

‘Gender-ing’ the Palette: how are gender concerns crucial to conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

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Abstract:

This paper shows how considering women’s problems and reinforcing their potentialities can make difference in a war-torn society and represent a requirement for a long-lasting peace and for avoiding violence could burst again in the aftermath of a conflict. The paper points out why gender concerns are not a superfluous aspect of conflict resolution and peacebuilding: recognizing that wartime can be a source of victimization, but also of opportunities for women, the article stresses how and why gender considerations should be taken seriously in account in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Since peacebuilding activities are multifaceted, for the sake of clarity the analysis follows the comprehensive model of the peace building palette firstly elaborated in 2004 in the Utstein Report. This palette recognizes peacebuilding as a manifold policy that encompasses four different main fields: security, socio-economic foundations, political framework and reconciliation and justice. Recognizing that the first step to end a conflict is its resolution through a peace agreement, the article firstly analyzes how in that sensitive moment gender concerns are crucial, then the analysis starts from the political aspect of the peacebuilding palette and encompasses all the four subsets of the model.

Introduction: *Lysistrata*, gender, and the Peacebuilding Palette

The Greek comedy *Lysistrata*, written in 411 BC by Aristophanes, is about an Athenian woman, Lysistrata, who is weary of her husband being away and fighting the Peloponnesian War, a 25-year-long conflict between Athens and Sparta. She therefore decides to refuse sex from her husband until men agree a truce, involving in this project women from Athens, Sparta, Boeotia and Corinth. The women also barricade themselves within the Acropolis, asking the local magistrate to end the war. The play ends with the success of Lysistrata and her 'army': Athenians and Spartans swear an oath of allegiance securing peace into the region.

More than 2000 years after Aristophanes' comedy, war and peace issues still involve men as well as women and women still have different perceptions and experiences of peace and conflict. During wartime, women are often victims, sometimes they directly participate in the conflicts; other times, armed conflicts can become a source of new opportunities to empower women's role in the society. Similarly, women's contribution and involvement can be essential to build peace and societies in the aftermath of a conflict.

The aim of this paper is pointing out how gender concerns may be crucial in war-torn societies, and how taking these concerns into account is a requirement for a long-lasting peace and for avoiding violence could burst again in the aftermath of a conflict. It will be argued that considering gender concerns in every phase of conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding is indispensable in order to (re)build an equal society and promote sustainable development. Gender concerns are not a superfluous, secondary, or unnecessary aspect of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, but they should be regarded as crucial. Since women usually have different experiences of the conflicts and their aftermath, not considering their instances, problems and opinions means not only ignoring

the needs of more than half of a society's population, but also undermining their participation, involvement and trust in the new society born in the aftermath of a war.

The term gender refers to a status “achieved through psychological, cultural, and social means”,¹ a “socially constructed definition of women and men [...] determined by conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life”.² This definition implies that gender is a set of attributes, roles, behaviours and activities socially constructed, context based, and learned through socialization that can vary according to a specific context and change over time and not a stable, natural and unchangeable biological condition. Similarly, the gender-based approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding of this paper refuses to consider women as a monolithic bloc inherently more peaceful than men, but it focuses on the roles women may play during conflicts and might potentially play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The term ‘post-conflict peacebuilding’ was firstly coined and introduced in 1992 by the former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali in his report *An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*.³ Post-conflict peacebuilding interventions are actions aimed at stabilising peace in the aftermath of a conflict in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. The concept of peacebuilding has been therefore broadened to a concept with a more comprehensive and also preventive

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¹ Skjelsbæk I. (1997), *Gendered Battlefields: A Gender Analysis of Peace and Conflict*, PRIO Report 06/1997. Oslo: PRIO, 19.

² Council of Europe (1998), *Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, May 1998, 7, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/3c160b06a.html>.

³ See *An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*. Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992, A/47/277 - S/24111, 17 June 1992, available at: <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>.

meaning, not necessarily related to peacekeeping operations.⁴ This new umbrella concept entails long term activities such as early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy work, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements, and the establishment of peace zones. When referring to peacebuilding, the paper focuses on the narrower understanding of ‘post-conflict peacebuilding’ activities, as firstly introduced by the UN Secretary General in 1992.

Post-conflict peacebuilding interventions are aimed at the prevention of “the recurrence of violence among nations and peoples”⁵ and at encouraging “the development of the conditions, attitudes and behaviour that foster and sustain social and economic development that is peaceful, stable and prosperous”.⁶ As conflict-related problems are different from place to place, these activities are usually multifaceted and aimed at targeting all the political, social, judicial and security issues characterising a war-torn society. Some peace scholars have therefore developed a multi-dimensional model underlying the wide array of activities and processes a peacebuilding policy entails, their inter-dependence and their interplay. This comprehensive model, known as ‘Peacebuilding Palette’, has been firstly elaborated in 2004 in the Utstein Report and is provided in Figure 1.⁷ The palette recognizes peacebuilding as a manifold policy that encompasses four different main fields: the provision of security, the establishment of socio-economic foundations, the

⁴ See for example Boutros-Ghali B. (1995), *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations*, Document A/50/60 - S/1995/1, 3 January 1995 (New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations), available at: <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agsupp.html>, Lederach J.P. (1997), *Building Peace*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, Haugerudbraaten H. (1998), ‘Peacebuilding: Six dimensions and two concepts’, in *African Security Review* 7(6): 17-26, and Maiese M. (2003), ‘Peacebuilding’, in *Beyond Intractability*, Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, available at: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/peacebuilding/>.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Smith D. (2004), *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together. Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding. Evaluation Report 1/2004*, Report commissioned by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, Norway: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10, available at: http://www.prio.no/files/file44563_rapport_1.04_webutgave.pdf.

⁷ The model of the peacebuilding palette can be found at: <http://www.international-alert.org/pdfs/palette.pdf>

construction of a political framework of long term peace and the promotion of reconciliation and justice.

Figure 1: The Peacebuilding palette⁸



Recognizing that the first step to end a conflict is its resolution through a peace agreement, the paper firstly analyzes how gender concerns may be taken into consideration during that sensitive phase. Furthermore, acknowledging that wartime can be a source not only of victimization, but also of opportunities for women, the paper stresses how gender

⁸ Source: <http://www.international-alert.org/pdfs/palette.pdf>.

considerations should be taken seriously into account in conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the presentation follows the comprehensive model of peacebuilding palette and aims at ‘gendering’ this theoretical framework. The analysis starts from the political aspect of the peacebuilding palette and encompasses all the four subsets of the model, trying to understand how gender may fit into post-conflict peacebuilding theory and to show gender concerns may have paramount importance for every part of the model.

The reason for a gendered approach. Women and war

The notions of war and militarism have often been linked with the notion of masculinity.⁹ Armed conflicts have therefore been considered as a matter for men or as particular situations which involve, maim, kill, have consequences and have to be ended only by men. Yet this vision is at least limited and has been sometimes challenged by reality. In particular, the direct or indirect involvement of women in war has been gradually increasing for many reasons.

Firstly, war is no longer an exclusive event waged only by armies as it was during the Middle Age: civilians have become one of the possible war targets, following an escalation path that crosses the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki up to estimate civilians as the 90 per cent of the victims of contemporary civil wars and international conflicts.¹⁰ Secondly, the direct participation of women in war has increased during the last century: even though armies are still mostly made up of men while women

⁹ On war, militarism, and masculinity, see for example Segal M.W. (1995), ‘Women’s Military Roles Cross-Nationally: Past, Present, and Future’, in *Gender & Society*, 9: 757-775 and Skjelsbæk I. (1997), *op. Cit.*, 7-10.

¹⁰ See International Alert (1999), *Women, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding: Global Perspectives*, London: International Alert, 10 and Ferris E. (1993), *Women, war and peace*, Research Report No. 14, Uppsala, Sweden: Life and Peace Institute, 21. Other sources indicate civilians as 80 to 85 per cent of the victims, see Norwegian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Fafo Programme for International Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (2001), *Gendering Human Security: From Marginalization to the Integration of Women in Peace-building*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 5

oftentimes serve mainly as combatant associates – such as cooks, carriers or spies – women’s conscription has become possible in different countries.¹¹ In particular, women have represented up to 30 per cent of the fighting forces in some conflicts and have played an important role in some guerrilla groups, as happened in Sierra Leone, where “women represented up to 30 per cent of the fighting forces”¹² and roughly 12.000 girls were actively involved in the conflict.¹³ Thirdly, civilian women are sometimes considered as a particular and preferred target in many wars: during the war in Bosnia for instance, women’s rapes used to be a systematic weapon of war, aimed to destroy the ethnicity of the enemy and what a rival woman symbolized. Finally, women’s participation and struggles for peace and peacebuilding have often represented real and effective ways to promote peace dialogue and to broaden the peace agenda through women’s considerations and problems, as happened during the Arusha Peace Talks in 2000.

Even the UN indeed stressed in many Documents and Resolutions the importance of gender concerns. The Preamble of the UN Charter, for example, underlines the UN faith “in the equal rights to men and women”.¹⁴ Likewise, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, encourages Governments to “promote an active and visible policy of

¹¹ For an historical overview about women combatants see Goldstein J. S. (2001), ‘Women warriors: the historical record of female combatants’, in *War and Gender. How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 59-127.

¹² Torry G. Ed. (2006), *SCR 1325 and the Peacebuilding Commission. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security – Six Years on Report*, New York: NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 26. For other examples see International Alert (2006), *Local Business, Local Peace: the Peacebuilding Potential of the Domestic Private Sector*, London: International Alert, 169, available at http://www.international-alert.org/pdfs/lblp_chap5.pdf.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ See the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>.

mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively”¹⁵

Gender concerns should therefore not be considered as one of the many aspects of the aftermath of a conflict, nor can they be overwhelmed by other and more contingent issues. During a conflict, women are often victims of gender-based and sexual violence; furthermore, they struggle to keep families together in war-torn societies, and they are consequently highly affected by the breakdown of the society entailed in the outburst of a conflict. Gender concerns in peacebuilding and conflict resolution are thus neither superfluous nor merely important: they are crucial. Women constitute half of a society’s population: not including women’s views and ideas can lead to a model of peace and security focused on militarism and power supported by force. Conversely, considering women’s problems, proposals, experiences and opinions represents a fundamental condition for achieving a lasting and just peace and for building an equal society after a conflict.

Women in conflict resolution

Before every peacebuilding policy and activity, the first step at the end of a war or a conflict is usually represented by an agreement, a ceasefire or a peace accord between the parties to end these wars and conflicts and to establish a framework to be followed during the aftermath.

The resolution of a conflict is a very complicated and sensitive phase: statistical data from the Utsein Report indicate for example that “about 50 per cent of peace

¹⁵ See the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995, A/CONF.177/20 (1995) and A/CONF.177/20/Add.1 (1995), available at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instreet/e5dplw.htm>.

agreements to end civil wars collapse within five years of signature”.¹⁶ In this sensitive moment, gender concerns have usually been recognised as a secondary and superfluous issue: peace accords and ceasefires have often been agreed only by men, following a ‘top-down’ or an ‘outside-down’ approach and without taking women’s needs into consideration. According to a research made by the UN Development Fund for Women, “in ten major peace processes in the past decade, women were on average 6 per cent of negotiators and under 3 per cent of signatories”.¹⁷ This lack of gender expertise among mediators in the formal peace processes results in a feeble consideration of women’s concerns and experiences: only few peace accords for instance refer to the use of sexual violence as a military and political tactic.

Yet a peace negotiation process can be a potential source of progress toward gender equality in the new society born in the aftermath of a conflict, whereas the fact of not considering gender perspectives during the negotiation phase could represent the first step toward an unjust peace and an unequal society. According to a study of the Norwegian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Fafo Programme for International Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, during wartime indeed women constitute up to 80 per cent of some villages population.¹⁸ Armed conflicts represent a way for them to acquire new opportunities and to assume new roles, functions and responsibilities in order to maintain the core relationships and institutions of a war-torn society. In Bougainville for example, “church groups provide women’s main opportunities for training, leadership,

¹⁶ Smith D. (2004), *op. Cit.*, 18.

¹⁷ See the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) website: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/peace_security/, the speech of Alberdi I. (2008), *Women's Equal Participation and Full Involvement in All Efforts for the Maintenance and Promotion of Peace and Security*, Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 29 October 2008, available at http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=753 and the research UNIFEM (2009), *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*, available at http://www.realizingrights.org/pdf/UNIFEM_handout_Women_in_peace_processes_Brief_April_20_2009.pdf.

¹⁸ See Norwegian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Fafo Programme for International Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (2001), *op. Cit.*, 20.

solidarity, networking and expressing wider experience than beyond their village and even beyond national borders”.¹⁹ Ignoring women’s achievements, networks, forums, groups and NGOs during peace negotiations therefore represents a backlash for women and a way to neglect their importance not only for the resolution of a conflict and for the peacebuilding process, but also as a members of the future society. Conversely, being aware of the new roles and skills achieved by women during a war and accepting them as peace facilitators can represent the beginning of a new involvement, consideration and political participation in a peaceful society.²⁰

As part of the Burundi peace process, the Arusha Peace Talks in 2000 are an example of a peace negotiation which accepted the presence of some women representatives of NGOs as observers in the initial talks.²¹ The presence of Nelson Mandela as chief negotiator played an important role in women’s achievements: he convened 19 different political parties at the Burundi peace talks held in Tanzania and he took always in consideration women’s importance, due to the fact that in South Africa women’s movements were very active in fighting against Apartheid and in addressing structural obstacles to women’s political participation. The presence of Burundian women at the peace talks gave them the possibility to lobby and influence the formal discussion, and to integrate their issues into the peace process through informal channels. Women’s presence assured not only a focus on protection of women and girls, on mechanisms for the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence, and on a legalisation promoting women’s right to inherit land and to access to education, but it also resulted in active political

¹⁹ Chinkin C. (2003), *Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women*, Expert Group Meeting, 10-13 November 2003, Ottawa, Canada: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), 10, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/peace2003/reports/BPChinkin.PDF>

²⁰ Chinkin C. (2003), *op. Cit.*, 7-13, reports eight issues to be considered to ensuring that women’s concerns are met within a peace agreement.

²¹ See Norwegian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Fafo Programme for International Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (2001), *op. Cit.*, 34-36.

participation. As a consequence, today Burundi is the 23rd country in the world for women's participation in the National Parliament, well ahead the 71st place of the United States of America.²²

Gender concerns in the peacebuilding palette

- Political Framework

Political participation, democratisation, good governance and institution building are all parts of a bigger political framework that represents the political framework of the peacebuilding palette.

Ensuring an “increased participation of women at all decision-making levels”,²³ particularly “in conflict resolution and peace processes”,²⁴ are also the first two points stressed by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, a watershed resolution which put for the first time gender concerns on the UN agenda, recognizing women as actors and contributors – not only as victims – and calling for their inclusion in all aspects and activities of peace and security. The UN also defined gender mainstreaming as

The process of assessing the implications for men and for women of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes

²² See *Women in National Parliaments*, compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

²³ See *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security*, S/RES/1325 (2000), 31 October 2000, available at http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf.

²⁴ *Ibidem*. For a report after six years of implementation of the Security Council Resolution S/RES/1325 (2000) and the Peacebuilding Commission see Torry G. Ed. (2006), *op. Cit.*, 1-32. For a good analysis about gender mainstreaming in the United Nations see Raven-Robert A. (2005), ‘Gender Mainstreaming in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Talking the Talk, Tripping over the Walk’, in Mazurana D. et al. (2005), *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 43-63, for some statistical data about the female presence within the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations see the Annex II of Lessons Learned Unit, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) (2000), *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective In Multidimensional Peace Operations*, New York: United Nations DPKO publications, 36-38.

in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.²⁵

Gender mainstreaming has therefore a strong political dimension which cannot be forgotten or left aside when peacebuilding activities deal with political issues such as the process of democratisation, institution building, the promotion of practises of good governance and human rights. Mainstreaming gender in every peacebuilding policy is a political step to reaffirm the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and to consider their point of views in the decision making.

Women and their forums, networks, NGOs, and peace groups should be considered important parts in the reconstruction of a war-torn society; their voices should be listened and taken into consideration as voices from the civil society during peace talks, their participation to elections and to National Parliaments should be encouraged and sustained. As shown by the high rates of women's participation in the Constitutional Referendum in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2006, women's involvement in elections is a pre-requisite for gender equality and a guarantee for equal opportunities for men and women to claim their civic rights and participate in their country's development.²⁶

The end of a conflict should not be seen by women as an unavoidable backlash into a macho or patriarchal society. Rwanda, South Africa and Namibia are post-conflict countries which have been able to translate and to channel women's roles, responsibilities, peace involvements, ideas and enthusiasm into political participation and inclusion. Rwanda is indeed the first country in the world for women's participation in the

²⁵ Lessons Learned Unit, DPKO (2000), *op. Cit.*, 6.

²⁶ See *Africa: Women's vote tilts balance in DRC's constitutional referendum*, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 20 January 2006, available at http://www.unifem.org/news_events/currents/currents200602.html.

Parliament, South Africa is the 3rd, Namibia is the 34th.²⁷ Gender awareness in every peacebuilding activity, explicit support to women's organisations, adequate training and education aimed to increase the participation of women in international, regional and national institutions are therefore political crucial steps for a just and lasting peace. However, this political participation is only one of the many aspects which characterise an equal and gender-aware society. Afghanistan for example precedes Namibia at the 33rd place,²⁸ nevertheless many news and reports denounced even recently how the country is still far away from gender equality and participation.²⁹

- Security

Women's political achievements are nevertheless worthless if they are not accompanied by effective improvements in the security sector of the peacebuilding palette. Activities in this field include actions against mines and landmines, Security Sector Reform, initiatives to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate (DDR) ex combatants and programs to recollect small arms and light weapons (SALW). Acting effectively in this framework means dealing with all the problems ex combatants as well as civilians may have when trying to re-adapt to a peaceful society.

Peacebuilding activities in the field of security should be aware that men and women experience war differently and consequently may have different needs in the aftermath. For instance, since at the end of a conflict women, together with children and the elderly, usually constitute the majority of the population, a gender focused policy may

²⁷ See the classification *Women in National Parliaments*, op. Cit.

²⁸ *Ibidem*. For an overview on the US gender policy in the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan see Steinberg D.K. (2003), *The Role of Women in Peace Building and Reconstruction: More Than Victims*, Remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations, U.S. Department of State, New York City, 6 March 2003.

²⁹ See for example Human Rights Watch (2010), *The "Ten-Dollar Taliban" and Women's Rights. Afghan Women and the Risks of Reintegration and Reconciliation*, New York: Human Rights Watch, available at <http://www.hrw.org/node/91466>; for an Afghan women's organization active since 1977 see the website of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA): <http://www.rawa.org/index.php>.

provide timely measures against mines and land-mines, one of the most used weapons in current armed conflicts that every year cause thousands of deaths among civilians and threaten them even once a conflict is over.

DDR programmes are another field of intervention in which gender awareness can make the difference: the demobilization of female fighters in Guatemala for instance was part of a bigger process of demobilization unanimously considered successful.³⁰ Yet female fighters faced some problems in their new civilian lives, due to the different levels of their education and to the difficulties in reintegrating in a macho and patriarchal society after many years of guerrilla in equal and gender respectful groups.³¹

Being women ex-combatants or civilians, taking in consideration their needs and foreseeing the security problems they could face in a new peaceful society are crucial aspects of an effective peacebuilding. Violence against women is a widespread and common practise during wartime as well as in peace and does not disappear with the end of a conflict. Effective policies of reintegration should contrast this violence: the return of traumatised male combatants to their homes and communities should not represent a source of domestic violence for women. A gender aware DDR programme might therefore provide opportunities and help to the ex combatants, and promote policies to prevent new outbursts of violence within the domestic realm.

Among these policies, programmes aimed at avoiding an excessive presence of SALW in an unstable and war-torn society should receive particular attention. Small arms in the hands of ex-combatants represent a dangerous threat for women and for the whole

³⁰ See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2000), *Demobilization and Reintegration of Combatants Some Lessons from Global Experience*, UNDP, 5, available at <http://unddr.org/docs/UNDP-GlobalExperience.pdf> and *Statement of the Delegation of Guatemala in the Security Council on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, 23 March 2000, available at <http://www.un.int/guatemala/english/speeches/psyd/2000/english.html>.

³¹ For an analysis of female fighters demobilization in Guatemala see Hauge W. (2007), *The Demobilization and Political Participation of Female Fighters in Guatemala*, Report to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), available at <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/DDR/FemaleFightersGuatemala.pdf>.

peacebuilding process. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) reports indeed that “domestic violence is more likely to be lethal if there is a gun in the home. For women, the risk of being killed if there is a gun in the home is increased by 172 per cent”.³² Moreover, once a conflict is ended the remnants of large amounts of SALW can foster the rise of non-state actors or criminal groups able to challenge the power of a weak state and to threaten the security of its population. Effective policies of peacebuilding should thus be aimed not only to the recollection of SALW, but also to the provision of security for the dismantled population and to the development of opportunities for the society as a whole. The provision of security and opportunities for development is indeed a non-secondary aspect in SALW policies. As some state responses to pastoral violence in Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya demonstrate, coercive measures that focus on disarmament without reconciliation and “weapons collections alone seldom reduce violence over the long term”,³³ but they can paradoxically “engender new vulnerabilities for some populations as well as stimulate violent resistance”.³⁴

Another important and gender-aware policy linked to the DDR programs addresses the legal status and the rights of women, who are often not considered as individual legal persons. Particularly, in some societies women do not have property and land rights: in Guatemala, for example, only programmes of collective reintegration allowed some women ex-combatants to become proprietaries of land for the first time in their life, since usually women could only have land co-property together with their husband.³⁵ Laws that do not give widows of ex-combatants the right to inherit land,

³² IANSA (2006), *2006: Bringing the global gun crisis under control*, 16 May 2006, London: IANSA, 8, available at <http://www.iansa.org/members/IANSA-media-briefing-low-res.pdf>

³³ Small Arms Survey (2007), “Responses to pastoral wars. A review of violence reduction efforts in Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya”, *Sudan Issue Brief n. 8, Human Security Baseline Assessment*, September 2007, available at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/sudan/Sudan_pdf/SIB%208%20Responses.pdf

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ See Hauge W. (2007), *op. Cit.*, 20.

property, benefits, incentives or entitlements of their husbands or relatives deceased in war, or that assure such rights only after many years, represent a serious obstacle to the effective inclusion of women in a war-torn society. Legal reforms addressing women's economic participation in the new societies and their struggles for an economic independence are therefore fundamental policies to empower women in the aftermath of a conflict.

- Socio-Economic Foundations

Women's problems and contributes should be taken in account also from a socio-economic point of view in order to build a peaceful and gender aware society in the aftermath of a conflict. Socio-economic aspects are indeed another important part of the comprehensive peacebuilding palette. Post-conflict peacebuilding activities tackle the socio-economic problems related to war and conflicts providing physical reconstruction of economic infrastructures, health, education and food security, and addressing the status of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Even in this peacebuilding field, gender concerns have crucial importance for many reasons. From an economic perspective, considering women's activities as potential peacebuilding forces, for example ensuring and promoting their participation in micro-credit schemes, can foster the construction of a new equal society where women are not just devoted to family labour and to the domestic domain, but they can also become economically independent, self sufficient and improve their decision-making power. Women entrepreneurs can become key actors in the reconstruction of a war-torn society, since they usually act at the grass-roots level of the societies and hold informal and small-scale business activities. International Alert showed how informal micro-level business activities "such as handicrafts, second-hand clothing retail, or growing and selling produce

in local markets”³⁶ of businesswomen in Nepal, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Abkhazia, Jerusalem and Sri Lanka empowered the role of the women in war-torn societies, and represented a way to address not only conflict issues, but also socio-economic gender inequality.³⁷ During a conflict, women’s activities sometimes represent the economic core of a society; these activities have also the potential to foster economic growth during the aftermath of a conflict. Micro-credit, micro-finance and loan schemes, donors and outside agencies should therefore encourage and support women’s initiatives, and provide them with training and education.

In addition, peacebuilding policies should address women’s social demands, being aware of their need of education and health in a war-torn society. The lack of education, malnutrition, and the scourge represented by mental, stress-related, infectious or venereal diseases such as the HIV usually have a tremendous impact on women’s lives. Efforts to provide health and education thus become efforts towards gender equality and against the marginalization of women in the new societies.

Finally, gender concerns have a paramount importance in the repatriation and in the return of refugees and IDPs. Camps for IDPs or refugees are set to provide shelter, food and help for people in desperate situations. Yet these camps can be a dangerous place for women, that together with children and the elders can represent “up to 80 per cent of the population”³⁸ in many refugee camps. The logistical organization of a camp can indeed make difference for a woman’s situation: if access to water is too far away from the residences, if latrines are in an unsafe place, if the camp is not patrolled during the nights

³⁶ International Alert (2006), *op. Cit.*, 171.

³⁷ See *ibidem*, 166-189.

³⁸ Olsen O.E. and Scharffscher K.S. (2004), “Rape in Refugee Camps as Organisational failures”, in *International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Winter 2004, 377. This statistical data refers to African camps’ population; the general statistical data indeed confirm the African number provided by Olsen O.E. and Scharffscher K.S. See for instance Olsson L. and Tryggestad T. L. Ed. (2001), *Women and International Peacekeeping*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 36: “in almost any conflict 80 per cent of the refugees are women and children”.

or it has no sufficient lights, women are isolated, discriminated and vulnerable. In these conditions, their permanence in the camps can easily become a nightmare: despite the UN set of guidelines on how to protect refugee women,³⁹ “camps are still set up and run in negligence of these guidelines”.⁴⁰ As a result of these ‘organisational failures’,⁴¹ women can experience violence, intimidation, sexual harassment and can be raped by the other men in the camps, by militia members during an attack or by the same peacekeepers or humanitarian workers.⁴²

- Reconciliation and Justice

Sexual violence in war is a common and widespread practise. Women are usually the main victims of this practise: weaker and less armed than men, they can easily be harassed, forced to prostitution or raped. In particular, rape has become a weapon of war in many civilian and ethnic conflicts, as regularly happened in the Balkan wars in the 1990s.⁴³ Even the UN Security Council in 2008 formally recognized that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide”.⁴⁴ Rape against enemy women is not only a violent action against an unprotected human being, but it also assumes a symbolic value in wartime. From a masculine point of view, the act of raping an enemy woman during a conflict is perceived as a way to possess an enemy’s property, to disrupt a woman’s

³⁹ See UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (1995), *Sexual Violence Against Refugees. Guidelines on Prevention and Response*, Geneva: UNHCR, Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Olsen O.E. and Scharffscher K.S. (2004), *op. Cit.*, 378. This sentence relies on Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2002), *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on Their Protection: An Assessment of Ten Years of Implementation*, New York: Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

⁴¹ The term echoes Olsen O.E. and Scharffscher K.S. (2004), *op. Cit.*,

⁴² See Rehn E., Johnson Sirleaf E. (2002), *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace-Building*, New York: United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 23-26, available at http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/214_chapter02.pdf

⁴³ For an analysis about rape as a weapon of war see Skjelsbæk I. (2001), ‘Sexual Violence and War: Mapping Out a Complex Relationship’. In *European Journal of International Relations* 7(2): 211-237.

⁴⁴ See *UN Security Council Resolution 1820 on Women and peace and security*, S/RES/1820 (2008), 19 June 2008, available at http://www.corriere.it/Media/Foto/2008/06/20/onu_test.pdf. For an analysis about rape as a weapon of war see Skjelsbæk I. (2001), *op. Cit.*

existence forcing her to sex, to violate intimately the adverse ethnic group making her pregnant and, since women are often associated with the idea of motherhood and nationhood, to conquer and to control a land.⁴⁵ Rape traumatizes a woman indelibly, making her unsafe and insecure. Some women refuse the baby they had after a rape, others try to forget their experience, fearing to be repudiated, rejected and ostracized by their society, starting in this way a new life in silent cohabitation with the burden of this trauma. As a consequence, sexual abuses and war rape crimes are usually underestimated, not reported, or get unpunished.

A peacebuilding policy aware of gender concerns' importance should not gloss over women's trauma, but should conversely contrast this lack of information on rapes, focusing on the way to heal this psychological trauma and assuring the perpetrators of violence to the justice. Since raped women tend to distrust men with uniforms, the presence of women among peacekeepers may for example be encouraged as a way to raise the confidence of traumatized women in the whole peace process. In addition, a gender balanced team of peacekeepers can better reflect the demographic balance of a society and build more confidence in the local population.⁴⁶ Finally, seeing their rapists brought to justice is a necessary step to build women's trust in the new peaceful society and to help them to reconstruct their lives.

Post-conflict peacebuilding policies should approach the problems related to justice and reconciliation – the fourth and last part of the peacebuilding palette –

⁴⁵ For a complete analysis of the problem and of the motivations behind sexual violence in war see Goldstein J. S. (2001), *op. Cit.*, 332-380. For a careful analysis of what rape in war can symbolize see in particular *Ibidem*, 362-371 and Skjelsbæk I. (1997), *op. Cit.*, 45-49.

⁴⁶ For some statistical data about female presence within UN Peacekeeping Missions see the Annex IIIa and IIIb of Lessons Learned Unit, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) (2000), *op. Cit.*: 39-40. For an overview about the role of the women in UN peacekeeping see Beilstein J. (1998), 'The Expanding Role of Women in United Nations Peacekeeping', in Lorentzen L.A. and Turpin J. Ed. (1998), *The Women and War Reader*, New York: New York University Press, 140-147 and Stiehm J.H. (1999), 'Peacekeeping: a new role for women seeking peace', in Breines I. et al (1999), *Towards a Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 127-142.

considering women not just as victims but also as potential and important actors. Gender concerns can therefore have a role in achieving effective justice and reconciliation through the reform of laws, new judicial system and more involving political processes. Since in wartime women constituted the majority of the civilian population and with their activities maintained societies alive, their potentialities in the reconciliation process should not be underestimated. In peace dialogues between antagonistic groups, women who did not fight can be perceived as impartial mediators. Furthermore, their efforts in wartime made them important and credible for dialogue at the grass roots level of society. Finally, their presence and attention can be crucial in healing rape traumas occurred to other women, as proven by the example of the Kamanyola Women's Collective in DRC.⁴⁷ All these activities not only make ex combatants and the whole population aware of women's role, but also constitute ways to reconcile women with society and to build their trust in a peaceful future.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of a conflict, peace processes have to deal timely and effectively with the numerous problems of a war-torn society. Yet in this grave and multifaceted situation gender concerns ought to be considered crucial and ought to be earnestly taken into account: overriding them can seriously undermine women's trust in the new society and jeopardize the peace process as a whole. This paper has shown how considering gender concerns may become crucial in every phase of conflict resolution and peacebuilding policies. Following the theoretical model of the peacebuilding palette, this paper has tried to show how considering women's problems and reinforcing their

⁴⁷ For more information about the Kamanyola Women's Collective see for example The World, *Rape as a weapon of war*, Public Radio International, available at: <http://www.pri.org/world/africa/rape-as-weapon-of-war.html>.

potentialities can make difference in a war-torn society. Yet the model represents only a theoretical division: as Abiew noted, “political, humanitarian, security, socio-economic, legal, and other issues cannot be separated into watertight compartments and are inextricably linked”.⁴⁸ Therefore, the four different parts of the palette are usually connected and have to be addressed together in a coherent and comprehensive way during conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Gender concerns, as the most important issue crossing the blurred dividing lines among the four parts, should be not underestimated, postponed or addressed afterwards. Every position, every policy is gendered, not neutral: ignoring gender concerns in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities does not mean acting timely and effectively, it means discriminating an important part of the society and undermining women’s trust in peace and reconciliation. As shown in this paper, women’s contribution can be essential for effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding as well as conflict resolution and peacebuilding can become a fundamental tool to improve women’s equal position in a new peaceful society.

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⁴⁸ See Abiew F.K. (2003), ‘NGO-Military Relations in Peace Operations’, in *International Peacekeeping*, 10(1): 26.

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