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**The 'sex war' and other wars:
towards a feminist approach to peacebuilding**

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Abstract

For more than a decade, resolutions from the United Nations and European Commission have highlighted women's suffering during wars, and the unfairness of their treatment on returning to peace. Yet the injustices and hypocrisy continue. Women are reified as the peacemakers whilst being excluded from peace processes. Women's suffering during war is held up as evidence of inhumanity by the same organisations which accept, if not promote, the marginalisation of women's needs during peacetime. In this paper I review the processes through which these phenomena are perpetuated and outline some ways forward which could help to break these cycles.

Introduction

For more than a decade, resolutions from the United Nations and European Commission have highlighted women's suffering during wars, and the unfairness of their treatment on the return to peace. During this time there has been an increasing interest in women's experiences during war and their potential capabilities for peace, but the interest has not led to significant changes in women's experiences. They still have highly distinct experiences of conflict which tend to leave them marginalised in peace negotiations, and significantly disadvantaged with the onset of peace. This paper considers the various explanations for this lack of change.

One of the charges which might be made against actors and analysts of conflict alike is that of conceptual confusion. *Conflict* is a word often used loosely to mean many different things often in spite of its long history in social science. Most types of social, political and economic change involve conflict of some sort, and one could argue that many of the positive changes in world history have occurred as a result of conflict. How much more confused then is the term *peace*! With much less of a social science tradition behind it, peace is a term which is not only subject to very little conceptual scrutiny by many who use it, but is also declared, with little qualification, as a political objective for which compromises, and indeed sacrifices, are to be made.

In the mix of such ambiguities about the terms conflict and peace, 'blindness' about gender inequality (often amongst other inequalities) commonly rests unchallenged, and the inequality itself commonly thrives. There is a sophisticated analytical literature on the history of women and gender relations during and after war which is persistently ignored by many prominent writers on conflict, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in favour of newly-coined terms and observations which are only rarely rooted in analyses of historical social, political and economic change. There is now

perhaps greater international political will to improve the position of women after wars end (if not actually during war) than ever before, yet there is little evidence of much positive change. Women's concerns are still rarely heard by policy makers at the point of peace settlements, let alone addressed.

I begin therefore with a preliminary review of the conceptual debates from literature on conflict & peace, women and gender relations and then consider these issues during the endings of conflicts and the era of peacebuilding. The questions I seek to address in the paper are derived from concerns about sloppy thinking around conceptual issues related to conflict and peace., about the nature of gender politics in 'post-conflict' situations. Specifically, I ask, 'Why are extreme forms of gender inequality still prevalent?' and 'What would improve the situation for most women in peacebuilding contexts?'

Concepts of conflict and peace

Accepting that no straightforward technical definition (such as more conventional approaches to the categorisations of battles and wars by the numbers of casualties) is likely to encapsulate the complexities of contemporary conflicts in much of today's world, observers frequently present descriptive typologies of conflicts which feature organised and/or collective violence. (1) Violent conflicts emerging since the end of the Cold War have commonly been called *ethnic conflict*, *social conflict*, and *civil conflict*, along with *international social conflict* where there is some cross-border activity or other state involved. These descriptive terms are intended to capture the much quoted condition that 90% of today's casualties of war are civilians (Lake, 1990), but also to convey something about their causes. Competing *identities* are often added to the list of causes, whether conceived in terms of an essentialist ethnicity, or regionalism, or tensions over state-formation, and marginality to the global economy, which is said to have something to do with their 'root causes' (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1999: 1-38).

The prevalent use of the word 'conflict', rather than 'war' is also a reflection of today's complexities, with stops and starts, fluid boundaries, battlegrounds in residential areas, and civilian casualties. However attractive the word is as a convenient device to catch all these phenomena, the term also allows a lack of clarity about what exactly is being discussed specifically. The word conflict may thus be used interchangeably to refer to the *conflict of interest*, or to the *violent expression of conflict*. The question hardly arises as to how or why this 'conflict' situation is different from what is 'normal', as typologies of conflict tend not to be connected to deeper, more sophisticated analyses of the places about which they are commenting. Moreover, there is very little discussion in much of the writing on 'conflict analysis' or 'conflict resolution' on the contribution of certain types of social relations to the specific forms of violence, let alone engagement with theories of human or social behaviour.

There is an emerging common approach which divides the causes of conflict between underlying causes – which might commonly be seen as 'structural inequalities' - and 'triggers' – factors which tip such situations into violent conflict. There is as yet no comprehensive, convincing account of why such difficult economic conditions, or indeed those of acute competition over resources between communities with different identities, lead to violent outbreaks of conflict in some places, but not in others.

Without clarity about the significance of similarity and difference between conflicts, it will remain difficult to assess with any reliability the chances of transition to peace. For instance, whilst it remains unclear precisely what weight to give particular economic circumstances in assessing the causes of a particular conflict, it also remains unclear what significance they may have in the chances of a peacebuilding strategy's success. Improved economic circumstances always figure on wish lists for peace, but the connections with violence are complex, not simple.

A rather narrower conception of conflict is still prevalent, and derives from a kind of 'socio-psychological model' (Duffield, 1997: Annex 1: 90). Here the cause of conflict is seen as being disagreement, or breakdown of communication, between individuals or groups. Violent manifestations of conflict are therefore viewed as irrational and, almost by definition, based on misunderstandings. The mechanisms through which people and organisations might be able to achieve peace are therefore seen to be those which strengthen (or even establish) channels of communication between conflicting groups and individuals, such as mediation and mediation training, and conflict resolution workshops. Such activity is focussed at the micro level, and is geared to the minimisation of violence *per se*.

Such techniques are not readily able to address the links between economic insecurity / inequality and violence. Indeed their logic, which often focuses on lack of understanding and empathy as the driving cause behind violence, can sometimes suggest that at times there is a need to play down the significance of such economic 'root causes', or political circumstances (such as corrupt government administration). Furthermore, where the 'psycho-social' model of conflict informs outside interventions, and that violence was committed fundamentally as a mistake due to poor understanding, it may be assumed that all people involved in the conflict were victims, no matter what role they played during the conflict. Such a view can lead to serious political and social tension if it informs the processes of peacebuilding.

Turning to conceptions of 'peace', Galtung's (1995) conception of *negative peace* has come into quite widespread use, and is probably the most common meaning given to the term, ie. the end / absence of widespread violent conflict associated with war. A peaceful society in this sense may therefore include prevalent social violence (against women, for instance) and structural violence (in situations of extreme inequality, for example). Moreover, this limited 'peace goal', of an absence of specific forms of violence, can and often does lead to a strategy in which all other goals become secondary. The absence of analysis of the social causes of violent behaviour also paves the way for peace agreements which leave major causes of violent conflict completely unresolved. Negative peace may therefore be achieved by people accepting a worse state of affairs than that which motivated them to fight in the first place, for the sake of the (perhaps short-term) removal of prevalent organised violence.

Galtung's alternative vision, of *positive peace*, requires not only that all types of violence are minimal or non-existent, but also that the major potential causes of future conflict are removed. In other words, major *conflicts of interest*, as well as their violent manifestation, have been resolved. Positive peace encompasses an ideal of how society *should* be, but the details of such a vision often remain implicit, and are rarely discussed. Some ideal characteristics of a society experiencing positive peace would include: an active and egalitarian civil society; highly and inclusive democratic

political structures and processes; and open and accountable government. Working towards these objectives opens up the field of peacebuilding far more widely, to include the promotion and encouragement of new forms of citizenship and political structures to develop active democracies. It also opens up fundamental question of how an economy is to be managed, with what degree and type of state intervention, and in whose interest. Discussion of these ambitions tends to be closed off, for the sake of 'ending the violence', leaving major causes of violence and war unresolved – including not only economic inequalities; but also major social divisions; and the social celebration of violent masculinities.

An egalitarian vision of 'positive peace' also embodies equality between ethnic and regional groups, races and, as is far less often mentioned, *genders*. Enloe's feminist definition of peace is, 'women's achievement of control over their lives' (Enloe, 1987: 538, cited in Kelly, 2000: 48) which she regards as requiring 'not just the absence of armed and gender conflict ... but also the absence of poverty and the conditions which recreate it' (Kelly, op cit). However, the details of these larger peace goals are rarely discussed, which serves to eclipse gender issues at the point of settlements and in post conflict situations. Where the question of pursuing greater gender equality does arise at the point of a settlement, it is not uncommon for it to be seen as neither essential, nor urgent in peacebuilding. In some cases changes in gender relations are actually cast as detrimental to the chances of peace holding. For example, many women in liberation movements have testified to the fact that they were accused of thwarting their movement's aims by exposing the sexist and violent behaviour of their male comrades, or even by concentrating their political activity specifically on women's concerns.

The ignoring and marginalisation of gender issues is not merely a political and tactical position of those at the forefront of negotiations, however. Writers and analysts in the fields of conflict analysis and Conflict Resolution (CR) 'discovered' gender later than Development Studies (DS) or International Relations (IR), for rather intriguing reasons (Pankhurst and Pearce, 1997). The process of gender being taken more seriously is also remarkably slow, and something which is being noted and analysed by an increasing number of writers (Reimann, 2000). One explanation which I still find quite plausible is that there was an 'efficiency imperative' in development to take gender issues seriously (Elson, 1995). Basically, many development *policies* often failed because they ignored women, and it became apparent (through the theoretical and empirical work of feminist academics and practitioners) that if gender issues were taken into account, a far greater degree of success could be achieved. This is a complex story, but, as a consequence, gender has now become more or less mainstreamed in some key areas of development analysis and policy, at least to a far greater degree than in IR.

If this explanation for the gendering of DS is correct, then in order for a similar push to occur for CR (or IR, for that matter) a related 'policy-wing' would need to benefit in some way by taking gender seriously. Until recently this was not perceived to be the case; settlements could be found to conflicts not only with no involvement of women, but also at the cost of women as a gender, where settlements were clearly not to their advantage. It was thought to make no difference to the ability to find a settlement, or the chances of that settlement holding, if women were completely ignored or disadvantaged. In other words, negative peace could be achieved in

conditions of extreme gender inequality, with no 'efficiency imperative' to push for change and sexual politics not sufficiently developed to make it a problem not to change.

More recently, with the extension of so-called conflict resolution into post-conflict policies, gender issues and the activities of women are seen to be far more central, and directly to affect the *efficacy* of peace settlements and attempts at peacebuilding, even as women still remain marginalised at the point of brokering a settlement, as I show below. This shift has not yet led back into reconceptions of peace and conflict to consider the significance of gender relations to the conditions of conflict or peace. It also has not led to a change in women's experiences of conflict or peacebuilding, to which we now turn.

Women's wars

For many years, women's roles in war and other types of violent conflict, were quite invisible throughout the world. Accounts of war, through news reporting, government propaganda, novels, cinema etc, tended to cast men as the 'doers' and women as passive, innocent, victims – cast as 'warriors' and 'beautiful souls' by Pierson (1989). In poor countries wars were not portrayed in quite the same way, but stories of the courage and bravery of men as fighters has also tended to eclipse the active roles which women have played. As we have come to know more of women's experiences, it has become clear that there are many different ways in which women live through wars: as fighters, community leaders, social organisers, workers, farmers, traders, welfare workers, and in many other roles. Nonetheless, many conflict narratives highlight a common theme of women seeking to minimise the effects of violence in their different social roles. Stories of women actively seeking to end the wars themselves receive increasing international attention. The bravery of those women who go against the general tide of opinion, and sometimes literally place themselves in the firing line has come to be much celebrated.

For instance, there has been a surge of interest in women who have negotiated peace between groups of warring men (Berhane-Selassie, 1994; El-Bushra, op cit), or who have even courageously intervened in battles to force peace (in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, for instance). These women have sometimes called on and expressed values, behaviour and codes which are explicitly associated with their gender. As one female peace activist commented,

Both men and women have the potential for peacemaking and the responsibility to build and keep peace. The women, however, seem more creative and effective in waging peace ... It is the women's emotional strength to transcend pain and suffering, and their predisposition to peace that provide them with greater potentials for peacemaking.

(Garcia, 1994: 45)

Similarly, commenting on the importance of coalition building in the peace process of the Philippines, another woman activist commented,

And here we see that women have played a large role. Perhaps because of their very lack of exposure to the way traditional politics has been played in this country and the way power has been used, there is in their attitude - and it is not because it's in our

genes but because it is in our experience and culture - much less of a kind of 'ego-involvement' which has to be overcome in dealing with the sorts of questions that need to be answered and the consensus building that needs to be done in forging a peace for a people that have been so divided ...

Moreover, women have largely been the survivors and carers of survivors, so this seems to have given them a sustained intensity of wanting to resolve the peace question ... Furthermore, through the women, there are possibilities of introducing new paradigms in conflict resolution, because, as I say, we are practised in conflict resolution and conflict transformation in the domestic sphere, that perhaps need to be played out more to become an input into the way public negotiations take place. (Garcia, op cit: 63-4)

But some of these accounts also show that in the same wars, women - indeed sometimes the same women - have played both 'peacemaking' and 'war-mongering' roles (El Bushra, 2000: 71, 72, 81; Mukta, 2000: 175; Jacobson, 2000: 181). An increasing number of accounts of wars highlight women's direct involvement in violence, or in motivating the men in their communities to fight (Vickers, 1993; El Bushra, 2000: 71; Mukta, 2000: 175; Jacobson, 2000: 181). This is particularly so where wars are about national identities, as women in most societies take the major responsibility for passing on cultural identities to children, and play active roles in supporting exclusive and aggressive ideologies about nationalism (Ferris, op cit: 5-6; Elshaint, 1987: 193). Accounts of some conflicts document actual violence committed by some women (Bennett, et al, 1995: 20-21, *passim*; Goldblatt, & Meintjes, 1998: 43-5 on South Africa; African Rights, 1995). These accounts remain in the minority, and their authors are sometimes subject to criticism, if not censure. The extent of women's involvement in violent acts in warfare is still barely understood, therefore, and violence is still commonly believed to be the main preserve of men (Jacobs et al, 2000: 12-14; Kelly, 2000).

It is clear that women therefore have great contrasts in their war experiences, which are also mediated by contrasts in age, class and regional or ethnic background. What is nonetheless striking is that there are also great commonalities in their experiences, no matter what kind of situations they have been forced into, or what kind of roles they have played during the conflict. During war, women tend to bear a much greater burden than men for the care of survivors, and always for children. They often continue to carry the main burden for ensuring the provision of food and other tasks of caring for children and the infirm, whilst at the same time also taking on a heavy burden of keeping social and political activities going where men are fighting away from their homes. This shift of social responsibilities from men to women is common despite the many different contexts in which conflicts occur, from remote rural villages in which most of the food has to be grown and/or gathered, to big cities where all kinds of resourceful innovations are developed by women to ensure that families have enough to eat, and some degree of care when they are sick.

For many women, even in the midst of the horrors of conflict, these changes have been experienced as moments of liberation from the old social order (eg. see Sharoni, 2001:94). As the need arose for them to take on men's roles in their absence, so they had to shake off the restrictions of their cultures and live in a new way. The relative minority of women who have joined armies (as nurses, administrators, or even fighters), have even sometimes been able to persuade their political movements to take seriously the demands of women for improved rights, and to accept women's political

representation and other forms of rights. A good number of commentators have observed that in moments of social crisis there is often more 'political space' for radical change in social relations, including those of gender (Elson, 1992 - on economic crisis; Kynch, 1998: 108-9 – on famine), and this has certainly been the case in many wars.

Nonetheless, these 'positive' experiences have to be placed in context. With the changes in the way war is normally fought, and the increasing predominance of civilians amongst the casualties, there is a continuing thread in the ways that women suffer in distinct ways; not because of any intrinsic weakness, but because of their position in society (UN, 1986: para 281). They were not normally leaders before the conflict and, in this sense at least, are not as directly responsible for war violence as men, yet they suffer high rates of injury and death (although not usually as high as for men) and the particularly brutal war injury of rape (always with much higher frequency than men). Rapes committed during war have received more attention in recent years, and also seem to be on the increase. The proliferation of light weapons has also increased the threat of rape for women, as it is harder to resist male violence when faced with a gun (Turshen, 1998: 7; Abdil Halim, 1998: 85-100). Common effects for women, in addition to the direct suffering caused by the rapes themselves include: social stigmatisation (Twagiramariya & Turshen, 1998: 104); physical and mental injury, as many war rapes are multiple and accompanied by other forms of violence; illness (from sexually-transmitted diseases, usually with negative impacts on reproductive health); and death itself (from HIV/AIDS, or assault and murder because of the stigma attached to rape survivors (*ibid*)).

The experiences of girl children in conflicts are even less well documented than those of boys, but are often horrific, and specific to their gender (Nordstrum, 1997). Generational relations are also destabilised where children become soldiers (Richards, 1995); a situation which is now prevalent, with the proliferation of light weapons which can be used by almost anyone (Turshen, 1998: 7). Many children in war-torn African societies have grown up without the respect for their elders which was normal before war, as the weapons have given them power over older, unarmed people. Women particularly feel the loss of this rare source of respect as elders, especially where young boys commit rape on older women (*ibid*).

Women's testimonies suggest that often they feel that they have had little *choice* about whether they are innocent victims or courageous participants; they often find that they have to actively participate, even in violence, or suffer dire consequences, including death. Perhaps this lack of choice is intensified because of changes in the nature of warfare over the years, and particularly towards the type of violence associated with post cold war conflicts. Jacobs et al (2000: 4) suggest that such constraint is not a recent phenomenon and might rightly characterise women's experiences of most wars. Certainly where there is no front line, as conflict is fought out in people's homes, with light weapons, and where the reason for fighting is the very existence, or at least presence, of people with a differently defined identity, women have been placed on one side or another whether they actively choose this or not. Women who are seen to 'break out' of the ethnic identity ascribed to them, for instance by having mixed marriages, or being members of human rights organisations, are often targeted for particular censure, if not actual violence (as in former Yugoslavia, for example (Korac, 1998)). There are elements of these experiences in many men's war experiences too, but women's stories

still remain relatively marginal or hidden as narratives of conflicts. Women's experiences also do not inform the terms of peace settlements and their concerns are marginalised in decisions about what should happen during the peace.

A history of gendered conflict endings and gendered peace

There are many different types of endings to conflict, with little analysis to demonstrate their implications for long term peace (Pankhurst, 1999). Nonetheless, whether they are from negotiated settlement or military victory, it remains common for women's voices on all sides to be absent or marginal at the point of a settlement – whether such voices speak as individuals or for group interests. This grossly unequal problem has been recognised as such by many international organisations for some time and indeed, in some efforts to redress the balance, women have been facilitated to participate in some key peace processes in recent years. Such efforts are sometimes based on questionable assumptions and resemble a drop in the ocean in effecting change in favour of women, as I show below.

Women rarely receive recognition for their contributions as providers and carers, let alone reward for their roles as social and political organisers. They usually receive much less support than male fighters in post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation projects (Goldblat & Meintjes, op cit: 47), even though the majority of caring and providing for the whole population is often provided by women after war, and therefore addressing women's basic needs would benefit the whole society (El Bushra, 1998: 29; UN, 1998: B). They also rarely figure in 'security concerns' in 'post conflict' situations, even though domestic violence increases during and after war (Kelly, 2000: 59-60; Krog, 2001;212).

It is common for a high proportion of women to have experienced multiple rapes and associated injuries and infections. Many give birth to children conceived through rape, which leads to many kinds of severe problems, whether the children are abandoned, killed or kept. Health facilities which deal with the effects of rape, and specialist support for such mothers and children, are consistently given low priority, and are rarely available. Women are unlikely to make formal complaints about rape, during or after conflict, unless they are encouraged and supported to do so. Violent acts committed against girls are even more hidden than those against adult women, and urgently require investigation in most post-war situations. What tends to happen is that girls are given even less support than adult women, and the onus for reporting rests with the children themselves (Nordstrom, op cit).

Wherever there are Truth Commissions or other kinds of trials after a conflict women are thought not to report anything like the number of rapes which actually take place (Goldblatt, & Meintjes, 1998). Relatively few women have come forward in spite of the extraordinary numbers of rapes committed in the Yugoslavian wars, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and the fact that these international tribunals have made it very clear that rape is to be taken seriously as a war crime (for Rwanda see, Twagiramariya and Turshen, 1998: 113; for Yugoslavia see Cockburn, 1998). One of the reasons for this reluctance to come forward and hold perpetrators of sexual violence to account is said to be that such women are commonly still under the threat of domestic and sexual violence. It is common after war for there to be no effective personal security for women and for rape, and other forms of sexual violence

(including domestic violence), to remain prevalent or actually to increase (Kelly, 2000: 59-60, Cockburn, 1998: 207; Krog, 2001: 212).

Rather than *support* at the end of wars, women usually suffer a *backlash* from government against any new-found freedoms, and they are forced 'back' to kitchens and fields. Where governments and / or warring parties establish new constitutions or peace processes, they often marginalise the needs of women (perhaps by neglect) or effectively limit or restrict the rights of women. In some cases such intervention might be carried out explicitly through the legal system, such as by restricting women's access to employment or other legal rights (Kelly, 2000: 62), and certainly by a failure to repeal existing discriminatory legislation. This might be called a 'gendered peace' (Pankhurst & Pearce, 1997).

Furthermore, a backlash is often experienced for women in their relations with men. It is not uncommon for there to be public outbursts of protest against women, sometimes accompanied by violent assaults, who are economically independent of men; or who are employed in roles seen by many as 'male', or who persist in living in urban areas and pursuing education in predominantly rural countries. Such experiences were felt bitterly by many of the women who were active liberation struggles in many parts of the world, such as in Algeria, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Eritrea and Mozambique, although in each case there have been debates about the extent to which the state and/or government has played a leading role (Jacobs & Howard, 1987; De Abreu, 1998). Many such women have to adjust to a new situation in peacetime in which they have less political space to challenge gender relations than they did during wartime or even beforehand. In similar vein, women commonly find their historical contributions marginalised in both official and popular accounts of war immediately afterwards, as happened in Europe after the second World War, as though in a denial that such shifts in gender relations were actually possible (Kelly, 2000: 62).

Official policies are themselves sometimes a part of the backlash, even if the state is not evidently orchestrating it. In an intense and sometimes violent moment, the state can bring to bear many of the policies observed in 'normal times' in many parts of the world to intervene in gender politics, or the 'sex war' in favour of men. The state becomes instrumental in enforcing controls over women's sexuality, fails to increase (and even to prevent a decline) in the personal security of women (especially in terms of protection from violence, sexual and otherwise); imposes and/or supports restrictions on women's movement, access to housing, jobs and property (especially land); and marginalises women's health needs. In many cases such official policy outcomes are also reinforced by the practices of international organisations.

Such states are intervening in contexts of social crisis where violence against women is very high and at both social and individual levels there are great battles to define surviving women's roles and rights as secondary to those of men. Attempting to answer the question 'why?' is certainly challenging. It seems as though the challenge to gender relations experienced during war becomes too great for patriarchal societies to maintain in times of peace. The ideological rhetoric is often about 'restoring' or 'returning' to something associated with peace in the past, even where the change actually undermines women's rights to a more unequal situation than before the war – in effect to a balance of gender politics which is unambiguously in favour of men as a gender. This is often accompanied by imagery of the culturally specific equivalent of the

‘beautiful soul’, strongly associating women with cultural notions of ‘tradition’, motherhood, and peace (Pierson, 1989).

In this post war situation, the *differences between women* often reassert themselves again, especially in many countries where women are divided by an ethnic and/or regional identity (Korac, 1998: 39-46). New divisions have occurred as a result of women’s different roles during the war, eg. whether one is perceived to have been on the side of ‘victors’, or ‘perpetrators’/ ‘collaborators’, and whether they have given birth to children of ‘the enemy’ after rape.

All of these issues can determine who qualifies for aid and other support (Turshen, op cit: 9), as can women’s marital status, and whether or not they still live with their husbands, or are widowed, abandoned or divorced. Marital status is highly significant in situations where women do not have strong legal rights (such as in land and property titles, access to credit etc). Where the majority of the surviving population is female (as in Rwanda, where it is 70%) this can lead to severely heightened tensions between women, who compete over men and resources. Tensions also exist between women over whether or not their children survived the war. For all these reasons, it is not unusual for there to be very little trust between women as a group. Distrust is also common between many survivors of conflict. The heavy significance of difference and tensions between women tends to add to the silencing effect on women’s common needs.

Peacebuilding strategies do not usually directly address this tension between common experience and major differences and divisions between women, but rather tend to focus either on ‘women’ as a category, or assume their existence as gender-less members of other groups, as I show below. On top of coping with all these difficulties, with little help to resolve tensions between them, all women are increasingly identified as those people best suited to ensuring that peace holds and in conflict zones, even of creating the right conditions for peace.

The new celebration of ‘peaceful women’

In many contrasting social and cultural contexts it is commonplace for the conceptualisation of *femininity* to include some of the ‘opposite’ qualities to masculinity: of seeking non-confrontational methods of conflict resolution; of willingness to work for the good of the collective; and even of passivity. Such qualities are assumed to be embodied by all women, who have special qualities which equip them better than men for peace, and better for peace than for war (UN, 1986: para 237; UN, 1995: para 134, 139). Such assumptions now have a long tradition of identifying female qualities with a rejection of war and conflict (Byrne & Powers-Stevens, 1996: 32-3; Ferris, 1993). Accounts of war which highlight the violence directed at women tended to reinforce the assumption that all women must always be pro peace / non-violence. There are also echoes here of the essentialist ‘mother’ figure who stands for peace, and the central place of the mother figure in many societies cultural ideal about ‘tradition’ (Cockburn, 2001: 24).

Recently there has been a great surge of international interest in ‘peaceful women’, also featured in much of the writing on war-torn societies – both in analysis and in policy debates. This seems to have occurred partly as a revulsion against the violence

of war, and in the hope that a focus of attention on women might reveal the way forward to more peaceful, and less violent worlds. Organisations have therefore increasingly assumed that policies to work with women ought to be fundamental to peacebuilding (UN, 1986: para 266; UN, 1995: E), and that women 'hold the key' for peacebuilding. For instance, International Alert's Code of Conduct (1998) stated that,

We explicitly recognise the particular and distinctive peacemaking roles played by women in conflict afflicted communities. Women and women's organisations are often reservoirs of important local capacities which can be used in peace-building activities ... (International Alert, 1998: 6)

Thus, some of women's distinctive qualities (whether these are thought to be biologically or socially determined) become identified with the way forward in peacebuilding. Strategies therefore focus on ways to enhance, support and extend the work that women are thought to be well-equipped to undertake, alongside all their other responsibilities, as 'women's work'. Indeed, many women internationally are themselves taking up this mantle.

Women's organisations have attracted attention as a way to carry implement this policy imperative (eg. UN, 1998: C), but of course they are not all the same animal! Some women's organisations have developed the capacity to work openly to protect and extend human rights (especially in many Latin American countries). Others have extended the work they took on during conflict to ensure that the social fabric did not collapse, through various forms of community organisation and welfare provision, especially where groups were established in camps of refugees or displaced people during conflict, such as in Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Guatemala, Rwanda and Burundi. Others more directly focus on the need to talk about, and take action on, strengthening peace in the name of women (such as the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks and Femmes-Africa-Solidarite in Africa, and others in Israel / the Occupied Territories and in former Yugoslavia - see Cockburn, 1998 for examples). Finally there are those women's organisations which explicitly attempt to challenge women's oppression and gender inequality in post-conflict situations (such as those which facilitate women's participation in war-crimes tribunals and truth processes). Many of these organisations also attempt to build bridges between groups of women with very different experiences of conflict, who might otherwise be separated by their ethnic, regional or political identities.

All of these types of organisations can therefore be of fundamental importance in addressing common weaknesses in existing peacebuilding strategies: the lack of attention to women's needs; the marginalisation of gender analyses; and the absence of efforts to challenge particularly 'unpeaceful' forms of masculinity in institutions and in society more widely. Furthermore, women's organisations have the potential to achieve many of the goals of peacebuilding: to increase women's (and thereby household) income; to increase women's abilities to participate in public, political processes and civil society more generally; to increase the number of women who become leaders and representatives; to reinforce efforts to challenge masculine cultures in institutions and society more widely.

These challenges and changes do not happen on a large scale at present because many women's organisations face great difficulties in their continued survival, let alone in achieving all of their objectives. Such problems include chronic under-funding, which is

commonly a more extreme problem even than for other types of community organisation. They also often require further training in the areas of management, leadership, and lobbying skills. In practice, new women's organisations often have to deal with not only marginalisation and stigmatisation by powerful government and non-government organisations, but also direct physical harassment from local men and security forces, which is especially likely in post conflict situations where gender tensions are usually already running high.

The provision of external funding for grassroots organisations is of great potential help, but often creates tensions. In allocating scarce funds to such groups there is sometimes an expectation that they should 'deliver the peace' single-handedly, which is unrealistic. Moreover, participation in such groups can sometimes lead to unsustainable increases in women's workload. Lessons from the development field suggest that those women's groups which stand the greatest chance of success, and make best use of external funding, tend to be those which have initially formed and established their objectives in the absence of (or with minimal) external funding; those which acknowledge the differences between women; and those which have clearly achievable objectives. These lessons also suggest that where women's organisations are encouraged by the state as part of a policy to enhance women's roles in development, this has often been shown to be a way of avoiding taking women seriously in other ways, and so a successful strategy of supporting women's organisations would have to be complemented by other gender-aware policies.

Supporting women as groups of individuals (rather than in organisations) is also a common strategy in trying to promote peacebuilding (UN, 1986: paras 263-271; UN, 1995: para 142; UN, 1998: C). A common request from peace activists and commentators is that there should be more of a female presence at the sites of peace-making, as well as at discussions which may take place as part of peacebuilding (EC, 1996b: 1.5(c); UN, 1995: 144(c)). There is a general tendency for the leaders of institutions and political organisations to be the only participants at peace settlements, with very little grassroots participation. Women in general are thus marginalised, as they are always poorly represented at leadership level. Outside parties have had some limited success in enabling women to participate in peace talks. For instance, the Life and Peace Institute was successful in ensuring that women's peace groups gained access to some of the Somalia peace and reconciliation talks (even though they only gained observer status). Similar initiatives have also occurred in Burundi, Sudan, Northern Ireland.

Merely being invited to attend talks or peace conferences, or other peace fora, is insufficient, however. Very few women have the education, training or confidence to participate fully, even if they are in attendance. This has been stressed by women activists and observers in many countries of the South, but also in Northern Ireland (Mulholland, 2001: 176). As one peace activist expressed it,

... there is very much technically that women have to learn. In terms of the technical capability to discuss the issues, women are much less prepared because we have not had the luxury of all the education and study that men have had when they go out and take long years to discuss these issues ... we are going to bring the women in and we are going to have to provide support to bring them in. It is not going to happen automatically.

(Garcia, 1993: 65)

There are lessons here from development policies which have attempted to expand the participation of women in the political process by offering them special training and educational opportunities. Providing training and support for women activists who might then be able to participate at peace talks and in decision-making bodies, and to train other women in turn, could, in time, have considerable potential spin-offs (UN, 1998, 272; UN, 1995: 144(c)). Where levels of women's basic education are low, other approaches are required to increase women's participation in the short term, such as special meetings which solicit women's views. These remain rare. There is clearly some positive potential for such women in increased education, potential income and even political power. What they argue for, or achieve politically, is bound to include the same variety of experiences and pressures for and against speaking on behalf of different constituencies (all women, the poor, people from 'their' region etc) as has been elucidated by the literature on 'women in politics'. Discussion about the potential for peacemaking women all too often takes place not in this intellectual and political context, however, but in a conceptual vacuum. What difference might it make to take on a feminist analysis in developing such policy?

And yet 'tradition' remains untouchable?

Many international organisations seeking to assist particularly African countries in peacebuilding have become very enthusiastic about promoting so-called 'traditional' methods of conflict resolution (in the sense for searching for an end to organised violence). So-called 'traditional' methods in this context are distinct from the identification of historic roles played by 'peaceful women' in the previous section, and are associated with responses of community representatives and people in positions of authority. International organisations often have multiple, and often unclear, objectives in these contexts and there is commonly confusion about what exactly might be promoted. Examples of international support for such initiatives exist in Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, Somalia, for instance.

The description, '*traditional' conflict resolution mechanisms* includes many different activities, such as: long, stylised discussions; public hearings, ritual blessings, symbolic acts of forgiveness, corporal punishment, and material compensation (symbolic, property and/or labour) awarded to an injured party to be paid by the 'guilty' (whether individual or collective). All can be intended to achieve a range of outcomes between different parties, including: a shared understanding of different points of view; retribution; compensation; forgiveness; and trust building. They do indeed sometimes work to build understanding and consensus, but in others can work to the benefit of the office holder and his family or community. All of these types of activities are to be found somewhere in the remembered, if not recent, history of many African countries, and are described in growing literature which verges on adulation and reification (eg. Duba et al, 1997).

These contrasting intentions and outcomes may exist in the same country - even in the same communities - but are increasingly being packaged within an international terminology of peacebuilding, not least to access funding from international donors. Some such mechanisms have been in constant use for several generations. More commonly, others are recently resurrected from the memories of elderly people (and also commonly re-invented); whilst others are actually being self-consciously

invented for the first time. This is not in itself surprising, in countries where the invention and/or re-invention of tradition has a long history in the hands of political leaders as a tool for mobilisation and strengthening legitimacy (Vail, 1989; Howard & Jacobs, 1987). The term 'traditional' is therefore often misleading, but tends to have the effect of placing it off-limits to outsiders. Instead, very local politics determine what actually happens.

One thing which these 'traditional' activities often have in common, however, is that the office-holders are almost universally men, which is also normally claimed as part of the tradition, whether historically accurate or not, and they are not easily held accountable for their decisions or actions. Where these practices are seen to 'work' they often exclude women from active roles, and tend to be about peacebuilding between men, with little to offer women *per se*. As they commonly make rulings on the relationships between communities of people, rather than simply individuals, women can find that they are affected, and even bound, by outcomes which they had little or no influence over. A key struggle for the future will be over the need to 'modernise' so-called 'traditional' mechanisms and approaches. In a context where international organisations are supporting attempts to 're-discover' and reify remembered versions of past practice, this struggle will be challenging indeed.

Feminist analyses of conflict and peace: debates continue

A significant number of feminist writers on these issues have come from, or remain in, the development field. This is not a coincidence as so many of the conflicts which challenge us on these issues in recent years have been in the South. There has been an outpouring of writing in this area which stands as a direct, and largely unmet, challenge to a lot of the contemporary policy interventions in conflict and peacebuilding. At the same time, key theoretical and analytical issues remain problematic and unresolved. We consider the implications of the widespread use of the term 'gender'; analyses of masculinity and of femininity; and the prevailing confusion about how to think about rape and sexual violence.

Abuse of the term 'gender'

Where the term *gender* is self-consciously used in relation to conflict and peace, the common enough working definition is usually offered: that gender denotes all the qualities of what it is to be a man or a woman which are socially and culturally, rather than biologically, determined. Gender includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men and in practice this refers to patterns in which women are generally disadvantaged over men. This working view of gender is summarised in the box.

GENDER OR SEX?

Gender is a term used in contrast to sex, to draw attention to the social roles and interactions between women and men, rather than to their biological differences. Gender relations are social relations, which include the ways in which men and women relate to each other beyond that of personal interaction. They include the ways in which the social categories of male and female interact in every sphere of social activity, such as those which determine access to resources, power and participation in cultural and religious activities. Gender also denotes the social meanings of male and female, and what different societies regard as normal and appropriate behaviour, attitudes and attributes for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society, and change over time, gender relations always include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology.

There are some 'grey' areas about what is and is not biologically determined which are still subject to debate, not least amongst feminists. Some people have argued that women tend to be less pre-disposed to aggressive and violent behaviour because of certain biological characteristics. These include lower testosterone levels than men, and the way women's brain structure and development is different from men's. These and other characteristics are said by some to make most women less likely to behave in challenging and competitive ways than most men. No scientific study argues that all forms of different behaviour patterns and roles in society can be explained by biological factors alone.

The most nuanced studies of gender address this problematic of gender disadvantage directly, with attempts to measure, explain and review ways of challenging it, and tend to focus almost exclusively on the behaviour and experiences of women. The differences between women are also explored in some studies, which helps to break down any tendency to see women as a uniform category (UN, 1988: para 282). However, this remains the exception rather than the rule in studies of conflict, in contrast to DS, where a far more sophisticated literature exists. With the increasingly widespread use of the term gender, in many kinds of writing and policy development, two key political challenges persist. First, how to ensure that the complexities and variety of women's lives are kept in view alongside the commonalities which are articulated through an analysis of gender relations. Second, how to ensure that feminist challenges to power relations, and a feminist project to transform society, do not get completely marginalised. Both of these challenges remain as central in the area of development as they are in peace and conflict studies, as highlighted throughout a recent major review (Jackson & Pearson, 1998). It is suggested that one of the main reasons for this loss is that practitioners coming into the development field are using the term gender when they have no familiarity with the basic texts, concepts and methods of feminist research. (Baden & Goetz, 1998: 22).

Authors in that volume (Jackson & Pearson, 1998), and elsewhere, argue that as gender was taken into development policy processes, particularly as part of a 'mainstreaming' of gender issues, it initially led to a focus on women as the target group to be brought into development. This process was based on the common, mistaken assumption that: a) women were not already involved in some way; b) that their labour was a 'free' good readily available for new activities; and c) that women would automatically control the fruits of their labour in any such activities. (2) As the crudest mistakes were realised, policy makers persisted with the need for a more careful inclusion of women, as it was recognised that successful use of women's labour could make development occur more efficiently. This 'efficiency imperative' has been illustrated most clearly and extensively by Elson, as cited earlier, and has for sometime been commonplace amongst major organisations. (3)

This misunderstanding of gender relations in the policy process is elaborated in the field of environmental policy in the South, in a way which has even closer parallels with peacebuilding, by Green et al (1998), who have extensive experience in environment and development policy and analysis. These authors argue that because policy makers

in the environmental field have only taken selectively from gender research and analysis, they have consistently failed to improve women's command over natural resources, but also failed in assisting project effectiveness (Green et al, 1998:259). Such policy makers tend to identify women as a homogenous group with some natural affinity as guardians of natural resources and therefore potentially the most effective group to carry out environmental projects.

Policymakers in the environmental field thus often target women and exclude men in their projects (eg. tree-planting and seed conservation), recognising women both as victims, but then also as effective environmental managers (Davidson. et al, 1992: 151, cited in Green et al, 1998: 272). Environmental policy makers' assumptions therefore echo some of the perspectives put forward in 'ecofeminist' writing (eg. Mies & Shiva,1993; Shiva, 1998) which emphasises the innate feminine qualities of women that make them the most appropriate guardians of natural resources. In effect such policies identify environmental projects as part of 'women's work' within established gender divisions of labour (Green et al, 1998: 271-3). In practice such policies tend to make the same kinds of errors described above – assuming that women's labour is free, when actually there are commonly already many claims on women's labour, let alone the opportunity cost of not using their labour on other crops or other activities. It is also commonly assumed that women automatically benefit from 'community activities' when there is considerable evidence to refute this, certainly when compared with men (Green et al, 1998:274-5).

The parallels with policymakers' expectations of women in peacebuilding are very strong here. Drawing on images of women's supposedly innate qualities described above (in this case the predisposition to work against violence and for peace), intervenors conceive of projects which rely on women's labour, often freely given, commonly to the exclusion of men. This occurs in a context where analyses show that women are far more diverse as a group and that the issues need to be tackled by men as well. Moreover they assume that this work is self-evidently a priority for women and that that it will inevitably help tackle gender inequality. On the contrary, evidence shows that women whose subsistence needs are barely secured tend to have other more pressing calls on their time. Further, gender inequality, which can actually increase during phases of peacebuilding, severely limits what women are able to do from very marginal positions in society.

Even in contexts where gender does have prominence in peacebuilding discourses, this is tending to replicate the problems in development of categorising women as a group with no significant differences – as I have tried to show above with the 'peaceful women' approaches. Moreover, none of the common approaches to peacebuilding take on the challenges of the feminist project of transforming gender relations, as they do not tend to consider how to work towards positive peace in the wider sense.

It's all down to masculinity?

Feminist research has shown the ways in which many large institutions across the world are not gender neutral, but tend to be masculine in culture and practice. State bureaucracies and security services, and international bodies, all tend to be structured and function according to norms of masculinity, rather than to have a gender neutral culture of their own (El Bushra, 2000:76). For instance, they tend to be hierarchical in

structure, and to militate against cooperative and consultative working patterns, and to encourage individualistic, competitive behaviour. They also typically have top-down leadership and management styles to match. Such institutions are also seen to depend on differences between women and men's economic and political roles remaining in place, and also being reinforced by the active use of symbols of masculinity and femininity, where the images of success and achievement tend to be those associated with masculine images of force and strength (Enloe, 1988; 1993; Elshtain, 1987; 1995; Steans, 1998; Peterson, 1993).

The effects of such types of masculinity are not only seen directly in the commitment of violent acts, but also in the structure and functioning of key institutions which are responsible for organising war, and indeed many of those which are meant to manage the peace. The logical policy implication is that transformation of the masculine nature of such institutions is of central importance in any peacebuilding strategy. It is certainly difficult to see how positive peace could be achieved without significant changes in the way certain institutions and policy-making bodies operate, such as government ministries and the security forces. In reflecting social norms, such institutions (private, state and international) typically are dominated by men, with few women being in responsible or decision-making positions. Such a pattern was until recently almost globally universal and it has now come to be seriously questioned and challenged in countries of the North. This is not only because of the desire for greater equity between women and men for employment and power, but sometimes also in the hope that this would lead to changes in the way that such institutions operate.

Security institutions are usually those most in need of reform in different post-conflict contexts (UN, 1995: para 143(c)). Without adequate personal security (for women and men), it is very difficult for levels of violence to be reduced, or even sometimes for a return to war to be prevented, and all too often such organisations are part of the problem, rather than the solution. They typically embody the aggressive values of masculinity outlined above, both in the way internal decisions are taken and management issues are resolved, as well as the way that services are delivered to the public. Several countries have begun to tackle these problems by focusing on reducing violence and corruption within the police force, and have incorporated the re-training of officers to deal with rape, which has been identified by international institutions as a priority peacebuilding (UN, 1997: paras 76-8). Policies which have been taken up on a small scale include: using women as key trainers; increasing the number of women employed, especially in more senior positions, and training and promoting women as investigators of such crimes (El Bushra & Piza Lopez, 1993: 2).

What is not known with any certainty is what difference it would make if there were to be a far stronger presence of women in positions of authority in some other institutions, such as government ministries and other parts of the civil service, although it is commonly assumed that this would change institutional cultures (eg. UN, 1995: para 142). There are of course no guarantees that a greater presence of women *per se* would even lead to a sustained challenge in the masculine culture of such institutions in the short term, let alone prevent conflict occurring. Unless one has a clear analysis of exactly *which* institutions are responsible for the fragility of peace, it is also not clear how to prioritise such change, and there is still a lot of work to be done here.

What seems to be agreed amongst feminist writers, however, is that challenges to existing patterns of entrenched masculinity are highly *unlikely* to change without the representation and participation of women being considerably increased, and that this seems to be an essential precondition. There is still a strong debate about the significance of increases in women's participation, membership and /or representation in the corporate and public sectors of countries in the North, but one position suggests that some changes may be achieved in key locations of major institutions (see Pringle & Watson, 1992: 62-65). Even where this is agreed, however, increasing the number of women in key institutions is generally not seen as being sufficient to bring about changes in institutional culture in societies which still highly value norms of masculinity that embody aggression and violence.

Writers within the development field have long argued that in trying to challenge the ways in which gender relations develop, there is need to look at the ways in which men are socialised to become part of a male gender. Research which focuses on the construction of *masculinity* has also revealed cross-cultural tendencies and some of these are highly pertinent for studies of conflict (Steans, 1998: 81-103; Lentin, 1997). Egotistical, aggressive, dominant behaviours are common features of cultural definitions of masculinity, as is men's dominance over women at a general level (Byrne, 1996: 33). War of all types creates militarised societies, and in many different cultural contexts, militarisation is linked with masculinity - not as a socio-biological attribution but as 'cultural constructions of manliness' (Turshen, op cit: 5).

Several writers have argued that at times of socio-political tension prior to conflict, as well as during conflict itself, some types of masculinity come to be celebrated and actively promoted to a greater degree than others (El Bushra, 2000: 76, 80; Cockburn, 1998: 207; Cockburn, 1998: 207; 2001: 20). Maitse (2000) argues that nationalism per se tends to emphasise aspects of masculinity which are more likely than others to lead to violence. In some conflict situations, the more violent aspects of masculinity are played out in all aspects of men's lives to an extreme degree, in what Hague calls a 'hetero-national masculinity', with reference to the Serb and Bosnian Serb military (Hague, 1997: 55). In other words, a culture of masculinity means that for a man to be a 'real man' he also has to be aggressive, egotistical, dominating and, at least be prepared to be, violent.

Whilst the analytical debate about masculinity is therefore quite developed, it has not yet influenced peacebuilding policy – nor indeed development policy – to any great extent, other than in attempts to reform security organisations. Theoretically it might be possible for people to reclaim positive cultural traditions of masculinity which have been lost or undermined during conflict (Large, 1997), but this would probably require leadership, or at least tolerance from, political leaders, and there are very few examples where this seems at all likely.

Women as the oeacemakers: constructions of femininity

One of the most challenging implications of the proposition that certain types of masculinity are more prone to arousal at conflict moments, is that in many societies, one of the main institutions for promoting one or other type of masculinity is that of the family – a site where **women** play a leading role in educating young people and indeed in encouraging adults to favour one or other set of attributes. As was described

above, in some cases this leads women to putting great pressure on male relatives, including sons, to embrace violence. It must be said that some writers are keen to avoid blaming women entirely for this phenomenon, stressing that this role has to be weighed against the role of other institutions which play key roles here. El Bushra (2000) for instance, stresses that political parties, nationalist movements and age groups also play key socialising roles in different contexts. She cites Richards' work (1995) on Sierra Leonean 'warboys', who highlights child abuse through several generations as a major cause of their extremely violent behaviour. These socialisation processes also have to be considered in the context of the overwhelming responsibility for committing actual violence being men's.

We have already highlighted some of the problematic assumptions made about femininity in the policy context of the 'peaceful women' approach. A growing number of writers seek to explore the variety of women's lived experience of violence, however – as perpetrators and collaborators in addition to victims and survivors. Jacobs et al (2000) highlight this tendency as an outcome of casting women as innately peaceful, non-violent individuals who are sometimes coerced against their will to play certain roles in conflict situations. These authors are keen to force consideration of the issue of women's roles in violence, ranging from complicity to agency (eg. Jacobs, 2000 for discussion of agency; Butalia (2001); for women's direct involvement in violence in India). Denying women's agency is also a potential outcome of the crude deployment of a 'gender' concept in policy, where all women are presumed to act in the same way and are powerless to do otherwise. Highlighting the difficulties that women face as a group so easily tips over into seeing them as all as innocent victims and does not allow for the great variety of role as actors that women actually embrace. Clearly there is a need for more analysis here to allow refinement of concepts of *femininities* – of what it means to be a woman in different contexts - and consideration of how they might lead to different types of peacebuilding policies.

Analysing rape and sexual violence

As I have tried to show above, there is still extreme under-reporting of violence against women, including rape, during war (Drakulić, 1997). Rape is recognised as a war crime, when it is assumed to be somehow distinct from rape at other times. Indeed, war itself is assumed to be a 'cause' of rape. There is not much agreement on exactly what the difference between war-rape and other forms of rape are amongst writers on conflict and peacebuilding. Rape as a war-crime can be linked to attempted genocide, but may not be. From various commentaries one might deduce that war-rape is less personal, part of a military plan and must have a different motive from rape at other times. The explanations for rape at other times are hardly straightforward, however, although rarely taken into account by non-feminist writers on conflict. Male rape has received more attention recently, and seems to have been present in many wars in the past, as part of 'normal' behaviour of heterosexual male soldiers. As research on male rape in 'normal' times is scanty, it is hard to make a judgement about how different it is in war.

There is an emerging debate about whether war rape is intended to undermine sexuality or to activate it. The perpetrators' sexuality is said to be activated as part of the development, or even transformation of war-like masculinity. Enloe (1988) has been influential in highlighting that military commanders have commonly regarded it as a significant bonding experience for combatants to commit rape against women,

particularly in public. The same argument is not made about male rape, however. By contrast, war rape is commonly assumed to be an attempt to undermine sexuality of the victim/survivor, whether male or female. Both of these types of analysis are commonly used in analysing rape in other contexts, however, and so do not assist in clarifying what is distinct about war-rape.

Turshen (2001) takes the debates somewhat further by considering the case of Rwanda and Mozambique in more detail. She suggests that there has been a neglect of men's motivation to gain access to property through women, and women as property. Through rape and other forms of assault on women, men were able to gain rights to women's land and access to their labour – through forced 'marriage'. They were also able to deny other men access to these goods through disabling and murdering women. She suggests that this motivation might be restricted to societies where gender relations are so unequal that women are not legally autonomous individuals (that is, where colonial and customary legal codes have combined to create the current situation (Turshen, 2001: 65). Perhaps an additional context is one of poverty, where access to very small amounts of property has great significance. Turshen gives us a careful analysis of the outcome of such violence in these two African cases, but the extent to which it constituted a conscious, pre-meditated motivation on the part of the perpetrators remains a question, as does the issue of whether this was simply the opportunism of the individual perpetrators, or whether there was some self-conscious understanding that this action was acceptable or inevitable during wartime, rather than at other times. It is worth noting that explanations offered for rape in other places, eg. former Yugoslavia (Cockburn, 1998:207) whilst not conclusive, do not mention gaining access to property or labour as motivations. Finding 'explanations' for war-rape remains as complex and challenging as it is for rape during peacetime, which hardly helps with the challenges of minimising or preventing it..

Giving women a better deal: policies and proposals

I have tried to illustrate some of the ways in which sloppy thinking around concepts of peace and conflict has served to limit the effectiveness of peacebuilding policy processes in addressing the needs of women. Clearly there are additional, political explanations for the persistent gender inequality and the injustices women suffer in peacebuilding, and these do vary with context. For instance in contexts with higher levels of urbanisation and education issues around employment law are of far greater significance than in predominantly rural, illiterate societies. Nonetheless, in an international context where there is a widespread perception that this is a problem, and there is considerable official concern to change things for the better, it is worth taking the analysis a stage further to think through where change could best take place.

A great deal more care needs to be taken in determining the conditions of a peace settlement. I have argued elsewhere (1999) that this is the case simply to increase the chances of movement towards positive peace and even of lasting negative peace. Any attempts which facilitate more consultation from women have to be an improvement on the current situation, with the provisos about increasing participation given above. Any international support which might be offered to limit the effects of a 'backlash' against women would also make a great deal of difference. Any 'blueprint peace agreements' which are used internationally ought to follow the guidelines about women's needs that have been agreed at UN level and other international fora. Facilitating women to

articulate their views could be increased and these might well include initiatives which are neither about personal security or economic policy. For instance, Pearce highlights the case of Peruvian refugee women who identified the loss of their self respect with the loss of personal property such as a comb. El Bushra (2000) argues that rather than seeking ways to achieve a feminist agenda of increased economic autonomy, many women in Africa countries prioritise ways to restore 'respect' through mended social relations between women and men, even where these are evidently unequal and exploitative. The key change in all of these approaches would be to have women's voices heard.

I list below some examples of what might be feasibly attempted in the near future in several areas of key policy, if a suitable political context were to be developed. By this I mean that there needs to be increased pressure internationally to debate and argue about why and how different forms of violence become more intense and organised under different circumstances; and about what are the fundamental conditions of peace. Comparative lessons about peace and conflict are rarely learned between countries – positive or negative – but in this spirit they could be. Conflict analysts and peace activists similarly could learn about gender from those practitioners and analysts who have been working in this area for many years. Fostering the space for 'making sense' of gender relations is almost essential. In this context outsiders might wish to support not only women in their efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, but also men. Working with men who are peace activists, community workers, parents and carers is seen as a useful peacebuilding tool (UN, 1995: paras 145(g), 146 (a) & (d)), but rarely acted on.

Macro-policy shifts need to be made by developing 'gender mainstreaming' in post-conflict, peacebuilding policy processes, alongside 'special' policies specifically geared towards women. This is an ambition which has been accepted as appropriate by key international organisations for some time (EC, 1996: II; EC, 1998: D). UN, 1995: para 141). At its simplest, a gender-aware approach requires the question 'Does this policy affect women and men differently?' to be asked of all policies and, if the answer is affirmative, to explore what can be done to prevent or correct women's disadvantage (Elson, 1995). Asking this question should lead to a complete re-think in the way a policy is developed and implemented in some cases, and in others would only require a minor adjustment. A few governments and international organisations have recently begun to 'engender' budgets to ensure that at least there are no unforeseen consequences of tax and expenditure plans which penalise women more than men (Elson, 1998), but there is considerable potential for further development in this area.

Some general economic policies have more acute implications for gender politics than others. For instance, it is very common for some kind of land reform to be considered necessary for peacebuilding. Nowhere in the world has a land reform been implemented where gender was not an issue, in spite of the fact that many studies on land reform have shown that there are economic advantages for society as a whole to granting women rights (Davison, 1998). It is not uncommon for women's previous land rights to be lost or undermined, with new land titles being granted exclusively to men. Women may have some access in their own right but this is usually less secure than men's and often dependent on their marital status. International donors have often been very influential in deciding the type of land reform which should be adopted and so there is a

great deal of potential for gender to be taken up as an issue where land reform is considered as part of peacebuilding.

Welfare policies have to address immediate post-war problems and establish programmes for the longer term, and are also often developed in a gender blind way. For instance, in the immediate post-war context there are often some special measures to provide support for ex-combatants before, during and after the process of demobilisation. It is very common for women (and child) ex-combatants to be relatively marginalised, if not completely neglected. Similarly the needs of women to be protected from the violent behaviour of demobilised (yet possibly still armed) male fighters are rarely considered. Furthermore, women ex-combatants' welfare needs rarely receive the same attention as do men's. As women are the main carers of survivors, neglect of their basic needs has knock-on effects throughout society. An alternative approach, which *prioritised* women's welfare requirements would have positive knock-on effects through society in times of peacebuilding.

Such neglect is sometimes a function of the broad macro-economic context where international assistance to governments is conditional on economic reform measures which tightly restrict health budgets. Strict limitations are certainly placed on the welfare budgets of many post-conflict governments by the stringency of World Bank structural adjustment loan conditions (and other bilateral lending). There is a growing lobby which argues that such conditions ought to be looser in post-war economies (Stewart & Fitzgerald, 2000), to allow governments to address the specific needs of peacebuilding. As yet this argument has not been accepted by donors. The same budgetary constraints also often restrict government spending on education and it is still the case that girls benefit less than boys in countries where rehabilitation of educational provision is taking place. There are many ways in which this perpetuates an already existing gender inequality and is therefore a useful point of intervention to foster positive change in gender relations. Moreover, where peace education is taken seriously as part of the new curriculum, this frees women from what might be seen as a private responsibility (that of educating their children for peace) and makes it a public activity, in which men could also play a part. Where peace education also contains explorations of gender issues, there is a direct, long-term input to helping to transforming gender relations per se, and thereby helping to build positive peace.

Nurturing a human rights culture through the establishment of and support for human rights organisations is a common mechanism used in peacebuilding. There is room for a very positive input from donors here, and as there is often a tendency for women's rights to be left out in human rights work, and this is clearly an area which ought to be supported and integrated (EC, 1995: III.12). It is more common for women than men to be unaware that they have human rights which are recognised internationally. Children's rights have received much publicity in recent years, but they still tend to be marginalised within a lot of human rights organisations. Where they are taken up this is much more often over the issue of boys who were implicated in killing and other forms of violence during conflicts than it is about anything at all to do with girls' experiences. There is therefore considerable room for improvement in this area.

If making politics 'more democratic' is seen as important in peacebuilding, then increasing the representation of women should be an objective, but it is often only when the mainstreaming gender question is asked about apparently gender-neutral

changes that any problems with, or potential for, achieving this objective become apparent. For instance, requirements for the registration of voters may affect men and women differently if high degrees of literacy, or long distances to travel are necessary. Similarly, attempts to encourage civil society organisations to participate in public debate, or consultations with government, may marginalise the views of women if most organisations are dominated by men. In both cases, special activities to involve women may be required (EC, 1995: III.9).

As discussed earlier, so-called traditional reconciliation and conflict resolution mechanisms need to be considered with care, even as they are being embraced with increasing amounts of enthusiasm internationally. There are perhaps two gender-based reasons why donors should exercise caution in providing support. First, they tend to be much more a reflection of highly gendered local politics and power relations than they are part of some value-free traditional culture. Second, women's needs are normally completely marginalised in their practice and may even be undermined by them. There are notable exceptions, where the re/invention of traditions has incorporated important roles for women, and even given women and young men space to influence outcomes, but it requires sensitivity to distinguish between the two approaches.

Truth commissions are coming to be seen as a central plank of peacebuilding, but they usually omit specific consideration of violence against women or else handle it very badly. Women's other experiences tend to be marginalised or ignored (UN, 1998: A), whether this is because it includes specific things which do not happen to men in the same way (sexual violence), or because women find it difficult to testify, or because commissioners, the government or the general public do not want to acknowledge the truth of women's war experiences. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognised some elements of all of these problems when it was well into its investigation and tried to address them by holding some hearings where only women were present, an act which many women regarded as successful in addressing the problem (Goldblat & Meintjes, 1998: 29). The point is not merely to avoid omitting the particular sufferings of women, but also for their experiences to be integrated into the whole story.

In other countries, different kinds of truth processes work outside national commissions. At local levels, sometimes with the help of national or external organisations, communities of people record and mark their conflict histories in different ways (eg. see REMHI, 1999 on Guatemala). Some accounts tend to emerge more spontaneously than others, and it is common for women's experiences to remain undeclared in the absence of encouragement (Goldblat & Meintjes, 1996). Although it is difficult for supporting outsiders to shape such processes with sensitivity, it is not impossible and may be able to open up the possibility for women to articulate their histories too.

Conclusion

The plights of women in war attract international attention, sometimes to a greater degree than men's, and often to be used as symbols of the horrific barbarism of mankind or of particular groups of people. Women's roles in working for the ends of conflicts are increasingly celebrated (and their other roles downplayed) and, along with children, they often constitute the majority of survivors. As a consequence of this

attention, women in ‘post-conflict’ peacebuilding have been thrust into unprecedented prominence in the policy processes of many international organisations. Yet women remain marginal, as a group or as individuals, in peace negotiations and in consultations about ‘post-conflict’ strategies. Whether in specific peacebuilding activities, or in more general macro-policies, women’s needs are consistently marginalised in ‘post-conflict’ societies, at the same time as they also suffer a ‘backlash’, often with physical and legal ramifications, which often involves not only citizens but the state itself.

This unjust and unequal situation persists as an outcome of intense gender politics in ‘post-conflict’ contexts, where the ‘sex war’ often becomes more acute than it was ‘pre-conflict’. Nonetheless it is important to register that the persistent reluctance of many analysts and advisers to take on lessons about gendering analysis and policy processes – from feminist histories of other conflicts, and from feminist studies of development – has itself allowed, if not facilitated, the playing out of such intense gender politics.

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Footnotes

1. And explicitly exclude situations where there are merely high levels of individual violence, such as that against women (Kelly, 2000: 48; Pearce, 1998)
2. Subsequently, as gender has come to be seen as a generic term referring to either male or female in the development field, some writers have argued that it has even tended to minimise attention paid to women's lives once again, and that the analysis of power relations between genders tends to get completely lost (Arnfred, 2000: 77, cites Baden & Goetz, 1998: 25).
3. eg. World Bank, 'Women ... often perform better than men because they are less likely to migrate, more accustomed to voluntary work and better trusted to administer funds honestly' (World Development, 1992: 113, cited in Green et al, 1998: 264)