

“GENDER & CONFLICT”

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ICRA’s discussion papers are designed to raise for debate some of the issues that occur in conflict situations rather than to provide a complete analysis.

In this paper on “Gender & Conflict” there is not only a précis of the normally accepted views on gender in armed conflict but a broader perspective to establish a correlation between gender issues in conflict and gender issues in a peaceful situation such as the workplace. There are some factors, like physical violence and risk of death, which exist in different ways in the non-conflict environment; other elements, like male dominance and psychological violence, are present in both situations and suggest how one may be a reflection of the other.

The paper suggests some points for discussion.

Gender as a generic concept

Gender as a generic concept refers to the biological and social difference between male and female. Some aspects of gender, such as the biological functioning of male and female, are common in all cultures. Other aspects, such as women’s roles in politics and business, can vary from culture to culture. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), gender issues are linked to the “socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women”¹. The question of how women in conflict become secondary to men is discussed broadly in this paper.

Gender [in] equality

The discrimination of one group of people based on gender is referred to as gender inequality. The reasons for gender inequality differ by country, culture and tradition.

¹ What do we mean by “sex” and “gender”? WHO. <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>

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International organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank focus on issues linked to gender inequality mainly in developing countries.

The World Bank promotes women's equality through the concept of empowerment by giving loans and grants – in 2012 alone 83 per cent of the Bank's contributions were allocated to gender-related operations². The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) have, among other objectives, the aim to promote “gender equality in the household and in society” by 2015³.

After World War II, the United Nations created the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to report on and monitor women's rights-related issues. The CSW, a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is still dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women⁴. Annual sessions aim to evaluate progress on gender equality and develop national policies to promote it. NGOs have recently been allowed to take part in the sessions along with State representatives. As a result, countries that are not UN members, like Taiwan, are now able to participate in the sessions.

The UN also approaches the topic through the Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)⁵, an organization established in 2010 to support UN Member States in designing laws and policies aimed at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. The body includes seven “thematic areas of critical concern”: Women, Poverty & Economics; Violence against Women; HIV & AIDS; Democratic Governance; Women, War & Peace; Human Rights and Millennium Development Goals⁶.

The 2013 Global Gender Gap Report, which examines over 130 countries, shows persisting gender gaps and slow progress since the first report was published by the World Economic Forum in 2006. Four areas of inequality between men and women are taken into

² The World Bank. Gender Overview. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview>

³ Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>

⁴ Commission on the Status of Women. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/>

⁵ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

<http://www.unwomen.org/>

⁶ Gender issues. http://unifem.org/gender_issues/index.html

consideration: economic participation and opportunity; educational achievement; political empowerment; and health and survival⁷.

Gender equality within minority ethnic groups or other minorities also needs to be addressed as women belonging to these groups experience three times the discrimination as other groups⁸.

Gender (in) equality in conflict situations – the victims

Gender relations change significantly in conflict situations. The demographics are altered with a higher rate of survival for women, which leads to changes in family structures. Roles at home and in the work place adjust as a result with traditional male roles being taken over by women. During World War II, white middle class women in the US, UK and other countries, replaced male workers in military equipment production and supply factories. In the US they were known as 'Rosie the Riveters', these women came to symbolize female empowerment, although they merely helped fill the male labor shortage caused by military conscription. Although many of these women were released when the soldiers returned home from the battlefield, they had proved their ability to make ammunitions and weaponry, a job that traditionally belonged to men. In a way this historical episode was not so much significant for the fact that females adopted a male role in time of need; but, that governments of countries that in relative terms were relative newcomers to female emancipation, showed that thinking in political leaderships was becoming more flexible on the issue. This realization of equality in the potential of women in the workplace would now remain. Women in many cases became the breadwinners with greater responsibility for dependants

However in situations involving armed conflict, because men are normally the executors of military and militant violence in war as well as being the majority casualty group, the plight of women can often be forgotten or overlooked. For instance, in the

⁷ The Global Gender Gap report 2013. World Economic Forum.

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2013.pdf

⁸ Gender approaches in conflict and post-conflict situations. UNDP. October 2002.

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/womens-empowerment/gender-approaches-in-conflict-and-post-conflict-situations-/gendermanualfinalBCPR.pdf>

Balkans conflicts of the '90's the high incidence of rape during the conflicts is only just being recognized. A major reason for this is the understandable focus by the international community and other interest groups on the genocidal acts predominantly against male combatants and non-combatants that took place in the conflict such as the massacre of Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in the summer 1995.

During the 1994 civil war in Rwanda, a gender-targeted genocide was carried out with rape being one of the main tools of ethnic violence and cleansing. An estimated 250,000 to 500,000 Tutsi women were subjected to sexual violence at the hands of Hutu militia groups, civilians, and members of the Armed Forces that was ordered by political and military leaders. Oversight in the attention of the international community toward this kind of conflict-related violence against women can be attributed in part to the nature of the crime of rape, which exists as a social act outside conflict as well as inside and therefore is not necessarily seen as 'unusual'. In part it may be to do with the fact that the brutalization of men and loss of moral values that can occur through constant exposure to violence is accepted as an unfortunate consequence of conflict.

In both the Balkan and Rwandan contexts; the violence against women was only recognized for its scale long after the events occurred. The tendency to use language such as; 'these things happen in war'; 'collateral damage' and so on was rife. Traditional notions of machoistic behaviour being acceptable in some way as a consequence of the brutality of war still existed. And it is probably true that men fuelled by adrenalin and brutalized by the acts of extreme aggression they can be expected to carry out as militants or soldiers, carry the psychological effects of that, possibly, uncharacteristic behaviour beyond the battlefield. It is possible that this psychological effect is likely to be directed more against women in societies where there is an embedded culture of male dominance, and where there may even be an accepted cultural acquisition of an adversary's females after victory in battle.

Gender equality in post-conflict situations – the peace builders

Women's role in peace-building is recognized by a number of international institutions⁹. UN Security Council Resolutions have highlighted its importance for recovery and conflict prevention. The latest UN resolution on women, peace and security, which was adopted by the Security Council in October 2013, highlights the role of gender equality and the importance of women's participation in peace and security issues. Women are often excluded from initial peace negotiations as they are not part of decision-making institutions in the pre-conflict period¹⁰. In addition, UNESCO has developed programmes aimed to guarantee the full participation of women in peace-making, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

Some have criticized the UN approach that considers gender equality as a foundation for sustainable security. According to Charlesworth (2008), the four recurrent elements in UN documents that deal with the topic are disputable¹¹:

- Women are better than men at developing and sustaining peace (Example: The Northern Ireland Peace Movement);
- Women are more vulnerable than men;
- Need to include women in formal peace negotiations because of their "affinity with peace";
- The term "gender" is used to refer only to women;

Despite the critics, there is no doubt that a number of female-led campaigns in the history of peace-building have highlighted the role of women in conflict situations. The Northern Ireland Peace Movement was an entirely female-led initiative that showed the way to peace talks by bringing the futility of the conflict that had been running for nearly 30 years into the

⁹ Gender, Peace and Conflict. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/gender-equality/gender-peace-and-conflict/>

¹⁰ Gender approaches in conflict and post-conflict situations. UNDP. October 2002. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/womens-empowerment/gender-approaches-in-conflict-and-post-conflict-situations-/gendermanualfinalBCPR.pdf>

¹¹ <http://archive.org/details/CharlesworthAreWomenPeaceful>

open. It is interesting to speculate whether a male-led movement could have achieved the same outcome. In Myanmar, the Karen Women's Action Group (KWAG) is one of a few NGOs working on inter-ethnic issues in the Southeast Asian country. A Pakistani schoolgirl, Malala Yusufzai, has become an inspirational campaigner for female education worldwide after being shot by the Pakistani Taliban/Tereek-e-Taliban (TTP) for countermanding the Sharia decree against female education.

One former UN military officer who was interviewed spoke of the role of women as interpreters as a way to soften potentially dangerous situations during negotiations between conflict parties on the ground¹².

Women undoubtedly have an innate ability to confront difficult issues that men would find more difficult, not only because of their inclination to do so, but also because men are more likely to be involved in the violence surrounding the issue.

Gender equality and state building

Participation of women in state building is linked to gender equality and human rights, and is essential in achieving sustainable peace and development, according to many international organisations¹³. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹⁴ and the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF)¹⁵ recommend that women's interests be a priority that needs to be addressed from the start. The OECD 2013 report looks at gender relations during transition times and highlights five areas of interest when considering gender and state building:

- Links between gender inequalities and wider political issues:
- Change takes time; presence of women in political institutions through quotas and training for female candidates is important, but male-dominated cultures can

¹² Ibid

¹³ What women want: integrating gender into statebuilding. Diana Koester. January 10, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/jan/10/integrating-gender-into-statebuilding>

¹⁴ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) promotes policies that aim to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. <http://www.oecd.org/>

¹⁵ The International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), which was established in 2009, is a subsidiary body of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a decision-making forum that helps development partners, international organisations and partner countries to respond to conflict and fragility. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/theinternationalnetworkonconflictandfragility.htm>

prevent women from exercising real influence once they are in office (such as in Afghanistan in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines);

- A single women's agenda does not exist; different groups have different purposes and priorities;
- Engage traditional, religious and community leaders to convince them to create space for women and to support gender equality;
- Support of women's participation in post-conflict constitution-making processes.

Gender equality and male dominance

Biology has justified much of the male dominance notion since the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. He writes that males are by nature more "hegemonic", or inclined to rule, than females. Charles Darwin describes this through his evolutionary theory, in which natural selection is linked to male competition between tribal groups of males and within them. More recently, Goldberg (1973)¹⁶ claims that male leaders have a naturally stronger desire for dominance than women because of their biological differences, justifying why male dominance is universal and common to all patriarchal societies and cultures.

The existence in history of female figures, which have overcome male authority, sheds doubts on this theory. Among them, Queen Boadicea, who led her Celtic Iceni tribe in an uprising against the Roman Empire in AD 60. But most scholars do not believe examples of women rulers are enough to prove the existence of a matriarchal society. Goldberg (1993)¹⁷ says that there has never been a society where the proportion of women in the highest positions exceeded seven per cent. The low number of cases in recent history of women in leadership positions, such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, only confirms that societies are generally dominated by men.

¹⁶ Goldberg, S. *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. 1973. William Morrow and Company. <http://goldberg-patriarchy.com/index.html>

¹⁷ Goldberg, S. *Why men rule*. 1993. Open Court. <http://goldberg-patriarchy.com/index.html>

Gender equality and violence

Patriarchy, which is believed to be a structure common to all cultures to varying degrees, is a way, either deliberate or by tradition, to maintain gender privilege and the status quo of male power. This affects relationships and often causes gender-based violence. Traditional cultural beliefs, which are part of the patriarchal system, often justify how women are treated, therefore excusing and pardoning gender inequality and gender-based violence. Rape, for example, is often at risk of being condoned in any patriarchal society that allows gender-based discrimination and limited perception of gender roles. Culture and cultural beliefs cannot be changed, but they can be challenged through societal changes and changes in international and domestic law.

A process of post-conflict reconstruction represents the ideal time to establish the rule of law to promote and protect women, also carries the intent to strengthen gender equality. Research has proved that gender inequality in peacetime as well as during a conflict is a root cause of violence against women. According to UNIFEM, violence against women is set to continue “unless its root in gender discrimination and inequality is addressed”¹⁸. Violence and insecurity often increases for women after a peace agreement is signed, as no effective justice system is in place and the security sector is in many cases lacking reforms. The re-establishment of the rule of law in a post-conflict environment is crucial to women’s security and should be a priority objective.

Many steps have been taken at international level to promote gender equality and eradicate gender-based violence. The Vienna Declaration (1993) calls for the elimination of gender-based violence. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) recognizes that violence against women by private actors is a human rights violation, and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) pinpoints violence against women as an impediment to equality, development and peace.

¹⁸ Violence against women will continue unless its roots in gender discrimination and inequality seriously addressed. 29 October 2004. http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detailf8d0.html

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The UN Security Council Resolution that was signed in October 2013 (see p.2) pledged to place greater focus on women's access to justice in conflict and post-conflict situations¹⁹.

According to UNESCO, new models of masculinity and femininity need to be created in order to address gender inequality and prevent gender-based violence²⁰.

Physical, emotional and sexual violence against women may also make them more vulnerable to diseases such as HIV. According to the WHO, gender inequalities are a key driver of HIV²¹. Women and girls are often more at risk of becoming infected because of their economic and social status, which does not allow them to have access to HIV information and services. More than 60 per cent of about 820,000 women and men aged 15 to 24 infected with HIV in 2011 in low- and middle-income countries were women. Lack of financial resources and education, fear of violence, limited mobility and limited decision-making power, and child-care responsibility represent some of the reasons women and girls often fall short when faced with gender-related issues. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) promote gender equality through HIV/AIDS programmes.

Gender-based violence aims for the "subordination and inferiority of women and everything associated with the feminine" (Copelon, 1994)²², which means that, although women are the main targets, men can also be victims of gender-based violence because they appear to be gay or feminine.

¹⁹ UN Security Council adopts new resolution on women, peace and security. 21 October 2013. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2013/10/21/un-security-council-adopts-new-resolution-on-women-peace-and-security/>

²⁰ Preventing gender-based violence. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/gender-equality/preventing-gender-based-violence/>

²¹ Gender inequalities and HIV. http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/

²² Copelon, R. (1994). Understanding domestic violence as torture. In Cook (Ed.), Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives (p.145). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. in "Violence against women and social change." Chapter One. http://new.vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/ActionForSocialChange_Ch1.pdf

Gender equality in the workplace

It can be argued that gender issues in conflict situations reflect gender issues in peacetime, particularly in the workplace. Gender inequality in non-conflict situations is often linked to the salary gap existing between genders with the same qualification. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention in 1958 promoted national policies that aimed to end discrimination in the workplace, including any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion or social origin. More than 50 years later a gender gap is still existent. The World Bank Group (WBG) has been publishing the “World Development Report on gender equality and development” since 2012. The first report showed overall progress in education over the last few decades. Two-thirds of all countries have reached gender parity in primary education, and in one-third of the countries girls outnumber boys in secondary education²³. Nevertheless, progress has been slow.

In a developed country like the US a striking fact emerges: the wage gap has barely narrowed in the last decade. According to a Wall Street article, in 2013 women in the US earned 76.5 cents for every dollar that men did in 2012²⁴. Some suggest that legislation and increased education, which contribute to advancing gender pay parity – are not enough. Although there have been more women enrolled in higher education than men since 1980s, men are more likely to pursue college majors and advanced degrees that lead to higher-paying careers. It is not the difference in qualifications that creates the gap, but rather gender.

The wage gap issue seems to be present in the film industry as well. A New York Film Academy study shows that of the 16 biggest earners in 2013 not one was a female actor²⁵. Martha Lauzen, executive director of the Centre for the Study of Women in Television, Film & New Media at San Diego State University, calls it “gender inertia”.

²³ The World Bank. Gender Overview. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview>

²⁴ Male-female pay gap hasn't moved much in years. Brenda Cronin. September 17, 2013. <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2013/09/17/male-female-pay-gap-hasnt-moved-much-in-years/>

²⁵ Gender inequality in film. New York Film Academy. November 25, 2013. <http://www.nyfa.edu/film-school-blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Gender-Inequality-in-Film.jpg>

Conclusions

Biological difference and cultural beliefs dictate a certain status quo of power relations that usually ensures male dominance. The subsequent gender inequality is a root cause of violence against women, whether a society is at war or is in a peaceful state. Physical, emotional or psychological violence is present in different types of societies at different levels depending on the degree of gender inequality present. Improving gender equality would contribute to diminish gender-based violence.

No matter what the field is, gender equality seems to dictate who is in charge and who follows. Whether it is biology or culture, acknowledgement of the issues appears to be the first step towards a more balanced gender-based society.

Despite the lack of biologically-induced gender inequality one key point to note is that females have proven that they have a unique role in conflict resolution through leadership, example, or through their unique qualities (viz: the Northern Ireland Peace Movement or as interpreters in tense situations²⁶).

Recommendations for Discussion

- Should we accept the status quo of gender relationships dictated by biology and culture?
- Are changes to the rule of law enough?
- Is gender equality, where gender refers to women only (UN), an acceptable foundation for sustainable security?
- If the wage gap is caused by gender and not differences in qualifications, is biology still to blame for gender-based choices regarding college majors and advanced degrees?
- How can we better institutionalize the role of women in conflict management and resolution?

²⁶ See Gender equality in post-conflict situations – the peace builders p. 4

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- Should this subject remain as a subject for discussion in the domain of international political circles, NGOs and academia? Or in the interest of increasing understanding for future generations and to provide greater prospects for resolution of the key issues, should it be part of the curricula in a child's education?

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