Mission impossible: gender, conflict, and Oxfam GB

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Introduction

It is now widely recognised among international non-government organisations (INGOs) that working in the context of conflict and turbulence presents them with specific challenges in relation to delivering gender equity in both their humanitarian and development aid programmes. INGOs in general accept the need for gender-disaggregated data, the fact that women and men have different needs and interests, and that conflict and upheaval present women with opportunities as well as threats, and also the chance to renegotiate gender roles following their *de facto* assumption of male responsibilities in the absence of men. However, the analysis is rarely taken further, or deepened. Gender is not identified by INGOs as a key defining factor of identity in relation to how war begins, what it is about, how groups are mobilised to fight, how ceasefires and peace agreements are reached, and what kind of peace can be said to have been achieved. For women, the end of war rarely brings peace, and can in fact bring new levels of violence into their lives.

The power relations which define gender identity, the allegiances, beliefs, and behaviours which are gender-based, are seldom regarded as important for (and even more rarely built into) most INGOs' analysis of war and non-international conflict, or the planning of interventions to address its consequences. The failure to do this can sometimes be attributed to lack of expertise or experience in gender analysis, and sometimes to a profound, often unformulated, resistance to incorporating it into the analytical framework, for a number of reasons that will be examined later in this paper. To address gender relations in the context of conflict entails entering highly contested terrain, not only

within the war-torn society, but also within all the institutions intervening in the situation, including the INGOs.

In this paper I will explore the mission of a large UK-based INGO, Oxfam GB (OGB), and some of its experience in addressing gender inequalities in the institutional structures and policies which govern its activities in situations of conflict and its aftermath.[1] I present some of the contradictions within OGB's organisational culture which have held this work back and continue to provide obstacles to it, in spite of substantial work on the issues within the agency over the years. I also examine some of the recent developments within OGB which are beginning to seek new solutions to the problem of gender-blindness in its interventions, and look at some positive examples of gender-sensitive practice.

My perspective is that of a policy adviser in what is now OGB's Campaigns and Policy Division, with a brief to work on gender, human rights, and conflict. My principal role is to offer advice and support to OGB's programmes at regional or country level, and to contribute to the development of OGB's global programme policy on conflict, gender, and human rights, within which violence against women is a key priority. While this paper represents my own views and not those of OGB as a whole, I draw upon the experiences and concerns of many staff within the organisation – indeed, all of us who believe in and work for the consistent delivery of gender equity in every intervention OGB makes. The next few years will reveal whether this is indeed, or not, a 'mission impossible'.

Having looked at some of OGB's 'institutional imperatives' – in other words its goals and aims, its mandates, policies, and guidelines – which govern its work during conflict and its aftermath, I will discuss some of the problems inherent in several conceptual and programmatic divides which make programme implementation in this area complicated and difficult. These divides, which overlap each other, are the same divides which separate relief and development responses, and technical and social approaches. Interwoven with them are different perceptions within OGB of the division between the public and private domains, and indeed different perceptions of these among those with whom OGB works in the North and the South. The critical feminist insight that the private/public divide has to be broken down, and the personal made political, in order to end discrimination against women and build gender equality is taking a long time to percolate through OGB; and there still remain both perceptual and actual obstacles to

making the connections between gender relations in the private and public spheres. However, there is a growing area of work on violence against women in war and in 'peacetime', which has the potential to encourage new ways of thinking beyond these divides, and I look at some of the implications of this work at the end of the paper.

The body of the paper presents examples selected from OGB's programme in Kosovo, Central America, South Africa, and Cambodia, where I look at some of the agency's experience in relation to integrating gender equity into its programme goals for work in the aftermath of war. Both direct operational interventions, especially in Kosovo, and work with counterpart organisations, are considered. While OGB's work is increasingly concerned with campaigning and advocacy, these areas are beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless it is true that the many of the contradictions that make it so difficult for gender equity to be at the heart of OGB's direct interventions are equally problematic in its campaigning and advocacy initiatives.

Oxfam GB's institutional imperatives

Founded in 1942, Oxfam GB is based in Oxford in the UK, with a decentralised structure of nine regional offices around the world. Its mandate is to relieve poverty, distress, and suffering, and to educate the public about the nature, causes, and effects of these. It describes itself as a 'development, relief, and campaigning organisation dedicated to finding lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world'. OGB works principally with partner or counterpart organisations – international, national, and community-based – supporting them to achieve goals common to both. In the fields of emergency response and campaigning, OGB is also operational, employing its own staff to deliver relief programmes in the field, or to lobby and campaign for changes in policy and public awareness, and working in conjunction with other INGOs and international agencies.

In recent years, OGB has defined its purpose in terms of helping people to achieve their basic rights, loosely in line with articles related principally to social and economic rights within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the two International Covenants. Thus OGB aligns its programmes according to a range of basic rights, including health, education, freedom from violence, and a sustainable livelihood. Additionally, political and civil rights are phrased by OGB as the 'right to be heard', related to governance and democratic representation, while the 'right to an identity' refers to gender equity and discrimination.

OGB has had a corporate gender policy since 1993, but the implementation of this policy throughout the organisation has been patchy, dependent upon the efforts of committed individuals, and limited to its international programme. This has meant that the profound transformations envisaged by the gender policy in human-resources policy and the structure and culture of OGB as a whole have not taken place. Progress in implementing the gender policy within the international programme was mapped in 1997, and pointed to several important lessons. These included that in the absence of clear criteria for measuring progress in implementing gender policies and practices, managers used very different standards, and there was no overall consistency in the integration of gender equity throughout OGB. Strengths revealed by the study were that OGB could demonstrate considerable success in working at grassroots level with women's organisations and in OGB's own gender publishing programme. There has been less success in relation to mainstreaming gender in large-scale emergency or development programmes, and little to point to in relation to gender-sensitive advocacy and campaigning work (Oxfam GB 1998). The mainstreaming of gender throughout OGB and its programme thus remains a challenge, but it is a challenge that the organisation has prioritised, and is beginning to take up in a systematic way through its new framework of objectives, and accountability, related to basic rights and gender equity.

OGB now has a number of sets of guidelines and standards relating to gender for its emergency programming, and these have been imple-mented successfully in some instances, but are not routinely applied. OGB was a key collaborator in an inter-agency project known as the Sphere Project, which aims to 'improve the quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters, and to enhance accountability of humani-tarian system in disaster response' (Sphere Project 2000). The Project's field handbook lays out a Humanitarian Charter, and a set of minimum standards for the various technical sectors in disaster response – water and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site planning, and health services. The 1998 trial edition was gender-blind; a gender review was called for, and OGB, among other agencies, submitted a detailed revision of the handbook from a gender perspective. The published edition (Sphere Project 2000) has incorporated some of these revisions. The Charter itself, however, makes no specific reference to gender or to any specific commitment to gender equity in the delivery of emergency relief, and there is still room for improvement in the guidelines themselves.

OGB is currently developing the concept of 'net impact' or 'net benefit' in relation to humanitarian relief. This has arisen as a result of the work – and the challenge – of Mary B. Anderson's 'Building Local Capacities for Peace' project. The question addressed by Anderson's work is:

> *How can international and local aid agencies provide assistance to people in areas of violent conflict in ways that help those people disengage from the conflict and develop alternative systems for overcoming the problems they face? How can aid agencies and aid workers encourage local capacities for peace?*
>
> (Anderson 1996)

OGB, along with other international humanitarian agencies, has to ask difficult questions: When does our presence do more harm than good, by exacerbating the conflict through diversion of aid, or inadvertent support to perpetrators of human-rights violations in conflict, or perpetuation of the war through provision of humanitarian relief, thus enabling national resources to be allocated to arms and the war itself? What are the alternatives to providing immediate help to victims of violent conflict? How do we balance high-profile advocacy with the security of staff and counterparts? How do we continue to provide humanitarian aid within all these constraints and difficulties?

David Bryer, former Director of OGB, writes:

> *The future of humanitarian aid is now perhaps more in question than at any time since 1945. The providers question whether the abuse of their aid outweighs its benefits; while the donors, at least the official ones, reduce their funding. Yet the need for aid continues; the number of people who suffer needlessly for lack of it rises. Here, we consider some of the practical difficulties and ethical choices involved in judging the 'net impact' of aid that is provided in armed conflicts, where its abuse has become a certainty.*
>
> (Bryer and Cairns 1997:363)

This same question could well be applied to gender equity and the impact of external agencies on women and on gender relations. When do our interventions bring more harm than good to women? Are we exacerbating inequitable gender relations by intervening in ways that do not positively address gender inequality, and tackle male dominance? Are we inadvertently exacerbating male violence against women by acting without a clear analysis of gender power relations? Are we making it easier for male oppression to continue by focusing on

women's projects that do not disturb the status quo? Are there times when we should be making a judgement and deciding to pull out of a direct intervention, and focus instead on high-profile lobbying and campaigning for women's rights? In the context of conflict, and in highly militarised societies, both of which can have extreme consequences for women, these dilemmas are particularly acute.

OGB had to address these issues in Afghanistan, when the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1998, and OGB's local female staff were prevented from coming to work. OGB had to scale down its operation, and find a way to balance its presence in the country with a principled stance on the abuse of the rights of women under the Taliban regime. There was considerable debate between those who thought OGB should take a very public position on what was happening to women, rather than implicitly supporting an unjust system by working with 'approved' women, and those who thought OGB should try to find ways of working with women wherever possible, within the constraints. A 1999 internal OGB report states that gender remains a vital concern in the programme, but in the absence of being able to address women's rights directly, health and education remain the most appropriate entry points to work with women. The report points to the dangers of adopting an approach which would aim for quick results, and advocates building on the positive aspects in the situation of women in Afghanistan – for example, that women's voices in local communities are stronger than normally perceived, and that intra-household distribution is more equitable than in many parts of the world. In the end, it was judged that the net benefit to women of OGB staying and working with the opportunities which could be found were greater than radically changing its programme approach, and abandoning direct interventions. (See Clifton and Gell 2001:12–13 for further discussion of these issues.)

This judgement – are we doing more harm than good? – is not, however, routinely applied in OGB's work in conflicts, emergency, or any other situations, and the tools to help staff make such an assessment are not yet developed. But the issue is regularly brought up in debate. A workshop to take forward its work on gender equity took place in Oxford in September 2000 and was attended by staff from all over OGB. Participants emphasised the critical importance of applying much tighter standards, and developing much clearer systems, for assessing OGB's impact on women and gender equity in the areas where it works – and for withdrawing support where it was either

of no use to women, or damaging to them. Much research and NGO experience over the last decades has shown how gender-insensitive development and relief interventions damage women and exacerbate their disadvantaged position. The concept of 'net impact' or 'net benefit' in relation to women's basic rights is an important overall guiding principle for OGB in all aspects of its work. Current work on impact reporting is beginning to formalise systematic procedures for asking questions related to the impact on gender equity of every project OGB supports. How this is to be measured, and appropriately recorded, is still work in progress.

Programming in conflict-prone areas: the hard and the soft

 'The thing about this programme,' one of the water engineers said to me in Kosovo when I visited in 1999, 'is that it's the soft side of the programme that is the hardest to do'.

The categories of the 'hard' and the 'soft' run through the ways in which different forms of action taken in response to conflict and poverty are seen and thought about. Actions and interventions that are bound by the urgent, which show fast, quantifiable results, and which are predominantly technical in nature, are 'hard'. The inputs are 'hardware'. Those that are associated with more subtle and cautious forms of intervention, whose results are more difficult to measure and take longer to manifest, and which are predominantly social and cultural in nature, are 'soft'. The inputs are 'software'. This dichotomy is closely associated with stereotypical categories of the masculine and the feminine, and runs through not only the ways actions and achievements are perceived in OGB – and indeed, in most institutions – but also how they are valued and rewarded. The 'hard', masculinised, interventions, whether in policy and advocacy work, or humanitarian relief, are generally more visible. The supply lines of the 'hardware', and the context of much policy work, are male-dominated and masculinised. Visible results and high-profile actions carry a premium in NGOs which are struggling in the marketplace for funds and which are under pressure to show concrete and quantifiable results to their donors – many of whom, in their institutional structures and cultures, are subject to the same kinds of masculinised and feminised dichotomies in values. The less visible, 'soft', feminised interventions do not thus attract the same attention or the same amounts of money, and are not valued as highly, either inside or outside the organisation.

This of course becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of highly gendered systems of value and reward, which affects not only the nature of interventions, but also the staff responsible for them.

Gender-equity programming in conflict-prone areas is thus itself prone to conflict in quite complex ways – linked to the opposing categories of the 'hard' and the 'soft'. Other divides intersect or run parallel with this broad dichotomy, as outlined in the introduction. For although organisations like OGB have theorised about the end of the 'development-relief' divide, the division still persists institutionally, and in field policy and practice.[2] The technical ('hard') and social ('soft') approaches to programme planning and implementation are also strongly associated with short-term relief and longer-term developmental approaches within the humanitarian intervention. Threading in and out of these issues, as was mentioned above, is the divide between the public and the private, and the implications for perceptions of violence against women in war, and in 'peace'. Rape as a war crime is perceived as 'hard', a public crime, associated with military strategy; rape as a domestic crime is 'soft', a private crime, associated with social issues and intimate relationships.

The impact of the dichotomies

The short-term versus long-term divide is gradually narrowing but its persistence in both policy and practice means that the implications of the nature of emergency-relief response for the rehabilitation and longer-term recovery and reconstruction work are not always appreciated. Or, to put it another way, the nature of the relief effort is often only peripherally influenced by the longer-term social and economic prospects for the victims of the conflict. The focus is on saving lives, which in OGB's case is principally through the provision of clean water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion. The importance of this aim, and its achievements, cannot be underestimated or undervalued. However, longer-term goals of addressing issues linked to gendered inequalities that sought, for example, to improve women's prospects through education, empowerment, or training, or strategies to prevent further conflict, are secondary to the provision of immediate relief.

Often the aims of relief and recovery themselves thus seem to be in conflict – particularly if resources are limited. Achieving one set of aims may be seen to be at the expense of the other. Moral claims for one or the other raise the temperature. Staff focused on, and responsible for,

delivering a quick, large-scale response accuse those emphasising the social complexities of the emergency of fiddling while Rome burns. While the technical staff are saving lives, the social staff are seen to work on non-life-threatening issues, complicating questions, and holding things up, or achieving nothing significant or measurable – or worse still, exacerbating social and political tensions they do not fully understand. Social-development staff, on the other hand, accuse the technical staff of rushing in blindly, treating people like numbers and objects, potentially doing more harm than good by ignoring social and gender differences in the population, creating dependencies, and paying little attention to the long-term consequences of the relief aid itself.

Add gender equity to the mix and the environment may become explosive. It is common to find strong resistance to building in gender-equity goals to emergency response on the grounds that (a) lives have to be saved quickly, information is not available, and there is no time for social surveys; (b) there is immense pressure from donors and the media to show that measures are in place rapidly and having an immediate impact, while the gender dynamics in the society are of less concern, and certainly less visible; (c) while we know distribution is more effective through women, there is often not time to organise it that way, or there is local resistance to it which OGB should not challenge; (d) an emergency is not the right time to challenge gender power relations; and (e) why should special attention be paid to women when everyone is suffering?

I have heard all these arguments in the field. They are arguments that frustrate practitioners on both sides of the debate, all of whom are trying to get the job done as best they can. These are complex issues which are not easily resolved in the clash between speed of response and the social, cultural, and political composition of groups which will determine the quality of that response.

OGB's response to the Kosovo crisis brought these issues out quite clearly, and programme managers made real efforts to work across the relief-development and technical-social divides, and integrate the 'hard' and 'soft' elements into a single programme. The process was fraught with difficulties. And yet, it seemed to have had a good start.

The example of Kosovo

OGB had been in Kosovo since 1995, working closely with women's groups and associations in several regions in the country.

OGB-Priština had strong relationships with local counterparts, and a strong local team. The focus was on long-term development initiatives aimed at the social and political empowerment of women, through capacity building of women activists. With the intensification of the conflict in 1998, OGB's work shifted focus to respond to the needs of displaced women and children. Women's Centres were funded in Viti, Priština, Obiliq, and Gjilan as relief distribution points as well as meeting places for psychosocial support. The programme also included substantial work on water and sanitation and public health.

In March 1999 with the onset of the NATO campaign, OGB evacuated with other INGOs, setting up an office in Skopje with several of its staff from Priština. The existing Albania programme was rapidly expanded to take on the provision of humanitarian relief for the refugees flooding into the country. During the period of exile and displacement, OGB continued to work in Macedonia with its highly committed ex-Priština staff, and some of its Kosovar counterparts, principally in the refugee camps. With the continuity provided by the ex-Priština staff, and programme experience from several years in Kosovo, the chances of a well-integrated programme building the relief response within longer-term strategies for recovery and return, with gender-equity goals at its core, seemed to be high, if not optimal.

However, this integration did not happen, for a number of reasons. A large-scale humanitarian relief programme was mounted, with an enormous budget raised by emergency appeals in the UK, and in the limelight of the high media interest in the crisis. The pressure was on OGB to spend the money, and spend it fast. A large number of expatriate staff, mostly water technicians and engineers, flew into Macedonia to set up OGB's water programme in the camps. Money flowed freely for the emergency response. But the dynamic between the social and technical responses, when I arrived to look at gender, human rights, and protection issues in April 1999, was difficult and competitive. Kosovar staff members, refugees themselves, were dealing with their own personal and family trauma, and with loss and uncertainty, as a result of the war. The problem was heightened by the fact that the new arrivals who arrived en masse to run the emergency-relief response were all expatriates, some with no previous experience of the region. The ex-Priština Kosovar staff felt overrun by the new technical 'expats', misunderstood, and alienated from a programme which had been theirs, and had now inflated beyond recognition.

Kosovar refugees – mostly educated young men and women – were taken on by the technical and social programmes to carry out the work in the camps. There was a heated debate about payment of the young workforce. In the old Priština-based programme, much of the work was based on voluntarism. But in the refugee situation, many of the other international agencies were paying their local recruits. Initially, the debate was played out in gendered terms – the young men working with the water engineers were paid, and the young women were not. This was subsequently adjusted.

The technical staff, running the water programme (the 'hard' side of the programme), were almost exclusively male, and were perceived by the almost exclusively female staff working on gender, disability, social development, and hygiene promotion (the 'soft' side of the programme) to have privileged access to the emergency resources. The technical aspects were thus perceived by those working on the other parts of the programme to be valued more highly than the social aspects. In fact, as in any emergency, all staff were clamouring for more resources, whether logisticians, engineers, managers, or social-development staff. Where all eyes are on the crisis, and the pressure is there externally as well as from the desperate plight of the refugee population, competition over resources is inevitable and where other divisions exist, very difficult to manage.

As is often the case, strong feelings focused on access to vehicles, as key and desirable programme resources. I travelled with staff from all three parts of the programme, and observed that indeed the water-programme staff in each camp had access to their own, new four-wheel drive vehicles, while the hygiene-promotion, disability, and social-development staff had to share older vehicles, one of which was quite unsafe, with a cracked windscreen and a field radio which did not work. I vividly recall sitting on the dusty roadside at the exit from one of the Stankovic camps for some time trying to hitch a lift back to Skopje because the social-development programme did not have its own vehicle. This put extra pressure on the 'soft' teams, and made it harder for them to accomplish all they had to do in the dispersed camps where they worked. There were other specific and more general problems regarding access to programme resources that were not adequately resolved, and this exacerbated the divisions between teams responsible for different components of the programme. This in turn militated against the integration of the social and technical aspects of the programme.

I reported at the time that OGB's programme was a three-pronged effort, comprising community development, with special emphasis on women and disabled people; hygiene and public-health promotion; and the provision of clean water. The programme has many strengths – namely OGB's long and established reputation in the fields of emergency relief and development, and skilled and experienced staff to implement it. The report recommendations included:

> For further development of Oxfam's response, its three elements need to be built into a single integrated programme, with the three aspects based on a clear analysis of the needs and rights of women, men and children. Data collection and appraisal methods sensitive to gender and age are needed to provide the information Oxfam needs for planning of all parts of the programme. Oxfam will then be well-placed to make a significant contribution not only to the current crisis but to the future in Kosovo.
> (Williams 1999)

Nonetheless, and in spite of not managing to achieve the desired programme integration, OGB's programme in Macedonia was respected for both its technical and social achievements, and some of the key issues were addressed. Specific needs related to gender and disability were taken into account by the technical team in, for example, the design of washing facilities in the camps. The work of the Social Development and Gender team in providing separate tents for social spaces for women and men set the context for beginning to address the gender-related violence experienced by women and girls, and OGB lobbied UNHCR to fulfil its protection mandate and implement its own guidelines by providing better protection measures for women and girls in the camps.

One of the real difficulties, common to all humanitarian response, was the tension between the pace and style of work of quick-impact emergency relief, and longer-term social processes, and the substantial differences in scale and funding levels of these programmes. Staffing patterns in humanitarian relief are based on rapid scaling-up of numbers, high turnover, and short-term contracts. Induction processes for these staff members are usually sketchy, and the culture of 'hitting the ground running' is not favourable to training in social and gender awareness in the field. In the Kosovo crisis the result was the running of parallel programmes in Macedonia, which was carried forward into the post-conflict work of reconstruction and recovery after the refugees returned. The integration of gender equity into the programme as a

whole remains a challenge, although the social-development programme works with previous and new counterparts with the overall aim of the empowerment of women for gender equity in a future Kosovo.

The nature of the funding environment during a crisis and in its aftermath has implications for longer-term work. 'Red' money is tied to specific donor-defined goals; 'green' money is OGB money for programming, and thus offers more flexibility. The 'red' appeal money that sustained the Kosovo humanitarian programme ran out in due course, and the OGB programme had to fund its development and gender work under the Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI), managed by UNHCR, but which came from an emergency budget-line in the US State Department. Although the KWI project set long-term empowerment goals, the spending for this fund, totalling US$10m, was short-term. This created considerable pressure on Kosovar NGOs as well as on the INGOs, such as OGB, acting as brokers or 'umbrellas' for this fund, to get new projects up and running and spending money, often beyond the organisational capacity of the partner groups. Some women's groups set up in order to create activities the KWI could fund. The KWI was in itself an example of the tension between short-term emergency funding demanding quick and visible returns, and developmental goals whose benefits are only measurable in the longer term. When the emergency money moves on to the next crisis, the gap left can be devastating to organisations which were mobilised, or created, in the plentiful funding climate, and which subsequently find themselves without support, and often collapse, amidst their dashed expectations.

The importance of programme integration was underlined again in OGB's September 2000 workshop on gender equity, referred to above. Joint planning between technical and social intervention teams was identified at the workshop as essential to programming, and it was established that *all* staff operating in emergency relief need to understand the social and gender dimensions of their work, and have clear guidelines to help them. The integration of gender equity would help the planning and design of emergency-relief measures to take into account the longer-term recovery and future development of the population involved, and foster consistency with programme goals designed for the long haul.

Gender assessments were carried out during the Kosovo crisis in both Macedonia and Albania. The Consolidated Recommendations drawn up by gender advisers for the response in both countries hold for OGB programming in general. These included:

- Gender and social development issues need to be fully integrated in the emergency response and future programme development, with every aspect based on a clear analysis of the needs and rights of women, men, and children, and disabled people.

- The social and technical aspects of the programme should inform each other effectively for maximum impact. Social and community services must run hand-in-hand with distribution of non-food items, and water, sanitation, and health/hygiene planning from the start, must be as well resourced and should operate concurrently in Kosovo as soon as OGB has access to the designated sector.

- Unified programme aims and objectives for social and technical interventions need to be set for the region, within the framework of OGB's strategic change objectives, to which gender equity is central, and gender-sensitive indicators for success should be set.

- Setting up a new programme in Kosovo presents an excellent opportunity for OGB to implement best practice in a gender-sensitive programme response in view of the above recommendations. Baseline data and indicators for gender equity should be set at the earliest stage in programme planning for effective monitoring and impact assessment (Clifton and Williams 1999).

Working with counterparts in conflict

OGB's success in integrating gender equity into programming in conflict and its aftermath depends critically not only upon how OGB's institutional dichotomies are resolved (or not), as we have seen above in the case of Kosovo, but also on the relationships with partner organisations and local and national NGOs, and their analysis of the situation. This section looks at some of OGB's experience in Latin America, where its programmes have been notable for the quality of long-standing relationships with local counterpart organisations. Here I focus on the work with counterparts in the immediate aftermath of conflict, where OGB did not have the same level of operationality in its response, and thus the 'technical/social' dichotomy is less evident. The 'hard' and 'soft' elements of the situation, and the programme response through counterpart organisations, however, still had a key influence on the way gender equity was addressed.

From the 1960s and 1970s the country programmes were characterised by intense counterpart relationships, many of which were built around a strong sense of solidarity with the political struggles against brutal military dictatorships and the social injustice and poverty

brought about by these regimes. The emphasis was on the long-term transformation of society, by armed or peaceful means, by the real agents of change – the poor and oppressed people of the region. Because of the nature of the regimes, much of the work supported by OGB was initiated by the Catholic church and took place under its umbrella. But the analysis of social injustice did not include an analysis of women's oppression by men.

In El Salvador, OGB's programme focused before and during the war on the strengthening of popular organisations allied to the church and progressive Salvadoran NGOs. In common with many of the liberation struggles of the 1980s, however, gender equity was not seen as part of the liberation goal, and the analysis of gender oppression was often regarded as a 'special interest' issue and potentially divisive to the aims of the movement. The liberation struggle was 'hard', armed, macho, political. Women's specific issues were 'soft', secondary, personal, and for women and men alike, diluted the toughness and authenticity of the armed struggle, whose goal was social justice for all. Moreover, despite the long history of popular feminism and women's struggles in Latin America, both counterparts and some of the OGB staff saw the analysis of gender inequity as having been imported from the developed countries, as yet another example of cultural imperialism, particularly from the USA. Martha Thompson, Deputy Regional Representative for Central America at the time, writes: 'Most counterparts saw the inequalities based on gender relations as a Northern concern, and not one of their priorities' (Thompson 1999:48).

While OGB began to include elements of gender analysis into the El Salvador programme in the 1980s, the extent to which it pushed its gender work was greatly influenced by the position of OGB's counterpart organisations. By 1995, however, OGB's Gender Policy began to require field programmes to show evidence of pursuing gender equity in their work. Thompson (1999:50–3) outlines four basic mistakes made by OGB in trying to incorporate gender analysis into the programme.

- Money was thrown at the issue. Counterparts could access funding if they attached 'gender' to a project. Without a gender analysis, counterparts included projects with women, such as training or micro-enterprises – some of which were effective, some of which were not. Funding agencies went along with this to gain the approval of head office.

- Rather than fully explore the tension between a class and a gender analysis, an uneasy compromise was reached, whereby OGB and counterpart agencies basically continued working as before, but with the addition of specific projects with women, and support to some women's organisations in the popular movement. A broad discussion with counterparts and local women's organisations on gender should have taken place, and would have avoided OGB contributing to the distortion of the concept of gender equity.

- Agencies did not recognise the gains that women had made during the war, gaining visibility in acts of courage, as combatants or resisting the fighting. Nor did agencies understand how transformation of gender roles could be integrated into social transformation. In the refugee camps, and later in the repopulated conflict zones, women began to take on leadership roles, addressing gender relations. But at the end of the war, women were supposed to relinquish their positions, and strategies were not in place to deal with this.

- OGB was unwilling to risk prejudicing its relationship with counterparts by raising gender power differences because of its perceived potential to cause divisions.

In El Salvador, the popular movement was dominated by men; during the war, women became stronger and were able to challenge their position after the fighting had ceased. A narrow political analysis, which did not take gender oppression and the value of internal democracy into account, held women back during the political struggle. Martha Thompson reflects:

> I am struck by a dichotomy: when the popular movement in El Salvador was strong, the development of gender work in member organisations was very weak; it became much stronger in the post-war period, when the popular movement was weaker.
> (Thompson 1999:57)

The experience of Salvadoran women in the post-conflict arena is reflected in countries such as Nicaragua, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, or South Africa. Once the war is over, women are sent back to be 'barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen', while men make the political decisions about peace and reconstruction, and fill the political positions in the new government order. Women are less likely to accept their subordination once they have experienced relative autonomy and respect

during the war, but the obstacles to their advancement are exacerbated by militaristic constructions of masculinity and femininity. The overall message to them is clear: both the war and peace will be dominated by men and masculinist priorities and interests; and this will be maintained as long as women do not have a formal role in peace making and reconstruction. The message to INGOs is that they need to bring their global experience to bear on local and national politics and social relations, and to seek and strengthen counterparts locally, particularly among women's organisations and organisations working for gender equality.

In Central America, OGB supported Guatemalan women's organisations in exile in Mexico, planning the return of the refugee populations to Guatemala. The support included training and organisational strengthening, and women participated in some of the delegations identifying land for resettlement. However, according to Beate Thoresen, then OGB's Programme Co-ordinator in Guatemala,

> *After the return to Guatemala there was a significant decline in the level of organisation of women. This has to do with the dedication to immediate survival in the resettlement process as well as the need to reorganise as the return communities were dispersed and the groups that had lived together in Mexico returned to different places. It could also be observed that there was a change in the attitude of men, saying that things should get back to 'normal' as they were now back in Guatemala. In some cases the leadership in the communities (men) resisted organisation of women after the return.*
> (Personal communication)

A central element in this resistance is connected to access to resources, such as land. As women often only have land-use rights through men, widows and single women are dispossessed during and after war. In Guatemala, land is allocated collectively, or in the majority of cases, as individual plots by family. The first post-war land allocations showed that women were not taken into account. Women are demanding joint property rights with men, and their right to become members of co-operatives to acquire land. In response to men's allegation that women have not contributed money or community work to the co-operatives, women are claiming that their domestic work should be accepted as their contribution to the community. On the southern coast of Guatemala, Madre Tierra is an OGB-supported returnee women's organisation that developed in response to women's specific livelihood needs,

such as for cooking stoves, and animals for generating income and providing food and milk. Tensions arose with men in the community over the success of the women's projects, but women opted to keep control of them, outside the community co-operatives, which do not represent women's interests. Madre Tierra now employs men to carry out some of the labour for the project.

While many in Guatemala assert that gender relations have not improved, there are considerable differences between one community and another, and women have gained skills and confidence in organisation building and awareness. Thoresen reports help given by an OGB-supported returnee women's organisation, which assisted a neighbouring women's group in preparing a project proposal that included gender training. When asked why they wanted training on gender awareness, 'they said they wanted a better future for their children and they had observed that the returnee women could dance with other men than their husbands at community celebrations!'

The heart of the matter: gender violence and post-war peace

In Africa there is not a universal definition of peace. It is not the clichéd definition of not being at war. In South Africa today there is increasing domestic violence, an increase in child abuse. So we cannot say South Africa is at peace.
(Thandi Modise, ANC Women's League)[3]

Peace does not come with the cessation of armed hostilities and the signing of peace agreements. High levels of social and gender violence are a feature of post-war societies. South Africa has experienced spiralling levels of interpersonal violence, with shocking statistics of sexual abuse of women and children. Violence, like war, is gendered. Its expression is inseparable from female and male gender identities, and the relations between women and men. Gender identities constructed, promoted, and sustained by armed conflict and the impact of militarisation powerfully influence women's and men's attitudes and behaviours in the post-conflict environment.

This section looks at the significance of gender violence and the meaning of peace in the light of the contradictions described in this paper. To address gender violence means overcoming the private/ public divide, and bringing together issues commonly categorised as 'hard' – those linked with war, arms, and high-profile, militarised

peacekeeping – and 'soft' – those linked to the personal experiences of violence of women, girls, and boys during and after war. It means making the connections between the violence perpetrated in war, within the ambit of relief interventions, and the violence perpetrated outside war, addressed by development programmes. Policies for the construction of post-war peace must also embrace and ensure peace between women and men. In this sense, programming on gender violence goes right to the heart of the matter, bringing the issues described in this paper into stark relief.

The wars in Rwanda and Bosnia brought rape and sexual violence in wartime to the public gaze through intense media coverage. These crimes were in the public domain, and thus became a legitimate focus for the attention of human-rights organisations, and for the interventions of development agencies – although in fact research in Bosnia showed that the majority of rapes and sexual crimes against women were committed by men known to them. The crimes of domestic violence and sexual abuse in societies not at war, or recovering from it, do not attract the same attention, and international organisations show greater ambivalence in addressing issues still widely perceived as too difficult, too complicated, and too private.

Nonetheless, OGB has supported work on violence against women for many years, and in line with the new programme objectives outlined earlier in this paper, a global programme on violence against women was being developed at the time of writing. The programme seeks to overcome the analytic division between the public and the private, and to address violence within a framework of understanding gender relations and the construction of masculine and feminine identities in any sphere, in war and in peace. OGB's experience from all over the world – South Africa, Central and South America, the Great Lakes, Eastern Europe, Cambodia, Viet Nam, South Asia – show that gender violence carries on decades after a war is officially over; peace means different things for women and for men. A closer analysis of gender violence is beginning to inform OGB's work in post-conflict reconstruction and recovery, but gender violence has yet to be tackled strategically, and in an integrated way, as a central element of emergency response.

OGB has supported work by local and national NGOs which tackles violence against women in the aftermath of conflict, or where conflict is endemic, in many parts of the world – notably in South Africa, Rwanda, Bosnia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Guatemala, and Colombia.

In Cambodia, for example, the Alliance for Conflict Transformation, comprised of 19 NGO and government workers, conducts training on conflict resolution for officials from the municipality of Phnom Penh, to be applied to disputes ranging from land issues to domestic violence. Domestic violence is widespread in Cambodia, the legacy of 30 years of war and brutalised relationships. The Project Against Domestic Violence in Cambodia (PADV) has been instrumental in raising awareness of violence against women through education and public campaigning, with government support. A national survey of the incidence of violence against women in 2400 households gained national and international media attention. These organisations make the link clearly between the violence of war and continuing violence against women after the war is over. A victim of violence is quoted in PADV's survey of domestic violence in Cambodia:

> *After 1979 men changed. Nine out of ten men are broken, nasty ('Khoch'). During the Khmer Rouge period they had no happiness at all. So now that they are free, men do whatever they want.*
> (Quoted in Zimmerman 1994)

There are many examples of the brutalisation of men by extreme nationalism and the experience of military action, and this has been well documented by women's NGOs and international organisations in Bosnia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and other parts of the world. A chilling case is reported from South Africa, in which a township gang was formed to rape women as a way of bolstering or recovering male identity and status, while at the same time getting back at political leaders by whom gang members felt betrayed. These ex-combatants replicate militaristic patterns of discipline and punishment, and assert their dominance through acts of gendered violence – the sexual abuse and rape of women. The leader of the organisation stated in a television interview:

> *I was a comrade before I joined this organisation. I joined it because we were no longer given political tasks. Most of the tasks were given to senior people. Myself and six other guys decided to form our own organisation that will keep these senior comrades busy all the time. That is why we formed the South African Rapist Association (SARA). We rape women who need to be disciplined (those women who behave like snobs), they just do not want to talk to most people ...*
> (Vetten 1998)

Addressing masculinities and the forces which lead to, promote, and maintain male violence towards women as a defining feature of gender power relations will be part of OGB's mission to have a significant impact on gender equity through all aspects of its programmes. To do this effectively, OGB – as any INGO or international agency – will have to examine closely its own gendered structures and cultures. This paper has identified some of the key areas of difficulty in relation to delivering on gender equity in the context of conflict and post-war programming. The tensions show up at all levels in the institution. The core argument of this paper is that the ways that OGB's organisational imperatives are both conceptualised and implemented are themselves gendered. The 'hard' and the 'soft' run through OGB's structure and culture as metaphors for the masculine and the feminine, and can bump up against each other in the heat of the moment, in the highly charged context of emergencies and post-conflict interventions, and generate tensions over priorities and resources, value, and reward. It is only a thorough and profound commitment to gender equity in all aspects of its structure, culture, and programming that OGB – or any other organisation – can begin to overcome these tensions and avoid the weakening of its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission to relieve human suffering and address its root causes.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1 In this paper, Oxfam GB or Oxfam refer only to Oxfam Great Britain, and not to the wider family of organisations known as Oxfam International.

2 Many writers have emphasised this. Anne Mackintosh, Oxfam GB's Regional Representative for the Great Lakes region from 1991–4, writes: 'even agencies who recognise the inappropriateness of regarding "relief" and "development" as separate phenomena perpetuate this false dichotomy, through resourcing long-term and emergency programmes in different ways and having them managed by different departments and staff. This often leads to unhelpful tensions and rivalry' (Mackintosh 1997).

3 Cited in 'Women and the Aftermath', AGENDA No. 43 2000, Durban, South Africa, a report on a July 1999 conference held in Johannesburg, The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Reconstruction.

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