

# A Gendered Approach to Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

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## A Gendered Approach to Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

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### Outline and Comment Critically on the Arguments put Forward in Support of a Gendered Approach to Peace-building and Conflict Resolution

#### Introduction

It has been over a decade since the passage of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the landmark document reaffirming the importance of women's participation and involvement at all levels of the peace and security agenda. The Resolution underlined the gradual acknowledgement among international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) that women and men have differential experiences both during and post-conflict, and that women have a unique set of challenges related to peacebuilding and security (Beever, p.21). Moreover, the informal contributions of women have been highlighted and declared invaluable to resolving conflict and building sustainable peace (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, p.490). However, formal peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives continue to ignore or marginalise issues of gender, and women's involvement in formal missions and talks remains low (Diaz, 2010, p.1). Further, those which *do* take into account issues of gender, overwhelmingly fail to address structural inequalities and power dynamics which are the foundation of gender discrimination (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). Arguments put forward in support of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution come from a diverse set of actors, from a variety of disciplines, with different political opinions and different recommended methods. Many of these arguments, especially those which have been brought into mainstream discourse, are instrumentalist in their approach, seeing women as instrumental in bringing about sustainable peace, and focusing narrowly on 'what women can do for peace', neglecting the issue of what peace can do for women. Other peacebuilding initiatives and movements employ essentialist definitions of women, confining them to their roles as mothers and caregivers, and thus denying them access to the broader agenda of peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.177). This essay will outline the range of arguments within the overall gendered approach, ultimately concluding that even a genuine gendered approach as understood by the UN and other peacebuilding community actors could fail to build a sustainable peace as it does not adequately address the fundamental economic inequalities created by the global neoliberal macroeconomic structure which also perpetuate violence and conflict.

#### Peacebuilding Defined

Confusion and disagreements over the meaning of the term 'peacebuilding' continue to play out among the variety of actors who use it. No definitive definition exists, and therefore academics, professionals, organisations, and activists involved in the field may use it to denote different meanings. Originally coined in 1975 by Johan Galtung, the term 'peacebuilding' intended to encompass a wider range of activities than the earlier notions of peacemaking and peacekeeping, by acknowledging the importance of identifying and building structures which might militate against war, therefore addressing the root causes of conflict (Barnett et al., 2007, p.37). The term was made popular in the international arena by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 Report *An Agenda for Peace*, and its importance was reaffirmed in his 1995 *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*, though at the time peacebuilding was

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referred to as '*post-conflict* peacebuilding', thereby limiting the application of the term to activities taking place when conflict had ended, or was coming to an end. This is where the main discrepancy in understanding of the term peacebuilding lies today. Though Boutros-Ghali has since commented that peacebuilding may refer to activities both pre- and post-conflict, a number of academics and organisations, including the new UN Peacebuilding Commission, tend to conceive peacebuilding as only applicable to post-conflict situation (Barnett et al., 2007, p.40). However, many actors working in peacebuilding adopt a much wider definition, linking it to Galtung's concept of 'positive peace' and the more recent concepts of 'human development' and 'human security' as advanced by the UN (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.5). In its broadest conception, peacebuilding can be understood to include the promotion of sustainable economic development, and social and political justice, in order to create a more equitable society, which can find alternatives to violent resolutions of conflict and where all citizens are free from both direct and structural violence (Barnett et al., 2007). This conception of the term encompasses the traditional notions of peacemaking, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, as well as peacebuilding. This essay will employ this broad definition of peacebuilding, considering the whole process from pre- through to post-conflict, including early warning systems, monitoring of instability, ceasefires and disarmament programmes, peace talks and agreements, and building positive peace and sustainable development.

## Context

The post-Cold War world continues to experience high levels of violence and instability (Alberdi, 2010, p.6). However, the nature of war has changed, with the majority of conflicts now being defined as intra-state conflicts or civil wars. The roles and responsibilities carried out by international institutions charged with peacebuilding and conflict resolution (namely the UN), therefore, have also changed. Since the early 1990s, the UN peacekeeping mission mandate has extended beyond military operations and mediation between nation states to "multidimensional missions" (Bertolazzi, 2010, p.6), which incorporate a wide range of activities. However, whilst billions of dollars are spent each year on such operations, sustainable peace remains elusive for large swathes of the world's population (Anderlini, 2007, p.230). Civilian populations have been increasingly affected as the nature of conflict changes and as the line between the 'home front' and the 'battlefield' becomes increasingly blurred (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.10). Ethnic conflicts, ethnic cleansing, and genocide have scarred many countries, as too has a rise in the profitability of the drug trade, causing an increase in deaths related to criminal gang activity, especially in South and Central America. Moreover, those countries that have transitioned to democracy and to relative stability face the threat of falling back into conflict, and the proliferation of light weapons and endemic violence against women continues (Moran, 2010, p.265). Thus, the concept of 'positive peace' remains for many a distant reality. Given this context, it appears that a different approach, one that takes a more holistic vision of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, is necessary. At the international level, there is now a general consensus on the need for a gendered approach. This is the result of long-term activism and lobbying by feminist and women's networks and organisations worldwide (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, p.491). Indeed, even since 1915, women from different nations met together in a Congress of Women to protest against the First World War, and founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which is still active today (Sharp, 2012; WILPF, 2012).

## Approaches

The Peacebuilding Initiative, a project designed in partnership with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office to share information within the peacebuilding community, argues that there are two key dimensions in taking a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Firstly, the approach must acknowledge differences in women and men's experiences, ensuring that women's interests and needs are met. Secondly, it involves recognising the key roles that women play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and facilitating those roles wherever feasible (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009). However, it is not possible to clearly sub-divide the different strands relating to these two dimensions. The main actors in the peacebuilding field – the UN and a wide range of NGOs, academics and activists – interpret their roles and implement their policies in a range of overlapping and sometimes conflicting ways. These approaches may be defined as 'instrumentalist', 'protection', 'practical needs', 'participation' and 'transformative'. Hence, ideas about the meaning, intentions, and implications of a 'gendered approach' are varied and diverse, as are the actors who employ the concept. Furthermore, the gap between rhetoric and implementation is not insignificant.

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## *The United Nations*

The complexity of all of these overlapping, cross-cutting and sometimes contradictory strands in gendered approaches to peacebuilding is perhaps best illustrated by the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. UNSCR 1325, adopted in October 2000, is a landmark document and the basis for the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. It was passed following the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action of 1999, which called for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to undertake steps to improve gender balance and gender equality at all levels of peacekeeping missions (Bertolazzi, 2010, p.8). UNSCR 1325 subsequently affirmed this aim and promised protection of women's rights as well as the guarantee of their equal participation in peace processes (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, p.490). It further affirmed its commitment to increasing women's role in decision-making, expanding the role of women to UN field-based operations, providing training guidelines to all member states on the protection, rights, and particular needs of women, ending impunity with regards to rape and sexual abuse of women and girls, and increasing financial, technical and logistical support for a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution (UNSCR S/RES/1325 (2000)). However, the concept of gender mainstreaming, which has been adopted by the UN and other international institutions, and by national governments, has been criticised for turning gender into a 'technocratic category', whereby women's involvement and empowerment has been reduced to a simple 'tick box' exercise (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007). Thus, an approach which was explicitly political and feminist in its conception, designed to challenge unequal gender relations in policy design and implementation as well as organisational structure, has been depoliticised as it has been adopted by the mainstream, and become bureaucratised, limiting its transformative potential. The UN Women, Peace and Security agenda is ambitious and transformative in rhetoric, and there are many different agencies and bodies in the UN which are truly committed to a genuinely transformative gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. However, the UN encompasses a multitude of different agencies, departments, and therefore, opinions and approaches, which may compromise the coherence of its approach. Furthermore, economic and political imperatives dictate funding priorities, and the promotion of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution may often be perceived as an optional add-on or additional complication (Onslow and Schoofs, 2010). Ultimately, the UN is limited in its power for delivering transformative change when it is at the behest of its member states.

Moreover, the UN itself, and in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, also continues to marginalise women, and fails to promote them to high levels of leadership (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, p.66), despite its stated commitment to ensuring gender balance and equality. It is crucial that the 'peacekeeping' side, as well as the host community, give weight to the issue of gender in their own organisations (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.25). Studies on the culture of large institutions, including the UN, has shown that such institutions tend to be "masculine" in culture and practice, favouring hierarchical structures, individualism, and competitive as opposed to cooperative or consultative ways of working (Pankhurst, 2000, p.11). Thus, it can be argued that the UN itself maintains a deep-rooted gender hierarchy, which militates against gender equality. Furthermore, high levels of sexual harassment and gender discrimination in troop-contributing country militaries reduces the number of women in peacekeeping forces. In 2008 only about 2% of military personnel in UN peacekeeping forces were female (Bertolazzi, 2010, p.6). Proponents of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution argue that women's involvement in peacekeeping missions in higher numbers will have positive effects for women in the countries where missions are stationed, by providing positive examples of female leadership (Bertolazzi, 2010, p.24).

Many authors argue that the UN continues to employ essentialist definitions of women as mothers, caregivers and providers. Women and children continue to be conflated into one category that signifies innocence, vulnerability, and in need of protection (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.172). Arguably, this focus on vulnerability and protection continues to form part of a stereotype of women which aims to justify their exclusion from negotiations and powerful roles, as they are portrayed as weak and thus, not suitable for the roles involved in peacebuilding and security. This has led some authors to argue that the celebration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and UNSCR 1325, is little more than empty rhetoric (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.183). As victims, actors and perpetrators in conflict, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the exclusion of women from formal processes is inexcusable. Their inclusion is imperative to reaching inclusive peace agreements that lead to positive and sustainable peace (Sweetman, 2005, p.4).

## *Practical Needs Approaches*

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It is worth considering in detail some of the specific strands and arguments supporting a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The practical reasons for a gendered analysis are numerous. Actors in the field have made evaluations and criticisms of post-conflict operations and initiatives which claim gender neutrality. Many humanitarian organisations cling to the principle of neutrality in post-conflict relief operations, arguing that meeting the immediate practical needs of populations is their task (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009). However, in practice, these operations do not exist in a vacuum, but work within communities which have their own gendered power structures in place, whereby women are often subordinated. An ostensibly 'gender neutral' programme, therefore, can easily reinforce existing inequalities and disadvantage women. This has been demonstrated in food distribution in refugee camps and in conflict zones. Humanitarian agencies have often neglected to implement special measures to ensure that women and girls receive (and are able to keep in their possession) equal amounts of food to men, sometimes resulting in women and girls malnutrition due to their lower status in society. Equally, some humanitarian interventions have given extra food to women on account of their assumed role in food distribution, but neglected to provide measures for their security which has sometimes increased their vulnerability to physical attack (Clifton and Gell, 2001, p.3). Simple practical considerations such as providing sanitary towels for women living in refugee camps who are menstruating are also often overlooked by humanitarian agencies (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, p.39). The needs for reproductive and sexual health services are also often greater amongst female refugee and displaced populations, yet this too is overlooked (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, p.39).

## *Protection Approaches*

There is a general consensus that a crucial component of a gendered approach to peacebuilding is to acknowledge gendered vulnerabilities and ensure that women and girls are afforded protection from violence. Conflict and its aftermath affect women and girls, and men and boys, in different ways (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003; Sweetman, 2005). Men and women assume different roles and are targeted differently by virtue of their genders. Women have specific vulnerabilities and often experience multiple forms of violence during and after conflict, with brutality and frequency reaching new levels in times of conflict and societal breakdown (Alberdi, 2010, p.11). The targeting of women's bodies has emerged a systematic strategy used during conflict. Specific forms of violence, especially sexual violence, are used against women in what has come to be defined as 'gender-based violence', violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals because of their gender. Furthermore, extremely high levels of violence against women *after* the formal cessation of conflict, problematises the notion of 'peacetime' for women[1]. However, a truly gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution must address not only how men and women experience conflict differently, but why. This means examining, for example, the reasons *why* women are more vulnerable during conflict:

*Women are not more vulnerable per se in times of war; they are made more vulnerable because of pre-existing inequalities in so-called peaceful societies* (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.176)

*Women do not suffer in war because of any intrinsic weakness, but because of their position in society* (Pankhurst, 2000, p.7)

Ignoring underlying gendered power relations and inequalities in a society can lead to an oversight of some of the fundamental causes of conflict (Anderlini, 2007, p.29), and undermine work towards building sustainable peace. Furthermore, painting women purely as victims can obscure women's agency and undermine the positive work which some women do in resisting conflict and violence, and can weaken future potential (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). Moreover, it also belies the diverse roles that women play and the positions that they occupy in society. Women are also involved in supporting conflict and agitating violence, as well as directly participating in combat (Pankhurst, 2000, p.5).

## *Sexual Violence*

Endemic sexual violence against women and girls is perhaps one of the leading reasons which has prompted arguments for a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Concurrently, a gendered approach also sheds light on sexual and gender-based violence, both during and after conflict (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009).

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As stated above, the targeting of women's bodies has come to be recognised as a systematic strategy used in conflict for political ends. Sexual violence against women during conflict often becomes the accepted norm, as militarisation and increased access to weapons result in high levels of brutality and impunity (IRIN, 2004, p.11). Sexual violence against women has been theorised in many ways (see, for example, Kelly and Radford, 1998; Kelly, 2000; Copelon, 1993). However, many authors argue that violent sexual attacks against women are one of the ways in which men communicate with each other during conflict (Anderlini, 2007, p.31). Deeply held patriarchal beliefs and strong patriarchal social relations are necessary factors in engendering high levels of sexual violence against women, and to the 'success' of rape as a strategy to humiliate and undermine male opposition forces (Pankhurst, 2008, p.306). Rape of enemy women in conflict can be seen as being *aimed* at men, using a woman's body as a vessel (IRIN, 2004, p.7), violating both a man's honour and his exclusive right to sexual possession of his woman as his property (Copelon, 2002, p.196). Thus, the rape of women as a strategy designed to humiliate men and the community "reflects the fundamental objectification of women. Women are the target of the abuse at the same time as their subjectivity is completely denied" (Copelon, 2002, p.203).

The issue of sexual violence against women and girls, therefore, illustrates the insufficiencies of the 'protection' approach: a truly gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution must deal with not only the symptom, but also the cause, of such high levels of sexual violence. Without addressing the fundamental power dynamics and imbalances which are at the root of such violence, a sustainable and 'positive' peace for both men *and* women cannot be established (Gibson, 2011, p.96). Moreover, while sexual violence is rife, women's ability to take part in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and development activities is severely undermined. There are numerous ongoing socio-economic and health consequences of being a survivor of sexual violence: for example, living with HIV, sexual infections and mutilations, and psychological trauma (Aroussi, 2011, p.580). Above all, the shame and stigma attached to women who admit to having been raped is devastating (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.12), therefore it is also crucial to challenge the social and cultural norms and their dictates about women's honour and virtue as attached to sexual purity.

Increasing international recognition of this problem has led to a number of statements explicitly addressing sexual violence: the Rome Statute (2002) of the International Criminal Court (ICC) criminalises rape and sexual violence during conflict as war crimes and crimes against humanity; UNSCR 1820 (2008) designated rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war (Porter, 2007, p.20). However, sexual violence remains widespread, whereas enforcement mechanisms, and justice for victims, remain elusive. Over a decade after UNSCR 1325 was adopted, peace agreements are overwhelmingly silent on the subject of sexual violence (Diaz, 2010, p.17). Arguably, despite the powerful rhetoric around the subject, the prevention and prosecution of rape and sexual violence against women is not a priority for international actors involved in the peacebuilding and security agenda (Anderlini, 2007, p.35).

## *Instrumentalist Approaches*

For many actors in the international arena concerned with peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the logic behind supporting a gendered approach is that it "enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of peacebuilding, and that women's peacebuilding efforts are a valuable resource for the development of sustainable, inclusive approaches to peace and security" (Onslow and Schoofs, 2010, p.11). This can be defined as an 'instrumentalist' approach, which is concerned with what women can do for peacebuilding, not the reverse (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.15). Instrumentalist arguments for funding education programmes for women in post-conflict situations, for example, might state that as women are primary caregivers and educating them will be beneficial because they can pass their knowledge on to the next generation. Clearly, disregarding the capacities and efforts of 50% (or more) of the population can be seen as a 'waste' of resources. However, these approaches are based on efficiency arguments, as opposed to considering the intrinsic value of empowering women and girls. Instrumentalist approaches and arguments can be seen to be, in many ways, a result of NGOs and other groups in the peacebuilding community having to compete for resources in a funding context which is very much driven by the desire of donors to see concrete outcomes, and to meet specific targets.

## *Participation Approaches*

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A further strand of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution is the requirement that women must be involved at all levels and all stages of the peacebuilding process. Examples of the crucial roles that women can play are numerous. The different roles that women and men play in society give them different insights and knowledge, and at present, much of women's knowledge and insight is not taken into account. From early warning systems right through to post-conflict transformation and reconstruction, women's contributions should be invaluable. Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf (2002) argue for a shift from a "culture of reaction" to a "culture of prevention". In terms of early warning systems, women often have information about signs of potential conflict and escalating attacks. This information is garnered not through "high tech surveillance and espionage", but through small signs of instability relating to day-to-day activities, such as market activity and timings, and the price of light weapons in the community (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, p.117). Furthermore, the position and treatment of the women themselves can be a sign of instability and escalating violence. These details are seldom taken into account by international actors in the peacebuilding arena, who may prefer more prestigious, and yet ultimately less effective, methods.

The argument for women's participation is perhaps best illustrated with reference to two specific issues: sexual violence and formal negotiation. The necessity of women's involvement is particularly clear in relation to the prevalence of rape and sexual violence. Firstly, women's involvement in post-conflict truth and reconciliation commissions, which deal with sexual violence is crucial. Having women-only hearings for women to discuss their experiences has been hailed as successful in many different settings (Pankhurst, 2000, p.21). Secondly, rape and sexual violence have often been perpetrated by police and security forces. A gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution should ensure that women are trained and employed in the police and security services, as the presence of more women in these forces has been shown to be effective in reducing the levels of sexual violence (Pankhurst, 2000, p.20), also making it more likely that women will report sexual violence, perpetrated by other actors, to these forces (Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, p.70). Furthermore, the men in these forces must be trained in gender-awareness and in dealing with sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite their peacebuilding efforts, the under-representation of women at the peace table continues to be much more marked than in other areas, with women's participation remaining a largely unfulfilled target of UNSCR 1325 (Diaz, 2010, p.2). It is men who continue to dominate the formal roles in the peacebuilding process: A UN Report from 2010 suggests that since 1992, fewer than 10% of peace negotiators have been female (Alberdi, 2010, p.7). Men make up the majority of politicians, peace talk negotiators, formal leaders, and peacekeeping troops (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009), and women's roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution (as well as in war) have been largely invisible. Moreover, where they are acknowledged, their roles are more likely to be notable at a local, not national or international, level (Gizelis, 2011, p.526). Women are involved in many different peacebuilding initiatives at the community level, as well as providing day-to-day and emergency support for their communities (Gizelis, 2011, p.525). Despite the fact that peace negotiations which are characterised by high levels of grassroots and civil society involvement have been shown to lessen the likelihood of a return to war (Diaz, 2010, p.2), formal talks have consistently failed to fulfil this involvement and bring in women's organisations that are working at the local level, therefore, women remain largely absent from formal peace talks: "women's activism in managing survival and community-level agency is predictably devalued as accidental activism and marginalised post-conflict, as politics becomes more structured and hierarchical" (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.9).

Moreover, where such participation is encouraged, women can be marginalised if they do not have the education and training necessary to fully participate (Pankhurst, 2000, p.18). Therefore, the gap between rhetoric and implementation remains wide. Arguably, this failure to involve women undermines the legitimacy of formal peace processes. The failure to engage women certainly undermines the prospects of building a sustainable peace, and ensures that peace deals continue to be silent on, or to marginalise, issues which are of great importance to many women (Alberdi, 2010, pp.7-12).

## *Transformative Approaches*

Numerous academics, activists and civil society groups have also put forward more radical and feminist arguments in support of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. These authors, such as Puechguirbal, highlight structures of patriarchy as a central reason why societies continue to resort to violence to resolve conflicts

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(Puechguirbal, 2010, p.179). These arguments can be labelled 'transformative', as they advocate a fundamental shift in gendered power relations, and a transformation, not reconstruction, of post-conflict societies. As Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen argue:

*During the transition from war to peace, or from military dictatorship to democracy, the rhetoric of equality and rights tends to mask the reconstruction of patriarchal power, despite recent emphasis on women's human rights (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.4)*

This can be seen more explicitly in post-conflict efforts to restore and re-establish pre-wartime roles. Stereotypes of femininity are often emphasised post-conflict, with women's roles as wives and mothers being extolled, whilst their wartime roles, which might have given them greater freedom or a wider diversity of roles, are ignored (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.13). As Pankhurst states:

*The challenge to gender relations often becomes too great for patriarchal societies to maintain in times of peace, and women find their historical contribution marginalised in both official and popular accounts of war, and their freedoms in peacetime restricted or removed (Pankhurst, 2000, p.6)*

The post-war period is seen by authors that advocate a transformative gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as a time when gender, gender roles and gendered power relations can be radically de/reconstructed (Moran, 2010, p.266). This applies both to the host community and to the 'peacekeeping' side of the operation: gender hierarchies are also perpetuated in the UN (Puechguirbal, 2010, p.179). Without challenging gender norms, and the attendant power imbalances between women and men, discriminatory attitudes and practices which disadvantage women and compromise their human rights will prevail post-conflict (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.23). As Cynthia Enloe (2005) has argued, the international peacebuilding community, and indeed the UN itself, have not grasped the transformative ideas behind UNSCR 1325, and have failed to take in:

*The genuinely radical understanding that informed the feminist analysis undergirding 1325. That feminist understanding is that 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 resolution to those violent conflicts (Enloe, 2005, p.281)*

Ultimately, transformative approaches assert that building peace is *not* about returning to the status quo.

## Stereotypes

### *Women as Victims*

There are significant tensions inherent in advocating for women's involvement in peacebuilding. Whereas war, and those agitating for war, often exploit gender stereotypes (Gibson, 2011), so too can peacebuilding and those advocating for peace. Arguing for women's inclusion and involvement in peacebuilding and conflict resolution on the basis of their roles as mothers can essentialise women's roles and perpetuate inequality, preventing transformative change (Whitbread, 2004). Reconciliation attempts in many countries have focused on simplistic stereotypes of women as victims and suffering mothers, and have conflated the categories of women and children into one, signifying innocence and vulnerability (Cupples, 2005, p.16; Puechguirbal, 2010). Stereotypes of women as inherently peaceful can also be damaging and reductive. A truly gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution must have a comprehensive analysis of the variety of roles that women play in society. Ignoring women's participation and complicity in organised violence could lead to false assumptions about the potential role of women in peacebuilding (Pankhurst, 2000, p.9; Onslow and Schoofs, 2010, p.12). Furthermore, using the category 'women', without further differentiating between them, hides a wealth of different experiences: "no woman lives in the single dimension of her sex" (Meintjes Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.5). For instance, wealthy women from privileged sectors of society will experience conflict and its aftermath in a very different way from the majority, who are too poor to emigrate when they are threatened with violence (Meintjes Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.6).

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## *Positive Masculinities*

Just as it is crucial that we do not assume women to be perpetual victims, and as natural peacebuilders, it is key that we do not stereotype men in the same way, simply as perpetrators and aggressors (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.9). A gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution must therefore also provide an analysis of the roles which men play in society and in conflict. Moreover, it is important to consider how masculine socialisation and norms are linked to the use of violence, and the pressure placed on men to conform to the traditional masculine role of fighter (Whitbread, 2005, p.43). Men, as women, are socialised to become part of a gender. Traits commonly identified in cultural definitions of masculinity often include egotism, aggression, dominance, and competition (Pankhurst, 2000, p.11). Clearly, these traits are easily linked with violent behaviour:

*A gender analysis suggests that social norms about masculinity strongly influence the prevalence of, and tendency towards, the violent expression of conflict in many places. Peacebuilding should therefore challenge these norms wherever possible* (Pankhurst, 2000, p.14)

As Moran (2010) argues, a gendered approach to peacebuilding is not complete if positive masculinities are not also acknowledged and supported. For example, men in societies where violence is rife, but who choose not to fight, should be supported as examples of challenging violent masculinities (Moran, 2010). Programmes designed to work with male teachers, peace activists, community workers and carers could all further a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Pankhurst, 2000, p.25). As Strickland and Duvvury (2003) argue, it is possible that men's identities may emerge from a period of conflict more damaged than women's, and if no attention is paid to supporting positive masculinities, "the reassertion of traditional gender norms and roles is inevitable" (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.9).

## **The Guatemalan Case**

The difficulties of designing and implementing a genuine gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution can be illustrated by the case study of Guatemala. Central America has experienced many protracted conflicts in its recent history, and in Guatemala, Latin America's longest civil war raged for 36 years until the formal signing of the peace accords in 1996. Guatemala, similar to many South American nations, has a history of military dictatorship, widespread human rights abuses and a powerful culture of 'machismo' (Anderlini, 2007, p.153). Arguably, Guatemala is a "quintessentially misogynistic culture" (Jackson, 2007, p.8), with sexist attitudes pervading popular culture, state institutions and social relations. There is widespread societal acceptance and perpetuation of strong gender bias and deep 'machista' attitudes. However, the Guatemalan peace accords were praised for including systematic references to gender-related issues throughout the text, which is attributed to the involvement of women's rights activists (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.21). Specific commitments were made in to women on housing, land, attempts to find children and orphans, and on penalising sexual harassment (Porter, 2007, p.39). Though only two women were included in the negotiating teams of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Government of Guatemala, participation of women's organisations and civil society group was high. For this reason, the peace process in Guatemala has sometimes been commended by those who argue in support of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Diaz, 2010). However, whether a positive peace exists in Guatemala today is very doubtful. Women are now being killed at the same rate as they were during the genocide in the 1980's, as the phenomenon of 'femicide' has blighted Guatemala. In 2007, it was estimated that 2 women were killed each day, with the majority being raped before their death. The prevalence of violence in Guatemala today is linked to the failure of the government and international community to enforce the resolutions made in the peace accords. The men who committed sexual atrocities against women have rarely been brought to trial, with devastating consequences. As Beltran and Freeman argue:

*The state's failure to bring to justice those responsible for the atrocities perpetrated during the war or to fully implement the commitments regarding women's rights contained in the Peace Accords has left a terrible legacy that continues to foster much of the discrimination and violence that threaten the lives of Guatemalan women today.* (Beltran and Freeman, 2007, p.7)



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Evidently, the implementation of the peace accords has been exceptionally ineffective, and a sustainable peace has yet to be built. Thus despite initial praise for the peace process and accords, and the central facilitating role played by the UN, the situation in Guatemala clearly provides support for the arguments put forward by feminist authors such as Puechguirbal, which criticise the mainstream gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution as superficial, arguing for a more fundamental gender analysis which addresses the deep rooted structural inequalities that perpetuate violence.

## Fundamental Criticisms of the Gendered Approach

The arguments put forward in support of a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, then, are complex and diverse. These arguments, and especially the way they are expressed through the Women, Peace and Security agenda advanced by the UN, are open to a number of criticisms, as seen above. However, there are more fundamental criticisms which critique the whole basis of the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Firstly, to assume the primacy of any one component of a person's social identity over another is inherently problematic: "Individuals constantly negotiate between the primacy of gender identity and the assertion of other social identities of ethnicity, class and religion" (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.8). UNSCR 1325 can be seen to privilege gender and marginalise other oppressions (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, p.495). The presumption that women involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives will only articulate 'gendered concerns' (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, p.494) is short-sighted and arrogant. Gibbins (2011) argues that the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda has no space for criticism of imperialism and foreign military intervention by Western powers, as was demonstrated by the embarrassment generated by the comments made by two Iraqi women during their visit to the UN, where they spoke at a meeting attended by gender officers for different UN agencies and several representatives from member states. They criticised the US-UK invasion of Iraq, condemning it as imperialist, and also critiqued the UN for its lack of support (Gibbins, 2011, p.525). Indeed, UNSCR 1325 has been criticised for ostensibly giving power to Western countries to intervene in peace processes around the world on the pretext of protecting women's rights (Aroussi, 2011, p.589).

Secondly, the implications of neoliberal macroeconomic policies such as structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) on building a sustainable and 'positive' peace are not adequately addressed by the UN or mainstream agendas on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. As David Moore argues:

*The concept of 'post-conflict' [is] an excuse for the main development agencies and international powers to devote fewer resources to the amelioration of complex political emergencies in the third world and to allow structural adjustment policies to reign as usual, instead of the supposed dependency inducing tendencies of welfarist humanitarian assistance* (Moore, 2000, quoted in Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.3)

SAPs are implemented by international institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who wield much power in post-conflict societies (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001). SAPs commonly include measures such as privatisation, liberalisation of financial markets, de-regulation of labour, and a cut back in state spending on services such as health, welfare and education. The effects of SAPs on women around the world have been well documented. Privatisation of land seriously disadvantages women as they lose a prime agricultural resource (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p.16). Tightly restricted welfare budgets lead to a neglect of women's welfare requirements, which can have a negative knock-on effect for building a sustainable peace (Pankhurst, 2000, p.24). Ultimately, SAPs have exacerbated inequalities, deepened the poverty of the already vulnerable, and created instability. Concurrently, widening inequalities and deepening poverty are clearly an underlying cause of conflict globally (Pankhurst, 2000, p.2). Thus, while there are many academics and activists advancing radical arguments for a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the agencies involved in post-conflict peacebuilding programmes and reconstruction, as well as the donors who facilitate these programmes, often look for short-term solutions which are compatible with the dominant global neoliberal approach to economics and development.

## Conclusion

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*The inclusion and empowerment of women in conflict prevention and peace processes is not simply idealism in the midst of international realpolitik. It is a necessary and infinitely pragmatic antidote to politics and business as usual, if the object is sustainable peace (Anderlini, 2007, p.232)*

The need for a gendered approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution has been gradually acknowledged by the international peacebuilding arena, led by the UN. UNSCR 1325, the landmark document underpinning the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda, is ambitious and transformative in its rhetoric, and calls for women's involvement at all levels of the peacebuilding agenda. There has been a marginal increase in the number of women involved in formal peace talks, protection of women and girls from sexual violence is, in theory, a priority for peacekeeping operations, and women's peace coalitions have grown in strength and are now increasingly able to get women's concerns on the agenda of peace talks. However, positive examples do not amount to system change (Alberdi, 2010, p.3): women's participation in formal peace processes remains low, their activism and contributions are consistently devalued, sexual and gender-based violence is endemic, and 'women's issues' continue to be treated as marginal to the main peacebuilding agenda. Thus, the links between powerful rhetoric and actual policy implementation are questionable, and the UN itself can be criticised for failing to understand and progress the truly radical ideas which underpin UNSCR 1325. Furthermore, there are fundamental criticisms of a gendered approach to peacebuilding which undermine even a more radical conception of its meaning: namely, that without challenging neoliberal economic policies which widen economic inequalities, further disadvantage women, and foment violence and conflict, even a truly gendered approach to peacebuilding cannot and will not deliver the ultimate goal, which is a sustainable and positive peace.

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[1] This can be illustrated by reference to Nicaragua, El Salvador and specifically Guatemala, where women are now being murdered at the same rate as they were during the 1980's when the civil war reached its peak of violence (Carey and Torres, 2010).

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