

Gender, Peace and Peacekeeping

Lessons from Southern Africa

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Weaving all the ideals of peaceful resolution of conflict, human rights and good governance together is the vexing issue of security. For, it is not merely good logic but the reality of life that, in the end, society's freedom from hunger, ignorance and disease is, more often than not, the dividing line between war and peace. The pursuit of the collective well being of humanity; to ensure that all persons live life to the full, is an ideal whose time has come.¹

Introduction

Africa's quest for a 'positive peace' is inextricably tied to the quest for gender equality. It is not possible to talk of peace on the continent when more than half of the population (women) are still subjected to all forms of structural and physical violence, gross human rights violations, and denied full participation in all spheres of public life.² Gender equality, however, has to compete for attention with issues of identity, indigenous culture, indigenous knowledge, spirituality and religion; all of which were historically denigrated through the processes of colonialism and the assertion of white superiority. African leaders, through various continental and regional legislative frameworks have committed themselves to increasing opportunities and creating space for the full participation of women, so as to achieve gender equality in all peace processes.

This paper acknowledges Africa's progress towards its peaceful goals, but notes its ambivalence to gender equality. We are beset with examples of 'lip service' being paid to international declarations to improve the status of women, and of the appropriation and decontextualisation of gender. In the overarching quest for peace in Africa, this appropriation means that gender is often added on to agendas without posing any challenge to what may be revamped versions of androcentric state and peace agendas.³

This paper alludes to the tensions between achieving gender equality (as a requirement for a just peace) and the maintenance of indigenous culture and religious traditions. The primary focus, however, is the teasing out of transformation opportunities presented during times of conflict and an analysis of the role of women in traditionally male domains of peace processes, in this case, peacekeeping. The paper compares the United Nations Observer Mission to South Africa (UNOMSA) to that of the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), both located in Southern Africa, as models of change. The paper argues that the movement towards gender equality and peace is accelerated when societies risk breaking traditional moulds and when they step forward into new ways of thinking and being for both men and women.

Engendering Peace in Africa

Conflict and post-conflict conditions create a radically new set of experiences (both positive and negative), especially for women, and may create possibilities for the transformation of gender relations.⁴

Sorenson confirms this with this remark:

As women and men set out to win, consolidate or reclaim different rights and positions, social institutions and categories such as community, family, household, workplace, and friendship take on new meanings and roles.⁵

Conflict therefore provides a possibility and an opportunity for many stagnant social structures to change, and has provided the most radical means for transforming gender roles. This is borne out by the impact of the Second World War on women's daily lives in Europe. Women moved out of their stereotypical 'female' roles and joined the workforce as a critical mass, a movement big enough to forever change the way that women were

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perceived as the 'weaker sex'; incapable of, for example, driving a bus or a train; prone to hysteria in a crisis – the list is endless. Conflict, therefore, is a primary motivator for transformation. Although widely perceived to be destructive, troublesome and a state to be avoided in most situations, conflict, in its non-violent expression, is pervasive. Without conflict, societies would stagnate. Whether at the individual or collective level, change is always preceded by a measure of discomfort that becomes too much for the individual, the community, the society or the nation to tolerate.⁶ To recognize this is not to advocate that all societies descend into conflict for there is the element of learning that is present. Moreover, even though conflict is a motor for change it is only in conditions of peace that gains made can be consolidated and advanced.

Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen explored the question of how to harness the transformative potential inherent in conflict towards ongoing, sustainable change and peace for both men and women. They asserted that there is no aftermath for women from violence and conflict, since peace efforts do not bring an end to gender-based violence. They put forward the theory that transformation can only be achieved by encompassing a political economy open to women in ways that recognise and value women's social and productive roles and contributions, as well as their desires as sexual beings. This transformation is thus only possible with the total transformation of the present patriarchal gender relations.⁷ Kofi Annan echoes this sentiment when he notes that:

Only if women play a full and equal part can we build the foundations for enduring peace.⁸

Mere Compliance or Steps towards Transformation?

The concept of peace itself ranks among the most controversial of our time. While it undoubtedly carries a positive connotation, various groups differ sharply about what peace entails, how best to achieve it and even whether peace is truly possible. Nelson Mandela is quoted at the beginning of this paper as stating that peace is more than just the absence of war. He talked of lasting peace, lasting security and freedom from hunger, ignorance and disease.⁹ The last decade has seen increased international attention on the issues of women, peace and security. For example, the United Nations Security Council passed a ground-breaking resolution (1325) in October 2000 recognizing that maintaining and promoting peace and security required women's equal participation

in decision-making and called on all actors to adopt a gender perspective. A coalition of NGOs, headed by International Alert, launched an international campaign to promote women's participation in all peace processes. Efforts have been made to 'engender' the Sphere Project's Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards. Added to that, the UN's 'consolidated appeal process' chose 'women and war' as its theme for 2001. Yet, in many ways, this attention appears to be at the margins of mainstream thinking on peace.¹⁰

African countries have taken huge strides by attempting to comply with these international declarations and to begin to foster a culture of peace and gender equality. The African and Beijing Platforms appreciate that without durable peace there can be no sustainable development; and that without sustainable development there can be no durable peace. They further stipulate that since peace is a pre-requisite for the advancement of women, without peace in Africa, none of the proposed recommendations and actions in the Platforms can be implemented. Considering that both women and men are actors in and victims of the enactment and consequences of conflict, the representation of both genders in all the mechanisms of peace is vital.¹¹

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Peace is a life-long process that is based on partnerships that are inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development. While gender is a focus on the relationships between men and women, Africa's male dominated systems and structures compels one to be vigilant about the levels of participation of women as one indicator of the progress towards gender equality. The number of women participating is by no means definitive and other indicators to measure gender equality and peace need to be articulated. Participation alone will not ensure gender equality but it is a first step towards bringing women's experiences and contributions into the mainstream.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa report lists the commitments made by African countries towards promoting peace and the participation of women in the process.¹² Noteworthy commitments on this list include: the Rwandan government, which committed itself to the integration of women in the reconstruction of society; the Algerian government which took unprecedented action in facilitating the passing of legislation to decriminalise abortion to allow abortions for raped women; the Burundian Ministry of Peace and the inclusion of women at the Arusha Peace Negotiations; the Tunisian government which reduced its military budget to support women's



organisations participation in peace negotiations and introduced peace education into school; and the Ugandan system which supports the active participation of women in decision-making.

However, given the increased insecurity and conflict in many parts of Africa, and the concomitant disarray of systems, particularly law and order, it is almost impossible to ensure that these gender-sensitive measures are implemented. Karin Koen cites various rights-based international instruments formulated to mitigate against these collapses and breakdowns of society: The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa – Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights; United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women’s inclusion in peace processes; and The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Women and Development. Women can and do organise around these instruments to hold the state accountable for their protection and safety¹³ but despite this, violence against women remains unacceptably high.

Information collected from studies and the media during the International Day of No Violence against Women in 2003, and based on reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and BBC News, as well as statistics collected by the World Health Organisation in 2005¹⁴ reveals the enormous scope and the magnitude of violence committed against women, mainly by family members and in homes. The United Nations estimates that up to 200 million women are demographically ‘missing’ because of female infanticide or gender discrimination. For example, females might not receive food or medical attention equal to their male counterparts. Globally, women aged between 15 and 44 are more likely to be maimed or die as a result of gender-based violence than through any other cause such as disease, accidents or war combined.¹⁵ These are indeed frightening statistics which create a picture that is all too clear. Theodore Winkler, Director of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), stated:

The world today is confronting a systematic gendercide of tragic proportions (...). There cannot be any room for complacency in face [sic] of slaughter, maiming, rape, degradation, and social discrimination [of women].¹⁶

During conflict, which in many cases continues into the post-conflict context, the human rights of women and girls are violently violated, to the point where sexual violence against women is now referred to as

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a ‘weapon of war’. Sexual violence is used to forcibly impregnate women (to change demographics), to force a population to flee, to break the resistance of the ‘enemy’, and for many other reasons “more complex than the direct infliction of a wound”.¹⁷ More devastatingly, even the protectors and peacekeepers called in to safeguard the civilian population often prey on the dependence and vulnerability of women and children through merciless sexual exploitation, disregarding their responsibility to protect and promote peace for all of the people, including the women and girls.

Recently, ‘gendercide’ – defined as gender-selective mass killing – has begun to attract attention from academics and humanitarians. A vital aspect to this study is the attention to gendercidal institutions¹⁸ like female infanticide, rape, domestic violence and intimate femicide. For example, in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe and some other African countries, the rape of girls, children and infants has become common. Whether this is based on the so-called ‘virgin cure’ myth or is part of the

general spectrum of sexual violence against women is debated in feminist circles. What is not contested is the fact that the cause is largely assigned to the entrenched patriarchal features of African society. This underlying system of gender-based discrimination and violence shows up nowhere else as starkly as in traditional forms of violence such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, deforming women for rejecting would-be suitors, and dowry killings, amongst others. These forms of violence against women are deeply ingrained in the respective societies and are protected by cultural relativists’ arguments that rights are culturally

determined. This tension between universal human rights and cultural relativism impacts and negatively influences the lives of many women throughout Africa and, indeed, throughout the globe. It is a vastly complex situation since many women find identity, self-respect and dignity within their culture, linking it to a sense of belonging.¹⁹ Gender activists report that the statement most heard when challenging destructive gender stereotypes and norms is ‘but it is in our culture’.²⁰

Conflict provides an opportunity for gender norms and stereotypes to be debunked and discredited. However, women need to be organised and to take every opportunity to consciously do this. The participation of women in traditionally male roles is crucial to this process, more so during the peace processes when societal upheaval takes the focus away from traditional gender-based roles and norms.²¹

Gender and Peace Processes

The Commission on the Status of Women, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU) recognised the need to move away from gender role stereotypes and that women have invaluable contributions to make toward the development of peaceful alternatives to conflict in Africa. To ensure that women play an equal part, are empowered politically, and adequately represented they have made firm and clear provisions for the full participation and access of women at all levels of peace processes. But, as Koen points out:

There is no blueprint to ensure such equality.²²

She adds:

Whether women will enjoy the rights afforded them in these instruments is dependent on the domestication of the instruments and the nature and form of such domestication.²³

Jaclyn Cock highlights three main components to peace processes: peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and advocates using these three broad categories to guide gender analyses of conflict and post-conflict situations. She offers the following definitions: peacemaking refers to the policy and political negotiations that bring about an agreement; peacekeeping is a largely military operation to monitor peace agreements like ceasefires but can also be a peace mission staffed by civilians to observe peace processes; and peacebuilding refers to the grassroots endeavours to promote human security. In the conventional dimensions of peacebuilding, there are four main inter-related components: demilitarisation, social reconstruction, democratisation and development.²⁴ Demilitarisation includes disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. Cock further observes that women are largely absent in peacemaking and peacekeeping, and overrepresented in grassroots peacebuilding endeavours.

Gender and Peacebuilding

The overrepresentation of women at the grassroots human security level points to gender role constructions and to the attribution of masculine and feminine qualities to the peace process categories. If we perceive peacemaking as an exercise in rationality, peacekeeping as a display of 'force' and peacebuilding as a caring, nurturing endeavour it becomes clearer as to why and where women are excluded or included. It brings forth essentialist

notions of the inherent 'peacefulness' of women and innate 'violence' or 'rationality' of men. Moser and Clark take issue with this and state that:

The stereotypical essentialising of women as 'victims' and men as 'perpetrators' of political violence and armed conflict assumes universal, simplified definitions of each phenomenon.²⁵

Vincent maintains that it serves to ghettoise women and remove them from the diversity of identities and extended range of experiences and ways of being that are, by implication, available to men. She claims that this way of thinking obscures the fact that attitudes which emphasise peace, sharing and partnership are as much part of human identity and potentiality as is the capacity for destruction and brutality.²⁶ Nonetheless, the presence of women at the peacebuilding level has demonstrated the impact of women's contributions to peace in Africa.

In 2003, the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was awarded the UN prize for Human Rights in recognition of its outstanding achievement in the promotion of human rights, including women's rights. Like MARWOPNET, many women's organisations throughout Africa have been involved in peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level but become invisible in official and formal peace processes. Nadine Puechguirbal asks:

What does it tell us about the position of women within societies that makes them less able than men to participate in peace settlements?²⁷

International observers regularly praise the work done by women but give little account of the obstacles that prevent women from being participants at all levels. Puechguirbal comments that "as long as women are confined to their biological fate in the private realm, they will never be accepted as autonomous individuals in the public arena."²⁸

Gender and Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping, with its history of human rights violations and sexual offences against women, is the arena that has been highlighted by the UN and other humanitarian organisations for focused gender mainstreaming.

Although the word 'peacekeeping' is not in the UN Charter, the UN Security Council has deployed over 50 peacekeeping operations into conflict and post-conflict situations since 1948. Known as 'blue helmets' or 'blue berets', UN peacekeeping

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personnel are made up of contingents from a number of countries. They patrol buffer zones between hostile parties, monitor ceasefires, and assist hostile populations in their search for durable peace. In recent years, the scope of peacekeeping has widened to include larger numbers of civilians as civilian police officers, electoral experts and observers, de-miners, human rights monitors, and specialists in civil affairs and communications.²⁹ This multi-dimensionality became evident when the UN realised that rebuilding societies re-emerging from complex conflicts, (where an apocalyptic worst-case scenario might feature uncontrolled gangs feeding off the chaos with the sole aim of enriching themselves) required much wider efforts than patrolling buffer zones. The emergence of child soldiers, mass rapes, genocides and other such forms of modern warfare is what moved the international community beyond the strictly military agenda to one that focused more on human rights and included a wider range of stakeholders, especially incorporating women and gender balances.³⁰

This traditionally exclusive male domain was forced to reflect on itself and to change, after many cases were reported of how they had a negative effect on women's security, and after accusations of gross human rights violations like rape and prostitution. During missions in Africa from 1993 to 1995, Belgian, Canadian, Italian and Pakistani peacekeepers were implicated in egregious acts against civilians, including torture, murder and rape, forcing several high-ranking officers to resign.³¹ Photographs of soldiers inserting explosives into a woman's vagina after raping her caused 12 peacekeepers to be disciplined, but no charges were brought against them, amidst claims that the report was being investigated.³² According to Nordstrom "each transient carried with him his own values about his rights as a soldier, as a peacekeeper, and (since most peacekeepers were male), as a man."³³ Higate expands:

UN Codes of Conduct prohibit the sexual exploitation of women and children, but peacekeepers are privileged and powerful actors on the ground, and operate within particular masculinised environments.

An important finding by this author seems to be that the majority of the sample he studied, and the UN itself, appeared to work with tacit acceptance of their personnel's involvement with prostitutes if they were over the age of 18. The challenge is to confront the deep-seated masculine identity of what it is to live up to being a man in these contexts, and to find

out how to change them through training based on gender awareness.

Despite these changes at the international level and the widely documented accounts of the different roles that women play, war is still rigidly gendered and women are still largely excluded from combat roles and kept out of the political arena around war, especially in Africa. Goldstein argued that there is a cross-cultural consistency of gendered war roles where masculinity is constructed around war in a variety of ways. He presented evidence that 23 million soldiers serving in armies in the 200 states of the world were 97% male and even when there were women employed they served in traditional roles such as typists and nurses.³⁴ This shapes the way society then perpetuates these gender roles. Over the past few years there has been a move to examine the role that gender plays in peacekeeping and what impact this has on debunking gender stereotypes. When we speak about women and peacekeeping there are two important areas to be focused on: women's equal participation in doing peacekeeping and ensuring that peacekeepers are aware of the linkages between gender equality and peace.

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There are several controversies surrounding the participation of women in peacekeeping which cannot be ignored. Many argue that it is buying into the androcentric war culture and alternatives should be sought. Anti-war feminists argue strongly for a culture where war would never be considered an option when resolving conflict, and seek to replace it with non-violent contest and reconciliation.³⁵

The counter-argument is that unless women involve themselves in these bastions of male power, its culture and orientation is hardly likely to change. Studies have shown that the presence of women in peacekeeping missions improved access and support for local women; made male peacekeepers more reflective and responsible; and broadened the repertoire of skills and styles available within the mission, often with the effect of reduced conflict and confrontation.³⁶ Women are more likely to bring the experiences of the severe human consequences of conflict and a commitment to expose the 'underbelly' of war. They are apt to see more clearly the continuum of conflict that stretches from the beating at home to the rape on the street to the killing on the battlefield and can often relate more vividly to the links between violence, poverty and inequality in daily lives. Gender mainstreaming is not just fair, it is beneficial – as is borne out by the experience of the UN Mission to South Africa (UNOMSA) in 1994.³⁷

The South African Experience, UNOMSA

The process of transition from the racist apartheid regime to a multi-ethnic and democratic South Africa led to the first non-racist and free elections in 1994. The period before the elections was marked by much violence in different regions of the country. The fact that it did not end in a bloodbath or total anarchy, and even though military might and intimidation played a part, was largely seen as a 'miracle' in the eyes of the world. While South Africa's diverse population and history of apartheid made the situation unique, there were many lessons for the global community to learn about how this 'miracle' came about. One of the showpieces of the lead-up to the first democratic election in South Africa was the all-civilian, women-led, gender-balanced observer mission, set up by the United Nations (UNOMSA) to observe and quell violence in order to allow the negotiations to proceed. This peace mission was the object of an extensive study by Gender Links, a South African NGO, to document the efficacy of this model but also, more importantly, to investigate the impact of women's participation in such a typically masculine, 'boys' stronghold.

The mission to South Africa fell more into what is known as 'preventative diplomacy' since its mandate was to quell political violence to allow negotiations to proceed, becoming a kind of peacekeeping-cum-peacemaking combination. Its role was to visibly work with and support local peace structures, while providing behind-the-scenes support to the negotiation process. This mission, therefore, did not fall into the traditional peacekeeping mould. However, the case study provided considerable evidence that systematically building gender considerations into all phases of peace processes, in a way that transcends mere access to transforming gender relations, was a powerful tool, both for securing peace and advancing gender equality.³⁸

At the time of writing up the case study, UNOMSA was the only completely civilian UN mission. It was one of the only three UN peace missions to have been led by a woman, in this case, Angela King. The mission was also the only one to have achieved a gender balance. In the first 16 months of UNOMSA's mission, women comprised between 46% and 53% of the mission staff. Half of the team leaders were women, even in the politically most volatile provinces of KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. The report went on to state that at the time the mission was mounted, the UN had no clear policy or guidelines with regard to the gender composition of

peacekeeping operations. The fact that the mission was entirely civilian played an enabling role in terms of achieving gender balance, given the paucity of women in the military. The fact that the mission was drawn largely from the middle ranks of the UN bureaucracy was another factor, since there are a higher proportion of women at these levels. Although the Deputy Head of Mission claimed that gender was not a conscious factor in the selection of staff for the mission, Angela King was reported as saying that it was because she had seen the positive effects of having a better gender balance in the Namibia mission that more women were recruited. Several women confirmed having been personally contacted by King to join UNOMSA.³⁹

Women members of UNOMSA commented that the mission drew strength from what they termed 'feminine' traits, including concern for the wider needs of the community, shedding symbols of status and power; networking; sharing information; making intuitive decisions, and using a hands-on approach. Angela King herself was described as being consultative, hands-on, and less hierarchical than the usual mission heads; providing space for personal growth. There were no incidences of abuse of local women reported, or undisciplined behaviour, the likes of which have tarnished peacekeeping operations elsewhere. Observers pointed out that the presence of women in UNOMSA meant that profane language and 'locker room' talk was not tolerated. The environment created by King was in direct contrast to Lakhdar Brahimi, who led the final phase of the mission. He was said to have seldom attended staff briefing meetings, was hierarchical, and constantly surrounded by an entourage of male advisers, making himself unapproachable and distant.

The pairing of observers according to race and sex debunked stereotypes of race and gender, especially in rural communities. Local women felt more comfortable talking to women observers about violence and specifically about gender-based violence that they had experienced. Observers frequently reported that when situations were tense and there was a possibility of violence, the female presence was often enough to pause the 'macho hotheads' from exploding.⁴⁰ The case study concluded with a suggestion that at worst, women are as capable as men in the full range of peacekeeping functions and, at best, they are probably better peacekeepers. There is compelling evidence that those United Nations peacekeeping missions with better gender-balanced staff have been highly effective. Cases of successful missions were: Namibia with 60% women; South

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Africa with 53% women; and Guatemala with nearly 49% women.

Angela King was reported to have said that when a critical mass of women was involved in a peace-related mission, women in the mission acted as role models for women in the host country. The presence of women seemed to be a potent ingredient in fostering and maintaining confidence and trust among the local population. The presence of so many women in leadership positions in UNOMSA acted as a catalyst to change the views and attitudes of many of the local women, regardless of party affiliation. According to King, one outcome of the mission was the determination of South African women to have a voice.⁴¹ This case study offers many insights into and lessons about how gender stereotypes and rigid patriarchal gender roles can be overturned. More than anything, it demonstrated the possibilities that exist when society is prepared to risk breaking traditional moulds that were cast in bygone eras.

The DRC Experience (MONUC)

The United Nations Security Council established MONUC to facilitate the implementation of the Lusaka Accord signed in 1999. With a budget exceeding one billion US dollars, it is the largest and most expensive mission in the Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO).

MONUC's mandate can be broken down into four phases:

- **Phase one** involved forcibly implementing the ceasefire agreement.
- **Phase two** involved its monitoring, and the reporting of any violations through the proper channels.
- **Phase three**, still underway, centres on the DDRRR (disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration) process.
- **Phase four**, also in progress, includes facilitating the transition towards the organisation of credible elections.

Aside from the importance of the DRC transition for Africa, much is also on the line for the UN. ONUC (UN Operation in the Congo, 1960-1964) was one of the UN's earliest and largest peacekeeping Operations.⁴² This operation (ONUC) remains a huge blot in the UN copybook and severely tarnished the image of peacekeeping in Africa. It served to halt other countries' involvements who wanted to do more. Today, MONUC, in the aftermath of yet another internecine war, is under pressure to make a difference. In addition, we must recognise that, with the rare exception of Namibia and South Africa, nation-building and peacekeeping activities have enjoyed very little success to date in the

larger states in Africa, for example, Nigeria, Sudan, and Somalia.

The very concept of peacekeeping is also being put to the test in the DRC, and under particularly arduous circumstances. Not only must the Transitional Government deal with the sad heritage of the DRC's history, but also with the reality that there is no lead country (nation-cadre)⁴³ as in Sierra Leone (UK); Liberia (US); Cote d'Ivoire (France); Haiti (US). The conflict has also been especially disastrous for women. Since 1996, between 40,000 and 60,000 rapes have been reported, including cases of survival prostitution for food and large-scale abductions of women for sexual purposes.⁴⁴ A South African journalist recently working in Rwanda came upon a group of women hiding in the jungle, carrying babies born as a result of repeated sexual attacks on them from marauding combatants. She was particularly struck by their resigned fatalism where they remarked that if they were not raped for a day, it was something for which to be grateful. They drew strength from their collective experience and supported each other to survive.⁴⁵ Thousands of other women have joined in the conflict voluntarily, either to support the combatants or to accompany them. Regardless of the myriad roles taken on by women during this conflict, they have not been considered fit for leadership positions. This view is borne out by the fact that no women were present at the Lusaka Accord meeting and only 10% of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue delegates in 2002 were women.⁴⁶

Building on the UNOMSA model, amongst other considerations, the UN put in place a strategy to include gender in all aspects of multidimensional peacekeeping operations (mapped out in the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action). An important result of this was the establishment of the MONUC Gender Office with a special mandate to work both within MONUC and the Congolese population to mainstream a gender perspective in all decisions taken on policy and programming initiatives. Compared to UNOMSA, MONUC has a dismal personnel gender balance, which raises suspicions about the UN's commitment to the mandate. Regardless of all the evidence at hand of the benefit of having women personnel (i.e. drastically reduced sexual exploitation and making local women more comfortable to report incidences of sexual violence), the personnel component of MONUC is largely male dominated, with less than 5% of women employed as staff on all levels of operation.⁴⁷ Schroeder writes extensively on the issue of mainstreaming gender perspectives in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, repatriation and resettlement process in the DRC and is highly critical of the MONUC gender office. She points out that the Gender Advisor, appointed to assist with the mainstreaming process within MONUC and

in the country, operated without a budget and with a staff component of five.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding these obstacles, the Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) was put in place in early 2005 to broaden the outreach of the Gender Unit in MONUC and has claimed numerous achievements since then. They list these achievements: having enabled the participation of women as part of civil society meetings with visiting ambassadors of the Security Council, facilitating women's groups' ability to organise and prepare for peace negotiations, and facilitating exchanges between women from the DRC and women from other conflict regions. More specifically, the OGA supported a conference to review strategies for addressing sexual violence and MONUC was represented at the highest level. The new draft constitution recognises the principles of gender equality and the responsibility of the state to sanction sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. The Office of Gender Affairs is now training trainers who will train magistrates, lawyers and legal auxiliaries (including armed forces) in gender justice. The OGA has also participated in the training of the Congolese National Police. It has influenced electoral laws to ensure that women vote and trained parliamentarians who have started engaging with women's constituencies and helped advance move the gender agenda. Finally, the OGA has developed women's leadership capacity, so as to expand the pool from which women candidates for political office could be drawn.⁴⁹

Compared to UNOMSA, which played a significant role in changing perceptions through women leaders as well as staff, MONUC has had to deal with gender being ghettoised in the OGA. However, it has managed to significantly influence policies and strategies from a gender perspective. UNOMSA demonstrated how successful gender balances in staffing and leadership could be, and MONUC is showing how a gender perspective, even with limited the resources, can still bring about a notable measure of change in terms of participation and access for women. South Africa, well into the post-conflict phase, is in the throes of the battle to sustain the gains made during the struggle for freedom. The DRC is not yet considered a country that is reconstructing or transforming after conflict. Time will tell whether any of the gender gains are sustained in the DRC.

Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The conflict moment provided the window of opportunity (in both South Africa and the DRC) for a gender perspective to be incorporated into

peace processes and to pave the way for increased participation and contributions by women in the aftermath. The post-conflict phase presents an opportunity to aim higher than merely recreating the pre-conflict society. Deliberate measures can be taken at this time, building on the awareness created and the gains made during the conflict, to sustain the momentum towards gender equality. The role of women during the apartheid struggle and the continued movement during the transition period of women's organisations, (as well as the international reinforcement of this with the UNOMSA experiment) went a long way toward opening up the terrain for women to step forward and claim some space. In the DRC, gender awareness has risen and more women than ever before have participated and contributed. However, Ndyo Sow, writing on the transformation process in the Great Lakes region is sceptical about these advances. The realities of women's lives have not fundamentally changed if sexual violence and domestic violence figures (during the transition) are anything to go by. Elaine Zuckerman and Marcia Greenberg propose a conceptual framework to ensure

gender issues are included in the analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of post-conflict reconstruction. This framework, while emphasising a rights-based approach, also underscores that women are assets for successful reconstruction. They suggest that "sustainable peace requires a more permanent transformation of social norms around violence, gender and power," and call for "transformative approaches to achieve gender equality premised on more gender-equitable relationships."⁵⁰

What this suggests is that it is not enough to change the structures and focus only on claiming rights. Through group discussions led by Diana Francis in London, the Committee for Conflict Transformation Support brought out a report which calls on society to challenge cultures, traditions and religions which, while being hotly defended by both men and women, simply fail to recognise that a people cannot be liberated while half of them remain subjugated. They also advocated that individuals examine their own lifestyles and individual practices to ensure that gender injustices were not being perpetuated on any level.⁵¹

Final Thoughts

While it is undeniable that profound and positive changes in the status and roles of women have occurred in the past 50 years in all spheres of human life, violence against women continues in all parts of the world. This violence takes many forms and is an indicator that the transformation has not been adequate. Deeply entrenched social beliefs regarding

The post-conflict phase presents an opportunity to aim higher than merely recreating the pre-conflict society

the identity and role of women constitute a strong barrier to the full participation and transformation of gender relations worldwide. To unravel peace and gender equality from its androcentric moorings requires that we go beyond standard labels of empowerment, liberation or gender. We need to learn from and implement the lessons from models of change, examples of which have been presented in this paper. Contexts and multiplicities must take precedence over one-dimensional policies and strategies. Allowing cultural, religious and historical nuances to enter the gender agenda is the only sure way forward to peace in Africa.

If women are indeed at the forefront of efforts to bring about peace in the international context and in divided societies, and if women are essential to the formal processes in areas of conflict, continuous debates around 'innate pacifism' or 'essentialist notions of male violence' are not useful. There is agreement that women are a wealth of untapped resources and that bringing about gender balances is beneficial to society as a whole. It has been suggested that the inclusion of women in the predominately male domains of peacekeeping causes beneficial changes, not only within the mission, but in the population as well. The symbolism of this change is not accidental. Challenging the stereotype of male-only protectors brings about a shift in the mindset of the organisation as well as the target populace.

If we are serious about peace then we are also serious about gender equality and the way forward is far beyond the declarations, instruments and incorporation of gender perspectives. It is time to take big steps, to look deeply into the bedrock of what holds society together and to unearth the issues that lie beneath the surface. We cannot continue to accept that it goes against the culture or the religious practice or the age-old traditions of 'how it has always been done.' Encouraging and training society to critique, question and discard harmful practices must be done boldly, without fear of stepping on sacred ground. The longer we delay, the more women die.

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About this paper

This paper reflects on the intersection between gender, peace and peacekeeping. The author draws on evidence from two Southern African peacekeeping experiences (UNOMSA in South Africa and MONUC in the DRC) to contend that having a critical mass of women in peacekeeping missions can make the mission more effective, but also changes gender stereotypes and rigid patriarchal gender roles. The author views conflict as, amongst other things, a motor of transformation. Conflict, though certainly fraught with gender-based violence, presents an opportunity for women to seek to change existing gendered power relations.

About the author

Anu Pillay is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. Ms Pillay also serves as director on the boards of the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre and the Masimanyane Women's Support Centre. She was co-editor, with S. Meintjies and M. Turshen, of *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*, published by Zed books in 2001.

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