Where are the *Men*? What about *Women*?

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Introduction

Reconciliation is a long-term process which includes the search for truth, justice, healing and forgiveness. Although it is a broad and inclusive process and should apply to each member of a given society, the reconciliation process is automatically gendered since men and women are differently affected by war. In this regard, before we turn to reconciliation we must acknowledge how conflict has involved and affected women and men in different ways.

The following paper has three chapters. The first one explores gender roles during the process of militarization and how social construction of masculinity and femininity is used to nourish and legitimize militarism. The second chapter highlights why and how the gender roles shift once a war starts. Besides suffering, the conflict can trigger an enormous strength and agency within women that many would otherwise rarely be in a position to exercise because of the patriarchal structures of many societies. Empowerment of women and the agency they obtain during a conflict move them from the private to the public sphere, once exclusively reserved for men. It also highlights that women are not simply victims of war: they are capable and autonomous individuals who play important roles as peacemakers. However, it usually happens that after the war women loose the gains made during the war. In addition, women are also rarely present at official peace negotiating tables where they could be able to spell out their needs and concerns. Finally, the third chapter will emphasize the aftermath of conflict and question the role of men and women in peace building and reconciliation. Do women and men have the same interests and concerns in reconciliation process? If they do not, why is that?

1.1. Gender and Militarism

Militarism is an ideology structured around creating enemies and pursuing those images of "others" as a threat to one's own security. The "other" is defined by making distinctions between people, countries, religions or ethnic groups – the "other", as the lifeblood of militarism, is defined as "less then". Once distinction is made and embraced, the other must be destroyed or she/he will destroy "us".[1]

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[1] Marshall, L., "The connection between militarism and violence against women" (26 February 2004) For more see: <http://www.awakenedwoman.com/marshall_militarism.htm>, accessed 3 March 2005

It is also essential to portray the enemy as absolute and abstract in order to sharply distinguish the act of killing from the act of murder.[2] By depersonalizing the other and creating one's nation as a potential victim, the authorities succeed in convincing the majority of people that the war is unavoidable as a defensive tactic.[3]

The very sense of "manhood" and being male is challenged and manipulated by the state in order to support the authority and public legitimacy of the military. To ensure that process of militarization is an on-going process and that males are willing to serve the army and go to combat is a burden placed on the state. Authorities have a task to "feed" the ego and social construction of men as brave and strong. Men are also presented with the impression that the "chance of their life" to prove all socially constructed attributes attached to them is combat, in which they become warriors.

Furthermore, the image of a soldier as a warrior who "self-sacrificially" protects women, children and others who are "in need" of protection is a very important motivator for the recruitment of military forces. The concept of "protection" is crucial to the legitimacy of force and violence. Moreover, a protector needs to have object of protection, something worth fighting for.

Therefore, men are sent into a war to protect their home and country, and told they have to protect their womenfolk from defilement by the enemy men. Women are used as objects who are in need of protection, as well as for creation of pressure and guilt in men if they have any doubt about the logic of a war. Women are seen as the sole victims and ones whose well-being is actually worth fighting and even dying for.

Militarism is equally important during war and peacetime.[4] Hence, militarism is probably even more important before a war, since war can not be conducted unless militarism is nurtured long before it begins. It is a form of structural violence imposed by the state, largely through mass rallies and state controlled media.

However, for women who prefer to work towards *solidarity interests* across lines of division, it is harder to cast the enemy as "the other". Concern for their children and family members gives them a social legitimacy and a linkage with the women on the other side of the conflict.[5]

Indeed, women who first stand up against a war and sympathize with women across ethnic lines are usually mothers whose sons are drafted into the war. Hence, without downplaying the immense importance of women rising up against a war, there is a danger that the *only* protestors against a war *appear* to be women as mothers. Women-mothers are deliberately

[2] Ruddick, S. "Mother's and Men's Wars" in Harris, A., King, Y. *Rocking the Ship of State* (Westview Press, San Francisco and London) p. 79
[3] Nikolic-Ristanovic, V., "Truth, reconciliation and victims in Serbia: the process so far" (New Horizons for Victimology XI th International Symposium on Victimology Stellenbosch, South Africa 13-18 July, 2003) Draft paper
[4] Wilson, D.; Pilisuk, M.; Lee, M., "Understanding Militarism, Money, Masculinity and the Search for the Mystical", in Christie, D., Wagner, R.; and Winter, D. *Peace Conflict and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st century* (New Jersey, Prentice Press, 2001) p. 324
[5] Women, Peace and Security, At a Glance (UN Department of Public Information, 2003) at 11

used as a part of militaristic propaganda and their protests are presented in a way that justifies the claims of the national leaders about the necessity of *fighting to defend women and children*. Media often chose to ignore the presence of some men and single women in the demonstrations. It is once more denial of selfhood to women.[6]

Women's identities are reshaped and engaged for the sake of successful national projects. However, their identities are only useful as procreators of children, culture and archaic traditions. For that reason, reproduction in both a biological and a social sense is fundamental to national politics and practices. Finally, their heterosexuality has never been questioned. It was taken for granted that all women are heterosexual, fertile and willing to reproduce the nation.

1.2. <u>Gender and War</u>

While there is a lot of information on women as victims, we have insignificant records about the immense increase in women's independence and self-confidence triggered by conflict.[7] Media repeatedly impose information that describes abuses women endure during war, meanwhile ignoring the actions taken by women as autonomous actors. The public image of women as victims and losers seriously affects awareness of the different impacts war has on men and women, and impedes the recognition of unique solutions that women might propose.

Indeed, women are victims of the war but they are also survivors. If gender-based violence is acknowledged to exist on a wide-scale in peacetime, it does not disappear once war starts; rather, it escalates in size and variety. Women become battlefields and objects of severe tactics for males, warriors. Deliberate layers of discrimination that already exist in a society allow women to be targeted and experience violence, sexual abuse or slavery, and pre-existing cultures of discrimination are often exacerbated.[8] Truly, as Cockburn said, "while men's lives and bodies are at the disposal of the nation, women's bodies are at the disposal of men."[9]

In fact, rape of the "other", women, is seen as the most effective way of "penetrating an enemy nation's defences, destroying its property [and] hurting its morale".[10] Since women are viewed as possessions of "their" men, when a woman is raped during the conflict it is perceived as an effective attack on the manhood of "her" man. They are specifically and deliberately targeted to humiliate, degrade and feminize the enemy, his particular culture and his ethnic group.

On the other hand, women are also empowered in the conflict by sudden shifts in gender roles. Conflict can open up unintended spaces for empowering women that effect structural

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[6] Cockburn, S., *The Space Between Us*: *Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (London and New York, Zed Books, 1998) p. 167
[7] Puechguirbal, N., "Women and War in the Democratic Republic of Congo" in Signs, Journal of Women in Cutlure and Society (USA, The University of Chicago Press, August 2003)
[8] ACCORD, "Conflict trends", Special Issue on Women, Peace and Security 3/2003. (The African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes and UNIFEM, South Africa, 2003) at 31
[9] Cockburn, C., *Supra* n. 7, p. 43
[10] *Ibid* p. 43

social transformations and produce new realities that redefine gender.[11] Women step out from their traditional roles in order to meet social and economic demands of war. Some women become for the first time sole breadwinners, active in politics, and newborn leaders.

The challenge of surviving this absence of men creates a sudden expansion of women's private as well as public roles. They organize formal and informal small local groups with an aim to provide relief to vulnerable populations, primarily women, elderly and children. As many men cannot move freely, for fear of being hunted by military police and sent to the front lines, public space is left to women.[12] Similarly, women use their traditional invisibility in the public sphere to create space for their activism. Many women start work in the informal sector, trying to provide minimum income for survival of their families, while men are in combat or hidden at home. They are in a position to control their incomes and make decisions regarding distribution of their financial assets.

These women redefine traditional roles prescribed to males and females by society and empower women's self-confidence. A number of new, committed women leaders are born, and many of them assume their leadership roles, in the aftermath. Since women are often regarded as a homogenous group, and yet have multiple roles, it is very difficult to draw the line between women as victims and women as agents of change within the society. Their roles merge and make complex task of requirement to be recognized not only as victims but also as autonomous individuals who are capable of taking action and demanding change.

1.3. Gender and Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a problematic term which can mean quite different things to different people.[13] The activities it might entail can vary even within one country and they can include different actors. It might include public hearings, rituals, retributive justice, symbolic acts of forgiveness or material compensation to be paid by the "guilty" side. However, whatever might be chosen as a "traditional" way of healing and reconciliation, the stake holders are almost universally men.[14] Organized as such, these practices tend to exclude women from active roles and tend to be about peace building efforts between men. As a result of gendered local politics and asymmetry of gender power women's voices are too often ignored or, in the best case, marginalized.

The issue of reconciliation has special importance and specific meaning for women which might differ from men's. For example, amnesty does not mean the same for men and for women. For men, it relieves them from responsibility and accountability for crimes, including those committed towards women. Therefore, they might never realize or

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[11] Meintjes, S., Pillay, A., and Turshen, M. (eds) *The Aftermath: Women in Post Conflict Transformation* (Londo, Zed Books, 2001) at 6

[12] Slapsek, S., "Hunting, ruling, sacrificing: traditional male practicies in contemporary Balkan cultures" in I Breines, R Connell and I Eide., *Male roles, masculinities and violence, A culture of peace perspective* (Paris, UNESCO, 2000) p. 139

[13] Pankhurst, D., "Issues of Justice and Reconciliation in Complex Political Emergencies" Third World Quarterly January 20, 1999 p. 239-256

[14] Pankhurts, D., "Mainstreaming Gender in Peacebuilding: A Framework for Action" (London, Women Building Peace, 2000) at 24

comprehend and regret the severity of crimes committed towards women. On the other hand, amnesty leaves women vulnerable to further attacks, particularly when the attacker was a former neighbor, which commonly happens in civil wars.

In addition, women are sexually vulnerable during a conflict in the way men are not. They suffer abuses that are rarely inflicted upon men such as gang rapes, enforced pregnancies or sex slavery. Their experience of the conflict demands special reflection because it is different from men's. For those women, reconciliation involves offences against them being recognized and appropriately punished. However, punishment does not have to be necessarily retributive in its nature - it could be restorative. Also, for war widows, reconciliation includes compensation and application of inheritance and family laws that recognizes them as main family providers.[15]

Women do need public recognition for their suffering, yet there is a gender aspect to their concern: women very often do not have the political and social ability to address their concerns. Moreover, even when they have space to encounter their abuses, they do not feel comfortable to speak up about sexual abuses committed upon them in public hearings where males, their family or community members are present. Even quite successful, South African model established by Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was not gendered. Indeed, debates were weak on extracting the truth about women. According to official statistics of who made statements to the Commission, more than 55 per cent were women; however they only talked about experiences of their menfolk and their children.[16] Women did not talk about their own experiences, about themselves.

Certainly, the process of truth can bring relief, but it also can bring stigma and shame for women. By coming forward to testify, women and girls bring social shame not only on themselves but on their family members as well. This can have fatal consequences for a woman's future. She can become ostracized from community, targeted for the rape or deemed unmarriageable. Moreover, between risking the future and obtaining valid prosecution of a perpetrator, there often exists a large imbalance, and a woman, therefore, might decide not to talk. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina law considers rape only as being penis-vagina penetration. Therefore, the woman who had an AK-47 shoved up her vagina was not legally raped. Instead, the perpetrator committed an *indecent* act.[17]

Furthermore, almost all peace processes do not have women present during the negotiation process. Therefore, lots of women's needs and concerns are left out of the final peace agreements that often have long-term impacts on future society. Peace agreements are not only about cease-fires, but rather are aimed at rebuilding and restructuring whole warn-torn societies.

Men are involved in the creation of reconstruction plans, which are very often gender blind. Men presented on the negotiating table are usually interested in distribution of the land and

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[15] Bloofield, D., "Reconciliation: am Introduction" Available at:< http://www.idea.int/publications/reconciliation/upload/reconciliation_chap01.pdf>, accessed 2 April 2005
[16] Sooka, Y., "Keynote Address to The Aftermath: Conference on Women in Post-war Situations" (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 20-22, 1999)
[17] Infoteka, "To Live With (out) Violence: Final Report [on] Violence against Women [in] Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina" A Second Look, no. 2 (Zagreb, Infoteka, 1999)

the future power in the state. Who will rule the country and who will have more power in governmental structures are considered far more important then any issues women might propose. Moreover, while moving from war to peace, men still maintain a highly masculinized society in which the budget and resources tend to be allocated primarily to "security issues".

Men do not see or they do not want to see that there is a need for formal recognition and acknowledgement of the gender transformation that happens during war. To recognize new strengths and roles of women might be frightening for the preservation of a patriarchal society. Indeed, that would be the first step toward loosening patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, militarism needs militarized masculinity in order to be able to exist as such. It nourishes "warrior identity" in men; his "unique strength" "courage" and "protective" role. Still, with the role of "protector" of the homeland, a man loses his primary, "natural" role as provider and breadwinner. This position can create "clashes" of masculine interests and roles in oneself, frustration and anger particularly after the conflict when men usually depend on women to continue to carry out bread winner roles assumed during the conflict. Therefore, the effects of militarism are harsh for women not only before and during the conflict but also in the post-conflict periods. Men returning from battlefields transfer their power to commit violence from the war zone to their family, as well as to their wider community. A majority of men, after coming home from the battlefield, are jobless; an increase in alcohol use and domestic violence becomes apparent. Being dependant on women's income might be quite frustrating and "humiliating" for men. Therefore, the reconciliation process must start on the individual level, between men and women from the same but equally important different ethnic and religious groups. Starting from the bottom, it should strive to reach the community level.

I also do believe that reconciliation can not be in any way imposed by outside players. Peace builders have an important role to play in the reconciliation process, but only after acknowledging the traditional methods particular communities employ when it comes to the process of reconciliation. There are two crucial reasons for this. First, as a long term process, reconciliation requires time and patience. Rehabilitation of victims and reconciliation among victim and perpetrator can not be reached immediately after a violent conflict.[18] Second, if the need for change and reconciliation is not internalized, there is a likelihood that change will be temporary.[19]

Furthermore, to some extent I would agree with Zehr that the heart of reconciliation is "the voluntary initiative of the conflict parties to acknowledge their responsibility and guilt."[20] However, I would add that acknowledgment of crime does not necessarily have to be linked with accepting the guilt for a particular event. In the case of Dragoljub Kunarac at The Hague[21], on trial for mistreatment of women in Foca, he did not deny having had sexual intercourse with number of Muslim girls and women. However, Kunarac argued that a

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[18] Kurtenbach, K., "Dealing with the Past in Latin America" in Reychler, L., and Paffenholz, T. (eds) *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide* (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, 2001) at 353

[19] Zehr, H., "Restorative Justice" in *Ibid* at 342

[20] *Ibid* at 341

[21] ICTY, Transcript, Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic, Foca case nos. IT-96-23-T, IT-96-23/1-T (2002)

woman could not feel severe mental pain or damage because he had had intercourse with her after she had been gang-raped before him by his comrades.[22] Radomir Kovac, Kunarac's codefendant, said that he believed that his victims had consented to intercourse because they did not forcefully resisted throughout the act and because he was in love with one of them. Moreover, he did not consider them as slaves since they had the key from his house and could escape at any time. Kovac did not clarify where Muslim girls could escape without money and clothes in Serb-controlled Foca in 1992. [23]

Therefore, while it is acknowledged that certain events had occurred, there is a lack of guilt. There are no feelings of responsibility and regret for events that had occurred, but rather absolute non-recognition of the severity of the crimes committed. Moreover, the impression is given that the women enjoyed being sex slaves and gang raped. The fact that Kovac was "in love" with one of them gave him "assumed credibility" to rape. Finally, none of them perceived those events as rapes since there was no forceful resistance on behalf of women. Admission of ones guilt and petition for forgiveness are the first steps toward reconciliation. If that is the goal, how shall we move forward considering these un-repentant attitudes of?

None of the men from either side have an interest in accusations of sexual crimes during the war, since such crimes were committed on both sides. Indeed, they would rather forget about it and move on. Women, however, cannot forget. They might forgive, but only after male perpetrators at least admit their acts and are held accountable in one way or another. Therefore, for some women the truth about what happened, as well as confessional truth on the part of perpetrators, is needed. For others, the identification of truth with those who committed the crimes, and the asking of the victims for forgiveness by those perpetrators, have to happen in order for women to move forward.[24]

Looking at the worldwide civil society grassroots projects and who is engaged in the majority of them, one might say that women are more interested in bringing about truth and reconciliation. Indeed, loads of NGOs emerge at the outbreak of conflict and they are mainly female. However, there are reconciliation activities initiated by men, former soldiers, in the form of public witnessing through which men in public spaces talk about their experiences and regret for their actions. However, there is a need for men, in this kind of debate, to apologize to women, as well as to each other, for committing the crimes they have.

The roles women have in the reconciliation processes are complex, reflecting the multiple roles women have in one society. Their approach and life has to be approached holistically since women symbolize peace educators within the family, in schools, in women's and mixed associations, and elsewhere. Their networks and knowledge of local affairs make them effective early warning monitors, alert for increasing tensions and others signs of potential conflict. Their often-extensive kinship relations, social prospects and training can make women highly effective mediators. Moreover, their status as outsiders and the perception that

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[22] *Ibid*

[23] ICTY, Appeals Judgment, Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic, Foca case nos. IT-96-23-PT, IT-96-23/1-PT (2002)

[24] Hunt, S., *This was not our war, Bosnian women reclaiming the peace* (Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2004) p. 170

they are not primary stakeholders in conflict also suggests roles as negotiators and originators of new approaches to peace.[25]

While one shouldn't downplay the destruction war brings itself, it is true that war also breaks down the patriarchal structures of society which degrade and confine political, civil and other liberties of women. It breaks down traditions and customs often imposed on women in order to control their behavior in society. Hence, war also creates space and opens the door to new beginnings.[26] However, with the demobilization of men comes a parallel process of "demobilization" of women from their new roles. With the shedding of their military clothes and arms and return to their former status, men assume that women should do the same. They should be stripped of their painstakingly gained roles during a conflict: economic freedoms and independence. Therefore, the reintegration of demobilized combatants and demilitarization of masculinity clashes with the mobilization acquired by women during a conflict and their wishes to preserve it.

To conclude, return to peace for women usually means return to the gender status quo that ignores the nontraditional roles assumed by women during the conflict.[27] How to keep and consolidate the gains made during the conflict is a challenge that confronts women in post conflict societies.

Conclusion

Building the culture of peace is a process which should involve men to question different types of violence, injustice and discrimination. Also, they should bear in mind that security cannot be measured through counting arms and guns but by measuring the level of understanding among people.

If the men in power continue to perceive women primarily as victims, war widows, or heroic mothers, we have little room for post conflict social transformation.[28] Indeed, women are victims of the war, *but* they are also survivors. However, women are often perceived simply as passive victims due to the wide range of violence they experience during the war. Media repeatedly impose information that describes abuses women endure during the war, meanwhile ignoring the actions taken by women as autonomous actors. Public images of women as victims and losers have serious consequences for the awareness of different impacts war have on men and women and impede the recognition of creative and new solutions that women might propose.

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[25] Anderson, S., "Women's Many Roles in Reconciliation", see:< http://www.gppac.net/documents/pbp/4/2_intro.htm>, accessed 30 March 2005

[26] Turshen, M., "Women's War Stories" in *What Women Do in War-time:Gender and Conflict in Africa*, ed. Tushen, M. and Twagiramariya, C. (London, Zed Books, 1998) pp. 1-26 at 20

[27] Meintjes, S., Pillay, A., and Turshen, M. (eds) , *Supra* n. 13, at 8

[28] Cynthia, E., "Deminlitarization-or more of the same? Feminist questions to ask in the postwar moment", in Cookburn, C., Zarkov, D. (Eds), *The PostWar Moment, Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2002) pp. 22-32 at 29

Our common task should be not to abolish but to *reshape* gender; in other words, it is to disconnect courage from violence as well as ambition from domination and exploitation.[29] Finally, it is both men and women that have the potential for peacemaking and the responsibility to build and keep the peace. In order to achieve this, we have to work on education for peace not only in schools but also in other arenas such work places, community organizations, labor markets, mass media, science, and family relationships.

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