The 'sex war' and other wars:
towards a feminist approach to peace building

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Introduction

For more than a decade, resolutions from the United Nations and the European Commission have highlighted women's suffering during wars, and the unfairness of their treatment upon the return to peace. Over the past few years there thus has been an increasing interest in women's experiences during war and their potential capabilities for peace, but this interest has not led to significant improvements in women's lives during and after armed struggle. 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 positive change.

One of the charges which might be made against both actors and analysts of conflict is that of conceptual confusion. *Conflict* is a word often used loosely to mean many different things despite 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 confusing, 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, 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 these two terms, blindness about gender inequality (often among other inequalities) commonly rests unchallenged, and the inequality itself 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 peace building

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in favour of newly coined terms and observations which are very seldom 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, let alone addressed, by policy makers during peace settlements.

I begin, therefore, with a preliminary review of the conceptual debates from literature on conflict and peace, and women and gender relations, and then I consider these issues during the peace-building process. The questions I seek to address in the paper are derived from concerns about sloppy conceptual thinking on conflict and peace, and on the nature of gender politics in 'post-conflict' situations. Specifically, I ask why extreme forms of gender inequality persist and what can be done to improve the situation for most women in peace-building contexts.

Concepts of conflict and peace

Accepting that no straightforward technical definition (such as more conventional approaches to the categorisations of battles and wars in terms of the numbers of casualties) is likely to encapsulate the complexities of contemporary conflicts in much of the world today, 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 states are involved. These descriptive terms are intended to capture the much cited observation that 90 per cent of today's casualties of war are civilians (Lake 1990), as well as to convey something about their causes. Competing identities are often added to the list of root causes, whether conceived in terms of an essentialist ethnicity, or regionalism, or tensions over state formation, or marginality to the global economy (Miall *et al.* 1999:1–38).

The prevalent use of the word 'conflict', rather than 'war', is also a reflection of today's complexities, with violence characterised by stops and starts, fluid boundaries, battlegrounds in residential areas, and civilian casualties. However attractive the term 'conflict' is as a convenient device to catch all these phenomena, it also entails a lack of clarity about what exactly is being discussed. The word may thus be

used interchangeably to refer to a *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 impact of certain types of social relations on 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 difficult pre-existing conditions (including economic hardship and 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, while it remains unclear precisely what weight to give particular economic circumstances in assessing the causes of a particular conflict, it also remains unclear what impact they may have on the chances of success of any peace-building strategy. Improved economic circumstances always feature on wish-lists for peace, but the connections between violence and economic conditions are complex, not simple.

A rather narrower conception of conflict that is still prevalent derives from a kind of 'socio-psychological model' (Duffield 1997:90 in Annex 1). 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 upon 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 focused at the micro level, and is geared towards the minimisation of violence *per se*.

Such techniques are not readily able to address the links between economic insecurity or inequality and violence. Indeed, their very logic, which often focuses on lack of understanding and empathy as the

driving force behind violence, can occasionally suggest that at times there is a need to play down the significance of such economic 'root causes' and other aggravating political circumstances (such as corrupt government administration). Furthermore, where the 'psycho-social' model of conflict informs external interventions, interpreting violence as the consequence of poor understanding, it may be assumed that all people involved in the conflict are victims, no matter what role they play during the conflict. Such a view can lead to serious political and social tension if it is relied upon during the processes of peace building.

Turning to the meanings of the term 'peace', Galtung's (1985) conception of *negative peace* has come into widespread use, and is probably the most common meaning given to the word, i.e. the end or absence of widespread violent conflict associated with war. A 'peaceful' society in this sense may therefore include a society in which social violence (against women, for instance) and/or structural violence (in situations of extreme inequality, for example) are prevalent. Moreover, this limited 'peace goal', of an absence of specific forms of violence associated with war, can and often does lead to a strategy in which all other goals become secondary. The absence of analysis of the deeper (social) causes of violence also paves the way for peace agreements that leave major causes of violent conflict completely unresolved. Negative peace may therefore be achieved by accepting a worse state of affairs than that which motivated the outburst of violence in the first place, for the sake of (perhaps short-term) ending organised violence.

Galtung's alternative vision, that of *positive peace*, requires not only that all types of violence be minimal or non-existent, but also that the major potential causes of future conflict be removed. In other words, major *conflicts of interest*, as well as their violent manifestation, need to be 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; inclusive democratic political structures and processes; and open and accountable government. Working towards these objectives opens up the field of peace building far more widely, to include the promotion and encouragement of new forms of citizenship and political participation to develop active democracies. It also opens up the fundamental question of how an economy is to be managed, with what kind of state intervention, and in whose interests. But more often than not discussion of these important issues 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, and, though mentioned far less often, among the sexes. Enloe defines peace in feminist terms as 'women's achievement of control over their lives' (Enloe 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 highlighted by Enloe are rarely discussed among those involved in conflict situations and their potential resolution, which serves to eclipse gender issues at the point of peace 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 peace building. In some cases, changes in gender relations are even cast as jeopardising the survival of peace. For example, many women in liberation movements have commented 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 marginalisation of gender issues is not merely a political and tactical position of those at the forefront of negotiations, however. Scholars and analysts in the fields of conflict analysis and conflict resolution (CR) 'discovered' gender later than development studies (DS) or international relations (IR) (Pankhurst and Pearce 1997). As noted by an increasing number of scholars, the process of taking gender more seriously as an analytical category within DS seems to have responded to an 'efficiency imperative'. This 'efficiency imperative' has been illustrated most clearly and extensively by Elson (1995), and has for some time been commonplace among major organisations.[2] In essence, many development *policies* often failed because they ignored gender issues, and it became apparent (through the theoretical and empirical work of feminist academics and practitioners) that if gender were taken into account a far greater degree of success could be achieved. Clearly, this story is more complex and complicated than I can elaborate here, but, in any case, gender has as a result become more or less mainstreamed in some key areas of development work, 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 in 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 to conflicts could be found not only without the involvement of women, but also at the very expense of women as a gender. It was thought that gender considerations made no difference to the ability to find a settlement, or to the chances of that settlement holding. In other words, negative peace could be achieved in conditions of 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 conflict resolution into post-conflict policies, gender issues have come to be seen as far more central, and as directly affecting the *efficacy* of peace-building initiatives, even if 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 the impact of gender relations on the conditions of conflict or peace. Nor has it led to a change in women's experiences of conflict or peace building, to which I now turn.

Women's wars

For many years, the roles of women in war and other types of violent conflict remained almost 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 the passive, innocent, victims. In poor countries, wars were not portrayed in quite the same way, but stories of the courage and bravery of men as fighters have also tended to eclipse the active roles which women have played. As women's experiences have become more broadly known, it has become clear that there are many different ways in which women live through and participate in wars: as fighters, community leaders, social organisers, workers, farmers, traders, welfare workers, among other roles. Nonetheless, many conflict narratives highlight a common theme of women seeking to minimise the effects of violence through their different social roles. Stories of women actively seeking to end wars have received increasing international attention. The bravery of those women who go against the general tide of opinion, and sometimes literally place themselves in the line of fire, 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 2000), 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 provides them with greater potentials for peacemaking.*
> (Quoted in Garcia 1994:45)

Similarly, discussing 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.*
> (Quoted in Garcia 1994:63–4)

But some of these accounts also show that in the same wars, women – indeed sometimes the same women – have played both 'peace-making' and 'war-mongering' roles (El-Bushra 2000; Jacobson 2000; Mukta 2000). An increasing number of accounts of war highlight women's direct involvement in violence or in motivating the men in their communities to fight (El-Bushra 2000; Jacobson 2000; Mukta 2000; Vickers 1993). 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 (Elshtain 1987; Ferris 1993). Accounts of some conflicts document actual violence committed by women (African Rights 1995; Bennett *et al.* 1995, *passim*; Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998 on South Africa). 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 remains poorly understood, and violence is still commonly believed to be the main preserve of men (Jacobs *et al.* 2000; Kelly 2000).

It is clear from the above discussion that women have great contrasts in their war experiences, which are also mediated by differences in age, class, and regional or ethnic background. What is striking, nonetheless, is that there are also great commonalities in their experiences, regardless of the kinds of situations they find themselves in, or the kinds of roles they play in times of conflict. During war, women tend to bear a much greater burden than men for taking care of survivors, as well as children. They also carry the main burden for ensuring food provision, while keeping social and political activities going when 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 are otherwise well taken care of.

Even in the midst of the horrors of conflict, many women have embraced these changes as moments of liberation from the old social order (see, for example, Sharoni 2001). As the need arose for them to take on men's roles, so they had to shake off cultural restrictions and adopt new lifestyles. 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 demands for improved women's rights seriously, and to accept women's political representation. Several 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 1998 on economic crisis; Kynch 1998 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 among the casualties, there is a continuing thread in the ways women experience suffering in distinct ways – not because of any intrinsic weakness, but because of their position in society (United Nations 1985). Women are not normally leaders in settings before conflict erupts, and so, in this sense at least, they are not as directly responsible as men for war violence. Nonetheless, they experience high rates of injury and death (although not usually as high as men) and the particularly brutal war injury of rape. Rapes committed in times of war have received greater attention in recent years, but they also seem to be on the increase. The proliferation of light weapons has also increased the threat of rape, as it is harder to resist male violence when faced with a gun (Abdel Halim 1998; Turshen 1998). Common effects for women, in addition to the direct trauma caused by the rapes themselves, include social stigmatisation; 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) (Twagiramariya and Turshen 1998).

The experiences of girls in conflicts are even less well documented than those of boys, but are often horrific and specific to their gender (Nordstrom 1997). Generational relations are also destabilised where children become soldiers (Richards 1995), a situation which is now increasingly prevalent in part as a result of the proliferation of light weapons, which can be used by almost anyone (Turshen 1998). Because these weapons have given them power over others, many children in war-torn African societies have grown up without learning to respect their elders, as was the norm before war broke out. Women, in particular, feel this loss of respect, especially when young boys commit rape and other forms of violence on older women (*ibid.*).

Women's testimonies suggest that they often feel they have had little *choice* about whether they are innocent victims or courageous participants in a war: sometimes they find that they have to actively engage in the violence, or suffer the consequences, including death. Perhaps this lack of choice is intensified because of the changes in the nature of warfare and in the types of violence that have emerged in the post-Cold War era. Jacobs *et al.* (2000) suggest that such inability to choose is not a recent phenomenon and may rightly characterise women's experiences in most wars. Certainly, where conflict is fought

out in people's homes (with light weapons) and the reasons for fighting involve issues of the very survival of a particularly defined identity, women have been placed on one side or another, regardless of how they feel about the conflict. Women who are seen to 'break out' of the ethnic identity ascribed to them, for instance by having mixed marriages or joining human rights organisations, are often targeted for particular censure, if not actual violence (as in the former Yugoslavia, for example (Korac 1998)). Men also experience elements of these hardships in wartime, but women's stories still remain relatively marginal or hidden as narratives of conflicts. In addition, women's experiences do not inform the terms of peace settlements, and their concerns are not taken into account in decisions about what should happen during the peace.

A history of gendered conflict endings and gendered peace

Conflicts end in many different kinds of ways, with little analysis to understand their implications for long-term peace (Pankhurst 1999). Nonetheless, whether they are the product of a negotiated settlement or of military victory, it remains common for women's voices – either individual or organised – on all sides to be absent or marginal at the point when a settlement is reached. Many international organisations have recognised this as a problem for some time and, indeed, in some efforts to redress the balance, women have been integrated in some key peace processes in recent years. Unfortunately, such efforts are often based on questionable assumptions and resemble a drop in the ocean in terms of their capacity to effect change favourable to women, as I show below.

Women rarely receive recognition for their contributions as providers and carers, let alone for their roles as social and political organisers. They usually receive much less support than male fighters in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation projects (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998), even though women provide most of the caring for the population in post-war settings, and it would thereby seem that addressing women's basic needs would benefit society as a whole (El-Bushra 1998; United Nations 1998). Women also rarely figure in 'security concerns' in 'post-conflict' situations, even though domestic violence increases during and after war (Kelly 2000; Krog 2001).

It is common for a high proportion of women to have experienced multiple rapes and associated injuries and infections during war. Many give birth to children conceived through rape, which leads to many

kinds of 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, which are more hidden than those against adult women, also 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 1997).

Even where Truth Commissions or other kinds of justice-seeking institutions are established after a conflict, it appears that women still do not report instances of rape anywhere near the numbers which actually take place (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998). This was true during the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, even though the international tribunals set up in both instances made it very clear that rape had to be taken seriously as a war crime (for Rwanda see Twagiramariya and Turshen 1998; 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, among other forms of sexual violence (including domestic violence), actually to increase (Cockburn 1998; Kelly 2000; Krog 2001). Rather than receiving *support* at the end of wars, women usually suffer a *backlash* against any new-found freedoms, and they are forced 'back' into kitchens and fields. Where governments and/or warring parties establish new constitutions or peace processes, they often neglect the needs of women or outwardly limit or restrict the rights of women. In some cases, such restrictions may be carried out explicitly through the legal system, either by failing to repeal existing discriminatory laws or by creating new ones (Kelly 2000). This might be called a 'gendered peace' (Pankhurst and Pearce 1997).

Furthermore, women often experience a backlash in their relations with men. It is not uncommon for there to be public outbursts of protest – and even violent assaults – against women who are economically independent, or are employed in traditional 'male' roles, or persist in living in urban areas and pursuing an education in

predominantly rural communities. Many of the women who were active in liberation struggles in places like Algeria, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Eritrea, and Mozambique bitterly experienced widespread instances of discrimination and backlash, although in each case the extent to which the state and/or government has played a role is still subject to debate (De Abreu 1998; Jacobs and Howard 1987). 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 a similar vein, women commonly find their historical contributions minimised in both official and popular accounts of war, as happened in Europe after the Second World War (Kelly 2000).

At times, official policies are themselves part of the backlash, even if the state is not evidently orchestrating it. 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 in favour of men. The state, for instance, is instrumental in enforcing controls over women's sexuality; in failing to provide adequate security to women (especially in terms of protection from violence, sexual and otherwise); in imposing and/or supporting restrictions on women's movement, access to housing, jobs and property (especially land); and in neglecting 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 posed to traditional gender relations during times of war becomes too great for patriarchal societies to accept it in times of peace. The ideological rhetoric is often about 'restoring' or 'returning to' something associated with the status quo before the war, even if the change actually undermines women's rights and places women in a situation that is even more disadvantageous than it ever was in the past. This is often accompanied by imagery of the culturally specific equivalent of the woman as a '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 along ethnic and/or regional lines (Korac 1998).

New divisions may also emerge as a result of the different roles that women play during the war, e.g. whether they are perceived to have been on the side of 'victors', or 'perpetrators' or 'collaborators', and whether they have given birth to children of 'the enemy' as a result of rape.

All of these issues can determine who qualifies for aid and other forms of support (Turshen 1998), as can women's marital status. Marital status is highly significant in situations where women do not have strong legal rights (including access to land and credit). Where the majority of the surviving population is female (as in Rwanda, where it is 70 per cent), this can lead to heightened tensions among women, who compete over men and resources. Tensions also arise over whether children survived the war or not. For these reasons, it is not unusual for there to be very little trust among women as a group, thereby weakening their capacity to act collectively to meet their needs and protect their rights. Peace-building strategies do not usually directly address these tensions and divisions between women, but rather tend to focus either on 'women' as a category, or assume their existence as genderless members of other groups.

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 ascribed to masculinity. Such qualities – which include things like seeking non-confrontational methods of conflict resolution, willingly working for the good of the collective, and even remaining passive – are assumed to be embodied by all women (United Nations 1985, 1995). These assumptions have a long tradition of identifying female qualities with a rejection of war and conflict (Byrne *et al.* 1996; Ferris 1993). Accounts of war which highlight the violence directed at women tend to reinforce the assumption that all women are always pro-peace and anti-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).

Recently there has been a 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 towards a more

peaceful, less violent world. Multilateral aid organisations have therefore increasingly assumed that policies that integrate women in their work are fundamental to peace building (United Nations 1985, 1995), and that women 'hold the key' to peace building. For instance, International Alert's Code of Conduct (1998) states:

> *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 peace building. 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'. And, in effect, many women are themselves taking up this mantle.

Some women's organisations have developed the capacity to work openly to protect and extend human rights (especially in Latin America). Others have extended the work they undertook during conflict to ensure that the social fabric did not collapse, including, for example, various forms of community organisation and welfare provision in refugee camps in Northern Ireland, El Salvador, Guatemala, Rwanda, and Burundi. Others focus more directly on the need to talk about, and participate in, strengthening peace in the name of women (such as the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks, the Femmes-Africa-Solidarité, and other groups in Israel and the Occupied Territories, as well as in the former Yugoslavia – see Cockburn 1998 for more 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 these types of organisations can therefore be of fundamental importance in addressing common weaknesses in existing peace-building strategies: the lack of attention to women's needs; the marginalisation of gender analyses; and the absence of efforts to

challenge particularly discriminatory practices in institutions and in society more widely. Furthermore, women's organisations have within themselves the potential to achieve many of the goals that peace-building efforts should strive to fulfil: to increase women's (and thereby household) income; to increase women's abilities to participate in political processes and civil society more generally; to increase the number of women who become leaders and representatives; and 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 ensuring their continued survival, let alone in achieving all of their objectives. Such problems include chronic under-funding and lack of training in the areas of management, leadership, and lobbying. In practice, new women's organisations often have to deal not only with marginalisation and stigmatisation by powerful government and non-government organisations, but also with direct physical harassment from local men and security forces, especially common in post-conflict situations where gender tensions are already running high.

The provision of external funding for grassroots organisations is of great potential help, but it often creates tensions as well. 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 a woman's workload. Lessons from the development field suggest that those women's groups that stand the greatest chance of success and make the best use of external funding tend to be those that were initially formed and established their objectives in the absence of (or with minimal) external funding; those that acknowledge the differences between women; and those that set themselves clearly achievable objectives. These lessons also suggest that when states support women's organisations as part of a policy to enhance women's participation in development, they avoid taking women seriously in other ways. This implies that a successful strategy of supporting women's organisations needs 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 peace building (United Nations 1985, 1995, 1998). 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 that may take place as part of peace building (European Commission 1996b; United Nations 1995). 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 the leadership level. Outside parties have had some limited success in enabling women to participate in peace talks. For instance, the Life and Peace Institute ensured that women's peace groups gained access to some of the Somalia peace and reconciliation talks (even though they gained observer status only). Similar initiatives have also occurred in Burundi, Sudan, and Northern Ireland.

Merely being invited to attend talks or peace conferences 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 not only by women activists and observers in the South, but also in the North (especially Northern Ireland – see Mulholland 2001). 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.*
> (Quoted in 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, generate enormous benefits (United Nations 1995, 1998). 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, poor

people, people from 'their' region, etc.) as has been elucidated by the literature on 'women in politics'. Discussion about the potential for peace-making 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 peace building have become very enthusiastic about promoting so-called 'traditional' methods of conflict resolution (in the sense of searching for an end to organised violence). '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 not always clear, objectives in these contexts and are confused about what exactly might be promoted. Examples of international support for such initiatives exist in Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda, and Somalia, for instance.

The description of '*traditional*' *conflict-resolution mechanisms* includes many different activities, like 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' party (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. These mechanisms do indeed work sometimes to build understanding and consensus, but they may also work to the benefit of the office holder and his family or community. All these types of activities are to be found somewhere in the remembered, if not recent, past of many African countries, and are increasingly described in the literature in terms that verge on adulation and reification (see Duba *et al.* 1997, for example).

These 'traditional' mechanisms are increasingly being packaged within an international terminology of peace building, not least to access funding from international donors. Legitimately, some of them have been in constant use for several generations. More commonly, however, many of them have been recently resurrected from the

memory of elderly people, while others are actually being self-consciously invented for the first time. In itself, this is not surprising: history is studded with examples of political leaders who have used the invention and/or re-invention of tradition as a tool of mobilisation and legitimisation (Jacobs and Howard 1987; Vail 1989). The term 'traditional' is therefore often misleading, but tends to have the effect of placing a particular 'tradition' off-limits to outsiders. Instead, very local politics determines what actually happens.

One thing which these 'traditional' activities often have in common, however, is that office holders are almost universally men, which is also normally claimed as part of the tradition, and they are not easily held accountable for their decisions or actions. Where these practices are seen to 'work' they tend to be about peace building among men, with little to offer women *per se*. Since these practices commonly regulate relationships between communities of people, rather than simply among individuals, women often find that they are affected, and even bound, by outcomes over which they had little or no influence. A key challenge for the future will be 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 arduous indeed.

Feminist analyses of conflict and peace: debates continue

A significant number of feminist writers on issues of conflict and peace have come from the development field. This is not a coincidence, as so many of the struggles we have witnessed recently have taken place in the South. There has been an outpouring of writing in this area which stands as a direct, and largely unmet, challenge to contemporary policy interventions in conflict and peace building. At the same time, key theoretical and analytical issues remain problematic and unresolved. Below, I 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 working definition that is usually offered is that gender denotes all the qualities of what it means 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. In practice, this has entailed the privileging of men over women. This working view of gender is summarised in Box 1.

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 they tend to focus almost exclusively on the behaviour and experiences of women. Studies that explore the differences between women are particularly useful in that they help break down the tendency to see women as a uniform, homogeneous category (United Nations 1998). 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, two key political challenges persist. First, there is a need to ensure that the complexities and differences in women's experiences are kept in view alongside the commonalities that are articulated through an analysis based on gender. Second, it is equally important to make sure that feminist challenges to power relations,

Box 1: 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 political, 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 influenced strongly by ideology.

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

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 in a recent major review (Jackson and Pearson 1998). The review suggests that part of the problem is that practitioners coming into the development field are freely using the term gender while they lack basic familiarity with the key literature, concepts, and methods of feminist research (Baden and Goetz 1998:22).

Feminist scholars have argued that as gender was taken into development-policy processes, particularly as part of an effort to 'mainstream' gender issues, the focus was originally on women as the target group to be brought into development (Jackson and Pearson 1998). This process was based on the common and mistaken assumptions that: (a) women were not already involved in some way; (b) their labour was a 'free' good readily available for new activities; and (c) women would automatically control the fruits of their labour in any such activities.[3] As the crudest mistakes were addressed, 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 (see Note 2).

This misunderstanding of gender relations in the policy process is analysed in the field of environmental policy in the South, in a way which has even closer parallels with peace building, 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 borrowed selectively from gender research and analysis, they have consistently failed to improve women's command over natural resources or to contribute to the effectiveness of projects (*ibid.*). Such policy makers tend to identify women as a homogeneous group with some natural affinity as guardians of natural resources and therefore potentially the most effective group to carry out environmental projects.

Policy makers in the environmental field thus often target women and exclude men in their projects (e.g. tree planting and seed conservation), recognising women as victims, but then also as effective environmental managers (Davidson *et al.* 1992, cited in Green *et al.* 1998). Environmental policy makers' assumptions therefore echo some of the perspectives put forward in 'ecofeminist' writing which emphasises the innate feminine qualities of women that make them the most appropriate guardians of natural resources (e.g. Mies and

Shiva 1993; Shiva 1998). In effect, such policies identify environmental projects as part of 'women's work' within established gender divisions of labour (Green *et al.* 1998). 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 it and many opportunity costs to consider if they don't use 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 (*ibid.*).

The parallels with policy makers' expectations of women in peace building are very strong here. Drawing on images of women's supposedly innate qualities described in the sections above (in this case, the predisposition to work against violence and for peace), interveners conceive of projects which rely on women's (free) labour and exclude 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 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 peace building, severely limits what women are able to do from very marginal positions in society.

Even in contexts where gender does have prominence in the peace-building discourse, the problems of categorising women as a homogeneous group tend to be replicated – as I have tried to show above with the 'peaceful women' approaches. Moreover, none of the common approaches to peace building 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.

Is it all down to masculinity?

Feminist research has shown the ways in which many large institutions across the world are not gender neutral, but rather tend to be masculine in culture and practice. State bureaucracies and security services, as well as international bodies, tend to be structured and to function according to norms of masculinity, and they do not have a gender-neutral culture of their own (El-Bushra 2000). For instance, they tend to be hierarchical in structure, to militate against cooperative and consultative working patterns, and to encourage individualistic,

competitive behaviour. They also typically have top-down leadership and management styles. Such institutions also seem to have a stake in preserving differences between women's and men's economic and political roles, which are continuously reinforced by the active use of symbols of masculinity and femininity. Appropriately, images of success and achievement tend to be associated with masculine images of force and strength (Elshtain 1985, 1987; Peterson 1993; Steans 1998).

The effects of such types of masculinity are not only seen directly in the commission 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 peace-building 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. In reflecting social norms, such institutions (private, state, and international) are typically dominated by men, with few women being in 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 also in the hope that this can 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 (United Nations 1995). Without adequate personal security (for women and men), it is very difficult to reduce violence, or even sometimes to prevent a return to war. 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, and in 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 they have incorporated the retraining of officers to deal with rape, which has been identified by international institutions as a priority in peace building (United Nations 1997). 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 gender crimes (El-Bushra and Piza López 1993).

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 (e.g. United Nations 1995). 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 the re-emergence of conflict. Unless one has a clear analysis of exactly *which* institutions are responsible for the fragility of peace, it is also not clear how change should be prioritised. A lot of work remains to be done in this area.

What feminist writers seem to agree on, however, is that existing patterns of entrenched masculinity are highly *unlikely* to change without considerably increasing the representation and participation of women as an essential precondition. There is still a strong debate about the significance of increasing 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 and Watson 1992). Even where this is agreed, however, increasing the number of women in key institutions is generally not believed to be enough to bring about changes in institutional culture in societies which still highly value norms of masculinity based on aggression and violence.

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

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 promoted more than others (Cockburn 1998, 2001; El-Bushra 2000;). 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 (1997) calls a 'hetero-national masculinity' with reference to the Serb and Bosnian Serb military. 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, when necessary, violent.

While the analytical debate about masculinity is therefore quite developed, it has not yet significantly influenced peace-building policy – nor indeed development policy – beyond 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 true leadership, or at least tolerance, and there are very few examples where this seems at all likely.

Women as the peace makers: constructions of femininity

One of the most challenging implications of the proposition that certain types of masculinity are more prone to be evoked at conflict moments is that, in many societies, one of the main institutions for promoting one or another type of masculinity is the family – a site where *women* play a leading role in educating young people and indeed in encouraging adults to live by a certain set of values. As was described above, in some cases this leads women to exert great pressure on male relatives, including sons, to embrace violence. It is important to recognise 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. 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', which highlights child abuse through several generations as a major cause of their extremely violent behaviour.

I 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 experiences of violence, 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 fact that sometimes women can and do engage in violence, ranging from complicity to agency (see Butalia 2001; Jacobs 2000). 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 common difficulties that women face as a group can easily degenerate into seeing them as innocent victims and prevents an appreciation of the great variety of roles women actually embrace. Clearly there is a need for more refined analysis of concepts of *femininities* – of what it means to be a woman in different contexts – and for further consideration of how these might lead to different types of peace-building policies.

Analysing rape and sexual violence

As I have tried to show above, violence against women (including rape) during war remains severely under-reported (Drakulić 1994). Rape is recognised as a war crime – and, indeed, war itself is assumed to be a 'cause' of rape. However, there is little agreement on exactly what the difference is between war rape and other forms of rape. Rape as a war crime can be linked to attempted genocide, but may not always be so. From some of the writings about it, one might deduce that war rape is less personal, is part of a military plan, and has a different motive from rape in other circumstances. The explanations for rape at other times are hardly straightforward, however, and they are 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 the 'normal' behaviour of heterosexual male soldiers. But since research on male rape in 'normal' times is scanty, it is difficult 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 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 rape against women, particularly in public, as a significant bonding experience (the same argument is not made about male rape, however). War rape is also commonly assumed to be an attempt to undermine the sexuality of the victim/survivor, whether male or female. Both of these types of analysis

are commonly used in studying rape in other contexts, however, and so do not assist in clarifying what is unique 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 see 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 by 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 (*ibid.*). Perhaps an additional context is one of poverty, where access to very small amounts of property has great significance. Turshen provides a careful analysis of the outcome of such violence in these two African countries, but the extent to which it constituted a conscious, premeditated motivation on the part of the perpetrators remains an open question, as does the issue of whether this constituted simply the opportunism of individual perpetrators, or whether there was some self-conscious collective understanding that this action was acceptable or inevitable during wartime. It is worth noting that explanations offered for rape in other places, e.g. the former Yugoslavia (Cockburn 1998), while not conclusive, do not mention gaining access to property or labour as motivations. Finding 'explanations' for war rape remains as complex and challenging as explaining rape during peacetime, a situation that hardly helps to minimise or prevent it.

Giving women a better deal: policies and proposals

I have tried to illustrate some of the ways in which sloppy thinking about concepts of peace and conflict has served to limit the effectiveness of peace-building policy processes in addressing the needs of women. Clearly there are additional, contextual explanations for the persistence of gender inequality and the injustices women suffer in peace building. For instance, in contexts with higher levels of urbanisation and education, issues concerning labour laws are of far greater importance than in predominantly rural, non-literate societies. Nonetheless, in an international context where there is a widespread perception that gender imbalances are 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 how and 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 (Pankhurst 1999) that this is necessary in order 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 forums. The capacity of women to articulate their views could be promoted through initiatives that are neither about personal security nor about economic policy. El-Bushra (2000) argues that rather than seeking ways to achieve a feminist agenda of increased economic autonomy, many women in African countries prioritise ways to restore 'respect' through mended social relations between women and men, even where these are evidently unequal and exploitative. The key improvement in all of these approaches would be to have women's voices heard.

I list below a few examples of what might be feasibly attempted in the near future in some key policy areas, provided a suitable political context is developed. By this I mean that there needs to be increased pressure internationally to ask why and how different forms of violence become more intense and organised under different circumstances; and what the fundamental conditions of peace are. Comparative lessons about peace and conflict – positive or negative – are rarely learned between countries, but they should 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 essential. In this context outsiders might wish to support men as well as women in their efforts to challenge gender stereotypes. Working with men who are also peace activists, community workers, parents, and carers is a useful peace-building tool (United Nations 1995), if rarely taken advantage of.

Macro-policy shifts need to be made by developing 'gender mainstreaming' in post-conflict, peace-building policy processes,

alongside 'special' policies specifically geared towards women. This is a goal that has been accepted as appropriate by key international organisations for some time (European Commission 1996a; United Nations 1995). At its simplest, a gender-aware approach requires asking, 'Does this policy affect women and men differently?', and if the answer is affirmative, then it is necessary to explore what can be done to prevent or correct women's disadvantage (Elson 1995). Asking this question would lead to a complete overhaul of the way a policy is developed and implemented in some cases, and in others it would require only minor adjustments. 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 that would 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 to consider *land reform* necessary for peace building. Nowhere in the world has land reform been implemented where gender was not an issue, yet gender has yet to be mainstreamed into its implementation. It is not uncommon for women's previous land rights to be lost or undermined, while new land titles are granted exclusively to men. Women may have some access in their own right but it is usually less secure than men's and often dependent on the women's 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 in cases where land reform is considered an important part of peace building.

Welfare policies needed to address post-war problems in the short and long term are often developed in a gender-blind way. For instance, in the immediate post-war context, special measures to provide support to ex-combatants are made, but 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 that *prioritises* women's welfare requirements would have positive knock-on effects in times of peace building.

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 welfare spending. There is a growing lobby which argues that such conditionalities ought to be looser in post-war economies (Stewart and Fitzgerald 2000) to allow governments to address the specific needs of peace building. 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. 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 can also play a part. Where peace education also contains explorations of gender issues, there is a direct, long-term input to helping to transform gender relations, 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 peace building. There is room for a very positive input from donors here, especially in terms of incorporating women's rights into human-rights work (European Council 1995). 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 the work of many human-rights organisations. Where they are taken up, they are much more concerned with boys' experiences than with girls'. There is therefore considerable room for improvement in this area.

If making politics 'more democratic' is considered important in peace building, then increasing the representation of women should be an objective. However, it is often only when the mainstreaming gender question is asked about apparently gender-neutral changes that any problems with 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 of travel, are required. 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 involving women may be required (*ibid.*).

As discussed above, so-called 'traditional' reconciliation and conflict-resolution mechanisms need to be handled 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, these mechanisms tend to be much more a reflection of highly gendered local politics and power relations than they are part of some value-free traditional cultural context. 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 peace building, but they usually omit specific consideration of violence against women or else handle it very badly. Women's experiences tend to be marginalised or ignored (United Nations 1998), either because they include specific things which do not happen to men in the same way (sexual violence), or because women find it difficult to bring complaints forward, or because commissioners, the government, or the general public do not want to acknowledge the truth about women's war experiences. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognised some elements of all of these problems once it was well into its investigation, and it did try to address them by holding some hearings where only women were present, an act which many women regarded as successful in addressing the problem (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998). 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 (see, for example, 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 proper encouragement (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1996). Although it is difficult for supporting

outsiders to shape processes of reconciliation and justice with sensitivity, it is an important task that may, among other things, open up the possibility for women to articulate their histories too.

Conclusion

In general, the plight of women in war attracts international attention, sometimes to a greater degree than men's, and it is often used as a symbol of the horrific barbarism mankind is capable of. Women's roles in working towards peace have become increasingly celebrated (while their other roles are downplayed). As a consequence of this attention, women in 'post-conflict' peace building have been thrust into unprecedented prominence in the policy processes of many international organisations. Yet women remain marginal, as a group as well as as individuals, in peace negotiations and in consultations about 'post-conflict' strategies. Whether in specific peace-building activities, or in more general macro policies, women's needs are consistently marginalised in 'post-conflict' societies, while they also suffer a 'backlash', often with physical and legal ramifications, not only from male citizens but from 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.

Notes

1 And explicitly exclude situations where there are merely high levels of individual violence, such as that against women (Kelly 2000).

2 For instance, the World Bank has stated that '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, cited in Green *et al.* 1998:264).

3 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 neglect women's issues once again, and that the analysis of power relations between genders has become completely lost (see Baden and Goetz 1998).

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