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Gender, Displacement and Transitional Justice

Sinead McGrath

University College Dublin, sinead.mcgrath@ucdconnect.ie

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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2017 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Gender, Violence, and Agency

Presenter: Sinead McGrath, University College Dublin

Title: Gender, Transitional Justice, Displacement, International Organisations, Forced Migration

Abstract:

In the past fifteen years, there has been huge emphasis on the need for gendered mechanisms dealing with both forced migration and peacebuilding. The UN landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325) and the gender-mainstreaming of the 1951 Refugee Convention have urged all actors to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding and their protection in instances of displacement. An underdeveloped link between these issues has not been addressed by the academic community, particularly when looking at societies in transition and the relationship of displaced women to international migration organisations in the context of transitional justice. This study aims to rectify this by asking, “Does involvement in programmes run by international organisations (IO) such as UNHCR and IOM affect displaced women’s agency in transitional justice contexts?”

This research brings together the fields of forced migration, transitional justice (TJ), and gender mainstreaming. In doing so, the author will assess the involvement of female IDPs and returned refugees with organisations that deal with displacement; this is to assess whether plans of resettlement and return encourage greater political involvement of women in transitional justice.

A comparative study of Colombia and Liberia using qualitative thematic analysis will be conducted with both female IDPs and returned refugees who have dealt with UNHCR and IOM through programmes of return or protection. By using Foucault’s writings on governmentality and Crenshaw’s intersectionality as theoretical frames, the research will use feminist qualitative thematic analysis to unpack themes related to agency in transitional justice, so as to highlight potential gaps between organisational policy and practice and to explore the effect of displacement and return on women’s agency in post-conflict situations.

The results of this research will have an impact on both the academic sector and the gender mainstreaming policies of international migration organisations in post-conflict contexts.

About the presenter:

Sinéad McGrath has a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and Italian from Trinity College Dublin and a master’s in international relations from the Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, earned as part of the Rotary Peace Fellowship Programme. A current doctoral candidate in the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIRe) at University College Dublin, she lectures in migration and development in the Department of International Development at Maynooth University. Her current research examines transitional justice contexts to identify whether being part of UN programmes of protection and return increases agency for internally displaced women and female refugees within post-conflict mechanisms.

McGrath previously worked in the nonprofit and international sector: UNHCR Costa Rica and Geneva, researching the detention of asylum-seekers in the Americas (Costa Rica) and gender-based violence (Geneva); in the World Food Program in Rome on gender issues; the Irish Refugee Council; the Latin American Solidarity Centre in Dublin; and as an independent researcher for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa. In 2016, she spent six months as a guest researcher in the Women's and Gender Studies Department of the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, through the Aesop+ Programme.