

# Peacebuilding and Reconstruction with Women: Reflections on Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine

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**ABSTRACT** *Valentine M. Moghadam looks at feminist insights into violence, conflict, peacebuilding, and women's rights, as well as developments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, to make the case for the involvement of women and the integration of gender into all phases of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and governance.*

**KEYWORDS** *gender justice; violence against women; decision-making; women's empowerment*

## Introduction

Armed conflict has dire effects on all citizens, but women face specific challenges. Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine all have weak state systems (although Iraq had a strong and centralized state prior to the US/UK invasion of March 2003) and armed opposition groups, as well as serious problems with human security, human rights, and women's participation. An advantage that Palestine has over the other two countries is a relatively stronger civil society. However, the conflict with Israel and non-resolution of the national question has hardened identities and strengthened patriarchal tendencies, leading to the imposition of social controls on Palestinian women in the refugee camps and villages, and the inability of the Palestine Authority to implement a women's rights agenda. Violence against women is common in all three cases. In Afghanistan's highly patriarchal society, women have been long subjected to violence by husbands and male kin. 'Honor killings' occur with some frequency in certain Iraqi and Palestinian communities. As feminist scholarship has shown, constructions of masculinity and femininity have tended to 'normalize' and 'naturalize' violence against women (Breines *et al.*, 2000). On top of that, wars, and especially occupation by foreign powers, have been accompanied by crises of masculinity that have led to restrictions on women's mobility and increase in violence against women (Enloe, 1990). In all three countries, women are caught between weak states, occupying powers, armed opposition movements, and patriarchal gender arrangements. Moreover, politics have been masculine and male dominated, with women largely excluded from political decision-making.

In October 2000, the landmark Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted,<sup>1</sup> reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and

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the need to implement fully the international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts.

Despite the adoption of this important resolution, we continue to see the sidelining of both women actors and gender issues in many contemporary conflicts, peace-keeping initiatives, and reconstruction efforts.<sup>2</sup> In Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq, a culture of 'hegemonic masculinity' prevails among the major political actors, be they the occupiers, the resistance, or the state.

In such a context, what are the prospects for women's empowerment? How to reconstruct – or in the case of Afghanistan, construct – political and economic systems while also ensuring human security and human rights, especially for women? These are among the questions addressed in this paper, which also examines the gender dynamics of peacebuilding and reconstruction more broadly.

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is supposed to be a model of post-conflict reconstruction, and yet women can hardly be said to be enjoying security, participation, and rights. According to a UNIFEM report (2004), 'harassment, violence, illiteracy, poverty and extreme repression continue to characterize reality for many Afghan women'. This is because of the persistence of patriarchal gender relations and the absence of a strong, centralized state with the capacity or will to implement a wide-ranging programme for women's rights.

Afghanistan's new constitution mandates compulsory education up to grade nine, but over 60 per cent of girls remain out of school. UNICEF confirmed 26 attacks against schools, mostly girls' schools, in 2003–2004. According to a Human Rights Watch report, girls represented 34 per cent of children enrolled in primary schools, but in ten provinces, fewer than one in four girls aged 7–12 years attended primary school. Secondary school enrollments remained extremely low, especially for girls; only 9 per cent of girls attending primary school continue to secondary school. The coun-

try's Supreme Court barred married women from attending high school – in a country where girls as young as 10 years are married off, often to far older men. The Taliban may be gone, but Afghan girls and women still learn to read and write in secret classrooms – girls because of attacks on schools or because their fathers will not send them to a state school, women because the government prohibits married women from attending school. In 2004, the literacy rate was 14 per cent for women and 43 per cent for men.

Patriarchal practices, attitudes and policies prevail. Approximately 57 per cent of girls are married before the age of 16 years, according to a study by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Afghan women's NGOs.<sup>3</sup> Under Afghan law, the legal age for marriage is 16 years, but courts often refuse to act in the case of forced marriage (Amnesty International, 2004). Health statistics remain dire for citizens as a whole, but women also suffer very high rates of maternal mortality (UNICEF, 2005, <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan.statistics.html>). In a culture where a woman without a *sarparast* (male household head) is often shunned, widows face many prejudices. Under the Taliban, widows were denied employment opportunities and many had to resort to begging to provide for their families. Today, it is estimated that as many as 30 per cent of households may be headed by women; in Kabul alone there are some 50,000 widows. Few institutions or policies are in place to assist their integration and independence. As one expert has put it, 'bakeries have been built, but there are no sustainable jobs or careers' (Zulfacar, 2004). Despite the existence of many 'gender specialists' and some 2,000 NGOs, mainly set up in Kabul by expatriate Afghans, new social problems have emerged. Street children, especially boys, abound, and there has been a growth of prostitution.<sup>4</sup>

Women experience considerable violence in the country. Son preference is still strong, and mothers can be abused by husbands and in-laws for not producing sons (UNIFEM, 2004). An Amnesty International Report noted that girls and women in many parts of the country are prosecuted for *zina* crimes such as adultery, running away from home, and premarital sex.

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Self-immolations appear to be on the rise in Afghanistan and are tied to forced marriage; the typical victim is 14–20 years old and is trying to escape a marriage arranged by her father.<sup>5</sup> Under such conditions, it is not surprising that the vast majority of women continue to wear the all-encompassing burqa. Veiling is determined not only by custom and tradition, but also social pressure within the family, and fear of harassment in the street. Patriarchy and violence are played out on women's bodies in other ways, too, especially in the provinces. There have been reports of retaliatory rapes of Pashtun women in northern Afghanistan by non-Pashtun men (UNIFEM, 2004).

The country remains in chaos, torn apart by warlords. Human rights groups have repeatedly called for demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) to halt warlord abuses. Owing to the continued lack of security, Medecins Sans Frontieres and other aid groups pulled out of Afghanistan. Security Council Resolution 1563 of 17 September 2004 determined that the situation in Afghanistan is still considered a threat to international peace and security and that the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) continue its work for a further 12 months until October 2005. Agriculture is largely geared toward poppy cultivation for opium exports, feeding addictions in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan.

In 2005, the court was headed by the extremely conservative judge Fazul Hadi Shinwari. Originally appointed by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, a conservative chief of the Northern Alliance, Justice Shinwari was later reconfirmed by President Karzai under the transitional administration in June 2002. Chief Justice Shinwari is in principle the guardian of the rights enshrined in the Constitution, but he has made several attempts to ban women from singing and dancing in public. In November 2004, the Supreme Court issued a ban on cable television channels, particularly condemning films from India showing scantily-clad women singing and dancing in musicals. Shinwari suggested that women should cover their bodies entirely, exposing only their faces and hands, and he decreed that a woman cannot travel for more than 3 days without a *mahram*, a husband or a male relative she cannot legally

marry. He also stated that adulterers should be stoned to death. During the campaign for the presidential elections in October 2004, Shinwari attempted to have presidential candidate Latif Pedram removed from the ballot for proposing that women and men should have equal rights in marriage and divorce.

In the transitional administration, Shinwari appointed scores of judges at all levels, all of whom are male and may or may not meet the requirements set forth in Article 118 of the constitution, which call for 'a higher education in law or Islamic jurisprudence' and 'sufficient expertise and experience in the judicial system of Afghanistan'. Many of Shinwari's appointments serve on the Supreme Court, which in 2004 had a reported 137 members and possibly more – a number that exceeded the nine justice positions authorized by the constitution – and many held extreme views regarding the subordinate position of women. Such are the contradictions in the legal frameworks and decision-making bodies of the post-Taliban Afghan state.

Despite serious obstacles, or perhaps because of them, women's organizations continue to work with each other, transnationally, and with global feminist groups to bring pressure to bear on the Karzai government, to raise funding for women's projects, and to make women's rights a reality and not merely a formality. Groups such as RAWA, the Afghan Women's Network, the Afghan Women's Council, and abroad, WAPHA and Negar work with international groups such as Women for Afghan Women, the Feminist Majority, and Equality Now. On 24 November 2004, the Afghan Civil Society Forum, whose partners include the Afghan Women's Network, an umbrella group of women's organizations in Afghanistan, issued recommendations to President Karzai in an effort to open dialogue between the first elected president and the people on the future of Afghanistan. Among the principal requests was the request for action to establish security and to enforce the rule of law, with specific reference to a 'sound and responsive legal and judicial administration system/structure'. Another positive factor is that there is much support from international organizations. For example, UNIFEM works with the

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Ministry of Women's Affairs, building a network of women's centres to provide women with health and psychosocial services, education, and income generation (UNIFEM, 2005). It also has assisted in the establishment of a CEDAW task force. A Gender Training Institute is to be set up at Kabul University jointly by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the UNDP.

### Iraq

The record of women's rights in pre-war Iraq was a mixed one, beginning with gains as a result of the Baathist ideology of Arab socialism and progress in the 1960s and 1970s, but setbacks following the Gulf wars, the sanctions, and Saddam Hussein's attempt to curry favour with tribes and religious forces by assuming an Islamic mantle and reinstating patriarchal family practices.<sup>6</sup> However, in 2003 and 2004, women's human security or human rights could not be guaranteed, as neither the post-Saddam Iraqi interim government nor the American military was able, or perhaps even willing, to protect women in their everyday lives. As one observer noted, 'After a year of liberation at the hands of the US military, most Iraqi women find that they are worse off on every count' (Susskind, 2004, [www.madre.org/art.n1.1.2004.html](http://www.madre.org/art.n1.1.2004.html), accessed 9 August 2004). Another stated that the CPA initially was 'astonishingly insensitive' regarding women's human security and their human rights (Sandler, 2003). Reports showed that many more women were appearing in public in *hijab*, for fear of harassment or worse. It was an ironic but tragic consequence of the American invasion and occupation that Iraq was experiencing a breakdown in public order, with reports of increases in domestic violence, honour killings, kidnapping, and rapes. What appears to be deliberate assassinations of prominent women, including those who do not observe hejab, has been on the increase.<sup>7</sup> As one observer noted, 'Women attribute the rise in violence to social disintegration triggered by the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime; the rise of Islamism; ongoing fighting between US and Iraqi forces' (Susskind, 2004). One prominent Iraqi woman said that 'terrorism does not discriminate among

people; parents now pay for armed guards to accompany their children to school'. She emphasized that 'Islamists, Baathists, foreign fighters, neighbouring countries, and the US army' all were responsible for the deteriorating security situation.<sup>8</sup>

The veracity of the repeated refrain: 'without *himaya* for women, there can be no place for democracy to grow in Iraq' was conformed after the first post-Saddam elections took place in February 2005 (Sandler, 2003). Apart from fears that a majority Shiite government might institute Islamic law, the overall environment of heightened insecurity continued to pose many difficulties for women and girls. Although a quota system was established to guarantee a 25 per cent share of women in the country's parliament, the legal framework for women's rights had serious limitations. There remained provisions in the Iraqi Penal Code allowing a man to escape punishment for abduction by marrying the victim, and allowing for significantly reduced sentences for so-called honour killings (Human Rights Watch, 2003, <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/iraq0703/1.htm>). Can Iraq undertake reconstruction and democracy building under such conditions, when overall security is lacking and women experience fear and new forms of violence?

The continuing violence and lack of security puts a brake on reconstruction, too. The World Bank noted in 2003 that 'Iraq's overall reconstruction needs today are vast and are a result of nearly 20 years of neglect and degradation of the country's infrastructure, environment and social services'.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the situation was even worse as a result of war and sabotage. A UNESCO survey documented the shortage of schools and a prevalence (over 50 per cent) of double-shift schools; many schools, moreover, were in poor physical condition. The gross enrollment ratio for girls at the secondary school level was just 31 per cent in 2003; for boys it was 49 per cent (UNESCO 2004: 3–4).

Ideally, a strong state should back women's rights and include it at all levels of programming and policy-making. Iraqi women have found a new space for themselves in their country's public sphere and in the transnational public sphere. The Iraqi Women's Network comprises a number

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of women's groups, some with ties outside the country (e.g., the transnational feminist network Women for Women International founded, coincidentally, by an Iraqi woman), and involves expatriates as well as long-term residents. Iraqi women's groups include Ala Talabani's Women for a Free Iraq (formerly, the Kurdish Women's Union) and the Iraqi Women's High Council, the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, led by Yanar Mohammad, who works with the US-based advocacy group MADRE, among others.<sup>10</sup> Groups of Iraqi women have travelled to the US for meetings organized by the US government, Women Waging Peace, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Woodrow Wilson Center, and others. They include Dr Raja Habib Dhaher Khuzai, former member of the Interim Governing Council, later a member of the Transitional National Assembly, an obstetric/gynaec specialist and women's health advocate, and Judge Zakia Haki, Iraq's first judge and in 2004 an advisor to Iraq's Ministry of Justice. They have called for abolishing laws impeding women's employment, ensuring the appointment of qualified women judges throughout Iraq, and hiring women for reconstruction tasks. In a series of meetings in Helsinki, Finland, two Iraqi women advocates discussed the government's new NGO policy, the family law, and the constitution. They described the 1959 family law as 'fairly liberal' though 'not perfect', and expressed the hope that the new constitution would state that Islam is *a* source of legislation, not *the* source.<sup>11</sup> Many Iraqi women advocates and their international supporters have insisted that women be part of the constitutional process in Iraq.

Despite the growth of women's NGOs and their collective action, the violence surrounding women's leadership is considerable, as Dr Raja said at a meeting in Washington DC in November 2004.<sup>12</sup> The violence began with the assassination in 2003 of Akila Hashemi, a member of the Interim Governing Council, and has continued with targeted killings of other prominent women, unveiled women, and women who work in services associated with the occupation or government. In the absence of a strong state with the capacity and will to mobilize resources, protect its citizens, and realize the stated objectives of women's rights, Iraqi activists note the rise of honour

killings and domestic violence, as well as targeted assassinations and the kidnappings, rapes, and killings of ordinary Iraqi women and girls.

Iraqi reconstruction will require massive international assistance. But US plans are highly controversial, as they entail the privatization of Iraqi assets and special deals for US corporations. These plans have come under much criticism, from feminists, human rights activists, and others (Klare, 2003; Klein, 2004). In contrast to the US plans for Iraqi reconstruction, what the Iraqi women hoped that international donors and partners would provide include information sharing and guidance, invitations to international conferences, help for higher education, including new schools, books, and facilities, as well as curriculum development and teacher training, and help in establishing a peace studies curriculum.<sup>13</sup>

### **Palestine**

The problems that Palestinian women face – early marriage and high fertility, the poverty of female-headed households, difficulties in daily life, domestic violence and sexual abuse, low political participation and representation, and absence of a legal framework for rights – originate in the persistence of patriarchal gender relations, the Israeli military occupation and non-resolution of the national problem, and the conservative nature of the main political forces. Patriarchal relations are particularly acute in the refugee camps and small towns. There, Palestinian women tend to be married young, at about 19 years, often to close cousins. The *hijab* campaign of the late 1980s led to increasing observance of veiling by Palestinian women, including students at Birzeit University.<sup>14</sup> Studies also show that the high rates of unemployment, loss of livelihood, homelessness, and the frustrations of the occupation have resulted in an increase in domestic violence. One poll showed that 86 per cent of respondents said that violence against women had significantly or somewhat increased as a result of changing political, economic, and social conditions. When asked if they knew of a woman who had been assaulted by her husband, 57 per cent of the respondents said yes, representing an increase of 22 points on a poll

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taken the previous year by the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (Stein, 2003). According to Nahla Abdo (2000), research on Palestinian refugee camps, particularly in Gaza, has shown that refugee women and girls bear the brunt of increased physical, mental, psychological, and sexual domestic violence, including incest rape.

Women also face the violence of the occupation. At the close of its March 2004 deliberations, the UN's Commission on the Status of Women passed a resolution expressing concern about the 'grave deterioration in the situation of Palestinian women' and calling for the resumption of the peace process. Women may be 'killed, targeted for arrest, detained and harassed for being related to men suspected of being linked to armed groups, and may be displaced as a result of house demolitions' (UNIFEM, 2004).

Women face important obstacles in their efforts to provide food and other basic necessities for their families. Thousands of women have lost husbands and male kin to the *intifada*, exile, emigration in search of work, Israeli imprisonment, or death. Half of all refugee families are headed by women, and female-headed households have been disproportionately affected by the rise in poverty that has accompanied the second *intifada* and the closures and curfews.<sup>15</sup> In refugee camps the number of female-headed households has always been high, and in 2003, out of a total population of almost 4 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, between 43 and 52 per cent of households were headed by women. Meanwhile, women's participation in the labour force, while remaining persistently low, has been affected by the rise in unemployment since the second *intifada* began. The conflict, curfews, and checkpoints also have adversely affected girls' access to schooling.<sup>16</sup>

All this has compounded the difficulties Palestinian women already face in meeting their family and household responsibilities, and has increased their dependence on assistance. What is more, births attended by skilled health workers decreased from 97.4 per cent before the escalation of violence in 2000, to 67 per cent in 2002. Home deliveries increased from 3 per cent to 30 per cent in the same period (UNIFEM, 2004).

It is perhaps because of all the violence, frustration, and humiliation Palestinians have faced that an unprecedented and certainly unexpected development has occurred: the participation of a number of women in suicide bombings since the second *intifada* began. The Palestinian national movement has produced at least one well-known guerrilla fighter (Leila Khaled, who was a PFLP militant in the 1970s), but the image of armed militancy was invariably a masculine one. Although Palestinian women have been strongly nationalist even when engaged in peacebuilding initiatives, violent action seemed to be outside the scope of their activities until relatively recently.

Palestinian women's political participation has been consistent and often significant, though usually unacknowledged. The national movement has produced outstanding diplomat-activists such as Hanan Ashrawi (the first female spokesperson for the PLO, instrumental in the Madrid peace process, though not in the secret Oslo talks), Leila Shahid (ambassador to France and Netherlands), and Zahira Kamal (a former activist with the Democratic Front who helped found the women's movement in the 1970s). But women have not been included in formal power structures to any significant extent.<sup>17</sup> The Palestine Authority has not demonstrated any strong support for women's rights. Clientelism and patronage have been the main criteria for political appointments, at least until the post-Arafat democratic elections of January 2005. According to the Palestinian Working Women Society, the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels has been minimal since the establishment of the PNA. Women occupy fewer than 10 per cent of leadership positions. A grassroots feminist push for quotas resulted in about a 17 per cent female representation in the municipal elections of 2004. In each local council, two seats are now reserved for women; each municipality elects from nine to fifteen councillors.<sup>18</sup> They are now pushing for 20 per cent representation in the PLC.

In January 2005 there was just one woman in government: the minister for women's affairs, Zahira Kamal. In discussions with the author, she noted difficulties in implementing her mandate of

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gender mainstreaming across the ministries, although she did cite the development of a gender statistical database by the Ministry of Planning as a positive sign.<sup>19</sup>

Although not fully involved in decision-making, the women's sector is active and strong, engaged in advocacy and research. Some notable organizations include the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling, the WATC, the PWW, and the Bisan Center. Most are part of the umbrella organization of the General Union of Palestinian Women. Palestinian feminist scholars reside at the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, the Women's Studies Center, and the Women's Studies programme at al-Quds University. Scholars and activists alike maintain regional and international links, working with CAWTAR, the Arab Women's Forum (AISHA, est. 1992), ESCWA, and a number of transnational feminist networks. UNIFEM supports the work of WCLAC, especially regarding violence against women, and has funded two reports on the status of Palestinian women: 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Palestinian Women' by Eileen Kuttub and Riham Bargouti, and 'Evaluating the Status of Palestinian Women in Light of the Beijing Platform for Action'.

Despite the achievements of Palestinian elite women, and the serious problems that women face generally, many of the 'peace' agreements have made no mention of women: the Oslo agreement, the Cairo agreement, the Wye River Memorandum, and the Quartet-backed Roadmap. Yet, the record of Palestinian-Israeli interaction across the years exemplifies the importance of bridge-building among women and the illogic of ignoring women in negotiations and post-conflict political developments. Palestinian and Israeli women have met and talked and negotiated in informal settings for years, and the Jerusalem Link – the main partners of which are Bat Shalom and the Jerusalem Center for Women – was set up to bring together a number of progressive Israeli and Palestinian women's groups in a more formal network of communication. In October 2003, two Israeli women, but no Palestinian women, participated in the negotiation of the independently initiated (non-state) Geneva Accord. Despite their marginalization from official peace-making pro-

cesses, women's peacebuilding has taken place in local homes and churches, in European cities and in symbolic places like the Notre Dame Center on the border of Israeli and Palestinian Jerusalem (UNIFEM, 2004). In February and March 2002, Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women from Bat Shalom together observed Land Day, focusing on Palestinian women's points of view. Israeli women belonging to MachsomWatch (Checkpoint Watch) maintain a daily presence at numerous IDF checkpoints throughout the West Bank, monitoring and recording the behaviour of soldiers and police to prevent the abuse of Palestinians. Machsom-Watch, which admits only women, works through non-violent, non-aggressive confrontation to challenge the power of the security establishment and to demand accountability. It publishes a weekly report in order to bring to public attention the human rights abuses and humiliation that Palestinians suffer.

Amneh Badran (2003, [www.learningpartnership.org/events/2003](http://www.learningpartnership.org/events/2003)) of the Jerusalem Coalition of Women has aptly referred to 'the political turmoil we live in, the patriarchal social realities, the deteriorated economic situation, [and] the backward educational system'. She has called for 'active and responsible participation from the international community towards implementing international legality, ending the Israeli military occupation in all its forms, and then embarking on a process of radical democratization of political life, economy and culture so that women and men can fulfill their power to act as citizens'.

### **Peacebuilding, reconstruction, and gender justice**

What do the three cases presented here offer by way of lessons of a wider relevance regarding the gender dynamics of conflict, peace-building, and reconstruction? And how may feminist frameworks and insights contribute to the success of peace and reconstruction processes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere?

A gender perspective puts the spotlight on the social relations that exist between women and men, and on the laws and actions of states. It places women at the centre of analysis because of

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the fact that across history and cultures, women have been denied equality, autonomy, and power. Women as a group have experienced diverse forms of violence from men as a group, because they have lacked power and because states or communities have failed to protect them or have in fact punished them. Gender analysis also demonstrates that conflict, peacebuilding, and reconstruction processes may reflect and reinforce forms of masculinity and femininity.

The women's movement of the second wave drew attention to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape (Brownmiller, 1976), but it was not until the 1990s that violence against women and the problem of wartime rape acquired global prominence and action. Armed conflicts in Yugoslavia and Rwanda showed that women, like men, are victims of military onslaughts and terrorist actions; they lose life and limb, and join the ranks of refugees or internally displaced persons. Unlike men, however, they are also the special victims of sexual violence, especially rape. Events in Afghanistan under both the Mujahidin (during 1992–1996) and the Taliban (1996–2001) demonstrated that women could experience punitive action over appearance, dress, and access to public space. During Algeria's civil conflict of the 1990s, Islamist militants not only bullied and harassed, but also raped and murdered women and girls – and this 10 years after the government had tried to placate the growing fundamentalist movement by instituting a patriarchal family law (Bennoune, 1995). All too often, women – their legal status, social positions, and bodies – have been pawns during conflicts or in post-conflict agreements. States have been known to make compromises or accommodations at the expense of women's integrity, autonomy, and rights (Kandiyoti, 1989).

What do we know about gender and conflict? We know that women's subordinate roles in peacetime render them vulnerable in wartime. Conflicts can be anticipated – so can the fact that women will be violated. Survivors of wartime trauma face inadequate services.<sup>20</sup> International outcries rarely succeed in bringing perpetrators to justice. The message is that women's lives matter less. Sexualized violence is implicated in armed violence but it also exists during the so-called times of

peace – hence the need to recognize the gender dynamics of peace as well as conflict. Johann Galtung's well-known maxim 'the absence of war does not mean peace' is complemented by Cynthia Enloe's feminist definition of peace as 'women's achievement of control over their lives' (Enloe, 1988: 538). For women, peace does not mean only the formal end of war and its concomitants, such as the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of armed combatants. It also means the enjoyment of human security and human rights, including the right not to be beaten at home or assaulted on the streets. Given this, it must be stated that many so-called peace processes have been at best flawed and at worse failures. The UN-sponsored peace in Afghanistan in the early 1990s did nothing to bring about stability and security, especially for women, who had to contend with marauding Mujahidin warlords initially and subsequently with the strangely medieval Taliban. The Israeli–Palestinian peace process of the early 1990s was regarded by its detractors as favouring the Israelis, and it was also accompanied by a growing Islamist movement which earlier had put pressure on the women in its communities to veil. These and many other examples show that women's human security and human rights, along with the attenuation of inequalities generally, are rarely considered in the so-called peace processes.

Ending gender and other social inequalities and bringing about human security, including women's security, is at the heart of feminist analyses of peacebuilding. Indeed, a significant feminist contribution to analyses of international relations 'is to point out how unequal social relations can make all individuals more insecure' (Tickner, 1992: 193). The concept of human security has been defined in different ways, but some aspects are: personal security, water and food security, rights to healthcare and political participation, and economic security. There is thus a connection between human security and human rights, and links among security, rights, and participation. That is, achieving peace and security for women cannot be guaranteed in the absence of a broader socio-political and economic project that rests on participation and redistribution of resources. As

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Ann Tickner has noted, 'The achievement of peace, economic justice, and ecological sustainability is inseparable from overcoming social relations of domination and subordination; genuine security requires not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations' (Tickner, 1992: 128). Reconstruction should, therefore, be viewed not only in terms of the repair or building of physical and social infrastructure, but also in terms of the establishment of participatory and egalitarian social and gender relations. In this regard, women have a special role to play, because they have experienced inequality, because they have a stake in reconstruction that is woman-friendly, and because of their roles in bridge-building and peace-making.

As one advocate stated: 'Women survivors of armed conflicts and advocates for women's rights during and after these conflicts recognize that meaningful justice must protect the fundamental human rights of all people and that there cannot be meaningful reconciliation without gender justice' (McKay, 2000: 561).

## **Reconstruction with women: Concluding thoughts**

Without idealizing women, one may plausibly postulate that an enhanced role for women in re-

construction could minimize corruption and cronyism – if only because women's absence from economic and political domains of power has prevented their involvement in clientelism. In addition, such a role would likely increase attention and allocations toward social policies to alleviate poverty, provide welfare, and promote social development. And since women have a stake in a welfare state that is also women-friendly, they are likely to assist in the (re)construction of strong social institutions such as social service organizations, health facilities; schools, universities, and training institutes, and nurseries.

An important area for women in reconstruction pertains to the cultural domain. Here, again, the global feminist movement can be of much assistance. This includes support for media campaigns in favour of women's participation and rights, promoting women's media, gender-awareness and sensitivity in the mainstream and government-controlled media, and women's involvement in cultural institutions such as the ministries of culture, education, religious affairs, and communications. Through such involvement, women would play a key role in the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace, human rights, and women's empowerment.

## **Notes**

- 1 See <http://www.un.org/docs/scres/2000/sc2000/htm>.
- 2 The study *Women, Peace and Security: Study*, submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (NY: United Nations, 2002), acknowledged that much remained to be done in the realization of the resolution, while also drawing attention to the importance of women's informal peace networking.
- 3 <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/facts.htm>, accessed 27 January 2005.
- 4 Maliha Zulfacar, in a presentation on Afghanistan at the AMEWS special session on "Gender and Conflicts in the Middle East" annual MESA. Dr Zulfacar also mentioned the kidnapping of girls and organ-trafficking.
- 5 'Self-Immolations on the Rise in Afghanistan', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 2002. Posted on RAWA website [www.rawa.fancymarketing.net/immolation.htm](http://www.rawa.fancymarketing.net/immolation.htm), accessed 28 November 2002.
- 6 Comments by Professor Naba al-Barak and Mrs. Mahdieh, Helsinki, 6 and 9 September 2004. (Seminar on 'Family, Society, and the Empowerment of Women: North African women meeting Finnish women', Helsinki, September 6–10 2004.) Mrs. Mahdieh and Prof. Al-Barak were in Helsinki at the invitation of the Finnish Women's Union. They had been a part of the 1,000-person commission that chose the Iraqi interim parliament. They described how the war with Iran changed the legal status of women. From 1981 to 2003, no woman could travel abroad without a 'mahram' (husband or close male kin).
- 7 In March 2005, a well-known pharmacist, unveiled, was assassinated by Islamists. See 'Iraq: Focus on threats against progressive women', IRIN 21 March 2005.
- 8 Mrs. Mahdieh, Helsinki, 9 September 2004.

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- 9 'UN/World Bank Present Iraq Reconstruction Needs to Core Group', *DevNews Media Center* [The World Bank Group, on-line] 2003.
- 10 Yanar Mohammad is also a member of the Worker-Communist Party, which seeks a secular, democratic, and egalitarian Iraq.
- 11 Naba al-Barak and Mrs. Mahdieh, 6 and 9 September 2004, Helsinki.
- 12 Policy Forum Roundtable Discussion, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 19 November 2004.
- 13 Naba al-Barak, Helsinki, 6 September 2004.
- 14 Author's observations, January 2005.
- 15 UNIFEM, *Gender Profile of the Conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*.
- 16 Rema Hammami, personal communication, East Jerusalem, 22 February 2005.
- 17 An exception was the policy of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a Marxist group that made women's rights a central plank of its program and recruited many women. This led to its designation, by both its supporters and detractors, as *jebheh-e mar'a* (see Hasso, 1998). A DFLP offspring is the current Minister for Women's Affairs, Zahira Kamal.
- 18 Khadija Habashneh, in a conversation in Ramallah, Ministry of Women's Affairs, 20 February 2005.
- 19 In a conversation with the author, 21 January 2005.
- 20 One response was the formation of Medica Mondiale, founded after the Bosnian conflict to treat women victims of sexual violence. [www.medicamondiale.org](http://www.medicamondiale.org)

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