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**Gender in Problem-solving  
Workshops: A Wolf in  
Sheep's Clothing?**

**Cordula Reimann**

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A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?**

Cordula Reimann

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**For Norbert**



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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract/Zusammenfassung/Résumé</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Setting the Scene: Introducing Gender, Gender as an Analytical Category, and Problem-solving Workshop</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 What is Gender?	7
2.2 What is Gender as an Analytical Category?	9
2.3 What is a Problem-solving Workshop?	10
<b>3 Gender in Problem-solving Workshops: Whose and Which Problems Are to Be Solved?</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Third Party	13
3.2 Participants	17
3.3 Strategies Taken	19
<b>4 Conclusion</b>	<b>27</b>





## Abstract/Zusammenfassung/Résumé

There is a rather elusive literature on gender/women and peace, non-violence and peacebuilding. Yet, a gender-sensitive critique of different third party approaches to conflict resolution of intra-state, violent conflicts has by and large sadly been missing. The paper offers a gender-sensitive critique of the "problem-solving workshop" as one non-official and non-coercive third-party approach to intra-state conflicts. This will be done on two levels: On the one hand, it will make some of the "invisible" spots and ideas of the problem-solving workshop "visible." On the other hand, it will introduce some gender-sensitive entry-points to the problem-solving workshop as theory and practice. The following analysis will focus on the third party, participants, and strategies taken as analytical guiding-lights.

Es gibt eine umfassende Literatur zu dem Themenkomplex "gender/Frauen und Frieden, Gewaltlosigkeit und Friedensförderung." Bis dato fehlt aber eine gender-sensitive Kritik von verschiedenen Drittparteiinterventionen in intra-staatliche Gewaltkonflikte. Das vorliegende Papier bietet eine gender-sensitive Kritik des "Problemlösungsworkshops" als eine inoffizielle und nicht-erzwingende Drittparteiintervention. Die Kritik setzt auf zwei Ebenen an: Auf der einen Seite werden die unsichtbaren Ideen des "Problemlösungsworkshops" sichtbar gemacht. Auf der anderen Seite werden gender-sensitive Zugänge zum "Problemlösungsworkshop" als Theorie und Praxis vorgestellt. Die Kritik konzentriert sich auf Fragen der Drittpartei, der TeilnehmerInnen und der Strategien des "Problemlösungsworkshops."

Il existe une riche littérature touchant à la relation entre des femmes/du genre et la paix, la non-violence et la construction de la paix. Néanmoins, une critique sensible au genre des différentes approches des parties tiers dans la résolution des conflits domestiques violents fait lacune. Cette contribution offre une critique de la méthode du "problem-solving workshop" dans une perspective sensible au genre. La critique opère à deux niveaux: Elle rend visible, d'une part, les dimensions et les idées "invisibles" de l'approche du "problem-solving workshop." Elle propose, d'autre part, des points d'entrée pour une analyse sensible au genre face au "problem-solving workshop" en tant que théorie et pratique. L'analyse se concentre sur le rôle des parties tiers, celui des participantes et des participants et sur les stratégies appliquées.



# 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

“Whistles are blowing [...] in gender relations... . The warning is that we are on the wrong track. The message is to look at our assumptions and to get them right, especially at the international level, before it is too late.”<sup>2</sup>

*John W. Burton*

In the face of the limited success of interest-based conflict management to address the intractable dynamics of intra-state, violent conflicts such as in Sri Lanka and Israel/Palestine, conflict resolution scholar-practitioners like John Burton developed in the 1960s/1970s the idea of problem-solving workshop<sup>3</sup> as a non-official third party strategy. Based on the idea that violent conflicts arise out of dissatisfied human needs, the very rationale of the problem-solving workshop was to address the conflict parties' needs for collective identity, security and distributive justice and hence move away from managing to resolving conflicts.

Without any doubt, the idea of a problem-solving workshop has had a lasting impact on developing a theory and practice of dealing with intra-state violent conflicts. Yet, after the initial enthusiasm about this non-coercive approach to intra-state conflicts, there was some critique especially from a culture-sensitive perspective by the mid- and late 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

However, a feminist or gender-specific critique of problem-solving workshops has so far been missing. This seems striking given that many problem-solving workshops are still all-male exclusive clubs. At the same time, it seems ironic in the light of a rich feminist literature on non-violence and peace.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article was written with the financial support of the IP 7 of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR North-South). See also [www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/](http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/) and [www.swisspeace.org/research/environmental\\_conflicts.htm](http://www.swisspeace.org/research/environmental_conflicts.htm).

<sup>2</sup> John W. Burton 1990: *Conflict. Resolution and Prevention*. Houndmills: Macmillan. 116-117.

<sup>3</sup> Note that Burton's definition of "problem-solving" should not be mistaken with Critical theory's understanding of "problem-solving" (that is mainstream "traditional theory" vs. Critical theory) or the Harvard Negotiation School's understanding of "problem-solving." The "problem solving workshop" goes by different names such as "controlled communication (early Burton); analytical problem-solving (later Burton); "collaborative, analytical problem-solving process or approach" (Banks and Mitchell); human relations workshop (Doob), third party consultation (Fisher), interactive problem-solving (Kelman), facilitation or problem-solving forum (Azar) and dialogue forum (Ropers). While these scholars-practitioners put different foci in their problem-solving workshops, for example, in terms of the transfer of learning in the wider policy process, I treat these differences here as a matter of nuance but not of substance. The following analysis will concentrate on Burton's concept of a problem-solving workshop and will take on board insights from other scholars-practitioners like Kelman and Mitchell/Banks mainly to elaborate Burton's initial ideas. At the same time, I use the terms problem-solving workshop and facilitation interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> See K. Avruch and P. Black 1991: *The Culture Question and Conflict Resolution*. In: *Peace and Change* 16 (1): 22-45; and Kevin Avruch 1998: *Culture and Conflict Resolution*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

<sup>5</sup> Pam McAllister (ed.) 1982: *Reweaving the Web of Life*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers; Brigit Brock-Utne 1985: *Educating for Peace. A Feminist Perspective*. New York: Pergamon Press; Jean Bethke Elstain 1987: *Women and War*. New York: Basic Books; Ruth Roach Pierson (ed.) 1987: *Women and Peace. Theoretical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*. London: Croom Helm; Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King (eds.) 1989: *Rocking the Ship of State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Birgit Brock-Utne 1989: *Feminist Perspectives on Peace and Peace Education*. New York: Pergamon Press; Elisabeth Ferris 1993: *Women, War and Peace*. Uppsala: Life & Peace Institute; Aruna Gnanadason, Musimbi Kanyoro and Lucia Ann McSpadden (eds.) 1996: *Women, Violence and Non-violent Change*. Geneva: WCC Publications; Karen J. Warren and Duane L. Cady (eds.) 1996: *Bringing Peace Home. Feminism, Violence, and*

The paper aims at partly filling this analytical gap. The underlying assumption is that while gender is *formally* excluded from the problem-solving workshop, it is nevertheless (omni)present and inherent in its construction and practical application. While most conflict resolution scholars like Burton do not make their gender-specific ideas explicit, *all* scholars base their work on particular understanding of gender relations in the private and public sphere and notions of masculinity and femininity. This is to say that gender as social relations is already – albeit implicitly – inherent in mainstream theory and practice and constitutes the “secret glossary.”<sup>6</sup> This makes gender simultaneously *absent* and *present* in problem-solving workshops.

The purpose of this paper is to bring into the open some of the hidden and taken-for-granted “gender-blind” and gender-specific meanings and perspectives in Burton’s problem-solving approach. This will be done on two levels: On the one hand, the paper will make the “invisible” “gendered” nature of problem-solving workshops visible. The guiding questions here are: Where and what are their main gender-blind or gender-neutral ideas? How far are problem-solving workshops in theory open to discuss *gender*? On the other hand, the paper will introduce possible gender-sensitive entry-points of problem-solving workshops. The guiding question is: What might gender-sensitive perspectives offer problem-solving workshops?

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part lays the analytical and conceptual groundwork: To help tackle the above set of questions, it is crucial to first define the terms gender and problem-solving workshop, and to employ a gender-sensitive framework, that is, gender as an analytical category.<sup>7</sup> The second part looks at the main underlying assumptions of the problem-solving workshop from a gender-sensitive perspective: It offers a gender-specific critique while revealing the most striking gender-blind spots. At the same time, it aims to put forward gender-sensitive entry-points to the practice and theory of the problem-solving workshop. The third part will conclude by summarizing the most crucial findings.

Before we venture further into the task, three comments are in order:

First, the chosen gender approach does not pretend to be all-inclusive. In fact, given that my gender approach is rooted in social constructivism, it offers only one possible, tentative gender-sensitive interpretation of the problem-solving approach. Other feminists may offer a different reading of it and may come to other conclusions.

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Nature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; and Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay 1999: Women and Peacebuilding. Montreal: ICHRDD.

<sup>6</sup> Eva Kreisky and Birgit Sauer (eds.) 1997: Das geheime Glossar der Politikwissenschaft. Geschlechtskritische Inspektion der Kategorien einer Disziplin. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus.

<sup>7</sup> This is to say, too, the following analysis works with a two-fold definition of gender, on the one hand, gender as the social construction of social relations between women and men and on the other hand as an analytical category to make “invisible” gender-blind categories and perspectives “visible.”

Second, there are different definitions of “conflict resolution.” I have in mind pro-active, process-oriented and needs-based third-party approaches of conflict handling (like problem-solving workshops) in contrast to more outcome-oriented and interests-based ones (like power bargaining and negotiations).<sup>8</sup>

Third, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to render justice to the great variety of “problem-solving workshops” in theory and practice on the one hand and the self-critique of conflict resolution scholars on the other hand,<sup>9</sup> I will discuss Burton’s problem-solving workshop as an “ideal type.” At the same time, one cannot stress strongly enough that the *praxis* of most problem-solving workshops since the 1960s has been very much an analytical and practical elaboration and extension of Burton’s initial ideas. In fact, Burton’s problem-solving workshops in their “pure form” have never been widely practiced. While a gender-sensitive critique of Burton’s initial ideas cannot claim to be equally valid for the further developed and in fact continually evolving forms of problem-solving workshops of the late 1990s, the following analysis opens up analytical space that is equally important for a gender-sensitive critique of the extended forms of problem-solving workshops and Burton’s initial ideas. At the same time, the paper refers to the feminist critique of conflict theory<sup>10</sup> and negotiation theory<sup>11</sup> and transfers it to the theory of problem-solving workshops where useful.

<sup>8</sup> In many conflicts, problem-solving workshops like in Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine have been (and continue to be) an integral part to negotiations: Official and formal negotiations may be, for example, in some kind of deadlock, and problem-solving workshops may not only be continued, but, may even lead to some breakthrough. As such, problem-solving workshops may be understood as crucial supplements to different stages of the negotiation processes. See also Cordula Reimann 2001: Towards Conflict Transformation: Assessing the State of the Art in Conflict Management – Reflections from a Theoretical Perspective. In: Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, ed. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management. Berlin: <http://www.berghof-center.org/handbook/>.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Ronald J. Fisher 1997: Interactive Conflict Resolution. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Anita Taylor and Judi Beinstein Miller (eds.) 1994: Conflict and Gender. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

<sup>11</sup> See Deborah M. Kolb 1989: Her Place at the Table: A Curriculum Module on Gender and Negotiation. Washington, DC: National Institute for Dispute Resolution, Deborah M. Kolb 1994: Negotiation Theory: Through the Looking Glass of Gender. Occasional Paper No. 9. Fairfax, VA: ICAR, George Mason University; Deborah M. Kolb 2000: More Than Just a Footnote: Constructing a Theoretical Framework for Teaching about Gender in Negotiation. In: Negotiation Journal 16 (4): 347-356, Deborah M. Kolb and Judith Williams 2000: The Shadow Negotiation: How Women Can Master the Hidden Agendas that Determine Bargaining Success. New York: Simon and Schuster.



## 2 Setting the Scene: Introducing Gender, Gender as an Analytical Category, and Problem-solving Workshop

### 2.1 What is Gender?

Gender should be defined as the social construction of social relations between “women” and “men.” Gender must be seen in terms of:

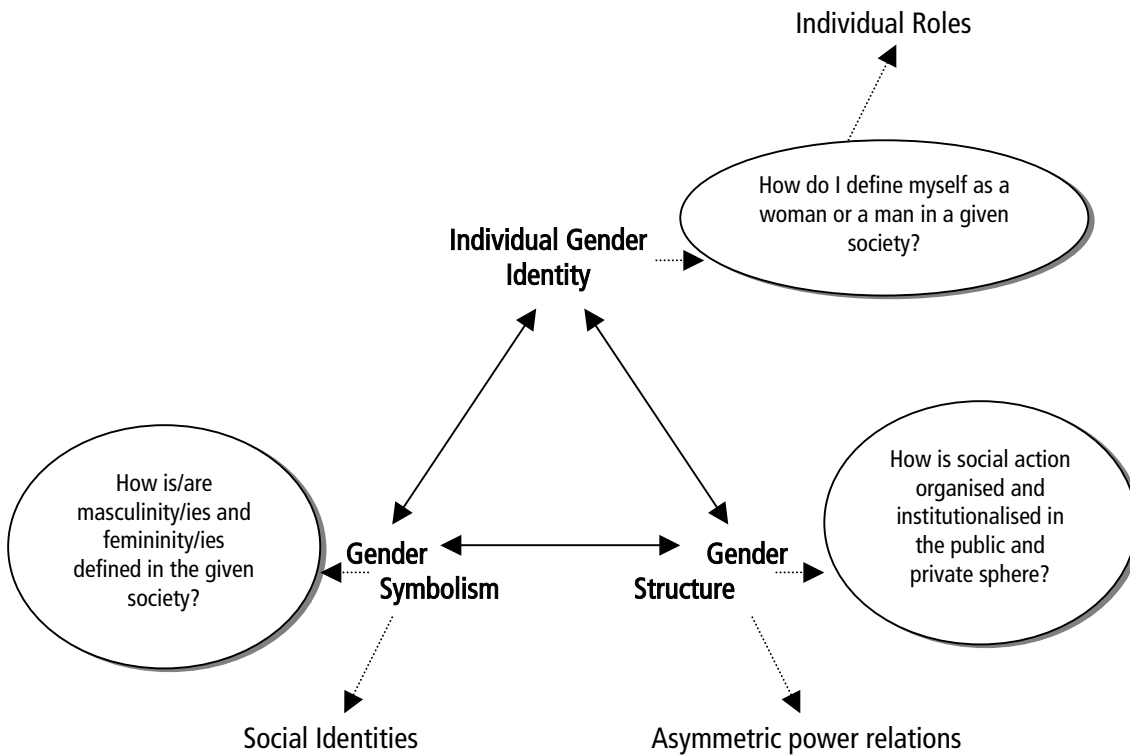
- the *individual gender identity* (social norms and the socially constructed individual identity);
- the *symbolism of gender* (classification of stereotypical gender-dualisms by dichotomies in “modern” societies: Masculinity is, for example, associated with objectivity/reason/autonomy/subject/production/ culture in contrast to femininity equated with subjectivity/feeling/dependency/object/value/reproduction /nature); and
- the *structure of gender* (the organization and institutionalization of social action in the public and private sphere).<sup>12</sup>

Gender is not a biologically driven inevitable, but a socially and constantly constructed process. The individual gender identity is a fluid and transformative construction derived from certain notions of femininity and masculinity, which, in turn, are very much based on the distribution of labor in the public and private sphere. The same holds very much true with the definition of the gender symbolism and the gender structure: Certain notions of masculinity and femininity are highly dependent on the distribution of labor in the public and private sphere and the socially expected behavior and interpretation of social norms. Masculinity/ies and femininity/ies are not single, fixed features but rather are dependent on class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age. The distribution of labor in the public and private sphere, in turn, profoundly affects both the construction of certain notions of masculinity and femininity and the socially expected behavior of a man or a woman.

To stress and understand the complementary nature of it all, I suggest illustrating the dynamics of gender in the following gender triangle:

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<sup>12</sup> Sandra Harding 1986: The Science Question in Feminism. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 16-17. See also Linda Nicholson 1994: Interpreting Gender. In: Signs 20 (1): 79-105.



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The gender triangle stresses that all three dimensions (individual gender identity, gender symbolism and gender structure) are closely connected and interwoven categories. All three dimensions just make sense together – one dimension like the gender structure in the form of the gendered division of labor has little, if any, theoretical and political meaning without taking into account the gender symbolism and the individual gender identity, which produce and re-produce the gender structure. By the same token, a change of any of the three dimensions leads to a change of “gender.” An illustrative example may be a change in the gender structure, such as more women entering male-dominated foreign policy-making institutions. This shift may, for example, slowly but surely alter stereotypical understandings of gender symbolism and socially expected behavior of a man or a woman in a given society. At the same time, individual gender identity, gender symbolism and gender structure are interdependent within any particular cultural setting – the manifestation of each category takes different forms in different cultures. As such, the definition and understanding of gender may vary from class to class, from culture to culture, from age group to age group, and from peace to wartime. This means it accounts for gender being made up by a complex and shifting conglomerate of social and cultural relations like “class,” “age,” “culture” and so on. Having said that, gender is not universalisable: Meanings of gender are fluid and historically changeable. One cannot speak of a generic standpoint of women and men and a single notion of femininity and masculinity in a given society. Rather, one comes across complex and plural forms of femininities and masculinities, which, in turn, are constantly open to (constant) social challenge and change.



Against this analytical background, how can one make the hidden and invisible “gendered” ideas and perspectives of Burton’s problem-solving approach visible? A glance through the rather elusive feminist literature on methodology will suffice to show that there is not a single, all-inclusive gender-sensitive tool to decode male bias or androcentricism in malestream<sup>13</sup> theory and practice. One way of decoding the gender-blindness is a gender-sensitive methodological tool like gender as an analytical category.

## 2.2 What is Gender as an Analytical Category?

Having stressed the three-fold definition of gender above, I argue that *gender as an analytical category* (and any gender-sensitive approach!) has to take into account all three gender dimensions.<sup>14</sup> Given the limited space in this paper, I comment briefly on the place of each gender dimension (individual gender identity, gender symbolism and gender structure) in *gender as an analytical category*.

First, taken gender as *social construction of identity*, one has to look at different fictions of men/“masculinity” in contrast to women/“femininity” being used in the problem-solving workshop. How do women and men appear in Burton’s problem-solving workshop? What ideas about men and women inform the problem-solving workshop? This means asking for the theorizing of *identity* and its *social construction* in Burton’s problem-solving approach.

Second, what *power structures* in the private and public spheres are hidden in the problem-solving workshop? The analytical focus here is on the theorizing of *hierarchical power structures* and their *taken-for-granted distribution*.

Third, how far is it possible to theorize about gender identities and gender roles based on changing notions of masculinity, femininity and power structures? How does Burton’s problem-solving workshop account for socially and historically influenced and changing gender relations? The emphasis here is on the theorizing of *social change and historical variability*.

Gender as an analytical category offers us some analytical space to discuss the following points: While looking at individual gender identity and gender symbolism, one is able to focus on theorizing about identity and its social construction. Moreover, to analyze the individual gender identity also points to the changing nature of identity/ies. To define oneself as a woman in the 1920s is different from women’s self-image of the 1990s. In other words, individual gender identity and gender symbolism allows us to explore the historically and socially evolving character of identity. Furthermore, the analysis of gender symbolism and gender structure highlights the necessary theorizing of social change

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<sup>13</sup> “Malestream” need not necessarily be mainstream (think of, for instance, gender-blindness of Critical theory) and vice versa (think of female scholars doing mainstream and gender-blind research).

<sup>14</sup> For a similar but differently developed discussion of gender as an analytical category in the context of IR see Sandra Whitworth 1994: *Feminism and International Relations. Towards a Political Economy of Gender in Interstate and Non-Governmental Institutions*. London: Macmillan. 41-42.

alongside historical variability. Gender structure puts centre-stage the theorizing of hierarchical power structures and their taken-for-granted distribution.

At the same time, and on a more general note, one should not forget that "real men" and "real women" do not necessarily or literally fulfill the gender prescriptions of an analytical category.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.3 What is a Problem-solving Workshop?

Conflict resolution scholar-practitioners like John Burton, Edward Azar and Herbert Kelman have been instrumental in developing the concept of the "problem-solving workshop" since the late-1960s/early- 1970s.<sup>16</sup> The analytical starting point was the limited success of interest-based negotiations to address the dynamics of intra-state, social violent conflicts such as in Israel/Palestine and Sri Lanka. According to Burton and Azar, among others, to varying degrees these "deep-rooted conflicts"<sup>17</sup> stem from the failure of effective state-formation structures to provide minimal social and political security (including minority rights): They arise out of the failure to satisfy human needs, like the need for collective identity, security and distributive justice.<sup>18</sup>

The key is to translate the interests (and positions) of the conflict parties into their underlying needs for collective identity, security, and participation. With the analytical focus on non-negotiable needs, the problem-solving workshop was introduced as a more process-oriented and relationship-oriented strategy than the interests-based negotiation.

The problem-solving workshop aims to bring together representatives of the conflict parties and to facilitate creative problem-solving through "direct communication" and in-depth conflict analysis. Burton defines "direct communication" as "an attempt to raise the level of communication to transform competitive and conflicting relationships into ones in which common values are being sought."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Joan Scott 1986: *Gender. A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*. In: *American Historical Review* 91 (5): 1053-1075. See also Joan Acker 1989: *Making Gender Visible*. In: Ruth A. Wallace (ed.): *Feminism and Sociological Theory*. London: Sage. 65-79.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of problem-solving workshops between the late-1960s and early-1980s see A. Betts Fetherston 1991: *The Problem-Solving Workshop in Conflict Resolution*. In: Tom Woodhouse (ed.): *Peacemaking in a Troubled World*. Oxford: Berg. 247-65; and for the period between the mid-1960s until the mid-1990s, see Fisher 1997: *Interactive Conflict Resolution*. 187-212.

<sup>17</sup> See John W. Burton 1984: *Global Conflict. The Domestic Sources of International Crisis*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books; and John W. Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict. A Handbook*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. Others speaks of, for instance, "protracted social conflicts" (Azar) or "intractable conflicts" (Kriesberg, Northrup and Thorson).

<sup>18</sup> See John W. Burton (ed.) 1990: *Conflict. Human Needs Theory*. London: Macmillan. For a gender-sensitive critique of Burton's human needs theory see Cordula Reimann 2002: "All You Need Is Love"...and What about Gender? Engendering Burton's Human Needs Theory. Working Paper 10. Bradford: Centre for Conflict Resolution. Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford.

<sup>19</sup> John W. Burton 1969: *Conflict and Communication. The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations*. London: Macmillan. 56.

The aim is not to eliminate conflict as such – quite the contrary, conflict without direct violence is considered to be a crucial catalyst for social change. The aim is, first, to address the fears and grievances of the parties and to satisfy their needs and, second, to increase and improve communication and cooperation between them.



### 3 Gender in Problem-solving Workshops: Whose and Which Problems Are to Be Solved?

The following analysis sets a two-fold task: On the one hand, it will make gender-blind or gender-neutral ideas “visible” in Burton’s problem-solving workshop. On the other hand, possible gender-sensitive perspectives of Burton’s problem-solving workshops will be introduced.

One way to approach this task is to have a closer look at the role of the third party, the parties involved and the strategies taken. While all three aspects are closely interrelated, the following analysis will devote some separate analytical attention to each of them, making cross-references where useful. I will first look at the qualities of the third party (section 3.1.), and then turn to the to the parties involved (section 3.2.) and the strategies taken (section 3.3.).

#### 3.1 Third Party

Who is the third party? What are its main characteristics and tasks? According to Burton, the third party should be a “panel” of social scientists (with an optimum number of 4-6).<sup>20</sup> The idea of a “panel” suggests that a team of facilitators is able to balance out the (personal and political) biases of individual facilitators. The facilitators or panelists should possess expertise in psychology, inter- and intra-group dynamics, (international) conflict theory, and facilitation. Their main tasks are to provide the setting, establish the rules of conduct and facilitate and encourage meaningful communication between parties.<sup>21</sup> To facilitate a more “objective” discussion of the parties’ interests, needs and fears, the “panel” may provide additional information on crucial conflict issues.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, the above criteria of the third party suggest a gender-neutral idea of the “panel.” Along those lines, a panel may consist of female and male academics, and it is up to the individual academic scholar to form or join the team of facilitators. Women may become facilitators – in whatever gendered context or with whatever gender dimensions is simply irrelevant. Burton mentions “gender” in his 56 “rules of behavior” for the problem-solving workshop and refers to the equal numbers of men and women as panel members.<sup>23</sup>

In practice, however, many panels put together since the mid-1970s have been “male-exclusive cliques” (personal observation). The exclusion of women mirrors their exclusion in higher echelons of academia in general. How far women as third parties would and could make a difference will be discussed later in section 3.2.

<sup>20</sup> See Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict*. Rules 10-18; and John W. Burton 1996: *Conflict Resolution. Its Language and Processes*. Lanham, MA and London: The Scarecrow Press. 28, 36.

<sup>21</sup> See Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict*. 7ff. See also Herbert C. Kelman 1990: *Interactive problem-solving: A psychological approach to conflict resolution*. In: John W. Burton and Frank Dukes (eds.): *Conflict. Readings in Management and Resolution*. London: Macmillan. 207-11.

<sup>22</sup> See Burton 1969: *Conflict and Communication* and Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict*; and see also John W. Burton 1972: *Resolution of Conflict*. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 16: 5-29.

<sup>23</sup> See Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict*. Rules 13 and 14.

For the time being, it seems important to stress that most facilitators have little if any knowledge of gender issues, such as the gender-specific dimensions of the conflict or different notions of femininity and masculinity, which may in one way or another influence the process of the workshop (personal observation). The most likely reason for this shortcoming is the fact that, throughout their academic career, most facilitators have gained little if any knowledge about feminist theory or gender issues. Training in gender issues or gender-sensitivity training does not (yet) belong to the official curriculum of most conflict resolution training sessions and manuals. It is very much up to the personal interest of the individual facilitator to gain more knowledge about gender-related issues. Along those lines, "gender sensitivity" (similar to "culture sensitivity") is (or would be) an "additional level of sophistication and expertise added to the already trained."<sup>24</sup>

As far as the facilitator's main characteristics are concerned, facilitators should first and foremost have (professional) experience, competence, control, communication and listening skills, empathy, trust/confidentiality and a deep sense of responsibility.<sup>25</sup> The last four attributes – listening skills, empathy, confidentiality and a deep sense of responsibility – go in tandem with the stereotypical attributes of women as empathetic, co-operative, non-violent, and patient. Panelists "with concern for stable and rewarding social relations"<sup>26</sup> represent qualified third parties. This makes women with their stereotypical roles as mothers, carers for the elderly and conflict mediators in families rather attractive to be panel members or facilitators. One could therefore argue that, while in practice women do not represent (equal) panel members, they implicitly enter the problem-solving workshop vis-à-vis their stereotypical characteristics like trust, cooperation, empathy, and patience. One could speak of a relaxation of the polarized gender dichotomies of masculinity and femininity. Gender symbolisms like masculinity traditionally defined as objectivity/conflict/violence/fact and femininity traditionally defined as subjectivity/cooperation/non-violence/value get blurred. Stereotypical feminine/female features and traits are emphasized and heightened to crucial characteristics of the third party.

From a gender-sensitive perspective, a third party primarily brings another power dimension to the conflict. As such, the third party, whether aware of this or not, becomes a crucial factor in the conflict dyadic and dynamics. While the parties are the ones who "...determine the 'facts' that are relevant, within a theoretical framework that ensures that sensitive and apparently irrelevant influences are not omitted,"<sup>27</sup> it is the "theoretical framework" put forward by the panel that sets the (implicit and explicit) rules.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Paul Lederach 1995: *Preparing for Peace. Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 55.

<sup>25</sup> See Michael Banks and Christopher Mitchell 1996: *A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. The Analytical Problem-solving Approach*. Fairfax VA: Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. 59-60. See also Burton 1987: *Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict*. Rules 15-18.

<sup>26</sup> Edward E. Azar and Chung in Moon 1986: *Managing Protracted Social Conflicts in the Third World. Facilitation and Development Diplomacy*. In: *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 15 (3): 402.

<sup>27</sup> Burton 1972: *Resolution of Conflict*.

<sup>28</sup> See also Anthony de Reuck 1990: *A theory of conflict resolution by problem-solving*. In: John W. Burton and Frank Dukes (eds.): *Conflict. Readings in Management and Resolution*. 187.

The panelists "... must use their own experience of analyzing conflicts to point them [the parties] in the direction of relevant theories and insights about the causes, dynamics and exacerbating factors in this particular case."<sup>29</sup> And "[a] quite rigid adherence to rules of procedure is desirable once they have been tested."<sup>30</sup> In other words, while the parties decide on *what* is discussed, the panel decides on *how* this is done. That is why Northrup speaks of "an interactive environment based on relationships of authority."<sup>31</sup> A gender-sensitive approach points to the very question of the legitimacy of the third party. In most conflict resolution literature the objective, academic setting and its analytical focus explain away questions of legitimacy. One reads, for example, that "...conflict resolution and prevention<sup>32</sup> have no ideological orientation: they are analytical."<sup>33</sup> The panelists are "non-threatening and de-politicised."<sup>34</sup> By the same token, most conflict resolution practitioners may agree with Kelman that "[a]s a third party I am not prepared to facilitate satisfaction of a *party's need*, for example, *for domination or control over the other*."<sup>35</sup>

A gender-sensitive perspective stresses that, given a rather complex web of "hidden" and open power relations in most problem-solving workshops, it becomes a rather tricky enterprise to identify and define the "weak party" versus the "strong party." The need for control of one party, for example, may be – unconsciously and implicitly – facilitated by a gender-insensitive third party without realizing the gender-specific nature of needs. As such, it may implicitly and indirectly perpetuate a rather exclusive understanding of the conflict parties' needs, fears and interests. The third party may not "deliberately" and "consciously" facilitate a party's need for domination and control, but may do so implicitly or subconsciously due to a superficial analysis of the power relations underlying the problem-solving workshop (see section 3.3. below).

This raises the question of the third party's neutrality or impartiality. While some scholars stress the importance of the third party's neutrality,<sup>36</sup> most conflict resolution literature acknowledges absolute value-neutrality as a chimera. As each panelist can act only upon his/her values, he/she "...favours one party."<sup>37</sup> Given the value-loaded-ness of the third party, it is vitally important to make "[...] oneself aware of one's own goals and values in undertaking any problem-solving exercise."<sup>38</sup> The facilitators

<sup>29</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. 117.

<sup>30</sup> Burton 1972: Resolution of Conflict. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Terrell A. Northrup n.d.: The Uneasy Partnership Between Conflict Theory and Feminist Theory. Unpublished Paper, Syracuse: Syracuse University. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Burton defines conflict prevention as the structural changes required to remove sources of conflict. See Burton 1990: Conflict. Resolution and Prevention. 3, 18-19, 230-234, 274.

<sup>33</sup> Burton 1990: Conflict. Resolution and Prevention. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Azar and in Moon 1986: Managing Protracted Social Conflicts in the Third World. 401.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert C. Kelman 1990: Applying a Human Needs Perspective to the Practice of Conflict Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Case. In: John W. Burton (ed.): Conflict. Human Needs Theory. 291 (Emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Edward E. Azar 1990: The Management of Protracted Social Conflict. Theory and Cases. Aldershot: Dartmouth. 30, 35-36; and Burton 1996: Conflict Resolution. 46.

<sup>37</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 6.

... must try to *eliminate* the effects of their own previous assumptions and values. [...] Being themselves human, they make also moral judgements about groups that have engaged in actions during the course of the conflict, which seem to range from the noble to the appalling. Both the theories and the values have to be put into *cold storage* while the initial appraisal and preliminary contacts are being made.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, facilitators must "separate" their *subjective values* and *assumptions* about the conflict and the conflict parties from the *objective facts* of the actual conflict situation and the analytical problem-solving workshop. This interpretation of the fact-value split is apparently what the early Burton had in mind when he recommended that "...the less, and not the more, the third party knows in advance of the 'facts' of the situation to be approached, the better. He does not then project his own viewpoints, or select data and make assessments on the basis of his own experiences and prejudices."<sup>40</sup>

A gender-sensitive perspective takes up the above exemplary advice to make "oneself aware of one's own goals and values in undertaking any problem-solving exercise" and asks, "what are one's gender-specific goals and values in undertaking any problem-solving exercise?" What does it mean to be an embodied conflict resolution scholar? How far does my identity as a female or male third party influence the goals and the values of the problem-solving workshop? What are the ideas and assumptions of the third party about gender-specific issues and gender equality? How far are they relevant for a fuller and deeper conflict analysis?

These questions indicate that the facilitator's "facts" will always – implicitly and explicitly – rely on a particular, subjective and mainly gender-blind reading of the conflict, the conflict parties and his/her role as facilitator. A case in point is here that the problem-solving workshop heavily relies on, but takes for granted, the private sphere, the family and household structure. In fact, conflict resolution scholars like Burton have failed to acknowledge the interconnections between the "private sphere" and the non-official "private world" of the problem-solving workshop. Yet, to render justice to Burton's overall work, one has to stress that in contrast to other conflict resolution scholars, Burton explicitly stresses throughout his work the necessity to include the domestic and family level as decision-making and conflict level – best reflected in his claim "peace begins at home."<sup>41</sup> Burton discusses the family as one of the "main institutions of society"<sup>42</sup> and pays particular attention to "family violence."<sup>43</sup> In fact, he explicitly refers to domestic violence as a form of "structural violence" in the private sphere in some of his recent

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 32-33 (Emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> Burton 1972: Resolution of Conflict. 18. See also Burton 1969: Conflict and Communication; and Ronald J. Fisher 1972: Third Party Consultation. A Method for the Study and Resolution of Conflict. In: Journal of Conflict Resolution 16 (1): 67-94.

<sup>41</sup> John W. Burton 2001: Peace Begins at Home. In: International Journal of Peace Studies 6 (1): 3-10.

<sup>42</sup> See John W. Burton 1997: Violence Explained. The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and their Prevention. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 50-58.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 55-57. See also Burton 1990: Conflict. Resolution and Prevention. 13, 19.



work.<sup>44</sup> However, and most importantly here, the implications of, for example, domestic violence as a form of direct and structural violence for the actual *praxis* of conflict resolution and problem-solving workshops remain completely unknown. Less surprisingly, the awareness of and sensitivity to gender-specific violence are not considered crucial qualifications of the panelists – and if they are, they are not made explicit. This seems striking in so far as a high level of gender-specific violence characterizes most protracted social conflicts (PSCs).

On a more general note, this raises the question how the problem-solving workshop is able to capture and address power imbalances involving forms of personal and direct violence. Conflict resolution practitioners including Burton and Azar remain silent about how to deal with participants' testimonies and stories of different forms of personal or collective violence. This leads us to the role of the conflict parties invited to the problem-solving workshop.

## 3.2 Participants

The participants of the workshops are individuals who are politically involved and influential within their respective communities. Generally speaking, the conflict parties themselves decide who should be their representatives. Strikingly, in contrast to the panel, Burton does not propose a gender balance among representatives of the conflict parties.<sup>45</sup> Participants are considered gender-neutral agents with no gender-specific needs, fears, interests and political agendas. They should be part of the *political mainstream* of their community:

The closer the participants are to the centres of power in their own communities, the greater the likelihood that what they learn in the course of their workshop experience will be fed directly into the decision-making process. By the same token, however, the closer participants are to the centres of power, the more constrained they are likely to feel, and the greater their difficulty in entering into communication that is open, non-committal, explanatory and analytical.<sup>46</sup>

A closer look at these criteria suggests that the focus on the *mainstream of the community* opens up space "to bring in" women. While most women in most PSCs, whether formally or informally organized, do not often belong to the wider *political mainstream*, they are nevertheless at the heart of the community and the backbone of society both in peace and wartime.

<sup>44</sup> See John W. Burton 2001: Conflict Prevention as a Political System. In: International Journal of Peace Studies 6 (1): 24 and Burton 1997: Violence Explained. 33.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Burton 1987, Resolving Deep Rooted Conflict.

<sup>46</sup> Kelman 1990: Applying a Human Needs Perspective to the Practice of Conflict Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Case. 286.

In a sympathetic reading, one could argue that the gender-neutral discourse opens up space to "bring women in" as women fulfill the criteria of "ideal parties:" Being themselves distant from official decision-making processes "enables them to think creatively, to speculate, [...] rather than needing to defend entrenched positions, or to participate simply in order to score off the adversary."<sup>47</sup>

On a more critical note, the gender-neutral discourse of conflict parties promotes the "myth of equality" between the two parties. While the problem-solving literature explicitly acknowledges the asymmetric nature of most PSCs and the asymmetric power relations among the parties,<sup>48</sup> most problem-solving literature stresses that in the end power inequalities are "less of a problem in the type of protracted conflicts."<sup>49</sup> In fact, "...the basis of workshop interaction must be *equality*, even if there is *asymmetry* in their [the parties'] *power relationship*."<sup>50</sup> The underlying assumption is that in the light of a loose or diffuse idea of power, the superiority of one party in one area, for example, military hardware may go along with the advantage of the other party in a different area, for example, knowledge of terrain.<sup>51</sup> In the end, "parties are equal enough to be able to *minimize* [...] issues of *significant imbalance*."<sup>52</sup>

A gender-sensitive perspective decodes this "myth of equality" as chimera: All problem-solving workshops have dealt with and/or taken place in PSCs, which are characterized by a highly gendered division of labor, including a strong polarization of gender roles. In all these countries, there is no "equality of opportunity" for most women to join as panel members or as participants in a problem-solving workshop: Whether women join the workshop or other non-official conflict resolution activities or not, is highly influenced by the tension of the "gender-culture double bind."<sup>53</sup> To be "gender-sensitive" means (as political minimum) "to bring women in" as workshop participants. To be "culture sensitive" means to accept local social and political "traditional" conditions and circumstances. This very often implies *exclusively* inviting men as participants. While conflict resolution scholars are still split on the question how far the problem-solving workshop may be considered in the sense of Burton as "transcultural island"<sup>54</sup> on which culture does not matter or is considered "neutral,"<sup>55</sup> the "gender-culture double bind" poses new (political and analytical) challenges.

The above analysis raises a more fundamental question: If women joined the problem-solving workshop as panel members or as participants would they make a difference?

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<sup>47</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>50</sup> Kelman 1990: Applying a Human Needs Perspective to the Practice of Conflict Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Case. 295 (Emphasis added).

<sup>51</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 55 (Emphasis added).

<sup>53</sup> See also Cordula Reimann 2001: Engendering the Field of Conflict Management: Why Gender Does Not Matter! Thoughts from a Theoretical Perspective, Peace Studies Papers. Fourth Series. Working Paper 2. Bradford: University of Bradford, Department of Peace Studies. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald J. Fisher 1997: Interactive Conflict Resolution. 262.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Burton 1990: Conflict. Resolution and Prevention. 14-15.

While there is no yet any convincing and rigorous empirical evidence on women's distinctly different impact on the actual course of a workshop, one could argue that the different roles women and men play during a conflict (often) prompt women's "different voice:" Due to a gender-specific division of labor in most conflicts, most women did and do experience the "culture of war" in a different way from men and hence indeed prioritize different needs, fears, concerns and interests in ending the war. In other words: What concrete difference do these differences make for the actual practice of problem-solving workshops?

The fact that some women may indeed prioritize different needs, fears, concerns and interests in ending the war may change the (open and hidden) agenda of the problem-solving workshop. Women who, for example, have been exposed to different forms of gender-specific violence like rape and domestic violence may put questions of women's needs in psychological healing, disarmament, reconciliation, and health on the political agenda. Yet, this does not mean to say that women are necessarily the better qualified panel members or participants armed with their supposedly in-born skills of empathy, patience, forgiveness and non-violence. Rather, it means that, due to their different roles and place in violent conflicts, women also offer a different perspective of how to solve a conflict. Without their perspective, interests and needs, the conflict analysis and the search for a lasting peace remain one-sided and distorted at best.

In conclusion, one could argue that with the selection of participants and panelists "the problem" starts: If women are not (identified as) highly visible social and political actors in an ongoing conflict or the post-settlement peacebuilding phase, it is very unlikely that women and will be "invited" to put forward their needs, fears and interests.

### 3.3 Strategies Taken

Burton speaks of "controlled communication" or "direct communication" defined as "an attempt to raise the level of communication to transform competitive and conflicting relationships into ones in which common values are being sought."<sup>56</sup> The aim is to offer a "new synthesis of knowledge"<sup>57</sup> and "new techniques and change in conceptualization"<sup>58</sup> based on the conflict reality of the participants.<sup>59</sup>

First of all, one could argue that the very term "controlled communication" suggests very much a scientific, "objective" power or control approach that is rather similar to a "man-over-nature" approach. Banks and Mitchell speak of a form of "appeasement wrapped up in a fancy academic language."<sup>60</sup> One could argue that a problem-solving workshop aims

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<sup>56</sup> Burton 1969: Conflict and Communication. 56.

<sup>57</sup> Burton 1990: Conflict. Resolution and Provention. 202.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 204.

<sup>60</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution. x.

at "professionalizing" social and human experience into a universal "scientific form"<sup>61</sup> where "...irrational" behavior is behavior not understood or not approved by others."<sup>62</sup> Yet, the panelist as "an outsider [...] has a clear understanding of the conflict and can ... also appreciate the *emotional* aspects of the situation. Passion has a role in effective mediation, the process should not be sterilized."<sup>63</sup> Using *gender as an analytical category* points to the underlying gendered connotations: The third-party as a neutral and impartial outsider may "accept" or "may bring in" emotions as (long as) they serve the "effective" and smoothly running facilitation process. Emotions defined as stereotypically female traits are absorbed. At the same time, the "rational" and "controlled communication" traditionally associated with men and masculinity is not changed. The analytical focus is on "cognitive characteristics" which permits "...privileged individuals to ignore the fact of their embodiment, and with that, the considerable material advantages they enjoy in virtue of their class, gender, and race."<sup>64</sup>

On a more positive note, one could argue that a gender-sensitive approach and its focus on changing perceptions of femininity and masculinity has strong similarity with the problem-solving workshop's analytical focus on clearing up (cognitive) perceptions. Both a gender-sensitive perspective and Burton's "controlled communication" imply "revealing the hidden data of goals and motivations,"<sup>65</sup> "questioning of assumptions"<sup>66</sup> and "...preconceived notions and perceptions."<sup>67</sup> This implies the need "...to listen for submerged issues, for *hidden* agendas, for *unnoticed* and *unacknowledged* hurts and resentments."<sup>68</sup> Along those lines, one could argue that the problem-solving workshop opens up some ontological space to discuss *gender as a hidden, unnoticed and unacknowledged agenda*. Continuing on another positive note, one could argue that Burton's problem-solving approach and its idea of direct communication has some prima facie purchase on Critical theory precisely on the question of conditions of adequate knowledge and undistorted communication. According to Burton,

...the solution is not the final end-product. It is in itself another set of relationships that contains its own set of problems...[P]roblem-solving frequently requires a new synthesis of knowledge or techniques and a change in theoretical structure...[T]he system of interactions is an open one, i.e. the parts are subject not merely to interaction among themselves (...) but to interaction with a wider environment over which there can be no control.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Betty A. Reardon 1985: *Sexism and the War System*. New York: Teachers College Press. 76.

<sup>62</sup> Burton 1972: *Resolution of Conflict*. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Azar 1990: *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*. 36 (Emphasis in original). See also Burton 1996: *Conflict Resolution. Its Language and Processes*. 47.

<sup>64</sup> Louise M. Antony 1993: *Quine as Feminist*. In: Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (eds.): *A Mind of One's Own. Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 195.

<sup>65</sup> John W. Burton and Frank Dukes 1990: *Conflict. Practices in Management, Settlement and Resolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 144.

<sup>66</sup> Burton 1990: *Conflict. Resolution and Prevention*. 5 and 20.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 20, 197-98, 209, 222.

<sup>68</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: *A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. 117 (Emphasis added).

<sup>69</sup> See John W. Burton 1979: *Deviance, Terrorism and War. The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems*. Oxford: Martin Robertson Press. 5. See also Burton 1990: *Conflict. Resolution and Prevention*. 202.

As such, Burton's "problem-solving workshop" comes very close to Habermas' "ideal speech situation." According to Habermas' "ideal speech situation" all participants have an equal opportunity to participate and to bring up a question.<sup>70</sup> This is to say, too, that the starting-point in Critical theory and in Burton's approach is the problematization of the origin of the given framework of institutions and social relations.

Like Burton's problem-solving approach, Critical theory aims at clarifying possible alternatives for social change and suggesting ways to transform the dominant social and political system. Similar to Burton, Critical theorist Horkheimer stresses that knowledge is not simply a reflection of a concrete historical situation, but that it has to be understood as a social force to generate social change as well.<sup>71</sup> While Burton's (above) anti-positivist line of argumentation clashes with his wider emphasis on a positivist study of conflict in general and of human needs in particular, it promotes the idea of "status equality" between the two conflict parties and between the representatives and the panel. The underlying assumption is that while focusing on changing the perceptions of the parties and their underlying needs, the very process can "make issues of power imbalance irrelevant..."<sup>72</sup> The general belief is that "...conflict conditions have been made by the parties themselves and they can unmake them"<sup>73</sup> and "it matters little whether the conditions creating conflict are in the real world or in the mind."<sup>74</sup> In the end, "...differences can be explored and potentially reconciled in a creative search for win-win solutions."<sup>75</sup>

A gender-sensitive perspective questions if and how power imbalances like gender inequality can be made *irrelevant* by changing (mis)perceptions and a facilitation process. This critique is anything but novel: It follows the earlier critique by Bercovitch, among others, who stressed that in the end problem-solving workshops remain unable to discuss and in fact sideline structural causes of conflict and power disparities as they cannot be tackled via communication, empathy and understanding.<sup>76</sup> A gender-sensitive perspective stresses that, given a highly gendered division of labor in most PSCs, material power structures are crucial as they do have a great impact on the selection of participants, selection of the setting and the distribution of agreed upon duties and tasks. Yet, a gender-sensitive approach does not stop here. It opens space for the more implicit and hidden

<sup>70</sup> See Jürgen Habermas 1962: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Neuwied: Luchterhand; Jürgen Habermas 1981: *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns*. Band 1. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp; and Thomas McCarthy 1978: *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. London: Hutchinson.

<sup>71</sup> Max Horkheimer 1972: *Critical Theory*. New York: Seabury Press. 215.

<sup>72</sup> Banks and Mitchell 1996: *A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Margot Light 1984: *Problem-Solving Workshops: The Role of Scholarship in Conflict Resolution*. In: Michael Banks (ed.): *Conflict in World Society. A New Perspective on International Relations*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 159.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>75</sup> Herbert C. Kelman 1992: *Informal Mediation by the Scholar/Practitioner*. In: Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin (eds.): *Mediation in International Relations. Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*. London: St. Martin's Press. 67.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Jacob Bercovitch 1984: *Social Conflict and Third Parties: Strategies for Conflict Resolution*. Boulder, CA: Westview Press.

power arrangements that are still in place but remain untouched by an open, largely symbolical willingness to change existing power structures. A gender-sensitive perspective calls for a more sophisticated analysis of the "hidden" and subtler power relations. In this context, one may refer, for example, to the feminist critique of family mediation practice.<sup>77</sup> Different feminist legal theorists have shown that facilitators are reluctant to acknowledge forms of dominance and power imbalances as they are extremely difficult to be clearly defined and "screened out," especially if they include personal or collective violence.<sup>78</sup>

Other earlier feminist theory stressed that power is an integral part of the very nature of language and makes it an instrument of domination.<sup>79</sup> Feminist and particularly post-modern feminist literature shows how language constructs gender identities and hence fosters hidden, hierarchical power structures.<sup>80</sup> Cohn, for example, discusses in her work on "nuclear language" how male defense scholars created a non-emotional, abstract and rational way of analyzing the development of mass nuclear weaponry in a highly "gendered discourse."<sup>81</sup> They did so by using sexualizing language and labeling emotional and moral considerations as the language of "wimps" and "pussies." In Cohn's work the way gendered assumptions structure and highly influence the national security discourse becomes evident. National security discourse becomes what Cohn calls a "gender discourse" defined as a symbolical organization of the world in gender-associated dichotomies.<sup>82</sup> Transferring these insights to the problem-solving workshop, one has to ask how far "direct communication" presents and promotes a "gendered discourse." Does "direct communication" re-enforce, explicitly and implicitly, stereotypical gender (mis)perceptions? The idea of a "gender discourse" brings into the open the more subtle and hidden power structures in language symbolism, which, in turn, structure both *verbal* and *non-verbal* communication.

As far as *verbal* communication is concerned, the use and notion of language remains rather (over)simplified in conflict resolution literature,<sup>83</sup> especially in Burton's work. As conflict resolution stresses the social construction of reality, the analytical focus is on different and multiple perceptions and truths of this reality. "Language" in most problem-solving workshops is primarily a medium or tool to express thoughts and convey meaning.

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Trina Grillo 1991: The Mediation Alternative: Some Process Dangers for Women. In: Yale Law Journal 100 (6): 545-610; and Diana Majury 1991: Unconscienability in an Equality Context. In: Family Law Quarterly 7: 123-53.

<sup>78</sup> Sandra A. Goundry et al. 1998: Family Mediation in Canada: Implications for Women's Equality. A Review of the Literature and Analysis of Data from Four Publicly Funded Canadian Mediation Programs. Ottawa: Status of Women, Canada, March. <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/>.56.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Sheila Rowbotham 1973: Women's Consciousness, Man's World. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>80</sup> See also Sara Mills 1995: Feminist Stylistics. London: Routledge; Sara Mills (ed.) 1995: Language and Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. London: Longman; Deborah Cameron 1985: Feminism and Linguistic Theory. Basingstoke: Macmillan; and Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds.) 1993: Gendering War Talk. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>81</sup> Carol Cohn 1987: Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals. In: Signs 12 (4): 687-718.

<sup>82</sup> Carol Cohn 1993: Wars, Wimps, and Women. In: Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds.): Gendering War Talk. 230.

<sup>83</sup> See also Terrell A. Northrup n.d.: The Uneasy Partnership Between Conflict Theory and Feminist Theory. 4-5.

It is the modern idea of language, which aims at making ideas and objects obvious or present by naming them in "direct, face-to-face communication." While Burton does devote special attention to language,<sup>84</sup> Burton's use of language remains reduced to the objective and rational representation of objects and ideas.

"Language" has been one of the main mainstream areas of feminist critique for the last three decades.<sup>85</sup> The starting-point of much feminist theory is that "*every* social practice is articulatory: It cannot simply be the expression of something already acquired but involves a continuous process of constructing new differences."<sup>86</sup> This clearly refers to the constantly shifting and socially specific forms and interpretations of language. The logical extension of the argument is that different social groups use different "language frameworks" available for them at a particular time, dependent on a particular place/location and specific circumstances. Along those lines, much feminist theory stresses the very link between knowledge, language construction and the everyday forms of living of women and men. To illustrate how the socio-cultural setting (highly) influences the way and exchange of (inter-personal) communication, one may just think of the many conflict situations especially in non-Western cultures: Here storytelling, poems and poetry are closer to the everyday life of most women and men than the rational discourse of the problem-solving workshop.<sup>87</sup> Using *gender as an analytical category* comes in by stressing that the very use of a particular kind of "rational" and "academic" language may be perceived as an exclusive and discriminatory form of power to some women and men. A gender-sensitive approach to language does not stop here. Not only does the application of *gender as an analytical category* stress the social construction and historical variability of language, it also points to language as a locus of power. Feminists brought into the open the intermediate relationship of gender inequality and "man-made" modern language<sup>88</sup> classified and transmitted in binary dichotomies, such as in masculinity/femininity, war/peace, interests/needs, and fact/values. They did so by decoding the dichotomous and dualist language as a site of power:<sup>89</sup> Far from being value-neutral or gender-neutral, modern language became a messenger of power relations and embodies the very mechanism for reproducing exclusive power structures.

<sup>84</sup> See Burton 1996: Conflict Resolution. Its Language and Processes. See also Kenneth Boulding 1962: Conflict and Defense. A General Theory. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>85</sup> See also Jane Mills 1989: Womanwords. London: Longman; and Luce Irigaray 1977: Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un. Paris: Editions de Minuit.

<sup>86</sup> See Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson 1992: Women's Interests. In: Michèle Barrett and Anne Philips (eds.): Destabilizing Theory. Contemporary Feminist Debates. Cambridge: Polity Press. 66 (Emphasis in original).

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Carolyn Nordstrom 1997: A Different Kind of War Story. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania. See also Michelle Lebaron 2001: Conflict and Culture. A Literature Review and Bibliography. Victoria, BC: Institute for Dispute Resolution, University of Victoria. See also Michelle Lebaron, Erin McCandless and Stephen Garon 1998: Conflict and Culture. A Literature Review and Bibliography 1992-1998. Working Paper No. 13. Fairfax, VA: ICAR, George Mason University.

<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Dale Spender 1982: Man Made Language. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler 1993: Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex.' London: Routledge.

Many conflict resolution scholars, mainly social psychologists, have discussed "hidden agendas and unnoticed hurts" vis-à-vis verbal communication and, particularly, built-in mechanisms of conflict such as "tunnel vision," "self-fulfilling prophecy," "stereotyping," "images" and "metaphors."<sup>90</sup> The focus is on changing the cognitive misperceptions among the parties. Misperceptions may be the results of "mirror images" or expressions of cultural differences among and within cultures. "Mirror images" or "enemy images" refer to the simultaneous creation of positive self-images of one's own party and negative images of the other party.<sup>91</sup> One of the ingredients of "mirror images" is an "irritating, patronizing, insulting, threatening"<sup>92</sup> or "dehumanizing or delegitimizing"<sup>93</sup> language used by one or both parties. With the help of the panel, parties should (learn how to) develop a de-escalatory and non-threatening language. Apart from openly sexist and androcentric language, a gender-sensitive perspective stresses that an "irritating" and "threatening" language may not be (necessarily) consciously or deliberately used by the third-party and the conflict parties, yet parties may feel dominated and threatened. This is to say that participants or panelists may subconsciously and inadvertently use forms of discriminatory language, which may be "irritating or alienating" and constitute a form of "power over" and exclusion for some women (and men).<sup>94</sup> If one applies this insight to the problem-solving workshop setting, it becomes clear that communication does not only take the form of "controlled communication," such as direct discussions of substance on needs and interests. Throughout the problem-solving workshop, the parties and third party constantly make use of non-verbal communication – albeit most of the time implicitly and subconsciously. This is to say, too, that the parties involved do not necessarily verbalize their ideas. Participants do not make their needs and fears explicit and, hence, misperceptions may not necessarily and always be obvious. In fact, gender (mis)perceptions tend to be hidden, subtle and, at the same time, closely and inextricably interwoven with the individual identity and – albeit even less obviously – with the social distribution of labor in the private and public sphere. As discussed earlier, the perception and the social norms of "femininity" and "masculinity" are always based on a very particular power distribution of gender roles in the private and public sphere.

Both the norms of gender symbolism and the power distribution have an important impact on the individual gender identity and how one defines him/herself as a "man" or as a

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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Kenneth E. Boulding 1956: *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press; Kenneth Boulding 1962: *Conflict and Defense*; Dennis Sandole 1984: *The Subjectivity of Theories and Actions in World Society*. In: Michael Banks (ed.): *Conflict in World Society. A New Perspective on International Relations*. 33-55; Robert Jervis 1970: *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; and Robert Jervis 1976: *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Nadim N. Rouhana and Susan T. Fiske 1995: *Perception of Power, Threat, and Conflict Intensity in Asymmetric Intergroup Conflict*. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39 (1): 49-81; Herbert C. Kelman 1973: *Violence Without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimness*. In: *Journal of Social Issues* 29 (4): 25-61; and Urie Bronfenbrenner 1961: *The Mirror Image in Soviet-American Relations: A Social Psychologist's Report*. In: *Journal of Social Issues* 17 (3): 43-56.

<sup>92</sup> Herbert C. Kelman 2000: *Group Processes in the Resolution of International Conflicts: Experiments from the Israeli-Palestinian Case*. In: Kelli A. Keough and Julio Garcia (eds.): *Social Psychology of Gender, Race and Ethnicity. Readings and Projects*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education. 90.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> See Northrup n.d.: *The Uneasy Partnership Between Conflict Theory and Feminist Theory*. 10.



"woman." This leads us to the question of the more hidden power structures within non-verbal communication. How does non-verbal communication enter the problem-solving workshop?

Generally speaking, *non-verbal* communication does not only repeat and complement *verbal* messages, but in fact, may *contradict* or may be a *substitute* for verbal messages.<sup>95</sup>

An illustrative example of non-verbal communication as *contradictory* to verbal messages may be the third party who openly and explicitly stresses its neutrality but interprets the needs and grievances of, for example women, as simply irrelevant, too emotional, oversensitive or simply not to the point. Following from that, the third party may tend to sideline the points put forward by the female participant, who in turn might feel intimidated and patronized and might stop engaging in the ongoing "direct communication."

To illustrate the idea of non-verbal messages as *substitute* for verbal communication, one may think of a female or male participant who is clearly upset while discussing the grievances of his or her ethnic group and does not talk or (deliberately) turns silent. Yet, this does not mean to say that he or she does not want to engage in the ongoing debate. Rather, it is her or his way of constructing the situation and communicating his or her needs and grievances. Due to expected stereotypical-gender roles a woman turning silent may be interpreted differently from a man doing so: "Women/femininity" may here be defined as more passive, shy, less assertive while a man turning silent may be classified as a moment of self-reflection or a sign of a passionate and committed party member. This example also illustrates that in problem-solving workshops men constantly engage in actions and behavior, which have been traditionally labeled feminine.

The complementary and contradictory function of non-verbal communication is best reflected in the decoding of gender and culture symbolism.<sup>96</sup> One may think of a problem-solving workshop in which Arab and non-Arab men and women participate: First of all, in Arab cultures to speak loudly indicates strength and sincerity and to speak softly reflects weakness and deviousness.<sup>97</sup> Now, irrespective of the actual substance and content of the conflict issues discussed, non-Arab men and women may interpret the loud voice by the Arab participants as simply irritating or threatening. Yet, while non-Arab men and Arab women may read the loud voice as an aggressive way of communicating, non-Arab and (some) Arab women may interpret it as not only aggressive but as a direct, personal attack.<sup>98</sup>

While in reality the complementary and contradictory dimensions of non-verbal communication tend to be more complex than what can be suggested here, the above

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<sup>95</sup> See William B. Gudykunst 1988: Bridging Differences. Effective Intergroup Communication. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 170-172.

<sup>96</sup> This does not mean to say that there are not any truly universal non-verbal cues. A smile as a sign for friendliness and cheerfulness may be one of them. Yet, even a smile has different cultural connotations: A smile in Sri Lanka has different cultural meanings than in the USA.

<sup>97</sup> See Gudykunst 1988: Bridging Differences. Effective Intergroup Communication. 189.

<sup>98</sup> See *ibid.* 187-90.

examples indicate that non-verbal communication as a form of "gendered discourse" takes the form of "shadow facilitation:" It is where the interchange of nonverbal, hidden agendas and masked assumptions create a momentum of its own.<sup>99</sup> Using *gender as an analytical category* puts "gender" center-stage as one of the triggers that sets hidden and taken-for-granted agendas in motion.<sup>100</sup> By its very definition, gender points to the underlying gender symbolism of language, like gender coding and meaning of terms such as conflict, violence, peace, rationality, emotions – all evocative of different notions of masculinity or femininity. Yet, this gender coding is far from universal or inborn. It is highly dependent on the social-cultural context and the dominant decoding rules.

In conclusion, the above analysis demonstrated how a gender-sensitive perspective exposes and decodes language as a "power tool" to (de)legitimize existing, more subtle and hidden power structures. It became clear that "direct and controlled" communication is always co-written by "indirect, uncontrolled" communication in form of a "shadow" "gender discourse." At the same time, and on a conciliatory note, the analysis brought into the open crucial points of convergence between "controlled communication" à la Burton and a gender-sensitive approach to communication. Both a gender-sensitive perspective and much conflict resolution theory highlight language as a powerful tool to interpret and reflect the socially constructed reality.

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<sup>99</sup> See Kolb and Williams 2000: *The Shadow Negotiation: How Women Can Master the Hidden Agendas that Determine Bargaining Success*. 21.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

## 4 Conclusion

At first sight, one could argue that, strictly theoretically and methodologically speaking, the gender-neutral discourse of the problem-solving workshop and its focus on direct communication and in-depth conflict analysis opens ontological space to bring in women's interests and their concerns like needs, grievances and fears. Yet, using *gender as an analytical category* showed that, however promising, this space remains limited: While most conflict resolution work stresses the identity as a key unit of analysis, the modern idea of identity remains rather simplistic and fixed. Burton's work on problem-solving workshops remains unable to theorize about the *social construction* and dynamic nature of *identity* and its diverse expressions, including the fluid and contradicting roles of women and men and changing notions of femininity and masculinity – especially in times of violent conflicts and their aftermath. While most conflict resolution literature is not able to capture the constantly changing and negotiated nature of identity/ies, its own discourse implicitly and unwittingly breaks with fixed identities, as in the above discussion of dichotomous gender dualism. It does so by "successfully" incorporating feminine/female traits like "empathy," "co-operation," and "communication skills." In fact, stereotypical feminine/female features and traits are heightened to crucial characteristics of the third party.

The gender-neutral discourse in the problem-solving workshop "neutralizes" the hierarchical power structures, women's needs, the allegedly non-political "private sphere," and most importantly here the gendered nature of PSCs. As a result, the gender-specific issues of conflict and violence, changing division of labor and changing notions of masculinity and femininity *and* their implications for the actual process of the problem-solving workshop remain "invisible," as considered irrelevant. By contrast, highly political issues and concerns from the official decision-making process as part of the public sphere are made "visible" during the private, non-official problem-solving workshop: While the "private sphere" remains apolitical and pre-given, the political sphere is turned "private" while, at the same time, remaining highly political. This clearly offers a new interpretation of the radical-feminist slogan "the private is political:" The power of what "is made *visible* and is *political*" and "what is left *invisible* and remains *apolitical*" is still in the "definition power" of men in the public sphere. By creating a "myth of equals involved in obstructed dialogue,"<sup>101</sup> the problem-solving workshop remains unable to explicitly address *given and hidden power asymmetries* among parties on the one hand, and the third party and the parties on the other. Hidden power structures come to full fore in the "culture and gender double bind" which is characteristic of most problem-solving workshops in/on PSCs.

The tension of the "culture-gender double bind" poses fundamental questions of shifting, often competing and contradicting *identity/ies*, which are linked to questions of *power structures and power distribution*. A gender-sensitive perspective points to the danger that, by inviting only men to the problem-solving workshops, the "old" principles and practices of patriarchy are kept in place in the "new" post-settlement institutions and policies. Applying *gender as an analytical category* then questions how far problem-solving workshops move clearly beyond the logic of *resolution* – if exclusive, gendered, power structures remain untouched and hidden.

<sup>101</sup> Vivienne Jabri 1996: Discourses on Violence. Conflict Analysis Reconsidered. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 155.



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