

Feminist Action at the Negotiation Table: An Exploration Inside the 2010–2016 Colombian Peace Talks

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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming and peacemaking are fundamentally about spurring institutional change. Much of the literature on gendering peace negotiations does not explicitly address the institutional nature of these spheres. Using a feminist institutionalist framework, I analyze the 2010–2016 Colombian peace talks to uncover the endogenic formal and informal ‘rules of the game’ that both enabled and constrained feminist work and the eventual incorporation of a gender perspective within the final agreement. I show that Colombia’s exceptional gender perspective in its 2016 peace agreement was due not just to the inclusion of women at the negotiation table but also paradoxically because of and despite continued gendered logics that prioritized the masculine over the feminine. These findings demonstrate that to understand gender mainstreaming outcomes in peace processes we must not simply account for how many women and which women are at the table, but also for the gendered logics of the negotiation space.

Keywords

gender – women – peace negotiations – UNSCR 1325 – peace agreements – feminist institutionalism – gender mainstreaming – Colombia

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In October 2000, the United Nations unanimously adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), formally acknowledging the gendered nature of the war, peace, and security arenas. This historic resolution emphasizes the need for all peace and security operations to increase women's participation and substantive representation in policy and program development, implementation, and oversight – including peace negotiations and agreements. Nonetheless, women continue to be marginalized in official peacemaking processes. While there has been an increase in women's participation in Track 1.5 and 2 peace talks, Track 1 negotiations have made little progress in terms of women's inclusion.² Furthermore, gender perspectives in peace agreements remain underwhelming. To explain these shortfalls, much of the literature on gender and peacemaking has focused on either the exogenous conditions that facilitate or impede women's participation (Bell 2018; Herbolzheimer 2014; Olsson & Gizelis 2014; Paffenholz 2014; Tripp 2018) and/or the eventual outcomes and representation (or lack thereof) in peace agreements (Bell 2015; Bell & O'Rourke 2010; Castillo Diaz & Tordjman 2012; Ellerby 2015; True & Riveros-Morales 2019). Notably missing is a discussion around the endogenous conditions – such as the gendered logics within these spaces – that contribute to the struggles for women's inclusion in peacemaking. Little is known about women's experiences or the processes of gender mainstreaming inside peacemaking spaces for two reasons. First, women are not often brought into Track 1 negotiations, and thus, gender scholars have focused on where women have had influence over negotiations, namely in Track 1.5 and 2 negotiations, as well as their pressure from the outside. Second, peace talks are highly confidential in nature and thus accessing data about what happens inside is complicated, with only limited information available.

To fill this lacuna, this article examines the feminist action within the 2010–2016 negotiations in Colombia and the eventual implementation of a gender perspective in its final agreement. Using a feminist institutionalist framework to discern the gendered logics at play, I untangle the endogenous formal and

2 Track 1 negotiations refer to official negotiations that typically occur among high-level political and military elite who serve as official representatives of their respective parties. In the Colombian case, the government and the FARC delegations are the official parties to the 2010–2016 peace talks. Subsequent tracks bring together unofficial members into the process. Track 1.5 negotiations “include a mix of government officials – who participate in an unofficial capacity – and non-governmental experts, all sitting around the same table” while Track 2 diplomacy “brings together unofficial representatives on both sides, with no government participation” (Staats & Tucci 2019). Track 1.5 and 2 negotiations are distinct from Track 1 negotiations in that they are technically unofficial in nature and whose purpose is not decision-making but rather offering support to Track 1 talks by offering insight and expertise that may be lacking at the official negotiation table.

informal processes that both enabled and constrained feminist action. In other words, I am less focused on how women entered the negotiations and more concerned with what happened once they arrived. I show that Colombia's exceptional gender perspective in its 2016 peace agreement was due not just to the inclusion of women at the negotiation table but also paradoxically *because of and despite* continued gendered logics that prioritized the masculine over the feminine. These findings are theoretically and empirically important because to understand the successes and/or failures of gender mainstreaming in peace negotiations – and peace processes more broadly – we must not simply account for how many women and which women are at the table, but also for the endogenous gendered logics of the negotiation space itself.

Case Selection and Methods

The 2010–2016 Colombian peace negotiations offer a unique opportunity to peer into the “black box” of gendering peace negotiation spaces from within. As a result of extensive outside pressure by women's organizations in 2013, warring parties opened the negotiation space by appointing female negotiators on each side of the table in 2014 and subsequently established a bi-partisan Gender Subcommission. The Gender Subcommission was comprised of delegation members and together they developed and oversaw the implementation of the most robust gender perspective to date. The final peace agreement, which was approved by Congress in November 2016, boasts more than 122 clauses that address matters pertaining to women and LGBTQ+ persons. Not only does it represent the most comprehensive gender perspective in a peace agreement thus far, but it is also the first to substantially include LGBTQ+ rights.³

To understand the gender logics at play, I employ a feminist institutional framework to identify the formal and informal ‘rules of the game’ within the negotiating space by tracing the location, roles, authority, and experiences of

3 According to Bell (2018: 168), “While other past accords have referenced issues of sexual orientation some of these references have been negative (for example, a banning of same sex marriage in the ‘peace agreement constitutions’ in Burundi (2005), Democratic Republic of Congo (2003), and Zimbabwe (2013)). The only other clearly positive reference was included in the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (1998) – where ‘sexual preference’ was included in an equal rights provision. While notable, not least for how early it was, it falls far short of the Colombian treatment.”

women at the table. To do this, I examine both the structure and organization of the 2010–2016 Colombian peace talks in Havana, as well as the location, roles, and experiences of feminist action within the negotiations. Data for this project were derived from interviews conducted with members the Gender Subcommission and their support teams, members who sat at the negotiation table who did not sit on the Gender Subcommission, women's and LGBTQ+ organizations privy to the work at the negotiation table, reports from Colombian think tanks, and online media sources.

I begin by situating this research within a theoretical framework rooted in feminist institutionalism and gender mainstreaming. Next, I provide an overview of the first four years of the negotiations, followed by an empirical analysis of the gender dynamics within the last two years when women were officially brought into the process. I focus on organizational structure and participant experience to highlight the intersecting formal and informal gendered rules, norms, and processes. To ensure data integrity while also preserving its richness, I use interviewees names where possible; however, there are moments where I opt to protect their identities. I follow with a discussion of these findings and offer preliminary results on the endogenous ways in which high-risk spaces, such as peace talks, both uphold and alter exclusionary gender norms. This article ultimately adds to theoretical understandings of how peace negotiations are inescapably gendered. Empirically, these findings increase our knowledge of both the organizational and operational aspects of gender mainstreaming within peace processes from within (True & Parisi 2013).

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Institutionalism and Gender Mainstreaming

Feminist Institutionalism

Both gender mainstreaming and peacemaking are fundamentally about spurring institutional change. However, much of the literature on gendering peace negotiations does not explicitly address the institutional nature of these spheres. Often regarded as 'rules of the game' (North 1990), institutions are defined by their formal and informal processes, which enable and constrain political behavior and the distribution of power (Acemoglu & Robinson 2005; Lecours 2005; Mackay et al. 2010). Formal processes are characterized by their explicit authority and organization, which is often established through contracts, laws, or constitutions, and they often exercise de jure power or power in accordance with law (Acemoglu & Robinson 2005).

Informal processes consist of socially shared rules of the game that are established and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels. They are typically unwritten; yet they are exercised, albeit in different ways, alongside, and sometimes in conjunction with, formal rules (Chappell 2006; Duerst-Lahti 2002; Helmke & Levitsky 2006; Mackay et al. 2010; North 1990). Informal institutions exercise de facto or unsanctioned power that is exercised as if it were legally constituted (Acemoglu & Robinson 2005). Examples of informal processes include clientelism, nepotism, corruption, and social scripts of sexuality, gender, and race (Helmke & Levitsky 2006; Weldon & Raymond 2013).

Feminist institutionalism conceives institutions as inherently gendered, meaning that norms of masculinity and femininity are inescapably embedded within the culture and logic of political institutions (Krook & Mackay 2015; Waylen 2014a). In other words, one cannot fully understand institutions without considering the gendered power dynamics at play. Feminist institutionalists argue that masculine norms of power and prestige are intertwined within both macro- and micro-level processes, which help explain why women and their contributions are often overlooked in institutional decisions and policymaking (Duerst-Lahti 2002). Because institutions have historically been established and advanced by male leaders, norms of hegemonic masculinity are regularly naturalized, legitimized, and fiercely protected (Acker 1992; Hawkesworth 2005; Kenney 1996). These norms in turn enable and constrain political behaviors and shape political opportunities for feminist agendas. At the core of feminist institutionalism is an aspiration to understand how gender is manifested within the daily life of institutions and how gender norms shape institutional processes and outcomes (Mackay et al. 2010), and vice versa.

Peace Negotiation Tables as Institutions

This article contends that peace talks are institutions in that they are arenas in which multiple institutions (for example, military, government, international actors, etc.) come together to create a new, albeit temporary, institution. In turn, the work within peace negotiations inevitably goes on to create new institutions and/or significantly alter existing ones should peace be reached. Moreover, they are not only “established, formal organization[s] with clear aims and rules specifying chains of command and work roles with responsibilities, authorities, and tasks,” but they also serve as sites of “less formalized but sustained sets of practices, relationships or behavioral patterns” (Aggestam & Towns 2018: 10). In other words, peace negotiations consist of organized configurations of both formal and informal rules, practices, norms, principles, and processes (Hall & Taylor 1996; March & Olsen 2008).

Because institutions associated with war, militarism, and peacemaking mainly stem from and are sustained by masculine conceptions of power and dominance (Cockburn 2010; Sjoberg 2013; Theidon 2009), peace negotiations spaces are built upon constructed masculinities that are rooted in racialized, heteronormative assumptions linking men with physical prowess, competitiveness, aggression, domination, heterosexuality, and protection (Bueno-Hansen 2018; Hawkesworth 2008; Theidon 2009, 2015). In turn, femininity, and subordinate versions of masculinities, have been linked with dependency, fragility, passivity, and victimhood (Blanchard 2003; Enloe 2014; Gilmartin 2017; Sjoberg 2018). The causal path, however, is not one directional; hypermasculine gender constructions inform and are informed by war and militarism (Connell 2000). This self-reinforcing cycle generates relentless momentum and creates tremendous barriers for gender mainstreaming in peace negotiations. As a result, hypermasculine principles are often considered 'high politics' while gender mainstreaming is perceived as 'low politics,' if not completely ignored.

Institutional Change through Gender Mainstreaming

In an effort to acknowledge the masculine bias in peace processes, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1325 calling for gender mainstreaming in all areas of peace and security.

Gender mainstreaming is a global strategy aimed at advancing women's rights and gender equality. Its principal goal is to dismantle mechanisms that maintain gender inequality by incorporating gender perspectives throughout social, political, and economic systems. Gender mainstreaming operates from the starting point that gender is a fundamental experience in and constituted by our social world, and thus, policies and practices are never gender neutral in their development, implementation, or evaluation (Chaparro González & Martínez Osorio 2016). Theories of gender mainstreaming understand gender to be both a social process and an analytic category (Beckwith 2005). It is a social process in that gender is actively produced and reproduced in social relations and inevitably enables, shapes, and constrains behavior. It is an analytic category in that it is also used to build, execute, and assess policy and practices that are fundamental to achieving gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming is inherently linked to institutionalism since its foremost goal is to ensure that gender dynamics are addressed throughout all social, cultural, and political institutions. Together, gender mainstreaming and institutions form symbiotic relationships in that they simultaneously inform and are informed by each other. Because gender mainstreaming seeks to transform institutions by integrating gender equality into the fabric of all its norms,

policies, and practices (informal and formal), receiving institutions respond by enabling, thwarting, and/or contorting gender mainstreaming efforts. In turn, institutions are shaped by their ongoing interaction with gender mainstreaming processes, and vice versa.

Since its introduction onto the world stage in the mid-1990s, gender mainstreaming policy and rhetoric have been captured by international, national, and local policy systems with remarkable speed (Daly 2005; Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2002). However, it has not had the impact many had hoped, and the area of gendering peace processes is no exception. For example, UNSCR 1325 calls for “an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes” and demands “all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective” (UN Security Council 2000: 1–2). Yet, peace negotiations and agreements have fallen short of these objectives as women’s exclusion from the negotiating table remains the norm and gender issues regularly fall by the way-side. As previously mentioned, when brought into the fold, women are often involved in Track 1.5 or 2 negotiations or forced to operate from the outside via pressure campaigns. In Afghanistan, where women have been routinely excluded from negotiations, women have been critical actors in the conflict resolution and local peacemaking processes on the ground (Azadmanesh & Ghafoori 2020). In Liberia and Burundi, outside pressure from women’s organizations opened up opportunities for women to serve as observers in their respective peace negotiations. Yet, as Aggestam (2018) notes, observers rarely influence the process in substantive ways and in the cases of Liberia and Burundi, female observers were not officially recognized as full participants (Saight 2016). This is not to say that women have never been involved in Track 1 negotiations; after all, in Northern Ireland and most recently in the Philippines, women made important gains at the table (Anderson 2016; Santiago 2015; Waylen 2014a). With that said, between 1992 and 2011, only 2% of chief mediators, 4% of witnesses and signatories, and 9% of peace negotiators have been women (Castillo Diaz & Tordjman 2012). Moreover, substantive gender representations in peace agreements are also lacking, and those that do make their way into processes are often done in a piecemeal fashion, lack robust gender analysis, and in many cases, work against the spirit of gender mainstreaming by essentializing women and reinforcing gendered stereotypes (Bell 2015, 2018; Bell & O’Rourke 2010; Hudson 2010).

To date, the bulk of literature on gender and peacemaking has focused on either the exogenous conditions that facilitate or impede women’s participation (Bell 2018; Herbolzheimer 2014; Olsson & Gizelis 2014; Paffenholz 2014;

Tripp 2018) and/or the eventual outcomes and their representation (or lack thereof) in peace agreements (Bell 2015; Bell & O'Rourke 2010; Castillo Diaz & Tordjman 2012; Ellerby 2015; True & Riveros-Morales 2019).

Drawing attention to the gender dynamics that occur once women are inside the negotiation space, the subsequent analysis examines how both formal and informal 'rules of the game' of the peace negotiation space shaped women's experiences and the eventual implementation of the gender perspective in Colombia's 2016 final peace agreement. Shedding light on these processes gives us greater insight into the ways in which feminist and LGBTQ+ goals were either advanced or frustrated throughout the negotiations, and in turn, we can gain a better appreciation for the endogenous factors that constrain and/or enable gender mainstreaming from within.

Overview of the First Four Years of the Colombian Peace Talks

2010–2012

As with most peace talks, the Colombian peace process began with secret communication between President Santos and FARC leadership, which lasted for two years between 2010 and 2012. Because secret peace talks inevitably involve a limited number of actors – mostly male military and political elite – women are rarely involved in this process, and women specifically representing women's interests in this space has yet to be seen. The Colombian case is no exception. While there was one woman involved from the beginning – Sandra Ramirez, widow of one of FARC's founding members – there is no evidence in the information that is available that she represented women's interests at large nor is there any indication that there were conversations around the need to integrate women's issues at this stage (de la Calle 2019; Santos 2019, 2020).

As the secret talks became more involved, more people were brought into the process. By the end of 2012, three women were involved, one from each side of the negotiations and one international guarantor. Again, despite women being brought into the process, there is no evidence to suggest that the warring parties were accounting for their responsibilities under UNSCR 1325.

When the official peace talks began in 2012, one woman from the FARC – Tanja Nijmeijer – alias Alexandra Nariño – served as a negotiator. The FARC later brought on Victoria Sandino in 2013 to also serve as a negotiator. Thus, only 20 percent (2 out of 10) of the FARC's negotiation team were women. Nonetheless, neither served as plenipotentiaries or had full negotiating power (Bouvier 2016). For the government's side, all negotiators – including the plenipotentiaries – were men. Women who were involved in the process were

operating in support roles and lacked influence over the agendas (Humanas Colombia & CIASE 2017). Furthermore, the official roadmap for the peace talks, which laid out the ‘formal rules’ of how many people would participate, what subjects were to be addressed, and how the information would be communicated, failed to acknowledge the table’s responsibilities under UNSCR 1325.

Between 2012 and 2014, the first three points of the peace agreement were agreed upon, all without women plenipotentiaries at the table and without a gender perspective. The palpable absence of women negotiators within the government’s delegation and the lack of a gender perspective in the developing peace agreement drew criticism among women’s and feminist organizations, causing women’s and LGBTQ+ organizations to make repeated calls for an increase in female negotiators and to push for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace agreement.

In August 2013, nine women’s organizations planned the first National Summit of Women and Peace, which occurred less than three months later. The Summit drew nearly 450 women from 30 of Colombia’s 32 departments, representing 19 distinct sectors. The organizers leveraged their key international support to provide logistical, technical, and financial assistance, and to recruit expert panelists for the event, which was critical to the Summit’s success. They also employed a robust media strategy that included real-time updates as well as extensive social and traditional media coverage. The Summit generated more than 400 proposals, which organizers subsequently synthesized and submitted to the negotiation table for review. A leading theme throughout the Summit was “Women want to be decisionmakers and signatories, not simply subjects to be decided upon by others.”⁴ They argued that women’s inclusion and representation constituted necessary conditions to achieve sustainable peace, that the exclusion of women threatened the viability of the peace process at large, and that their inclusion would ultimately result in a higher quality of peace (Cumbre Nacional de Mujeres y Paz 2014).

Empirical Analysis: 2014–2016 Colombian Peace Negotiations

In the end, the Women’s Summit proved effective. On November 26, 2013, approximately one month after the National Summit for Women and Peace concluded, the Colombian Government announced that they were adding two women plenipotentiaries – Maria Paulina Riveros and Nigeria Rentería – to their team, replacing two outgoing members. Both women held full negotiation

4 This is loosely translated from “*Las mujeres no queremos ser pactadas sino ser pactantes.*”

power and constituted 40% of the plenipotentiaries and 20% of the negotiation team.

Gender Subcommission (2014–2016)

In March 2014, just a few months after their appointment as plenipotentiaries, Rentería and Riveros began exploring the idea of a Gender Subcommission. Together they met with female independent consultants, each of whom had extensive expertise in gender, human rights, and international treaties. They subsequently took their idea to the negotiation table. As Riveros recalls, “it was something new, and the truth is, [the negotiators] had a very open mind. They listened to us – a little surprised – but they listened to us. As a result of that meeting and after presenting the idea to [them], the FARC and the government unanimously decided to formally create the Gender Subcommission” (Riveros 2020).

Announcement of the Gender Subcommission came in June 2014 and was formally established in September of that same year, with a mandate to implement a gender perspective – or an *enfoque de género* – throughout the peace accords. As Rentería recalled:

When President Santos called me to participate in the negotiation table with the FARC, his instructions were clear: I, as Counselor for Equity for Women, must ensure that everything agreed in Havana continues to maintain a gender perspective, one of equity. Women in the conflict carry an enormous weight on their shoulders, more than half of the victims of this war are women and I, in some way, [will ensure] that every word that is agreed between the Government and the FARC considers the rights of all women in this country.

AFROFEMININAS 2014

Because the first three points of the General Agreement had already been decided upon, it would be up to the Gender Subcommission to suggest changes to the already agreed upon text and to make recommendations for the sections that had yet to be written (Col – FARC-EP 2014). Furthermore, the Subcommission did not receive specific direction as to the content and so, to begin, they grappled with the basic question: what does a gender perspective mean for a peace agreement (García Trujillo 2021; Riveros 2020)? They agreed that this process did not aim to make cosmetic changes to the language, such as adding “men and women” and “los/las” to the text,⁵ nor was this going to

5 In Spanish, there are feminine and masculine gender markers for pronouns, nouns, adjectives, determiners, and demonstratives. For example, masculine nouns are often marked

be an annex to the agreement. Instead, it would be central – not additive – to the text. Second, the gender perspective would ensure that “conditions of equality” would be infused throughout the agreement, which meant that “men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, bisexuals, and those with diverse [gender] identities – would be recognized as citizens, as political subjects, [and] as visible interlocutors in social discourse” (Riveros 2020). As Rentería also noted, the work of the Subcommission was not to think about these groups as only victims of the conflict, but also “as subjects of rights and protagonists in the construction of peace” (Emisora Juvenil Universitaria 2014).

Methodological considerations were also important. Because several priorities of the peace agreement had already reached consensus among the warring parties, the Gender Subcommission needed to find a way to incorporate gendered considerations without disrupting the existing content. Such considerations would include, but not be limited to, highlighting the differential impact of the armed conflict on women and LGBTQ+ groups while also considering regional and territorial differences among these groups. They would also need to ensure that the language they used would be accessible for all people, and make certain that the public became and remained aware of their work (Riveros 2020).

As for the structure of the Subcommission, it comprised 5–6 members of each negotiation team at any given point in time, as several members, such as Rentería, would rotate off, allowing space for new members to come aboard. Throughout the two years, all official members, except for one member from the FARC delegation, were women. The support teams were also predominantly women, although one male representing the government’s delegation – Andrés

with the suffix *o* while feminine nouns are typically marked with an *a*. In addition, the definite articles are also gendered (*los* and *las* to mean ‘the’). Thus, the word for doctor is *médico* – for a male doctor one would say *el médico* – and for a female doctor one would say *la médica*. Linguistically speaking, the masculine is unmarked in Spanish, that is, it serves as the standard or norm. Thus, when a person’s gender is unknown or when referencing a mixed-gender group – no matter the gender composition of the group, the masculine is prioritized. For example, if one says, “doctors are nice” – the noun and corresponding adjective would be *los médicos son simpáticos*. In the context of the peace agreement, because the language is general, it would thus defer to the masculine. Feminists and LGBTQ+ groups have long argued that romance languages inevitably promote sexism through language and so movements have pushed for the increased visibility of women and other genders in language by promoting the use of neuter pronouns and inflections with different combinations of symbols or vowels. A concrete example of such discrimination is the struggle female presidents have had in getting the public to recognize the term *la presidenta*, which technically speaking is grammatically incorrect since the noun ‘president’ is masculine. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ groups have been pushing to replace the *o* and *a* with an *e* to mark gender neutrality. For example, the word for ‘everyone’ is *todos* or *todas*, depending on a binary gender composition. Some advocate for the use *todes* to indicate gender neutrality.

Garcia Trujillo – was actively involved throughout. Furthermore, while it is certainly beneficial to have women specifically representing women’s interest, women’s participation at the table as a whole was not evenly distributed. Women remained a minority among negotiators and other subcommissions had few, if any, women. For example, the Subcommittee for the End of Conflict – a technical group established to address a bilateral ceasefire and definitive end to land mines and other hostilities (Arias Ortiz & Prieto Herrera 2020) – had only one female representative among its 13 official participants.

Women’s and LGBTQ+ Organization Delegations in Havana

To ensure that the gender perspective would accurately reflect the needs of the Colombian people, the Gender Subcommittee regularly consulted with local women’s and LGBTQ+ organizations, resulting in what attorney and activist Alejandra Coll (2019) called “a fluid communication between the negotiation table and NGOs.” A good portion of the information exchange occurred in a series of official gatherings, whereby civil society leaders went to Havana and provided input as to what the gender perspective should include. Between December 2014 and March 2015, with the support of UN Women and the Cuban and Norwegian Embassies, the Gender Subcommittee convened three meetings with women’s and LGBTQ+ organizations representing “national and regional groups of women victims of the conflict, feminists, women’s rights defenders, ex-combatants, artists, indigenous people, peasants, Afro-descendants and LGBTI persons” (Sánchez Gómez 2018: 51–52). The three delegations comprised 18 individuals representing 15 women’s and LGBTQ+ organizations. Sixteen of the 18 delegates were women and 2 were men.

Over the course of the three meetings, civil society delegates spoke about the need to transform existing systems of power; attend to women as victims, political actors, and economic leaders; and add specific language to the peace agreement specifically addressing peasant, Afro-Colombian, and indigenous women as well as LGBTQ+ communities. In total, women’s and LGBTQ+ organizations submitted 340 proposals to the Gender Subcommittee for review (Cañas Cortes 2015).

Developing the Gender Perspective

The Gender Subcommittee also met with international experts who provided guidance throughout the process over the course of the next year and a half. The advisors’ role was not to direct the Subcommittee on what substantive gender provisions to include, but rather to help guide them in strategy and design (Molano 2021), allowing for the creation of a homegrown gender perspective where the Subcommittee could incorporate the needs and demands

of women and LGBTQ+ communities from the Havana forums and other meetings.

During this time, the Gender Subcommittee remained somewhat marginalized from the rest of the negotiations. While several members interviewed for this project stated that they felt they had adequate resources to achieve the task at hand, others had a different experience. Multiple interviewees disclosed that the Gender Subcommittee had been viewed as a matter of lower importance to the peace negotiations at large. Other research efforts also confirmed this sentiment. In a joint project among two prominent advocacy organizations in Colombia, women acknowledged that their work was viewed “as something minor [...] as an annex” (in *Humanas Colombia & CIASE 2017: 29*). For example, on occasion they had not been invited into specific spaces until international delegates or the press called for their presence. Furthermore, the Subcommittee had not always been allocated adequate space and time in advance to meet. On multiple occasions, the Subcommittee had to work “in the free time [outside of and around] other commissions and activities,” on their own time and in their own homes (in *Humanas Colombia & CIASE 2017: 29*). One said that oftentimes “when there was no space, or we had to meet late or late at night, we met at the house of the Norwegians” (in *Humanas Colombia & CIASE 2017: 29*).

This was considerably different as compared to the Subcommittee on the End of Conflict, the other official Subcommittee of the negotiations. Comprised of military and government elite, this committee appeared to obtain more resources, better working conditions, and greater attention for their efforts (anonymous interview). At different points in time, different subcommittees and working groups obtained priority depending on what issue on the table was under discussion. However, because of the nature of the Gender Subcommittee’s work, which was to be involved in all aspects, they received less recognition throughout the process (anonymous interviews). While this is partially due to their constant presence throughout the negotiations, it also speaks to the fact that leading men at the table did not fully comprehend the concept of gendering a peace agreement. FARC negotiator and co-chair of the Gender Subcommittee Victoria Sandino noted that the government thought that a gender perspective meant superficially changing language to add ‘men and women’ as opposed to it being about implementing women’s needs and perspectives (RPA Sur 2016). Similarly, Juanita Millán (2019), a lieutenant with the Colombian Armed Forces and a member of the Gender Subcommittee remarked that the broader negotiation table “did not give much importance to [the Subcommittee] at the beginning” as it “was seen as a space in which women were going to have some input into the text and no more.”

Once they began submitting concrete proposals, however, it became clearer to the lead negotiators what the Gender Subcommittee's was and how they would impact the agreement (Molano 2021). While some observed that the substance of the gender perspective was not contentious in and of itself, tensions did arise during the implementation stage, especially for the first three points, which had been agreed upon prior to the formation of the Gender Subcommittee. Andrés García Trujillo (2021) noted that the delegations were often concerned that the other side would try to strategically use the gender perspective as leverage to renegotiate the terms already agreed to, and thus the negotiators were regularly on the defense when trying to add the gender perspective to the agreement. Paola Molano (2021) explained that each modification resulted in a renegotiation: "every comma, period, or anything else that was added or changed was a new negotiation and this was very exhausting for the table."

With regards to the latter points, a concerted effort to incorporate the gender perspective existed from the outset. When asked if pushback came from the male negotiators during this phase, Sandino (2018) noted, "There were questions and doubts, as in any similar process, but no resistance." When asked about the negotiation teams' response specifically to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ communities in the gender perspective, María Paulina Riveros of the Government delegation responded that for some members it "was difficult for them to understand, but there was no adverse reaction ... They tried to understand the subject and the reaction was not one of rejection, but rather ... of surprise and of trying to understand the concepts." However, several interviewees noted that the Gender Subcommittee was never seen as central to the work, but rather as additive. One interviewee felt that the negotiation table rarely objected to the gendered interventions simply because they saw the gender perspective as "marginal" compared to other parts of the agreement that needed to be settled. Another stated that the gender perspective was seen by male negotiators as something "very progressive ... rather than as a necessity for guaranteeing a more successful implementation." In other words, the gender perspective was not perceived as fundamental to democracy and sustainable peace; instead, it was viewed as a component that helped make the document a vanguard in the realm of peace agreements.

Regarding the internal dynamics of the Gender Subcommittee, occasional friction arose between representatives of the two delegations – such as agreeing upon what constituted sexual violence; yet, tensions never became significant enough to stall progress (Molano 2021). This was likely due to the nature of their work – because the Subcommittee was working with an already negotiated text, they were limited in what they could implement. They were tasked with adding a gender perspective on top of what had already been agreed

upon, and thus there was less opportunity for contentious debates. For the points that had yet to be agreed upon, the Subcommission worked together to come up with joint proposals around a common goal of gender equality, thus minimizing the points of contention.

Tensions were highest early on, but with time and as the Subcommission made progress, the process became much more fluid and was perceived to be a very productive space (Garcia Trujillo 2021). In fact, several members have talked openly about the bonds that they formed during this time. In an interview with Millán, the lieutenant discussed her experience of sitting at the table with people who had been her enemy for so many years and having to transcend that divide in the name of achieving peace. When asked what she valued most about her time on the Gender Subcommission, Millán said (2019):

Those two years of working with FARC women taught me a lot ... they were my enemies ... what was it that Ghandi said?... ‘Sometimes you have to sit with the enemy and make him your friend.’ In those two years I made very good friends ... I love them very much. I respect them a lot ... being able to spend two years working hand in hand with them is what I value the most about the opportunity.

In another interview at the University of the Andes (2018) in Bogotá, Millán spoke about her evolving friendship with FARC leader, Victoria Sandino, stating “In war we were enemies, at the negotiation table we were *compadres*, and today we are colleagues and friends.”

Women in Support Roles

As mentioned above, women did occupy several supporting roles on both sides of the table. For the FARC delegation, 13 members of the support team (43%) were women (Molano Jimeno 2013), and for the Government’s delegation, 51% of the support team from the Office for the High Commissioner for Peace were women (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz & Presidencia de la República 2018). As described by Bouvier (2016: 21), women served as the backbone to the negotiations by conducting research and coordinating communications, and they were critical to the drafting and redrafting of the peace agreement’s language. While women clearly served a vital role in the work in Havana, nevertheless some in supportive roles reported that they felt stretched and unrecognized. In a report released by the Corporation for Social and Economic Research and Action (CIASE) and the Humanas Corporation (2017), several women stated that they had double the responsibilities in that they had their regular full-time jobs with the State or the FARC delegation, then additional work during specific points in the process. Their involvement in Havana

did not mean someone else took care of their responsibilities, and therefore there were times when they felt as if they had two jobs. This remained particularly true for women of the Government delegation, where women constituted 80% of the Office for the High Commissioner for Peace in all (Bouvier 2016). Some women reported that their work lacked recognition, particularly in spaces outside of the official negotiations. For example, they reported that while in Havana, they had to clarify to others that they were in charge in situations where people went to the men for information or guidance, when in fact, they should have been asking the women. Finally, since men made most of the final decisions, several women reported feeling frustrated by the gendered hierarchy. For example, a few women from the Government noted that there were specific moments in which they could have contributed more, given their expertise and experience; nevertheless, they were overlooked or lacked the authority to do so. By contrast, women on the FARC's support teams reported feeling recognized and heard; however, their work fully depended upon the authority of the organization's all-male Secretariat, thus constraining their influence (Humanas Colombia & CIASE 2017).

Discussion

Examining the structure and organization of the peace talks, and women's subsequent location, roles, and experiences within the negotiations, sheds light on the cross-cutting formal and informal gendered 'rules of the game.' In this case study, peace negotiations began as a gender-blind process, meaning issues of gender were not acknowledged or discussed during this time (Santos 2020). While women were present from the beginning and their descriptive representation increased with time, they did not advocate for a gendering of the negotiations during this stage. Problems with gender-blind institutions is not just the absence of gender representation and recognition; they also reinforce gender inequality in obvious and subtle ways, which have short- and long-term effects. Here, the development of the General Agreement – the roadmap for the formal talks – failed to acknowledge gender as a priority. The absence of gender considerations in the formal rules created a hurdle for women's descriptive and substantive representation. As a result, women's groups had to leverage their own resources, organizing the National Summit of Women and Peace, which occurred nearly two years after the official negotiations began and after several points of the peace agreement had already been negotiated. This latter point created several difficulties for the Gender Subcommittee as will be discussed shortly.

Responding to the women's pressure campaign in early 2014, the government delegation appointed two women negotiators with full negotiating power and the negotiation table established a bi-partisan Gender Subcommission tasked with implementing a gender perspective throughout the final peace agreement. The Gender Subcommission was made up predominantly of women with two male participants, only one of whom participated regularly. While this demonstrates awareness to gendered needs within the negotiation space, members of the Subcommission reported that they were less resourced and received less attention and notoriety by the table. Furthermore, it is evident that those with authority at the table were unclear as to what gendering the peace agreement would look like. There was a clear pattern of relegating women's issues to 'low politics' while continuing to prioritize traditionally masculine affairs, as opposed to both sharing equal prestige. Furthermore, while it is essential that women have authority over women's issues, the roles of women were not evenly distributed throughout the table. This speaks to the persistence of a gender division of labor in institutions where "men tend to congregate in what is considered 'hard' fields of military and finance, [and] women often cluster in allegedly 'feminine' or 'soft' fields" (Aggestam & Towns 2018: 11).

The women's experiences in support roles further illustrates this. Arguably the backbone of the peace talks, women occupied most of these positions, which came with less prestige, visibility, and decision-making power. As mentioned, several women felt frustrated that they were unable to make decisions when they had the expertise to do so, but their position did not allow them to do so. Furthermore, when they did have authority, men continued to seek out other men for information, instead of the women in charge. In short, men retained most of the authority and the talks continued as a gender-blind process.

The structure of the negotiation table both aided and constrained the eventual gender perspective. The Gender Subcommission entered the process after several agenda priorities had already been negotiated. As a result, the Subcommission had to add the gender perspective on top of what was already drafted without disturbing the main agreement. In other words, there was no room to introduce new ideas or measures. This certainly was limiting in that not all their desired proposals could be worked out. Nonetheless, because the Gender Subcommission members were working toward a common goal of gender equality, and not negotiating other differences related to their respective delegation, fewer tensions and relationships formed across conflict lines, aiding in the efficiency and ultimate quality of their work. Finally, because the delegation leaders did not fully understand the depth or nuance that gender perspectives entail, they did not push back against the substantive gender inclusions.

Thus, viewing their work as 'low politics' gave women greater freedom to develop and advance a more comprehensive gender perspective that went beyond just the inclusion of women while also acknowledging the importance of including diverse sexualities and gender identities in the discussion. Initially, the lack of appreciation for their work paradoxically resulted in little to no pushback for the progressive gender perspective. Had there been greater understanding of the what the Gender Subcommittee was producing, it is possible that they would have anticipated some form of backlash from opposition. However, once implemented in the first draft, the gender perspective earned accolades from national and international organizations and media, playing into President Santos' need for international legitimacy to secure the agreement.

Conclusion

While the Gender Subcommittee seemed to navigate indifference but not outright resistance in Havana, their work unexpectedly provoked fierce opposition among right-wing politicians and conservative evangelical churches. In September 2016, just weeks before the Colombian people voted on whether to accept the proposed peace accords in a national referendum, these groups organized against the peace agreement arguing that the gender perspective did not belong in the agreement. On October 2nd, the Colombian people rejected the peace agreement: 50.2% of the population voted against it.⁶

Over the next several weeks, the negotiators embarked on a Grand National Dialogue, conducting "more than 60 exhaustive meetings" (de la Calle 2019: 298) with opponents and supporters of the peace agreement to renegotiate the terms of the peace plan, including the gender perspective. Despite the unexpected exogenous pressures, the gender perspective remained intact and in fact was strengthened in the final agreement, due to the astute renegotiation skills of women's and LGBTQ+ groups (Corredor 2021).⁷ As a result, the final peace agreement, which was approved by Congress at the end of November 2016, now boasts the most robust gender perspective in a peace agreement to date, and the first in the world to positively and substantively address LGBTQ+ rights.

6 For more on the backlash to the peace agreement's gender perspective, see Beltrán 2018; Corredor 2021; Hernandez & Otálvaro 2020.

7 For an in-depth analysis of the gender perspective in the final agreement, see Corredor 2021.

By viewing the 2010–2016 Colombian peace negotiations as an institution, I have underscored the formal and informal ‘rules of the game’ that influenced both marked and unmarked gender rules, practices, norms, principles, and processes. I show that while the negotiation table began as a gender-blind institution with little interest in gender inclusion, changes to its formal rules enabled women to gain access to the table in multiple capacities and implement a gender perspective in the agreement. Nevertheless, steps toward gender sensitivity did not alter long established gender norms – or the informal rules; the negotiation table continued to underestimate women’s work and failed to grasp the importance of a gender perspective within its agreement. While this frustrated members, it also paradoxically benefited their work as it helped facilitate an impressive gendering of the final peace agreement without resistance from the table, as they were unaware of how ambitious the final perspective would be and thus did not view it as a threat to their position nor a threat to finalizing the peace agreement. Furthermore, evidence shows that the gender perspective did eventually gain legitimacy at the negotiation table at large, as evidenced by the table’s desire to keep the gender perspective in the agreement despite the backlash.

This case study helps us better understand the endogenous gender dynamics within peace negotiation spaces and the gendered processes that occur between women’s entrance to the negotiation table and the gendered outcomes within peace agreements. It highlights that both the formal and informal rules are essential for understanding outcomes. In the Colombian case, we see that the inclusion of women and the creation of a Gender Subcommission did not significantly alter the informal gender norms at the table. While the subordination of women’s work ultimately helped the Subcommission craft a more robust gender perspective in this case specifically, such a result cannot be taken for granted in future cases. In other words, we cannot fully understand gendered outcomes in peace agreements without looking at both formal and informal gendered norms at the negotiation table. After all, gendering institutions is not solely about formal recognition of rights or positive action (Parada Hernández 2018), it is also about understanding the more subtle and unseen ways in which gender norms usurp or uphold traditional power arrangements.

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