda on Women, Peace and Security, mainly through the Resolution 1325. Since then, measures have been taken in this direction, such as the creation of the role of a gender adviser to implement a gender perspective into PKOs.

MINUSCA had gender advisers since it was created, but at first they responded only for the civil and police components of the mission. In 2018, the Brazilian captain Márcia Braga was the first gender adviser to be required to implement the gender perspective within MINUSCA's military component. Braga's worked side by side with other advisers, still responsible for the general incorporation of the perspective within the civil and the police components.

This chapter will analyse how captain Braga implemented the perspective in the military component of MINUSCA. It will focus on the mechanisms and steps developed to implement the perspective and take into consideration the influence of UN Resolutions and guidelines in her work. In addition, it will address the challenges and personal experiences of Braga while implementing the perspective. The steps and activities developed by the captain will be described according to different kinds of sources: interviews with Braga, UN material (guidelines and resolutions) and existing literature on the subject.

## 5.2 Captain Braga's work and implementation steps

Captain Márcia Braga has been in the Brazilian navy for 18 years and is currently a Corvette Captain. Braga subscribed to be a volunteer at United Nations through the Brazilian navy. After her application, the role of commander force adviser at MINUSCA was offered through UN vacancies and she could fulfil all requirements to run for the position, which included fluency both in French and English (United Nations 2019b). Braga ran for the position with another Brazilian military but in the end of the process she was selected. After being admitted, her preparation included attending a special gender course developed by the DPKO in Uganda; UN online mandatory courses related to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA); as well as studying normative documents of the mission and MINUSCA's mandate. The captain is among the 5.25% of women personnel currently serving in military contingents of PKOs (United Nations Peacekeeping 2019). Braga was first designated to work at CAR's capital, Bangui, where the UN headquarter is located (Pereira and Kuele 2019b).

Once she arrived at the mission's headquarter, Braga developed an action plan to start implementing the gender perspective within MINUSCA. The captain described the implementation of the perspective in five basic steps, based on the mission's mandate and UN Resolution 1325. Braga pointed that during the process of implementation, the five steps went on simultaneously due to the lack of time and to the urgency of the situation.

Among the main duties of the operation were the protection of civilians – an essential component in the functions of a multidimensional operation and its processes (Kenkel 2013) - and the prevention of violence against local populations. The civilian protection is actually

responsibility of the national army, but given CAR's complex environment, and the fact that around 60% of its territory is occupied by armed groups (World Bank 2019), MINUSCA also perform security duties. The broader framework entailed the necessity of going beyond the traditional military rationale, focusing instead on the population and its vulnerabilities (Braga 2020). The steps adopted by Braga while designing the perspective were the following:

### **Step 1: Information and team creation**

The first step consisted on the collection of information about the country, its population and the civil conflict. This proved essential since there weren't any former documentation or research available on those topics. As the following quote by the Captain in the first interview:

When I arrived at the location I thought the situation was more advanced. But instead, in my office there was just a CAR map and the SOP. At that moment, I hadn't received any report in the United Nation mailbox about the operation sectors, how the local population had been affected by the conflict or even about women's situation.

SOP (Standard Operating Process) is a document to outline and define the reporting system for gender advisers in their missions to DPKO/DFS. The SOP also describes specific focus on impact and analysis of the missions' achievements in implementing the resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (United Nations Library). It wasn't possible to access the SOP because the document is only available for UN Permanent Missions and Peacekeeping Training Institutions.

The objective of this first step was to understand the situation on the field, the different groups in the region and how the population had been affected by the conflict. The creation of a team was also a challenge at that moment. First of all, there was a need for additional personnel: one gender assistant per sector (3 sectors + the capital task force), sent by the DPKO and also from the national force. These new assistants were designated to work with the general officer in their respective areas. Once the team was created, captain Braga had to design an action plan for each of the battalions operate in the identified focal points. As described by UN guideline of the implementation of a gender perspective in the military component (2010), the focal point is responsible for supporting the integration of the perspective in the work of the military component. The gender adviser and focal points are expected to work closely with the gender adviser of the mission in its tasks.

### **Step 2: Personnel training**

After the arrival of newly hired personnel, captain Braga started training them to work as local focal points. They visited different regions throughout the country, attended women's groups' meetings, gave training to militaries, police officers and human rights workers and briefed force commanders on the importance of adopting a gender perspective in its operations. This was an unprecedented endeavour, so captain Braga highlighted that gender perspective should be justified based on UN documents and action plans. The duty of the gender adviser can also be found in the UN guideline, that highlighted the responsibility of a gender adviser to provide an overall strategy to guide and orientate the implementation of the perspective in the work of the components of the mission (United Nations 2010). Once the training was finished, a report was elaborated containing all the information collected in the period and providing some suggestions. Braga described this process as a very complete step, which allowed her to better understand the local situation through the perspectives of

officers that were spread through all the regions of the country, as described in the quotation above:

For me it was also a manner of understanding the conflict from different points of view. Each component has a different function, so comprising and exchanging all the information was essential. Once I introduced the gender assistant to the sector, I could also enhance my knowledge about the conflict in that region, for instance, understanding how civilians, women and children were affected.(Braga 2020)

Among other things, Braga made an effort to convince generals and other high-ranking officers that the information collected (for instance, regarding the dynamics of local communities and their vulnerabilities) could add to the mission's processes and provide solutions to the challenges on the ground.

### **Step 3: Information exchange**

Braga (2020) highlighted the importance of exchanging information between the different components of MINUSCA (civil, military and police). Given the complex situation in the region and the high risk scenario (Braga 2020), the different components of the mission had to work side by side and share information as much as possible. According to Braga (2020), "the flow of information was the driver of the mission". For instance, groups of human rights and MARA (Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements) were responsible for monitoring and investigating conflict-related sexual violence cases, including those committed by blue helmets (Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General n.d.), but, most of the times, the military component of the mission didn't have access to this kind of information. Another important item consisted on the elaboration of classified reports containing sensitive material.

### **Step 4: Gender and child protection mainstreaming**

In this phase, all the content regarding how each group was affected by the conflict should compose the operation's documents. The different dynamics and patterns of violence suffered by each group and the periods in which violence increased, among other things, should be detailed in the documents according to the guidelines inscribed in UN Gender Resolutions (e.g. inclusion of women in the process of peacebuilding, children protection, prevention against sexual violence).

### **Step 5: Engagement**

The last step focused on the engagement of the mission's personnel with the local population. As already mentioned, one of the main objectives of the perspective was the protection of civilians. Besides safeguarding the lives of the locals, there was also a strategic goal at stake, since the death of civilians could negatively impact the way the operation was perceived. Engagement with the locals also allowed contingents to be aware of challenges on the ground and put in place short term initiatives to diminish these vulnerabilities. These initiatives comprehended development projects such as installation of solar panels, water pumps near the houses, community gardens etc. Since most of the violations took place when the population (especially women) had the necessity to move to work in the plantations, collect water etc., these small-scale initiatives had a deterrent effect on gender-based violence. Such initiatives were developed as a personal vision by the captain to provide a prompt action to protect the

population utilizing the mission's source for quick projects, called QIP (Quick Impact Projects). As an example, between 2017-2018 a budget of US 3.000,00 was designated to QIPs at MINUSCA (United Nations Peacekeeping 2020a). Another initiative was the increase of woman patrol officers in the locations. As quickly noticed by the mission, where the presence of women patrol was higher, more complaints were filed, including those related to sexual abuses committed by UN peacekeepers.

### 5.3 Working with local community

As mentioned earlier, one of the main characteristics of the fifth generation of PKOS is to incorporate local actors to play a role in the missions' activities, amplifying local voices in the peace process (United Nations 2014). The necessity of working together with local communities is inscribed not only at MINUSCA's mandate, but at most UN Gender Resolutions, which advocate for the incorporation of women's voices "taking measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements" (United Nations 2000).

As mentioned by captain Braga, periodic meetings with local women's groups (identified at UN Resolution 2122) allowed UN officers to understand their necessities and vulnerabilities, and at the same time, guided the mission's efforts to attend the population, mainly, women and children. MINUSCA's civilian gender team had already established contact with the women's groups leader and the captain took advantage of that structure to build her relationship with them (Pereira and Kuele 2019a). According to Braga, women are the family leaders in CAR and they play a very important role in the reconstruction of communities in post-conflict situations. Also in the realm of the gender related duties, the mission strived to reintegrate children's soldier (girls and boys) that had been recruited by armed groups for house working and sexual exploitation., as inscribed in Resolution 1888 (2009: 5), which:

Encourages leaders at the national and local level, including traditional leaders where they exist and religious leaders, to play a more active role in sensitizing communities on sexual violence to avoid marginalization and stigmatization of victims, to assist with their social reintegration, and to combat a culture of impunity for these crimes.

The daily contact with local communities, especially women group leaders, and the engagement of the mission's personnel allowed the captain to make sure that local populations were being assisted and, at the same time, include women in the process of peace building and transformation. There are indicators that female participation in post-conflict realities, in local levels, can help UN PKOs to overcome some barriers in the building process of a durable peace (Olsson and Gizelis 2014). According to Braga (2020), in the regions less affected by the conflict, where people were trying to build their "normal" lives again, women were responsible for the economic activities and the restructuration of the environment in general. The captain highlighted that through her work she could perceive the importance of incorporating women in the stabilization process of the mission:

In comparison with the men in their communities, the women I met were more committed to peace, especially because they were more concerned for the well-being of their families. In many communities, the men were responsible for raising cattle, whereas women were the household's main providers.(Braga in Pereira and Kuele 2019a)

As mentioned in step 5 (“engagement”), Braga and the team of gender advisers carried out infra-structure projects to avoid civilians’ deaths and women abuses, which used to happen during their way to the plantations. Another initiative that contributed to increase the participation of women in the mission’s operations was teaching French (the country’s official language) to local women. According to Braga, most of them were illiterate because of the risks of going to school. Teaching women the official language of the country increased their participation in the peace process, for instance, as Community Liaison Assistants (CLA)<sup>4</sup>. According to the captain, most of CLAs were men, the ones who are literate.

Still about local community and gender issues in peacekeeping, other researchers have been pointing the benefits of the participation of local communities in the implementation of the gender perspective. The UN Missions at Kosovo (UNMIK) established a unit responsible for gender issues, which dealt with topics such as the political representation of women, gender violence and economic empowerment (Hudson 2005: 802). The UN Mission at East Timor (UNTAET) developed projects, together with local women’s groups and institutions, responsible for fundraising for war widows, providing assistance to female candidates to the constituent assembly, training civil and civil society and creating a local newsletter of gender-related issues (Hudson 2005: 799).

These are some examples of how a direct work on local community have been enhancing gender perspectives in PKOs and, at the same time, attending local populations and incorporating women into peacebuilding processes.

## 5.4 Challenges and experiences of implementation

Braga mentioned some important aspects regarding the challenges of the implementation process. The first barrier mentioned was the short period of time that a gender adviser was allowed to work in the field, normally 1 year or less. With so little time, they could not see the results of the implementation, especially with regard to sensitive aspects such as sexual abuses and human rights violations, which take a certain period to show meaningful changes. Furthermore, Braga also mentioned that different sectors of the mission were frequently discontinued, with direct impact on the local population and also on the mission’s operations. This instability occurred, as diagnosed by the captain, because, in the absence of an action plan, initiatives depended a lot of the individuals who implemented them. It is the responsibility of a gender adviser to create an action plan according to the circumstance and the available documents/reports. Braga mentioned her wish to create a manual to guide future gender advisers, with basic language for general understanding, containing the necessary information and steps about the implementation of the gender perspective and the UN Gender Resolutions. Braga emphasized the necessity of combining different projects with NGOs and other actors that could enhanced mission’s operations.

The captain spoke about the challenges of comprising information about the innumerable violations, mainly against women and children in each region, in a way to convince officials of the importance of working substantially in these regions, increasing the number of patrols, for example. The work of a gender adviser is still unknown for most of the officials of the mission. It is almost a process of convincement, but after some time, she could observe changes in the posture of the officials regarding gender issues.

As personal challenges, Braga mentioned the daily situation in the country that is naturally challenging, with recurrent health crisis and terrorist attacks. When Márcia arrived at

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<sup>4</sup> CLAs are national staff who act as an interface between the peacekeeping mission, local authorities and populations (Kullenberg 2016)

Bangui around April 2018, the UN vehicle carrying the captain and other militaries was attacked. In the day after she was allowed by the doctor to go back home but, given the movements restrictions due to the injuries suffered during the attack, she went to live with a Spanish civil who worked with the protection of civilians and provided a fundamental support for her recovery. After the recovery Braga could participate in the induction training but a few days after the captain was diagnosed with a tumor in her hips due to an internal bleeding caused by the impact of the attack in the UN CAR. Fortunately, Braga could recover from the tumor and started to work on the headquarter in May of 2018 (Pereira and Kuele 2019b). Braga mentioned that she opted for living in the community with the locals, so she could perceive the daily changes faced by the population, but of course, with much less impact, as she pointed.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the key findings regarding the implementation of the gender perspective at MINUSCA developed by captain Márcia Braga, as well as the challenges and experiences of this process. Through the analyses of this chapter, it could be perceived how the implementation of a gender perspective in PKOs performs in practice and how the UN guidelines and rationale influence in the design and implementation processes. Through a perspective of a peacekeeper, this empirical chapter tends to contribute to a better understanding of the practice of a peacekeeper as gender adviser as well as the role of a gender adviser in a Peacekeeping Operations. Aside from this, by way of the information comprehended in this topic, in the next chapter, it will be scrutinized, by a critical feminist lens, how the work of a gender adviser could be enhanced, likewise of highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process.

# Chapter 6: Feminist practices and gender perspectives in PKOs

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses aspects of the implementation process of a gender perspective in PKOs based on the practical experience of a gender adviser in the field. This will be done through the case study of the implementation of a gender perspective at the military component of MINUSCA by the Brazilian navy captain Márcia Braga. The empirical data will be interpreted through a critical feminist literature in a way to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process and understand the role of a gender adviser and its autonomy within a PKO.

## 6.2 Gender Mainstreaming and the UN Rationale

The first issue to be addressed in this analysis is the United Nations gender mainstreaming approach. As seen in previous chapters, an agenda on WPS was established over the 1990's prioritizing the incorporation of women in all levels of global institutions and highlighting the unequal opportunities and the patterns of violence suffered by women (Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbins 2010). Awareness was raised about the issue of inequalities between women and men and how it can negatively affect societal dynamics. This process, which culminated in the approval of UN Resolution 1325 (2000), consolidated a mainstream approach for the international discussion of gender issues. The reversal of gender inequalities was understood as a major factor in the quest for social justice and, in the case of this research, to enhance peacebuilding and peace transformation processes (Cohn 2004).

This mainstream approach was opposed by a number of gender studies, mainly written by feminist authors, that highlighted important aspects that were not contemplated before (Heathcote 2014). Assisting women to achieve economic independence and protecting women in conflict situations are essential goals, but must be followed by a deep structural reflection about who are the most vulnerable women inside a group; and how gender issues are impacted by other aspects such as religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and social class (Cohn 2004). These factors are not only essential to understand local dynamics, but also to address projects and efforts to attend a community in its plurality.

While implementing a gender perspective at MINUSCA, Captain Márcia Braga benefited from a privileged relationship with local communities at the Central African Republic. Such position allowed her to gather in depth information about gender dynamics and understand the nuances and complexities of a post-conflict reality in the country. In the interviews, she mentioned the plurality and non-homogeneity of the community she was working with, that included from widows to ex combatants (Braga 2020). All these women attended joint meetings with Braga, what seems to be in line with UN Resolutions' objective of promoting inclusiveness and incorporating different groups while dealing with gender issues. However, some questions still remain: are these people have been violated in the same proportions? How can gender violence and its power dynamics affect people differently? Addressing the plurality of these groups and identifying the dynamics of the local society could help orientate the implementation of a gender perspective and properly address the several nuances existing within societies, especially in post-conflict realities (Shepherd 2014).

Another problem is that UN guidelines, policies and resolutions approach gender issues in a bureaucratic manner, thus being insufficient to implement a gender perspective at PKOs.



These documents put too much emphasis on the collection and analysis of disaggregated data (by sex and age) and the development of a performance framework. They establish long checklists to be fulfilled by gender advisers, instead of use the collected data to provide an action plan to deal with the gender-related issues.

There is a difficult to fully include gender at the core of the designing process of these guidelines and policies. On the one hand, the issue started to be taken into consideration by the UN in its technical and bureaucratic processes. On the other hand, the institution still neglects political and cultural structures that perpetuates gender inequalities and do not promote a meaningful and comprehensive transformation (Cousins 2014). The United Nations gender mainstreaming tends to turn gender-related issues into an a-political discussion, silencing women voices by institutionalizing feminism and gender-related issues (True 2016).

### **6.3 Autonomy of military gender advisers**

In addition to the “insufficiency” of United Nations’ gender mainstreaming rationale (Cousins 2014), UN documents to assist gender advisers on the ground are also unsatisfying. Resolutions, guidelines and policies regarding gender perspectives at Peacekeeping Operations are extremely repetitive. They do not provide practical guidance about how to implement such perspective, develop a communication with other components of the missions or even approach local community in complex situations (Braga 2020; Cousins 2014). The available documents do not go beyond a checklist of issues that need to be addressed in the perspective implementation process. Consequently, captain Márcia Braga had to design and implement the perspective by herself, guided mainly by her military knowledge and the training she received from DPKO. Given these circumstances, her performance exceeded expectations.

The lack of a robust framework grants gender advisers a certain level of autonomy while designing and implementing the perspective. The main steps and processes are one hundred percent designed by the person who is leading the implementation on the ground. In some aspects, this “freedom” to implement that perspective could benefit gender advisers, which are not necessarily limited by UN rationale and have the opportunity to go beyond practical guidelines and checklists, bringing to the table new perspectives about gender relations in post-conflict realities. This liberty is not complete, however, since part of the work of a gender adviser consists on conveying the importance of the gender perspective to the head of the battalions and other components of the mission and making them aware of the situation of women in different regions of the country (Braga, 2020).

Summing up, if, on the one hand, the gender advisor could not change the structure of the mission itself, on the other hand, there were some advancements on the ground, such as an increase of personnel specialized on gender-related issues, efforts to assist focus areas and the development of a modus operandi while approaching local populations. Nevertheless, a few questions remain. The main one is: to what extent a gender adviser could contribute to a significant change in the decision-making process of the PKOs? While the data shows that captain Braga had enough autonomy to implement the perspective, it remains unclear how it could influence MINUSCA’s course of action.

A military gender adviser has to bring its considerations to the table and call attention to the importance of addressing gender-related issue in the military operations of the mission. It has the duty to advise the head of the battalion and orientate the military component’s operations in order to accomplish the goal of implementing a gender perspective. As mentioned above, MINUSCA has a gender adviser for each of its components and they all need to work together (United Nations 2020a). The ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the gender perspective in the mission as a whole lies in the Senior Gender Adviser, that

works directly with the Commander of the mission (United Nations 2020a). This Senior Gender Adviser had more influence in the decision-making process of the mission than Braga. As a military gender adviser, her influence was less direct, as the result of the work of the military component. Such information contributes to a better understanding of the different levels and practices of gender advisers within PKOs. It also provides further clarification on who influences the decision-making process of PKOs, an essential information to evaluate if the UN is really working towards the incorporate women in decision-making processes (Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2010).

In this sense, one should also question if the gender perspective could be extended in order to influence gender dynamics within the structures of PKOs. The internal environment of the mission may also affect the performance of a gender adviser, as discussed in the following topic.

## 6.4 Pervasive masculine structures

Most of the structures of UN Peacekeeping Operations are still composed by men. As mentioned before, one of the objectives of Resolution 1325 (and further WPS Resolutions) was to increase the number of women personnel in PKOs. However, the parity between men and women in PKOs is far from being achieved: currently, only 5.25% of the military contingents are women; 9% of police units; and 26% of justice and corrections government-proved personnel (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019). Another 7 military women are currently heading PKOs as Special Representatives from the Secretary-General (United Nations 2018a).

The reflection on the UN strategy to increase the number of women in PKOs is indeed important, but not enough, as stated by feminist authors mentioned above (Cohn 2008, Harris and Kings 1989, Heathcote 2014 and Simic 2014). This strategy still neglects the necessity of changing the UN's masculine structure and fails to address gender-related issues in post-conflict realities (Heathcote 2014). This topic will raise some aspects of concern with regard to these issues, based on UN documents and Braga's interviews.

Braga's highlighted that one of her duties was bringing the importance of a gender perspective to the heads of the battalions in a way to orientate the operation's efforts. Even though the WPS agenda was created 20 years ago, and several efforts have been made ever since, gender perspective in PKOs was still regarded as a "new vision". The challenges to incorporate gender-related issues in military environments is linked to the masculine environment of these operations, as illustrated by the above-mentioned differences in the representation of women and men in the military personnel. The UN mainstream approach, which claims for the incorporation of the gender perspective through special gender advisers (mainly women), reinforces the stigmas of women as peaceful and caring while men are war makers (True 2016, Harris and Kings 1989).

Women were indeed incorporated into PKOs, mainly in duties related to the relationship within local communities (Olsson and Gizelis 2014), as showed by Braga's work in MINUSCA (Braga, 2020). Nevertheless, the proportion of women in PKOs is still low, a pattern that could be also related with a non-favorable environment for them. The incorporation of more men as gender experts could be useful to overcome stigmas within the UN normative and also contribute to a more equally environment in terms of the so-called "gender equality". Both aspects should evolve in parallel: at the same time that it pursuits a greater presence of women in all levels, the UN should also recognize gender-related issues as duties to be carried out by men, working towards a more consistent and fair perspective (Dhamarpuri 2011).

In that sense, another point to be addressed is the existence of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations against peacekeepers (Burke 2014). This unfortunate situation perpetuates gender power-relations, especially if the vulnerability of local communities in face of male peacekeepers is taken into consideration. Even though some authors point to a reduction in the number of cases in recent years (Gassama 2018), one must question why those cases are still occurring within PKOs, perpetrated by the very peacekeepers that were supposed to protect the population from SEAs. For sure, such answers are not simple, and, as stated by Gassama (2018), there are innumerable potential reasons.

The point to be made here is that the UN still fails to recognize the nuances of the gender issue, limiting its approach to the inequalities in the representation of women and man and failing to address problems within its own structure. Efforts have been made to punish the perpetrators of SEAs, but they do not address the problem as part of a gender-related issue. By reaffirming the idea of women peacekeepers as sensitive and caring, and placing on them the responsibility for the prevention of sexual crimes committed by male peacekeepers, it reinforces stigmas and fails to properly incorporate men to gender-related efforts (Simic 2014, Dhamarpuri 2011 and True 2016). In addition, Braga (2020) mentioned MINUSCA's difficult to establish partnerships with other UN programs and other organizations in CAR working with gender related issues. For instance, a gender perspective could go hand by hand with MARA (Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements) in a way to enhance the combat against sexual crimes in all levels, including those perpetrated by peacekeepers.

## **6.5 Challenges on the ground: Braga's experiences**

As for the challenges identified in post-conflict realities and PKOs, Braga (2020) raised some important points related to the lack of an action plan to orientate UN's efforts to implement a gender perspective in the field. This research also verified the absence of action plans within the most important UN documents to guide gender peacekeepers on the ground, such as: United Nations Principles and Guidelines for Peacekeeping Operations; DPKO Gender Policy; Responsive United Nations PKOs; and, especially important to understand Márcia Braga's implementation work, the DPKO/DFS Guideline for Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations.

These documents often reinstate gender obligations at PKOs, provide a framework to the implementation process (usually presented in the form of checklists) and describe topics to be developed by those responsible for the implementation. The absence of real practical guidelines contributes to interruptions in the implementation process, once it becomes dependent on individuals. Braga (2020) mentioned, for instance, that her mandate was limited to one year. If an action plan is not well developed, different military gender advisers may have different approaches to implement a gender perspective.

Another problem lies in the UN gender mainstreaming rationale. As mentioned previously, such understanding of gender-related issues shows a limited capacity to understand post-conflict realities as well as the plurality of groups in that society (Heathcote 2014). It induces a wrong interpretation of gender-related issues in different contexts and inefficiently addresses action plans regarding the implementation of such sensitive perspective.

Additionally, Captain Braga mentioned the natural challenges of working in a high risk country (as recognized by the United Nations). As mentioned before, Braga's suffered an attack in the field, together with other UN members. Even so, Braga chose to live outside an UN compound and stay close to the local community. She considered that experience very important to understand the dynamics of that society. She could build a relation of trust in the place she was designated to work, as well as address the proper measures to incorporate

a gender perspective at MINUSCA. The choice of the captain can be understood as a gesture of incorporating the community into her daily life and work. This approach enhances the United Nations rationale of incorporating local communities in peacebuilding processes and at the same time, affirms the importance of going beyond the UN frame regarding the interaction with local community, transforming such argument in the incorporation of the community in the design process of the perspective.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

United Nations Resolution 1325 is a milestone in the construction of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and marked the first time in which the UN Security Council orientated its efforts to include women's experience in post-conflict realities (Cohn 2010). The resolution adopted the gender mainstreaming strategy, through which the UN worked towards the achievement of gender equality in all levels of the institution, especially at Peacekeeping Operations. The incorporation of a gender perspective into PKOs highlighted the importance of addressing women's vulnerabilities in post-conflict situation as well as enhancing women's participation in all levels of peacebuilding processes (United Nations 2000). Nevertheless, since the approval of 1325, a number of researches, mainly conducted by feminist authors, have been discussing the gaps and shortcomings in the implementation of a gender perspective in PKOs. The year of 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the Resolution and its strengths and weaknesses are still subject of debate.

The objective of this research was to understand how the gender perspective is translated into practice in PKOs and how Resolution 1325 was implemented within the context of the UN Peace Operation at the Central African Republic, through the analysis of the efforts made by the Brazilian captain Márcia Braga to incorporate the perspective in the military component of the mission as a gender adviser. The first conclusion regards the importance of the role of the gender adviser as the key element to integrate the perspective in the different components of a multidimensional peacekeeping operation such as MINUSCA. The presence of captain Braga contributed to a more substantive implementation of the perspective within the military component of the mission, where its strategies and operations were designed, and showed indispensable to the establishment of a direct contact with local groups. Through the daily contact with the population and, especially, with women's groups, Braga could understand the gender dynamics within the community: roles, challenges and claims of the locals. The analysis of these dynamics provided Braga with information that allowed her to orientate the efforts of the military component towards the implementation of a gender approach and, most important, to design an action plan that could address the main claims of that community. Among the challenges to the implementation of the perspective, Braga (2020) mentioned the lack of organizational memory and of an action plan to implement the perspective. The most important documents she relied on during the implementation process were Resolution 1325 itself and UN guidelines regarding gender perspective.

The analysis of UN guidelines, Resolution 1325 (and other resolutions on WPS) and the DPKO Policy on gender responsive in PKOs showed an absence of practical information regarding the implementation of the perspective. These documents also provide an overview of the gender mainstreaming approach that lies at the core of UN initiatives in the area. From a critical feminist perspective, this approach constitutes United Nations' main problem, limiting gender-related issues to differences between the roles of women and men in a society. Such binary vision neglects important aspects such as the links between gender and the power relations existing within a community, as well as its relations with the PKO itself. It also ignores the role played by other factors aspects in post-conflict realities, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion (Heathcote and Shepherd 2014).

Although the UN is able to identify the diversity of groups in communities (United Nations 2009), it fails to address the plurality of these groups with regard to gender-related issues. This gap is manifested by the lack of an action plan robust enough to guide the implementation of a gender perspective in post-conflict communities. On the other hand, this absence grants gender advisers a certain autonomy to design the implementation process of

the gender perspective in the field. The lack of a robust framework also turns the presence of a gender adviser indispensable for the efficient implementation of the perspective. If the implementation process is not properly settled, it may lead to an interruption or discontinuity of the process.

The dominance of the mainstream rationale regarding gender-related issues also interferes with the implementation of a gender perspective within UN's internal norms and structures. As showed along this research, the number of women personnel has been increasing slowly since the approval of Resolution 1325. PKOs' environment remains mainly masculine as well as UN's internal structures. Moreover, the modus operandi of incorporating women specially to cope with gender-related issues reinforces stigmas and preconceived ideas of women as peaceful and caring while men are war makers (True 2016; Harris and Kings 1989) and burden women with the responsibility of fixing alone the problem of gender imbalance. The commitment with the implementation of a gender perspective should be shared by both women and men within the UN structure, in order to create a more consistent and fair process (Dhamarpuri 2011).

Last, but not least, this research made the case for the incorporation of a robust gender perspective within the UN normative, and especially in PKOs, as the only way to address the problem of sexual abuses committed by peacekeepers. According to this interpretation, it's not enough to punish the perpetrators; the situation must be addressed in a broader manner, intrinsically related to the power relations between UN male peacekeepers and local community.

After carrying out an analysis, based on a feminist critical literature, of the implementation of a gender perspective at MINUSCA, a few questions remain. What are the impacts of Resolution 1325, 20 years after its approval? Are feminist practices possible in PKOs? Feminist authors diverge from the UN rationale in many aspects. On the one hand, both sides share a number of assumptions and assume that collective action is needed in order to promote gender equality and enhance women's representation in global institutions. On the other hand, feminist theories criticize the United Nations for failing to address important issues while implementing a gender approach. They also highlight the multiple dynamics involving gender-related issues in post-conflict realities, mainly ignored by the mainstream approach adopted by the UN.

Feminist thinking could contribute immensely to enhance the implementation of a gender perspective not only within PKOs but also at UN normative "examining the meanings of gender as they are institutionalized in new rules and hegemonies, and critically scrutinizing them in terms of feminist goals and criteria for a more gender-just world order" (True 2010). Therefore, a recognition by the United Nations of the necessity of rethinking its gender approach strategy is essential. Meanwhile, feminist researches continue to challenge global institutions and the bureaucratization of gender studies.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

1. First interview with Captain Márcia Braga about the implementation of a gender perspective in the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in The Central African Republic (MINUSCA)'. A non-structured interview made by Andiara Valloni, via the application Skype.

The Hague, Netherlands at 28 May 2020.

2. Second interview was stated as a questionnaire sent to Captain Márcia Braga according to the findings of the first interview. The answers were sent by Braga via the application WhatsApp in the form of audios.

The Hague, Netherlands at 06 June 2020.

## Appendix 2

### **Resolution 1325 (2000)**

**Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000**

The Security Council,

*Recalling* its resolutions 1261 (1999) of 25 August 1999, 1265 (1999) of 17 September 1999, 1296 (2000) of 19 April 2000 and 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000, as well as relevant statements of its President, and recalling also the statement of its President to the press on the occasion of the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace (International Women's Day) of 8 March 2000 (SC/6816),

*Recalling* also the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/52/231) as well as those contained in the outcome document of the twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" (A/S-23/10/Rev.1), in particular those concerning women and armed conflict,

*Bearing* in mind the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the primary responsibility of the Security Council under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security,

*Expressing* concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation,

*Reaffirming* the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the

need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution,

*Reaffirming* also the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts,

*Emphasizing* the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls,

*Recognizing* the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and in this regard noting the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (S/2000/693),

*Recognizing* also the importance of the recommendation contained in the statement of its President to the press of 8 March 2000 for specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations,

*Recognizing* that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security,

*Noting* the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls,

1. *Urges* Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;

2. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision - making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes;

3. *Urges* the Secretary-General to appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to pursue good offices on his behalf, and in this regard calls on Member States to provide candidates to the Secretary-General, for inclusion in a regularly updated centralized roster;

4. *Further urges* the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel;

5. *Expresses* its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding measures, invites Member States to incorporate these elements as well as HIV/AIDS awareness training into their



national training programmes for military and civilian police personnel in preparation for deployment, and further requests the Secretary-General to ensure that civilian personnel of peacekeeping operations receive similar training;

7. *Urges* Member States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United Nations Fund for Women and United Nations Children's Fund, and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies;

8. *Calls* on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia:

(a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction;

(b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements;

(c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;

9. *Calls* upon all parties to armed conflict to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, especially as civilians, in particular the obligations applicable to them under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977, the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol thereto of 1967, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 and the Optional Protocol thereto of 1999 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the two Optional Protocols thereto of 25 May 2000, and to bear in mind the relevant provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

10. *Calls* on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict;

11. *Emphasizes* the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions;

12. *Calls* upon all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and to take into account the particular needs of women and girls, including in their design, and recalls its resolutions 1208 (1998) of 19 November 1998 and 1296 (2000) of 19 April 2000;

13. *Encourages* all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants;

14. *Reaffirms* its readiness, whenever measures are adopted under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, to give consideration to their potential impact on the civilian population, bearing in mind the special needs of women and girls, in order to consider appropriate humanitarian exemptions;

15. *Expresses* its willingness to ensure that Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups;

16. *Invites* the Secretary-General to carry out a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution, and further invites him to submit a report to the Security Council on the results of this study and to make this available to all Member States of the United Nations;

17. *Requests* the Secretary-General, where appropriate, to include in his reporting to the Security Council progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls;

18. *Decides* to remain actively seized of the matter.

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