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**HUMAN SECURITY AND PEACEBUILDING
THROUGH A GENDER LENS**
CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Empirical evidence shows that while both women's near absence at the formal level as peace negotiators and political decision-makers and their informal peacebuilding contributions at the grassroots level have been routinely recognised, it remains difficult to translate gender awareness into workable plans for implementation. The paper argues for a hybrid position between cultural relativism and 'one size fits all' solutions. Four areas of attention are highlighted, namely women's ambivalent roles in peace and conflict, the challenges of a truly inclusive post-conflict transformation process, the need for an organised women's movement, and connecting the international legislative framework with the national context.

“If we are to find just and equitable responses to the great challenges of this era and increase all forms of human security ... then those who are most affected by insecurities and injustices must be involved in finding solutions.” (Noeleen Heyzer, The 2004 Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture)

INTRODUCTION

The important peacebuilding contributions women make at the grassroots and informal level has been repeatedly noted (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts & Parpart 2005:3). Mothers Fronts in Yugoslavia, Latin America and Russia, Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Chile and Kashmir, Association of Widows in Guatemala and Rwanda, all form part of a growing women’s movement to create a culture of peace. Ironically though, women’s near absence at the formal level as peace negotiators and political decision-makers has also been repeatedly noted. For instance, there were no Bosnian women at the Dayton negotiations in 1995, no recognition of women’s rights in Sierra Leone in 1996, and at the Arusha peace talks on Burundi, initially only one women present during the first round of talks (Porter 2003: 248). Despite increased awareness of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls in the areas of sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking, displacement, health and livelihood, the transformation agenda of post-conflict reconstruction processes routinely fail to consider the gendered causes and consequences of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

Why is it so difficult to translate an awareness of gender injustice into workable plans? The answer lies in returning to the fundamental purpose of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstructive work – addressing the root causes of conflict. Scholars such as Johan Galtung and others have devoted their lives to tease out the philosophical and theoretical roots of peace and conflict. But for some scholars, such as Cynthia Enloe, the answer is simple: patriarchy “in all its varied guises, camouflaged, khaki clad, and pin-striped – is a principal cause both of the outbreak of violent societal conflicts and of the international community’s frequent failures in providing long-term resolutions to those violent conflicts” (Enloe 2005:281). In view of the pervasiveness of patriarchal practices, efforts at mainstreaming gender in conflict-ridden or militarised areas are often open to ridicule, backlash and even forms of neo-patriarchy.

In similar vein Mary Caprioli (in Greenberg & Zuckerman 2006:19) links gender inequality to violence. She argues that gender inequality does not merely harm women's status and livelihoods, but more importantly, increases the likelihood that a state will experience internal conflict. Conversely, high levels of pluralism promote an inclusive stable democratic system. This makes the 'engendering' of the post-conflict reconstruction phase essential for achieving peace. In this paper 'gender' (referring to the socio-cultural construction of female and male identities) is thus viewed as a tool for building peace before and during the post-conflict period. A gender analysis therefore serves to identify areas for action, identify processes and structures that perpetuate inequalities, and also seek to illuminate possible interventions in conflict and peacebuilding situations. For example, in order for policymakers to design holistic policy, they should have disaggregated data at their disposal, documenting men and women's position regarding access to resources and participation in decision-making processes.

I begin this paper with a clarification of the theoretical assumptions underpinning the analysis of the role of gender in peacebuilding in Africa. I argue for a contextualised approach which takes cognizance of African feminism(s) and how they interact with other identities. From there the discussion shifts to a number of overarching guidelines for the way forward. The challenge is to move from awareness to implementation; from principle to practice in the form of concrete action plans. My aim is therefore to offer a macro-perspective of how lessons learned can be translated into standard practice.¹ The areas which are covered, include a plea for treating the myths associated with women's roles in conflict and peace with circumspection; the dangers of a transformation process which only creates a semblance of inclusivity; the need for an organised women's movement; and ways in which the international legislative framework regarding women's rights can be more effectively implemented at national level.

HUMAN SECURITY, PEACEBUILDING AND AFRICAN FEMINISMS

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report (1994) affirms the emphasis on human security as being universal, global and indivisible. This means that the security of people in one part of the world depends on the security of people elsewhere. Human security as policy framework forms the backdrop against which peacebuilding efforts take place in Africa. This people-centred understanding of security broadens the understanding of security

¹ I do not however attempt to suggest 'one size fits all' solutions.

to include freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to choose. State and non-state peacebuilders must be assessed against these three criteria in terms of their ability to promote or threaten human security. Peacebuilding must be rooted in a critical understanding of human security that links people's everyday experiences to global structures and whether they are included or excluded from the system. Feminist peaceworkers must ensure that those freedoms extend to women.

A feminist perspective can make security discourse more reflective of its own normative assumptions. In respect of an expanded human security concept, a feminist perspective highlights the dangers of masking differences under the rubric of the term 'human'. Despite the broad and inclusive nature of the human security approach, the gender dimension tends to be overlooked, hence providing only a partial understanding of security issues. Feminists therefore point out that an understanding of security issues needs to be extended to include the specific security concerns of women. There is a real danger that collapsing femininity or masculinity into the term 'human' could conceal the gendered underpinnings of, for instance, conflict resolution and peacebuilding practices. The term 'human' is presented as though it were gender-neutral, but very often it is an expression of the masculine. In this respect Puechguirbal (2005:3) contends that by putting women in the same group as the elderly, the handicapped and children, the potential of women as autonomous actors with rights is undermined. It is fallacious to argue that disarming militia, warlords and rebels would automatically address women's insecurity!

One should also avoid the presentation of women as a group, since such a practice masks the differences within that group. The security needs of Western women and women in the developing world are different to the extent that no global sisterhood can be assumed. Attempts of Western feminists to speak on behalf of Third World women as a uniformly oppressed group have led to outright clashes with Koranic injunctions regarding the role of women in society and may, in fact, exacerbate African women's insecurity through repressive forms of neo-patriarchy (Tickner 2002a:345). In response to such universalising tendencies, African women have begun to reassert their own brands of feminism. In Africa in particular, gender is intertwined with other identities such as race, class, nationality, and culture. If we therefore genuinely want to make sense of gender in Africa, we need to foreground the specific assumptions of uniquely African sets of feminisms and allow space for indigenous approaches to human security to evolve.

The discourse on the role of women in peacebuilding is largely situated in the liberal and standpoint feminist paradigms (Vincent 2003:5-8). According to the critics (see Väyrynen

2004), United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (like the Millennium Development Goals) is enshrined within a neo-liberal, managerialist or problem-solving approach, which is essentially state-centric and follows a relatively narrow approach to security². Consequently, from a critical point of view, the gender roles which this neo-liberal paradigm ascribes to are rather one-dimensional and unproblematised. In other words, women are added to the peacebuilding discourse and the many ambivalent gender voices and power relations are left unexamined.

The liberal feminist paradigm produces a hegemonic universalism through its pursuit of the norm of equality (women becoming like men); whereas standpoint feminism produces another kind of universalism, namely a binary universalism – men as dominating and violent, women as subordinate and peaceful mothers. Both paradigms offer partial and rather unsatisfactory explanations, since both overlook the fact that reality is fractured, identities overlap and experiences are contextually based. In contrast, postmodernist feminist views prioritise special interests over general interest. This helps to steer away from easy generalisations, since the nuances of power and identity politics are taken into account.

But while any unitary approach is bound to exclude certain groupings, an overreliance on difference could in turn encourage cultural relativism, political fragmentation and a weakening of the feminist emancipatory agenda (Tickner 2002b:277). As Tickner (2001:136) also warns, “if feminism becomes paralyzed by women not being able to speak for others, then it will only reinforce the legitimacy of men’s knowledge as universal knowledge”. Navigating an alternative between these two extremes may offer us an approach that is culturally relevant but not relativistic or deterministic. Synthesis of difference and disadvantage can be achieved through recognising difference as a tool within a bigger process of emancipation. An awareness of diversity is essential to an explanation of how and why systems of domination originate and are kept in place, but this does not nullify the universal fact that forms of oppression do exist across space and time. Difference should therefore not be absolutised.

Such an alternative involves the creation of hybrid identities. As hybrid manifestations, African feminisms acknowledge their connections with international feminism but demarcate a specific African feminism with specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities

²The ‘Human Security Now’ Report (2003) of the UN Commission on Human Security similarly represents a marriage of liberal and radical elements into a pragmatist blend of state and people’s security with an emphasis on strengthening institutions.

of African women's lives. Their point of departure is to address oppressions simultaneously, and in that context gender is but one unit of analysis that sometimes has to subject itself to the universal bond between men and women against racism and imperialism. One of the most prominent African feminist alternatives is the notion of 'womanism', on the basis that this better accommodates African women's reality and identity and the dynamics of empowerment. The concept emphasises cultural contextualisation, the centrality of the family and the importance of cooperation with men (Kolawole 2002:92-98). Womanism thus refers to a feminist inclusionary approach rather than a feminist transformationalist approach (Hassim in Gouws 2006). Through their emphasis on contextualised universalism, African feminisms have helped to clarify the link between strategic gender needs that are feminist in nature and practical or tactical women's needs grounded in women's everyday experiences. Women's interests need not always coincide with gender interests. In Africa, in particular, where feminism is severely stereotyped, a more flexible interaction between these two categories is required. The notion of 'locationality' is useful here in that it conceptualises 'who we are and where we come from' in a material and non-material sense as a matter of culture, history and geography *and* values, ideology and spirituality. Relevance within society is the key to ensuring that gender theory gains legitimacy (Tickner 2002a:345).

So what one needs then is the application of Resolution 1325 in an 'engaged' manner. In conflict situations where differences of race, religion or ethnicity play a huge role it becomes necessary to seek common ground. I therefore agree with Porter (2006:252) that there is a need to "affirm universal rights of dignity, respect, and quality that hold true across all cultural differences". These framework affirmations must however not become straightjackets. The liberal notion of gender equality can therefore embrace cultural difference but should not reinforce cultural subjugation. To make sense of this distinction in practice, Baxi (in Porter 2006:252) identifies three levels: the abstract universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the abstract particularity of women's rights as human rights³; and the concrete universality of rights in everyday experience. The notion of 'womanism' as a particular type of feminism takes its cue from the locationality or situatedness embodied in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which emphasises communitarian rather than individualist rights and duties toward family, community, the state and the international community (Article 18). In this context, often rather than seeking economic independence, women would mend social relations between men and women, even though these relations remain deeply unequal (Pankhurst 2003:171). This shows that culture-specific applications, as long as they are broadly

³ This bifurcation is necessary since women and men have not been able to equally enjoy their rights.

consistent with the universal human rights framework, may also promote a degree of emancipation.

Thus by making a connection between the liberal concept of women's representation at peace negotiations, their role as decision-makers in a post-conflict dispensation, and sustainable peace in the long-term, lofty moral arguments about gender is translated into effective practice.

WOMEN /W PEACEBUILDING

The notion of 'peace' is broadly defined in this paper in terms of social justice and recognises the inclusive nature of positive peace by means of both formal and informal processes through all the stages of conflict.

Peacebuilding⁴ underpins the work of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between conflictants. According to Galtung's conflict triangle (1996:112), peacekeeping lowers the level of destructive behaviour, peacemaking aims to change attitudes of the main protagonists (through mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and negotiation), and peacebuilding tries to overcome the contradictions which lie at the root of the conflict (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse 2000) through processes of demilitarisation, democratisation, development and justice. This can be done by identifying and supporting "structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a lapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali cited in Van Nieuwkerk 2000). The goal is to promote human security by enhancing the indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence, i.e. to institutionalise the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The line between peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction is very fine indeed, since both terms suggest on-going processes of change after formal cessation of conflict and should not be seen as sequentialist. Post-conflict reconstruction, therefore, is aimed at operationalising the institutional context created by peacebuilding through a variety of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights mechanisms (Strickland & Duvvury 2003:6). What is important, though, is consideration of gender in peacebuilding during the pre-settlement phase (e.g. during negotiations), since inclusion or exclusion of marginalised

⁴ UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali first used this concept in the 1992 and 1995 editions of "An Agenda for Peace".

groups here already indicates the potential success or failure of long-term societal reconstruction.

In the 1990s, there had been a shift of emphasis away from top-down forms of peacebuilding towards more localised, holistic, and people-centred efforts. The point is that those who are most directly affected must be the major interpreters and resolvers of problems of security. However, these shifts to the grassroots have not necessarily ensured the inclusion of women in formal peace processes and political negotiations. Also, conventional definitions of peacebuilding - as espoused by the UN - do not explicitly acknowledge informal activities (such as peace marches, intergroup dialogue), thereby rendering invisible the work of women in informal peacebuilding (Porter 2003:256). I therefore concur with Duffey (in Miall et al, 2000:61) that this exclusion of women may well be a factor which perpetuates the exclusionist and violent discourses which sustain the conflict in the first place.

In the Arusha (Burundi) peace process (2000) women were reluctantly allowed in as observers at a very late stage and could only use informal lobbying to influence the negotiations. This came a few months before signing as a result of the intervention by UN experts and the chief negotiator, Nelson Mandela. Only through the impact of regional women's networks (the women's collective comprising thirty organisations) at the peace negotiations, did the All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference succeed in having 23 of their recommendations included in the peace accord (Puechguirbal 2005:5-6; Karamé 2001:35; King 2005:40; Porter 2003:248). The initial exclusion of women from the UN-sponsored peace conferences in Somalia also served to increase the legitimacy and power of the warlords who were not accountable to the local communities. Women's involvement in informal grassroots peacebuilding (e.g. through inter-clan marriage, acting as intermediaries between opposing clans) was completely overlooked (Woodhouse & Duffey 2000:205) until in 2000, when women organising themselves in the so-called Sixth Clan persuaded the leaders of the five main clans in Southern Somalia to attend peace negotiations and to think beyond clan differences (King 2005:38). Once again outside parties such as the Life and Peace Institute also had to intervene to help the women's groups to gain access to the Somalian peace talks as observers (Porter 2003:260; Pankhurt 2003:163). The so-called 'gender neutrality' of conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding initiatives has had dire consequences for peace negotiations, since they failed to consider the specific effects of conflict on women and men and the gendered consequences of conflict intervention.

This gender critique of peacebuilding underlines two challenges. Firstly, it highlights the problem of how to make the formal peace process benefit from the efforts of women at the

informal grassroots level without the latter being subsumed by contestation at the elite level. The symbiotic relationship between these two levels must be recognised. Secondly, it remains a challenge to find ways in which the four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction, namely security, justice and reconciliation, social and economic well-being, and governance and participation all can be instilled with a genuine gender perspective. Greenberg and Zuckerman (2006) (also see Zuckerman & Greenberg 2005:70-82) propose the application of three interrelated gender dimensions:

- Women-focused activities;
- gender-aware programming (gender mainstreaming); and
- transforming gender roles to heal trauma, build social capital and end further violence.

In all three dimensions a rights-based approach is followed.

- In the first dimension tactical women-focused activities aim to overcome gender inequalities in respect of (women's) rights, i.e. political rights to representation and participation, property rights, the right to employment without discrimination, and the right to freedom from violence. Progress in this dimension is largely hampered by a lack of sustainable funding and failure of women leaders to promote issues of gender.
- The second dimension concentrates on macro- and micro-economic issues and draws a clear link between gender inequality and economic and governance deficits. Such programmes must address unequal gender relations and power dynamics. Macro-economic reforms (e.g. liberalisation, privatisation and decentralisation) must recognise the differential impact of resource allocations on men and women and should therefore focus on removing gender barriers. Positive examples include the role of women in monitoring public expenditures and conducting gender-budget analyses, in countries such as South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania (Zuckerman & Greenberg 2005:74). At micro-economic level facilitating access to credit and adopting gender-sensitive programmes in agriculture, health, and employment serve as possible strategies. But particularly important in the aftermath of violent conflict is the resource allocation in respect of demilitarisation, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR). Note for instance the male bias in the case of Angola where women who followed soldiers into the bush to perform services as carriers, cooks and forced sexual partners were excluded from benefits (Zuckerman & Greenberg 2005:75). In Angola, for example, disabled men received prostheses whereas women who were victims of landmines received none. Greenberg and Zuckerman (2006:17) contend that many of the DDR programmes are

implemented in haste, based on outdated so-called gender-neutral models.

- The third dimension of transforming gender roles is strategic in its long-term nature and aims to change societal values. The negative social capital of the conflict period must make room for trust, healing and social networking at individual, family and community level. In this, room should be made for challenging the connection between femininity/masculinity and militarism.

The value of women's contribution in these three areas lies in the fact that they bring issues to the table which might easily be overlooked as a result of the institutionalisation of patriarchy. These include issues of reproduction, sexual violence, land reform, access to loans, property rights, healthcare, and education, to mention a few. A rights-based framework with an emphasis on mainstreaming alone could be criticised for its narrow neo-liberal assumptions. For that reason I would argue that a multi-pronged approach overcomes this by working on many levels. It not only promotes capacity building, but also works towards transforming structures of power - especially when it comes to the issue of interrogating gender roles for the purpose of rebuilding social capital. In this sense a human rights framework provides the practical context for implementing the abstract political ideal of human security. This approach facilitates a shift from gender sensitivity to gender transformation across a variety of contexts.

What follows is not an exhaustive list of recommendations, but rather broad themes or propositions which researchers and practitioners need to bear in mind when engaging with gender in the area of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

Unveiling women's many faces in peace and conflict

The picture which emerges is one of ambivalence, because throughout history women have played a vast array of very diverse roles during times of war and peace, many of which have been of an indirect and symbolic nature. These myths hamper a deep understanding of women's contribution to peacebuilding. It is also imperative to promote greater awareness and documented knowledge of the various roles played by women during conflict. The transformation of the post-conflict situation is doomed if men in power continue to perceive women simply as victims or mothers.

The first 'lesson' to learn before the notion of roles in conflict and peace can be analysed is not to use the terms 'gender' and 'women' interchangeably. Men's roles are also not static and masculinity comes in many guises. For example, variation in notions of manhood occurs

across culture, class, and conflict types (e.g. wars of liberation as opposed to (un)civil war). Whether men are involved in socio-political work or actively safeguarding the *status quo* may also impact on their propensity to shed patriarchal behaviour and belief systems. Men's reaction to the mainstreaming of women's issues in peacebuilding is also under-researched. Pankhurst (2003:169) contends that "[w]hile the analytical debate about masculinity is ... quite developed, it has not yet significantly influenced peace-building policy".

Women's involvement in the peace movements has often been in their capacity as mothers. This has invariably led to essentialist thinking – equating mothers with care and love as opposed to violence – and has presented gender roles as static (Puechguirbal 2004:60). This goes against the feminist contention that gender is socially constructed and that both men and women can 'unlearn' certain behaviours.

The stark dichotomy of depicting women in conflict situations as victims and in peacebuilding contexts as trouble-makers drives home the extent to which gender stereotypes dominate the conflict management discourse. Both images tell only part of the story. It is a myth to assume that women and girls are not associated with violence during armed conflict. Some Rwandan women became complicit in rape and murder during the genocide. In the Eritrean liberation struggle women played combative roles and there were notorious women such as "Adama Cut Hand" and "Krio Mammy", a member of the leadership of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (George-Williams 2005:63). War also offers possibilities for the empowerment of women. The social and political gains from the liberation struggle in many African countries testify to this. In other types of wars, such as the so-called identity wars, gains obtained by women are less visible and women in this context are therefore still largely viewed as victims rather than active subjects. However, economically women have learnt to capitalise on the conflict situation. Cases of women providing militia with fresh food, cooking and washing clothes, mothers and families benefiting from the war booty their sons reaped, and involvement in smuggling of contraband arms, precious stones and drugs have been documented (Bop 2001:24-25).

Chinkin (2004:33) reminds peacebuilders not to make assumptions about the needs and priorities of women within the conflict zone. Such a perception reaffirms the victimhood of these groups and deprives them of their agency and rights as independent actors, with context-specific needs. Women in Burundi were concerned about protection, the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence, land and education for girls. Liberian women chose disarmament over elections as their most pressing concern. Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) listed, amongst others, the inclusion of women in transitional government, violence

against women, disarmament, and reintegration of child soldiers as their goals. For the women of Sudan the return of refugees and the internally displaced as well as increasing women's capacity to enter the democratisation processes are the most pressing issues (Africa Report, 28 June 2006). Certain categories of women have specific needs. For example, issues of reintegration pertain to former women combatants; the economic livelihood of women active in the transfer of small arms may be threatened by a peace deal; and rape victims may need assistance in the area of HIV and AIDS.

The second 'lesson' one can draw from paying closer attention to roles, is that tradition plays a very ambiguous role in stereotypical thinking about women in peace and conflict. Azzain Mohamed's study of women in the Darfur Region of Western Sudan (2004) has unveiled examples of how these women instigate violence through their traditional roles and relationships with husbands and other men in their societies. These women are called the *Hakkammas* and live among nomadic communities. They use a variety of methods to induce feelings of revenge or anger in the men in their communities. These include mocking them openly in public places, singing songs about their 'cowardice' and refusing to let them into their own homes on the grounds that another tribe has 'taken over'. This behaviour can have the effect of driving the men out of the community until they return with proof of committing a courageous 'manly' act. In traditional cultures such as these, the so-called 'shame culture' plays a huge role in instigating acts of violence under pressure to perform according to stereotyped gender roles. However, he also cites examples where the shame technique is used to convince men of the necessity to promote peace. Azzain Mohamed (2004:23) concludes by remarking that the role of women in public life in Western Sudan is hugely contradictory: "On the one hand, in many respects men subordinate women, but on the other, women have a great influence on the behaviour of men." In this regard Emebet Mulugeta (2005:121) cites the cases of the Amhara and Tigray culture (Ethiopia) where women are given as wives to one of the disputing groups in order to prevent further conflicts and thus become 'instruments' of peacemaking in a very literal sense of the word!

The gains made by women during liberation struggles can be a double-edged sword. Greater emphasis on nationalistic loyalties often obscures women's multiple roles and underplays gender equality and advances already made by feminists before the struggle (as in the Chiapas case). In other cases where women are less organised they may gain equality by default or through the 'back door' and not as a result of a change of value system. The gains made in gender relations during conflicts are therefore usually easily reversed in the aftermath of the conflict. Consequently gender relationships in post-conflict situations tend to reinforce traditional patterns. Internal and external stakeholders in the post-conflict phase therefore

have a huge responsibility to conceptualise and plan the transition from conflict to peace holistically and equitably.

Post-conflict transformation for whom?

In the previous section I argued that an understanding of women's (and men's) often contradictory roles will benefit those in charge of post-conflict reconstruction, since it would allow advance (proactive) planning regarding the integration of gender issues. Such knowledge would also provide a basis from where the window of opportunity to establish a gender-responsive framework in the post-settlement period could be enlarged.

The African Union (AU) Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework (2002) makes the right noises in that it recognises that sustainable peace and development can only be achieved if a comprehensive strategy based on humanitarian and developmental issues is adopted. The intention is to serve as an overall strategy from where individual states can develop their own context-specific action plans. Although women are included amongst the vulnerable in respect of resource mobilisation, as a general framework this policy seriously negates the issue of gender mainstreaming (Murithi 2006:17-19). Women are ignored not only as part of civil society, but also as a sector of the society which has a specific role to play in reconstruction through their economic involvement in agriculture and the informal economy, in their capacity as heads of households, and through nation-building and the promotion of a culture of forgiveness.

Complacency about the comprehensive nature of transformation could easily mask gender inequalities embedded in so-called transformed institutions. The pursuit of gender equality forms part and parcel of developing an accountable, transparent and legitimate system of governance. For instance, peace agreements brokered under the guidance of the West often privilege civil and political rights at the expense of social and economic rights (e.g. the 2003 Liberian Peace Agreement) or the human rights component is added as an after-thought to the political negotiations. Sudanese women were largely excluded from both the North-South and Darfur peace negotiations, perceived by some as an agreement between the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) without any real input from civil society. It follows then that neither the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement nor the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement provides guarantees for women's participation in the implementation processes. Women's absence here is further reflected in the failure of achieving the promised broader representation of women in formal government structures. The commitment towards greater participation of Congolese women in governance

has likewise remained a paper exercise and sexual violence against women continues unabated (Africa Report, 28 June 2006).

Post-conflict transformation is complex in that it involves many transitions in one, such as from war to peace; from authoritarianism to democracy; from a command economy to free market; and also from patriarchy to gender mainstreaming and ultimately emancipation. Not only is national political leadership and support of the international community essential, but careful linking and sequencing of elements of transition is also crucial. Two gender-related issues threaten the transition: Firstly, the reconstruction is often disconnected due to the fact that while women's activists are preoccupied by grassroots human rights violations, gender violence and lack of basic service provision, the warring parties and external actors strike deals without them. Secondly, a gender perspective is often imposed from the outside in a situation which is already undergoing complex transition. While there is a real danger that such cultural imposition could do more harm than good in the short-term, I would still contend that long-term peace cannot be divorced from the aim of achieving 'gender justice'. The notion of 'gender justice' should permeate every dimension of justice: legal justice should address the normative framework underpinning discriminatory laws and practices against women (e.g. inheritance laws that prevent women from owning property); restorative justice must deal with the violation of women's rights and war crimes; and distributive justice should address structural and systematic inequalities of a political, economic and social nature (Heyzer 2004:26). The tendency to concentrate on restorative justice only should therefore be avoided and rule-of-law institutions should be transformed to align with reconstruction agenda. In this regard the consistent mainstreaming of gender in all aspects of the transition can serve as an important integrative tool to facilitate the coherence of the overall transitional process. The normative glue necessary for this to happen relates to a gender sensitive linking of peace, justice, governance and development.

Gender-sensitive political reconstruction implies a focus on women as active agents of political change. Women's organisations together with the media should function as critical watchdogs overseeing the process of democratic transition. But ironically, reconstruction and rehabilitation assume an element of going back to the way things were. For women the goal of peacebuilding is not restored dependence and subordination, but rather a continuation of any positive benefits which they have accrued during the conflict. Repatriation of women often means losing newly gained independence. In 1998, at a conference in Dakar, Liberian and Sierra Leonean women decided against repatriation (George-Williams 2005:65). Puechguirbal (2004:61) states in this regard that "women need to take advantage of the transformative experiences of war and a weakened patriarchal order to build up a strong women's movement

... before traditions that oppress women have returned to take over the space that had opened momentarily". The women's movement in Africa has a huge responsibility to oversee this transition.

Searching for a common political platform:

Can the African women's movement get it right?

The first challenge relates to definition. In order to understand the role of the women's movement in peacebuilding in Africa it is firstly necessary to clarify the conceptual murkiness – feminist movements share a power analysis of women's subordination on the basis of gender. In contrast, women's movements unite around women's identities as women (Gouws 2006). But does this distinction help us to move closer to peace on the ground?

Experience in the DRC, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia during the 1990s have showed that the involvement of local women's groups in peace processes was marked by a lack of long-term political strategies for achieving their objectives (Puechguirbal 2004:47). One of the lessons to learn from this is that the integration of women's perspectives in peace processes requires organised advocacy by women. Women use a variety of modes of expression such as poems, plays, marches, prayers, physically barricading peace talks with their bodies as human shields, and intercepting delegates in corridors. These means are innovative and eye-catching in the short-term, but have little impact in long-term strategies for securing a seat at official peace negotiations. Women need a political platform with a feminist consciousness, i.e. a movement to act as a powerful force for reducing violence and fostering democratic public institutions. Without such a platform women will not have access to the national, regional and international institutions that could help them transform social attitudes and cultural norms.

This takes us back to the point made about womanism as a particular hybrid form of African feminism. As mentioned earlier the distinction between feminist inclusionary and feminist transformationalist strategies helps to clarify the nature of African women's movements. The former, being more focused on tactical women's needs, follows a more limited strategy of engagement with the state to include women into the policymaking and implementation spaces. Clearly this strategy with its emphasis on gender mainstreaming runs a much bigger risk of cooptation and a deradicalising and depoliticising of the emancipatory feminist agenda. The latter concentrates more on the long-term strategic analysis and transformation of gendered power relations. Both approaches are risky. The tactical approach of 'fast tracking' women's inclusion in decision-making structures is top-down and often a quick fix, whereas the strategic approach takes longer and has to balance top-down with bottom-up methods – a process which requires commitment, endurance and the ability to see the bigger picture.

African feminists involved in formal and informal peacebuilding initiatives should therefore clarify the relationship between ends and means. Is their participation in peacebuilding part of a bigger feminist project? Or is the emancipation and empowerment of women viewed as instrumental to achieving a peaceful process of nation-building? And in both cases, what language is used to communicate or promote these objectives?

Secondly, the question of autonomy is one of the most pressing challenges to the women's movement in their peacebuilding work. This relates to the dangers inherent in the transition of society from conflict to post-conflict. This may sound paradoxical, but experience in countries such as South Africa (see Gouws 2006) has showed that institutionalising gender mechanisms within structures of government could demobilise the women's movement through cooptation, i.e. when goals can be achieved without structural reform. Demobilisation leads to depoliticisation when no explicit political strategies are being adopted, i.e. when women's movements do not engage in specific policy debates.⁵ This reflects the general dilemma of civil society: government views women's nongovernmental organisations as service providers and not as representatives of a constituency with a legitimate right to advocate change. In this regard it is useful to remember that one of the main reasons for Uganda's fairly advanced and organised women's peace movement is the fact that it has managed to remain independent, especially in funding terms. The women's movement therefore needs to carefully construct its insider and outsider strategies, also in relation to the movement's alliances with other movements such as labour and men who share the feminist notion of inclusivity.

Thirdly, networking to share common experiences and practical training for conflict resolution and trauma counseling within the broader community have contributed towards significantly reducing violence (Africa Report, 28 June 2006). In 1999, women in the Sudan facilitated the Wunlit Tribal Summit to end violence between the Dinka and Nuer people. Similarly Burundian women have created associations for peace and reconciliation to bring Hutu and Tutsi women together for their informal role in the Arusha peace talks (Porter 2003:260)⁶. In 2003, Liberia's women's movement embarked on a "Mass Action for Peace" campaign. Always dressed in white, these women achieved high visibility on the streets of Monrovia. The women successfully combined protest with a united front of regional women's organisations. With the support of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (of the West Africa Network for

⁵ The unwillingness of the ANC Women's League to speak out on gender violence and HIV/AIDS in the Zuma rape trial is a case in point.

⁶ Also see the inter-clan mediation role played by many Somalian women.

Peacebuilding, WANEP) and the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) a parallel meeting of women was held during the negotiations culminating in "The Golden Tulip Declaration of Liberian Women Attending the Peace Talks". In 2001, Rwandan women ex-combatants from diverse political groupings formed "Ndabaga" in order to broker negotiations between female ex-combatants and the National Demobilisation Commission (NDC). Many of these women are now active in Rwandan parliamentary politics (Centre for Conflict Resolution & UNIFEM 2005:28).

The best example of networking at the sub-regional level is MARWOPNET - a network of women's organisations established in 2000 in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. This group transcended class and educational barriers amongst women and was successful in bringing the heads of state of the three countries back to the negotiating table in 2001. Ironically though, MARWOPNET was not invited to attend the Summit in 2002. This model of activism should be replicated in other African regions (Karamé 2004:20; Puechguirbal 2004:53-54).

On the continental or regional level, the Federation of African Women Peace Networks (FERFAP) has linked more than 20 women's organisations in over 15 countries. Their "Peace Torch" is recognised worldwide as a symbol of peace (Centre for Conflict Resolution & UNIFEM 2005:29). Increasingly calls are made for adopting a Pan-African plan of action for addressing women's issues and evidence of strategic partnerships and planning by women's networks is accumulating. Since the formation of the AU in 2001 and the creation of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) women have significantly increased their role in formal political decision-making. The President of the PAP (Gertrude Mongella), the Chair of the AU Peace and Security Council, and 50% (5 out of 10) of the AU Commissioners are women (Diop & Makan-Lakha 2003:39)⁷. In July 2003, heads of state and the AU adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The AU created a Directorate on Women, Gender and Development to coordinate all gender-related activities of the Commission. Four strategic consultations led by women's organisations under the auspices of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) have been instrumental in these changes. These initiatives were the Durban Consultation (June 2002); the Dakar Strategy Meeting (April 2003); the Maputo Women's Pre-summit Meeting (June 2003); and a meeting in Ethiopia (July 2004). At the 2004 Addis Ababa meeting women's organisations produced the Solemn Declaration on Gender

⁷ The PAP protocol stipulates that each country's delegation must have a minimum quota of 20% women members of parliament.

Equality in Africa, which led to a proposal by African heads of state to monitor themselves on gender mainstreaming. In 2005, in Abuja, Nigeria, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the AU, and the nongovernmental Africa Leadership Forum pushed for continued monitoring of progress regarding gender parity. In the same year, FAS was instrumental in establishing its Pan-African Centre for Gender, Peace and Development, followed by the first African Gender Awards given to Presidents Wade and Mbeki (King 2005:28-29).

Overcoming institutional and political inertia remains the single biggest challenge. The under-resourced situation of the PAP needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Three of the four states who failed to pay the 75 per cent shortfall are oil-exporting countries, namely Algeria, Libya and Nigeria.

Much work also remains to be done in formulating

- an effective gender mainstreaming strategy which goes beyond mere gender parity in the Peace and Security Council (PSC)⁸, the African Standby Force and the Panel of the Wise; and
- an efficient coordinating framework for managing gender within the AU structures at large. For instance, there is a lack of alignment between the six PAP portfolio committees, the eight AU commissioners' portfolios, and the 14 AU Commission Directorates. The AU Commission Directorate on Women, Gender and Development does not correspond with the very broad PAP Portfolio Committee on Gender, Family, Youth and People with Disabilities, Justice and Human Rights. Furthermore there is no AU Commissioner tasked specifically with Gender affairs.

These overall successes at the elite level do not necessarily translate into gains for women at grassroots level. For this reason, concerted capacity-building of women peacebuilders and/or decision-makers is necessary. In a political sense it refers, amongst others, to overcoming political illiteracy and developing an ideological framework to sustain collective strategies of the women's movement. This also includes allowing women the space to develop skills and

⁸This 15-member organ for prevention, management and resolution of African conflict does mention women in relation to their vulnerability in conflict situations and their role in promoting peace, but fails to define clearly how women will be integrated into its structures, such as the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, the Military Staff Committee, and the Peace Fund.

gain experience in negotiation, advocacy, and lobbying techniques (Puechguirbal 2004:47). Increasing women's visibility at the negotiation table will ensure that their informal contribution is recognised.

Finally, dissemination of information is central to overcoming all other challenges. Women should monitor the availability of consolidated data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the accurate registration of these impacts country by country. Furthermore, women's organisations should ensure that at the local level there exists an awareness and understanding of the international legislative framework for gender parity. Research indicated that many women's groups in Africa have not used Resolution 1325 in their advocacy since they are not aware of its contents. There is therefore a definite need for wider dissemination among local women's and other groups. (Sub)regional women's groups can be quite effective in calling for accelerated ratification of protocols and other commitments. All these efforts work towards building a common platform against state-induced patriarchy. In this regard women's role in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue included, amongst others, to recall in an open letter commitments by the DRC government to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Resolution 1325, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) (Whitman 2006:39).

Translating the international legislative framework into action plans at national level

Much progress has been made in the last decade in developing a comprehensive rights-based international framework to which most governments in Africa subscribe. Women in post-conflict situations nowadays have the advantage of drawing on international legislative frameworks to assist them in their cause of equality and emancipation. Thus, linking local initiatives to international systems is imperative to peace processes. In this regard the CEDAW (1979), the UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)⁹, and the Heads of State

⁹ Article 10 of the Protocol to the African Charter states the following: "(1) Women have the right to peaceful existence and the right to participate in the promotion and maintenance of peace. (2) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women" in peace education; in the structures and processes of peacebuilding, in all decision-making structures, and in all aspects of planning, formulation and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction. It came into force in November 2005 and to date 15 African states have ratified the protocol.

Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004)¹⁰ serve as useful instruments in the pursuit of women's feminist and security agenda. It is also encouraging to note that the UN recently established a Peacebuilding Commission as an intergovernmental advisory body to promote a coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding (and human security by implication) through recognising the link between development, security and human rights. It also affirmed the important role of women in peacebuilding, stressing the salience of their equal participation in peacebuilding as well as the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the Commission (UNSC Resolution 1645 (2005)).

In October 2000, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The Resolution made two very pertinent points. Firstly, it recognised the severe impact of conflict on women and children and the consequences of this for peacebuilding. Secondly, it affirmed the important role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Although generally regarded as a political watershed for women involved in peace and security work, it remains a rhetorical commitment. The UN has no mandate to enforce implementation and regular feedback on progress from states.

In 2002, two subsequent reports on this topic were released. The UN Secretary-General submitted a study on "Women, Peace and Security" and an Independent Experts' Assessment was commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to conduct comprehensive research on women, war and peace. In 2004, reporting on the progress in implementing Resolution 1325, Kofi Annan (2004) cited the following positive developments:

- Greater global understanding of the content of Resolution 1325;
- the expansion of international law to include rape, forced prostitution and trafficking in women and girls as war crimes and crimes against humanity; and
- improvement in gender balance with the inclusion of gender advisers and gender units in some peace operations (an increase from two to ten in four years).

¹⁰ This declaration commits AU members to ensure full and effective participation and representation of women in peace processes stretching across the prevention, conflict and post-conflict stages.

On the negative side, however,

- women remain overwhelmingly excluded from peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction as a result of endemic discrimination;
- out of 27 UN peace operations only two were headed by women;
- (sexual) violence against women during times of conflict remains unacceptably high (such as in Sudan's Darfur region as well as backlash in the form of assassinations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia where women have dared to defend women's rights in public decision-making)¹¹;
- pervasive sexual violence furthermore exacerbates the HIV/AIDS pandemic where three in four of those between the ages of 15 and 24 living with the disease are female; and
- gender perspectives are not systematically included in the planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of any area of peace and security work.

In line with the central argument of this paper, these attempts at institutionalising a common international framework should be seen for what it is – a framework which needs to find context-specific application at the (sub)regional and national level. Thus a key way in which progress with implementation can be monitored is to look at developments at national and (sub)regional level. At the national level progress has been made with the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia as the first African women president. There are currently five deputy presidents from Uganda, Gambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Burundi. In 2005, Rwanda achieved the world's highest representation of women in parliament with women constituting 48.8% of parliamentarians. The parliaments of South Africa¹², Mozambique, and Rwanda rank among the 17 top parliaments in the world in the area of women's representation (Centre for Conflict Resolution & UNIFEM 2005:21). While this is promising, practice shows mixed results. In cases where a proportional representation electoral system is used, candidates are accountable to the party and not to the constituency, in this case women.

¹¹ See in this regard the UN study on gender violence which indicates that at least 102 of the 192 member states have no specific legal provisions on domestic violence, while marital rape is not a prosecutable offence in about five countries (Deen 2006).

¹² South Africa ranks eight in the world in terms of gender equality at national level. Nine of its 27 cabinet ministers and eight of its 14 deputy ministers are women (Garson 2006). The 50:50 campaign is under way and in the 2006 local government elections concerted efforts were made to get as close as possible to this target.

Allegiances to the party therefore often hinder women parliamentarians from supporting legislation favoured by women's movements. This is the case in South Africa, Mozambique, and in Uganda (Mutume 2006:8-9).

Sub-regional economic communities have also begun to consider gender. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established a Women's Desk in 1999. In 2002, the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) formulated a gender policy. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in 2003, endorsed the establishment of a Gender division in the ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria. In Southern Africa the SADC established a gender desk in 1997. In the latter case, as in many of the others, the continuing challenge is lack of institutionalisation, uneven implementation across countries, and lack of political will to address the tension between customary and codified law (Centre for Conflict Resolution & UNIFEM 2005:24-25).

The UN views gender balance and gender mainstreaming as the two main strategies for achieving gender equality, i.e. equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men. Gender mainstreaming, as defined by the UN, refers to "a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated" (Karamé 2004:12). Successful mainstreaming is pivoted on the achievement of gender balance through creating gender awareness, developing cultural sensitivity, and acquiring local knowledge. Gender balance thus refers to the degree to which women and men participate within the full range of activities within any organisation (Mazurana et al 2005:13). The notion of gender balance is essentially a liberal but loaded concept. The use of quotas must be seen as a temporary solution, a first step towards gender equality and should not overshadow long-term strategies that address women's socio-economic marginalisation (Puechguirbal 2004:62). Quotas must be used in conjunction with measures for identifying legal and social barriers to women's participation in the peace process. While it may be relatively easy to acquire unanimous support for a 50:50 quota of AU commissioners, this approach at national level may generate fierce antagonism from male participants. Illustrating this dilemma is the example of the 50:50 group of female politicians in Sierra Leone which antagonised the men with their confrontational approach to the point that the men insisted that women also carry half of the household responsibilities (George-Williams 2005:70). Such efforts may therefore in the end prove to be counterproductive, thus demanding a fine balancing act. Furthermore, although the literature suggests that a critical mass of 30% is significant and that some countries such as South Africa have adopted a 50:50 men-women

norm for their party lists, there is also no guarantee that women in power would routinely mainstream gender.

Declarations have not succeeded in translating gender consciousness into practical gains for women at the grassroots level. Throughout the continent, state machineries are poorly funded and disjointedly integrated into national goals and priorities. No wonder then that the monitoring of the domestic implementation of the international legislative framework is hugely ineffective. A report by the Institute for Democratic Alternatives (IDASA) highlights the fact that most national gender machineries in Southern Africa are under-resourced; not strategically located; that political parties generally lack commitment to gender equality; and that customary law and progressive government policy continue to co-exist uneasily (Koen 2006:8). As indicated before, having bureaucratic representation does not necessarily offer women the institutional scope to pursue feminist objectives. For that one needs a vibrant civil society to engage national machineries in participatory political discourse.

Hence I propose three ways in which the international rights-based framework can be translated into meaningful gender justice at the national level. Firstly, at the international level much more needs to be done to overcome the UN's fragmented dealings with women's issues and women's human rights. In this regard I support the recommendation by Stephen Lewis (2006), UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, to create an international women's agency within the UN, to do for women what UNICEF does for children. Secondly, I concur with Lazarus (2006:250) who proposes the establishment of a Council of African Women Mediators comprising women from civil society as well as women who no longer hold government positions. Such women of standing can then use their influence in resolving conflict and ensuring that women are represented at the negotiation table. Such a group could also function as liaison between the formal structures of the AU and the African women's movement. This will promote policy alignment and communication as well as accountability. Thirdly, at national, continental (regional) and sub-regional level political will and adequate resourcing are required. Case studies of 'good practice' have revealed the following to be essential:

During the pre-negotiation phase advance attention needs to be systematically paid to:

- Identifying all role players;
- increasing women's meaningful participation in peace talks;
- increasing women's participation in the planning processes of DDR;

- creating parallel support systems such as safe forums for women and girls during the DDR process; and
- increasing women's voice in determining new governance and security structures.

Governments of societies in transition should ensure that

- key policies are engendered and firmly grounded in a gender equality and human rights framework;
- the three-pronged approach outlined earlier is used as a guideline for the development of specific action plans;
- the 'new' gender machinery is empowered through sustained funding and training;
- women are empowered in the area of political governance and citizenship;
- information technology is used effectively to disseminate academic research and knowledge about the international, regional and local frameworks; and
- a democratic civil society in general and women's organisations in particular are supported through a gender-sensitive resource allocation policy and strategic placement within institutional structures.

The value of a peer group of states pushing for gender mainstreaming is illustrated by the Norwegian and Danish Governments' action plans for the implementation of Resolution 1325. The Norwegian action plan is informed by a clear gender analysis and commits itself to integrating a gender perspective into a variety of areas, such as international peace operations; conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding; as well as protection and human rights. Amongst others, the Norwegian Government pledges to support the AU in its implementation of Resolution 1325, especially in efforts to establish the African Standby Force (ASF), and also through integrating a gender perspective into the activities of the Training for Peace Programme. Similarly, the Danish Government's African Programme for Peace aims to help build the capacity of the AU and regional organisations in respect of conflict prevention and crisis management. Priority is given, amongst others, to the protection of women's and girls' rights and to increased participation and representation of women in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes in the local areas where Danish troops are deployed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence 2005). What now also needs to happen is an assessment of the impact of these interventions.

CONCLUSION

Without women there can be no peace and no development. A deep gender analysis must permeate peacebuilding work. Post-conflict restructuring must address gender issues strategically – a few *ad hoc* women-focused initiatives stirred into the male pot of DDR and democratising initiatives will not prevent the milk from going sour!

So, having outlined the approach of African feminisms and having highlighted the unfriendly environment within which these feminists have to operate, it remains to be said that women must seize the political initiative. Filling the vacuum of political leadership in the post-conflict reconstruction phase must be done through building a strong women's movement with a coherent plan to transform gender relations. Such a strong movement is the ideal platform from where patriarchal practices could be questioned and human rights protected. The secret lies in how women go about communicating the connection between their struggle for equal rights and the potential for sustainable peace and development. Women's contribution to peacebuilding in Africa is multi-faceted. The acid test lies in how women integrate their political project of emancipation into the larger work for sustainable peace in their countries.

Despite the gender critique advanced in this paper - especially in respect of implementation - the examples cited also implicitly highlight the vibrancy of the gender debate on the African continent. The incentives attached to making it work in a region historically riddled with conflict and injustice are beginning to dawn on more and more African leaders. No wonder then that Mary King (2005:48) makes the bold (over)statement that the United States "is no longer at the forefront of rights for women. Africa now leads the way".

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