

<b>Institution: The University of Winchester</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA19</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Impact on NGOs working with women in militarized areas of the South Caucasus</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017 – 2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Ulrike Ziemer	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Senior Lecturer in Sociology	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  March 2012 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 – 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)  <p>Underpinning research into the militarization of women's lives has positively impacted on local communities in Armenia in the South Caucasus. Research, workshop and training activities have enhanced our knowledge and understanding of the role of militarization. In turn this has impacted on the practices and skills of women NGO activists in Armenia and enhanced their engagement with women in communities affected by militarization. Evaluation data demonstrates that research-informed communal projects have contributed to noticeable change in the attitudes and practice of NGO staff.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)  <p>Military conflict has been a defining feature of the South Caucasus over the past 30 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the early 1990s was accompanied by the emergence of three major secessionist armed conflicts: Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan (where there was intense fighting in 1988-1994), and South Ossetia (1991-1992) and Abkhazia (1992-1993) in Georgia. During the 1990s and much of the 2000s, these conflicts in the South Caucasus continued under conditions of 'no peace, no war'. Thus, the heightened militarization of society, and in particular its impact on women, needs to be understood empirically and counteracted through the development of training for local NGO women.</p> <p>The research which underpins this impact case study has been carried out by Dr Ulrike Ziemer, as part of an ongoing project in the period 2017-2021, in collaboration with women activists from the Women's Resource Centre Armenia in Yerevan (WRCA) and Shushi (Nagorno Karabakh), as well as to some extent, the Women's Fund in Tbilisi (Georgia) and the Yuva Humanitarian Center in Baku (Azerbaijan).</p> <p>Two principal research aims have driven this research project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To analyse the realities of militarization in women's lives in the South Caucasus – currently an under-researched topic. Scholarly perspectives on political transformations in the region have been dominated by macro theories most often involving ethnic conflict, transition and international relations. Instead, this case study is based on a 'bottom-up' perspective that uses a gender analysis derived from ethnographic research and qualitative interviews.</li> <li>2. To provide empirical research on the realities of the militarization of women's lives and to feed-forward this knowledge into workshops and training to help local women's NGO activists overcome the negative impact of this militarization in the region.</li> </ol>		

Primary research insights and findings include:

- According to the Global Militarization Index in 2018, Armenia is one of the third most militarized countries in the world, and the most militarized country in Europe. Militarization has become an entrenched and normalized part of women's lives in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Despite this normalcy of militarization in people's lives and unquestioned compliance with the discourse of militarization, it is not void of male hypocrisy [3.1; 3.2].
- Empirical research has shown that the impact of protracted conflict in the region needs to be understood through an analysis of emotion. Fear, grief and trauma not only affect individual women but also create a collective identity amongst them that is defined by compliance with the heightened militarization of society in this region. In addition, by unpacking emotions surrounding regional conflicts, we see how they feed into the persistence of patriarchal relations. Such findings are novel and mostly absent in the literature on the South Caucasus but also the literature examining war as lived experience within the larger field of international relations [3.3; 3.6].
- While women are considered essential to the militarization discourse in the region, in particular as national symbols of 'mothers' and for the production of future soldiers or sisters and wives of soldiers, it does not mean that they do not experience discrimination. For example, even though war widows have a special status and receive substantial state support, they are often socially marginalized in everyday life because of their war widow status [3.5].
- Despite modest progress in recent years, women in Armenia continue to suffer from major inequalities in political, social and economic life, as evidenced by several international rankings on gender equality and women's empowerment. Despite the recent, so-called 'Velvet Revolution' in Armenia (change of government by peaceful means) and the consequent transition from an authoritarian government to a more democratic government, women are still significantly underrepresented in leadership positions in the public sector, falling short of the minimum target of 40% of women in public decision-making bodies [3.2].

This research has been supported by funding, most importantly, the two-month Visiting Fellowship to the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki, Finland, which enabled Ziemer to write a research-based peer-reviewed article on women and emotions in the prolonged conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, published in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* [3.3]. Furthermore, Ziemer received funding for ethnographic fieldwork from the Armenian Institute at the University of Southern California, US, which enabled her to publish an article on authoritarian norm-diffusion in Armenia (an unexpected finding) in the journal *East European Politics* [3.4].

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Ziemer, U. (ed.) (2019) *Through War and Peace: Women's Everyday Lives and Politics in the South Caucasus*. London: Palgrave.
- 3.2 Ziemer, U. (2019) 'Women against Authoritarianism: Women's Agency and Political Protest in Armenia', in Ziemer, U. (ed.) *Through War and Peace: Women's Everyday Lives and Politics in the South Caucasus*. London: Palgrave. Submitted in REF2
- 3.3 Ziemer, U. (2018) "'The waiting and not knowing can be agonizing': Tracing the Power of Emotions in a Prolonged Conflict in the South Caucasus.' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20(3): 331-34. Submitted in REF2
- 3.4 Roberts, S. and Ziemer, U. (2018) 'Explaining the Pattern of Russian Authoritarian Diffusion in Armenia.' *East European Politics*. 34(2): 152172. DOI: [10.1080/21599165.2018.1457525](https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2018.1457525)
- 3.5 Shahnazarian, N. and Ziemer, U. (2018) 'Women Confronting Death: War Widows' Experiences in the South Caucasus.' *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(2): 29-43. Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss2/3>
- 3.6 Shahnazarian, N. & Ziemer, U. (November 2014) 'Emotions, Loss and Change: Armenian Women and Post-Socialist Transformations in Nagorny Karabakh'. *Caucasus Survey*, Vol 2 (1-2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2014.11417298>

Outputs were assessed by external reviewers and were rated 2\* or higher.

**Research Grants:**

**May 2018 – May 2019, University Research Knowledge Exchange Funding**

Women and Militarization Participatory Needs Assessment Workshop

A joint research project with the Winchester Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace  
£7,755.

**Aug 2017 – Sep 2017, Visiting Fellow at the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki, Finland**

Geopolitical Challenges and National Identity in Armenia: Exploring the Contours of Domestic Insecurities and The Russian Security Discourse  
€3,000 per month.

**Apr 2017, Research support by the Armenian Institute, University of Southern California**

Women, Migration and National Identity in Armenia

\$2,646 for 14 days of ethnographic fieldwork in Armenia

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

One of the major findings of Ziemer's ethnographic research is that militarization is normalized in everyday life and that societal thinking is dominated by an ideology that prioritizes military force as a necessary resolver of conflict. In reality, however, militarization is a multifaceted phenomenon impacting on every aspect of women's lives.

**Impact on local NGO work via a Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA) Workshop**

In view of the opacity and sensitivity of militarization in the South Caucasus, Ziemer decided that it was necessary to organize a Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA) Workshop to help women's NGOs in this region to clarify their strategic priorities, skills and training needed to achieve communal impact by counteracting this process to empower local women.

In May 2018, Ziemer and the Director of the Winchester Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace, Dr Mark Owen, organized a PNA workshop on women and militarization inviting 2 representatives from 3 major women NGOs in the region - The Women's Resource Center Armenia (WRCA), Yuva Humanitarian Center in Azerbaijan and the Women's Fund in Georgia.

The May workshop was based on the Participatory Inquiry Framework (PIF). PIF is an application of co-operative inquiry methodology designed to enable groups facing complex challenges, such as the normalization of militarization in everyday life, to gain deeper understanding of their situation by asking questions in a structured manner. A senior representative of WRCA explains the impact of this workshop on the work of the NGO practitioners: "We used a lot the discussions [on the hypocrisy of militarization] from the workshop. we used this for our [potential grant] proposal with Pervana [also a workshop beneficiary from Humanitarian Center in Baku]...In our region, they try to avoid the subject of militarization ... You know in the region they are very nationalistic and that sort of stuff...If we want to influence the young generation, we need to start to analyse this militarization, how it affects women's lives, young guys' lives and have a public discussion in Armenia especially after the revolution ..." [5.1].

In a follow-up interview in December 2018 with the senior representative of WRCA, they explained that they had already used this approach in their own capacity-building workshops: "The facilitation [of previous workshops] was in a very traditional way, but now it triggered something. It is good because now when they [women participating in the workshops organized by WRC] chose what is the most important topic, the discussion flows and they go oh" [5.2].

Similarly, another senior representative of WRCA, following the participation in the PNA workshop, reported how much the workshop has influenced their work, in particular the use of a discussion moderator during the workshop. Before the workshop, they were not familiar with discussions

making use of facilitators to allow an informal discussion: “The idea that it is not a training [she refers to the more informal style]. The role of the moderator. That was for me very interesting ... It was more like from the discussion. We used the [inductive] model [obtained from the workshop in Winchester] when we started to do the capacity building project for the women’s fund.” When asked if this had enhanced the work of WRCA and the participation of women they work with, she replied “definitely ... We’ll see the success going forward, if we get the funding proposals we apply for ... I also think the dynamic was very, very good [when they used the new approach]. ... it was such a great ambience; you should have seen it. We literally saw each other for the first time and became friends, it was a totally different dynamic for this group” [5.3].

### Significance and reach of this impact

It is a significant result to achieve a change in WRCA’s work practices, as since their foundation in 2003, WRCA has consistently worked with various international partners and grown into a vibrant resource centre, which promotes women’s rights and empowerment. WRCA has benefited approximately 2000 people so far, 90% of whom are women (out of an estimated population of 3 million in Armenia [5.4]), and has won several awards in the past; for example in 2016 WRCA won an award to set up a crisis centre for victims of domestic violence [5.5]. Furthermore, WRCA is supported by a variety of larger charity trusts, such as the Sigrid Rausing Trust, which has supported WRCA since 2014. In total, WRCA has £290,000 to date and is receiving a current grant: £165,000 over 3 years, starting on 1st February 2018 [5.6].

Following the WRCA’s feedback and their successful implementation of PNA practice in their work, it was decided to continue to work very closely with WRCA and organize two more PNA workshops on trauma and militarization for their branch in Shushi in the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR). This republic is an unrecognized state currently in a prolonged conflict situation with Azerbaijan and therefore extremely militarized. The PNA workshop in May 2018 showed that a big problem in highly militarized societies, like Armenia and NKR, is that sensitive issues like trauma are hardly dealt with and do not receive any attention from the government of these two states.

The aim of our work was to train local women activists (for the first time ever in NKR) through informal discussions in the format of two PNA workshops. Unfortunately, two contextual factors severely impacted this ICS. First, both Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh have been hard hit by the global COVID pandemic. Second, Nagorno Karabakh was the site of a major conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over a six-week period in September 2020. Please see the supporting statement.

Ziemer has been able to raise awareness beyond the regional context about the impact of conflict in the South Caucasus on women’s lives in several public media outlets [5.7]. Most notably, she was approached by the producer of ‘Economic Divide’ [5.8] – an Iranian political TV programme and part of the PressTV media outlet in Tehran (Iran) – to appear as a main guest for the show, based on her expertise on Nagorno-Karabakh. The show has a global audience of around 10 million viewers a week (according to the producer) and thus a significant international reach. In addition, her edited volume [3.1] is ranked among the top most cited publications on SpringerLink that concern the UN SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions [5.9].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Follow up interview with a senior representative of WRCA, May 2018.
- 5.2 Follow up interview with a senior representative of WRCA, December 2018.
- 5.3 Follow up interview with a second senior representative of WRCA, December 2018
- 5.4 Noteworthy here that Armenia is a small country with only 2,962,197 people estimated in April 2020: [www.worldpopulationreview.com](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com)
- 5.5 Awards initiative to empower local organizations working with and for girls: <https://www.withandforgirls.org/awards/womens-resource-center-armenia>
- 5.6 Sigrid Rausing Trust: <https://www.sigrid-rausing-trust.org/Grantees/Womens-Resource-Centre-Armenia>
- 5.7 Ziemer, U. (2020) [Nagorno-Karabakh: Caught between Peace and War. Political Studies](#)

[Association](#), October 2<sup>nd</sup>. (Ziemer was approached by the PSA editor to write this news blog)  
On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, Dr Ulrike Ziemer was interviewed for the [Diplomacy Review UCL Podcast: 'Reflections on First Ten Days of War in Nagorno Karabakh'](#)

The University Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peacebuilding (CRRP) invited Ulrike Ziemer to participate in a Podcast on discussing the war over Nagorno Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenian as part of the Centre's podcast series on Talking Peace, Exploring Conflict on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

<https://anchor.fm/talkingpeace/episodes/Cycles-of-conflict--displacement-and-a-call-to-end-the-war-in-Nagorno-Karabakh---Panel-Discussion-led-by-Dr-Mark-Owen---Talking-Peace--Exploring-Conflict-Thought-Leader-Series-eme4ve>

- 5.8 On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, Ulrike Ziemer, was invited as main guest to a talk show about the war in Nagorno Karabakh by an Iranian news channel, TV press.

<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2020/10/26/637305/Nagorno-Karabakh>

- 5.9 Springer Nature Publisher's email from 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020.