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Engendering Security

1. INTRODUCTION: IS SECURITY GENDERED?

This paper will critically interrogate constructions of security generically, and human security specifically, in relation to women and notions of women's security. The constructs *national security* and *human security* will be critiqued, whose interests these serve, and how these constructs are specifically gendered (and class-based) and thus lead to a neglect of issues relevant to women specifically, and other marginalised members of the international community.

At workshops in Cape Town, South Africa, grassroots women identified their needs for spouses or partners to be faithful and monogamous. Given the high rate of generic societal violence, they also requested more mortuary vans and ambulances. These women specifically called for an end to violence, an end to the gangsterism that plagues their communities, and critically, given the pandemic of gender-based violence in South Africa, an end to violence against women and children.

A recent study on violence against women in metropolitan South Africa found that almost 60 percent of women felt 'very unsafe' while walking in their own neighbourhoods at night, with only five percent of women feeling 'very safe' in their neighbourhoods at night (Bollen et al, 1999: 78,75). The alarming statistics on violence against women illustrates that a lack of women's security affects the entire Southern African region. Goldblatt and Meintjes (1998: 8) discuss the present effects on women of apartheid violence against communities, the condition of women in the aftermath:

"The entrenchment of violence creates new daily insecurities for women – constant and overwhelming fear, exposure to abuse and obscenities, and threats of rape, kidnapping or death for themselves, their children or other relatives."

Security and Peace Studies have been dominated by men, and men's interests, particularly their emphasis on guns and war. As with most fields of study, women's interests and needs have been largely neglected and ignored.

2. CONTESTING SECURITY

Barry Buzan (1983) recognises security as an underdeveloped and contested concept. Buzan draws critical conceptual distinctions between defence and security, individual and national security, national and international security, violent means and peaceful ends. He applies his concept across a range of military, political, economic and social sectors. According to Buzan (1983: 20) the national security problem is a systemic security problem in which individuals, states and the system all play a part. Thus Buzan (1983: 187) proposes the holistic notion of systemic security so that the:

"national security problem defines itself as much in economic, political and social terms as in military ones."

2.1 NATIONAL SECURITY

Security has tended to be defined in terms of the nation state. Thus the notion of national security, emanating predominantly from the field of Strategic Studies, is dominated by the neo-realist mode of thought, with its focus on power and institutions of power, especially the military. This traditional notion of national security, in terms of armies, guns and war, emphasises the state as both the primary actor and level of analysis. Narrow state-centrism excludes other important actors and levels of analyses, including individuals and groups (ethnicities and religious groupings, political and ideological groups, and non-state actors like corporate mercenaries), as well as other institutions (e. g. transnational corporations (TNCs) and multi-national corporations (MNCs), international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, as well as the global arms trade from manufacturers to marketers to purchasers). This skewed focus on the state usually excludes the worst affected, women and children, especially in rural areas where women and children are the ones who have to seek fresh water and wood for fuel, which exposes them to landmines.

The traditional definition of security also emphasises protection from harm for citizens of a country within national boundaries. Sovereignty of borders is often bestowed, with little or no consultation, and with little regard by the international community to the impacts on the inhabitants within the borders. The idea of protection from harm for citizens is narrowly defined, and effectively means protection from foreign attack, but does not preclude offensive measures deemed in the interests of citizens and state. So too, this traditional definition of harm does not include other aspects of safety, security or wellbeing, including the environment, basic needs (for example food and housing), identity and dignity. A more holistic definition of protection from harm would mean more than the traditional protection from war and invasion by foreign armies. It would mean, to name a few examples, protection from hunger, protection from poverty, protection from sexual assault for women, children and men.

Negative peace, or the absence of war, conforms to traditional definitions of security in general, and traditional protection from harm in particular. Positive peace, on the other hand, means both negative peace, as well as the realisation of even the most basic of social justice needs. Traditional notions of security are based on conventional (though flawed) distinctions between public and private spheres. The state has traditionally been concerned with the male-dominated public realm. Thus issues outside of the public realm, including domestic violence, job discrimination, the status of women, have not been viewed as concerns of national security.

2.2 HUMAN SECURITY

A second approach that contests the national security model is proposed by Johan Galtung, who matured from radical analyses of (under)development since the 1960s to groundbreaking peace studies during the 1990s. Galtung (1996) took the debate into new realms of understanding the requirements for peace when he proposed what has come to be called the human security model.

The human security paradigm is designed to provide a more holistic comprehensive definition of security and protection from *all* forms of harm. These include indirect or structural, cultural, and direct or personal violence, and their respective antitheses. The antithesis of violence, of course, is peace¹, and the three forms of violence outlined below would also have corresponding forms of peace.

¹ Conflict, which is not the same as violence, is not necessarily and intrinsically bad, and may contribute to creativity if resolved peacefully. All relations, and all societies, will invariably experience conflict at least some of the time, in part due to

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difference(s). It is in acknowledging conflict (and differences), and dealing with it constructively and peacefully that creativity and growth can be fostered.

Thus it appears that none of these forms of violence, and their respective antitheses, are entirely isolated from the other. For example, one cannot eliminate gender-based violence without transforming institutions, as well as ways of thinking and being. And if one changes cultures of violence into cultures of balance and harmony in line with a partnership model, one will necessarily eliminate gender-based violence since there will no longer be polar opposites, distrust and devaluation of Others.

The human security paradigm attempts to address critical questions about who is secure, and who not, and whose interests are served. Reactively, human security would include the absence of physical violence, or negative peace. But proactively, human security involves establishing mechanisms (policies and structures) that will ensure that individuals and communities enjoy personal, structural and cultural security, in other words positive peace.

A question that could be asked is: how is security constructed, and how does it exclude women and other marginalised groups (e.g. indigenous peoples)?

Reardon (Interview, January 1999) speaks of four sources of human security: the environment, basic needs (for example food and housing), identity and dignity, and finally, protection from harm. She asserts that human security of groups and individuals is essentially the expectation of wellbeing.

In a departure from traditional practice, the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF), with assistance from civil society, drafted its security legislation in a radically new way. They redefined security in terms of development, and acknowledged the absence of an external aggressor, and the very real threat of poverty to internal stability. As chairperson of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC)², Kader Asmal (1996: 33), put it:

”non-military sources of instability in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields have become threats to peace and security.”

Galtung’s model is by far the most comprehensive in terms of inclusivity, and he painstakingly demonstrates his respect for and desire to include women in his analysis.

3. ENGENDERING SECURITY

Grassroots women in Southern Africa define security as:

1. more than individual, and including families and communities;
2. more than physical, and including economics and health;
3. depending on gender justice;
4. including the quotidian or everyday (from food to sexual assault).

In South Africa a woman is raped every 26 seconds, and a woman is murdered by her male partner every 4 days (Medical Research Council). This can be compared with developed countries like Sweden, Belgium, Germany and the USA, where at least 30% of women are battered by their male partners.

² A cabinet committee charged with ratification of all sales and purchases of arms, the NCACC has, in direct contravention of its own guidelines, ratified sales of weapons to countries with dubious human rights records, such as Indonesia and Turkey.

3.1 THE UNCIVIL WAR AGAINST WOMEN³: GENDER AS SOCIETY'S BATTLE LINE

When countries are not officially at war with one another, can it justifiably be called peace when women and children are beaten and raped every few seconds in every country in the world? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the origins of violence. The construction of binary oppositions may stem from a particular identity formation, the ways in which people are taught to view themselves and the world. This construction of Self fundamentally needs an Other against which to measure itself and its value. Such identity construction premised on polarity⁴ or 'Othering' fosters conflict over access to and control of resources. Power as a relation between people became a contest over resources because it was premised on a flawed belief system centred on Othering and the devaluation of the Other.

3.1.1 Othering and oppressions

The origins of Othering and oppressions centres on the explication of two fundamental belief systems. Riane Eisler (1995), based on the work of anthropologist Marija Gimbutas, posits two models, the *partnership* model and the *dominator* model. She describes the partnership model as one in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking. The dominator model, on the other hand, is based on domination and force and the power to take life (death, killing), rather than the power to give life (birth) as in the partnership model, where actualisation and maximisation of individuals' potentials are primordial.

Western and modern thinking and beliefs are premised on the dominator model. Societies based on this paradigm are intrinsically unequal, hierarchical and oppressive. This particular way of constructing personal and group identity fosters conflict rather than cooperation, and by its very nature leads to violence.

3.1.2 Partnership and 'matriarchy'

The dominator model can be juxtaposed with the partnership model, ancient and indigenous ways of thinking that preceded colonisation, found in societies such as that of the Khoisan of Southern Africa, the Toltecs of Latin America, and almost the entire East where buddhism was and is still widely practiced.⁵

The partnership model is premised on harmony and balance, on mutual respect for, and interdependence of, each other and the environment, on cooperation rather than conflict. It is personified in the *yin/yang* symbol, which epitomises a harmonious integration of all elements into one being, all dancing fluidly together to create a dynamic organism. It perhaps embodies a different tenet like, "I am because I care; I am because I belong".

In this model matriarchy is not necessarily the opposite of patriarchy. Ancient matriarchal societies were not hierarchical, oppressive and violent (towards men). Instead, they have been shown to be cooperative and peaceful, societies in which

³ Phrase coined by Lillian Artz of the University of Cape Town. Cf. Muthien/ Combrinck (2003).

⁴ According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* polarity implies two poles with contrary qualities, two opposite tendencies/ opinions, while dualism implies being twofold, duality; theory regarding two independent underlying principles, e.g. mind and matter, form and content, theological forces of good and evil equally balanced in the universe, Christ as both divine & human. So what we have is polarity and what we are striving (back) towards is duality.

⁵ While it is acknowledged that buddhism is not entirely unproblematic, especially in the context of gender relations, the scope of this chapter precludes a more detailed exploration of this aspect.

men and women were equal and equitably shared resources,⁶ even as females were key leaders, spiritually and otherwise, of their societies.⁷ Hence the term 'matriarchy' to describe ancient cooperative societies as the antithesis of patriarchy is erroneous, and various scholars have posited alternative terms, agreeing in essence that prepatriarchal societies were both matrilineal and matrilocal (with patriarchal societies being patrilineal and patrilocal).⁸

3.1.3 The origins of gender oppression

Ancient societies were not always patriarchal or necessarily gendered. In the context of gender, the dominator model presupposes a rigid distinction between the two genders. There are countless examples of modern colonisers imposing and maintaining this separation at the expense of the partnership model of thought. Heike Becker has shown in her studies of gender-based violence and the San that both colonisation and capitalism (as well as apartheid in Southern Africa) caused and exacerbated gender-based violence in the Khoisan communities in Southern Africa, through the introduction and fostering of rigid and controlled gender distinctions.

Especially in Africa, the impact of colonialism, grounded in monotheistic and patriarchal religious systems,⁹ extended beyond the imposition of rigid gender polarities to also subvert traditional constructions of family and partnerships. While studies about marriages between women have always been limited, Anthonia Uzuegbunam (2001) documents this phenomenon amongst the Igbo in Nigeria, and traces documents relating cases from the 1930s. She asserts that marriages between women are common in East, Southern and West Africa, as well as Sudan (2001: 3). According to Uzuegbunam:

"(...) woman–woman marriage in Igboland is portrayed as a flexible option available to women to pursue any number of interests, political, social, economic and personal. The guiding principles therefore are flexibility, heterogeneity and ambiguity." (2001: 11)

This centuries-old practice of woman-woman marriage, with its intrinsic mutuality and egalitarianism, has been steadily eroded by the colonisation of indigenous African societies. Man's fear of penetration and/ or violation by the 'impure' (bisexual) Other, does seem to cast some light on the reason(s) for his rejection of her. A useful analogy can be drawn between black and white, or colonised and coloniser. The need to increase and maintain the distance between these opposites stems from the fear of the (strangeness/ difference of the) Other.

⁶ As to the relations between women and men in Old Europe, the archeological evidence suggests that there was no apparent social superiority of males over females, and, generally, the distribution of goods in the cemeteries of Old Europe points to an egalitarian and clearly non-patriarchal society (Baring/ Cashford 1991: 56).

⁷ The National Centre for Women Development in Abuja, Nigeria, has a display of prominent women throughout recorded history, including Moremi of Ife, Mai Bintu the 'King' of Hunters, Fatima Mohammed Nur (first woman to memorise the entire Koran), Chief Mercy Eneli (the premier Ibo female in the cabinet of Igwe the Kingmaker), Maira Aisa Kili Ngirmaramma (1501-1558, who ruled Kanem-Borno for 7 years, 7 months and 7 days), Queen Amina of Zaria, and Emotan of Benin (who ruled the old Benin Empire), as well as various female chiefs from the 19th century forward.

⁸ To more accurately describe patriarchy, Eisler proposes the term *androcracy* (Greek *andros* = man; *cratos* = rule), and she depicts the prepatriarchal non-hierarchical social constructions as *gylany* (Greek *gyne* = woman; *an* from *andros* and *l* as a linking of the two genders) (1995: 105).

⁹ Tomasevsky (1993) emphasises that the subjugation of women did not begin 'until the advent of the religions, and became more intense as the centuries rolled on'.

3.2 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This understanding of violence and peace now allows a more in-depth examination of the concept of 'gender-based violence'. According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (General Recommendation No 12), gender-based violence is defined as:

"violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, and threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty."

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women notes three key spheres in which gender-based violence may occur or which may perpetrate and/ or condone such violence: the family, the community and the state.¹⁰ December Green adds one further site of gender-based violence, i.e. the economy. The concept of gender-based violence should accordingly be broadened to also include the notion of economic abuse, which has been defined in the South African Domestic Violence Act (1998) to include "the unreasonable deprivation of economic or financial resources or the unreasonable disposal of household effects in which the victim / survivor has an interest."¹¹

Gender-based violence therefore occurs through the act of *being gendered*. Through the kinds of identity construction where the Self cannot exist without the Other, and where the Self cannot be valued without devaluing the Other, women are valued as less than men. (It may be useful to note that men too get raped, especially during times of conflict. This is because these more vulnerable men are made into the Other, and so feminised or turned into surrogate women. This happens in prisons throughout the world, in gangs and in other areas of conflict.)

The CEDAW definition above focuses on women as the subjects of gender-based violence; however, it should be recognised that such violence also affects men, not only as potential victims, but also when they act as *perpetrators*.

It is ironic that the dominator model, and the ways in which it articulates itself in the construction of contemporary societies, brutalises everyone, even the dominant or oppressor. If one is taught violence, control and domination as a way of life, one becomes brutalised by it, on all sides of the equation. In this way even oppressors are victimised by the system and their own violent behaviours (whether physical, institutional and/ or cultural), since they cannot perceive of a more harmonious and compassionate existence. This is most readily evident in cases of family violence, especially in intensely patriarchal contexts where the role of father and provider turns on itself when the patriarch murders the entire family he is meant to protect.¹²

Violence, murder and rape exact a toll on the psyche of both perpetrator and survivor/ victim, and everyone is (re-)brutalised in the process, even spectators through vicarious trauma, as those working to combat gender-based violence will attest. As Jane Bennett puts it:

"Both women and men are vulnerable to the way dominant norms of gender relation, within their contexts, are working. Within South Africa, men are as likely to

¹⁰ Article 2(a) – (c) of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women UN General Assembly Resolution 48/104, 20 December 1993.

¹¹ Sec 1(ix)(b) of the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.

¹² South Africa is an example of a particularly patriarchal society where family murder by a patriarch is routine, especially amongst sectors of society that are highly militarised and/ or hierarchised, e.g. the police force.

become blunt assailants of women (and often, of men), as women are to become victims of sexual abuse, domestic battery, economic abuse, and incest. Clearly, those who actively assault retain responsibility for their violence that is a matter of principle and law. But the challenge for South Africans committed to the transformation of oppressive social norms is to untangle both 'victim' and 'perpetrator' from their terrible interlock of violence, no matter how shocking the 'perpetration' or how resonant the 'victimhood/survivorship'." (2000: 4)

Gender-based violence, as is commonly known, is not about sex or about conflict. It is about control and about power, in keeping with the dominator model. Gender-based violence is fundamentally premised on the ideology of male control over women's productive and reproductive powers, of male control over women's skills and resources, and especially of control over our power to produce future generations of producers. It is also about male control over women's sexuality, which is the key aspect of reproductive powers. So too, with the kind of identity formation discussed earlier of Self-Other, with women devalued as lesser beings than men, women's sexuality is also devalued and of less consequence than that of men.

According to some writers, there are four clear indicators of gender-based violence. In societies where these circumstances prevail, gender-based violence is more likely to occur and/ or to occur in more severe forms. The indicators are:

1. economic inequality;
2. existing patterns of using physical violence to resolve conflicts;
3. male authority and control over decision-making (and excluding women from this process);
4. restrictions on women's ability to leave the family setting.

All four indicators fit in with the dominator model, from inequality (economic and other forms); employing violence (physical, structural and cultural) as conflict resolution methods; male control over women and others; as well as restrictions on women's (and others') mobility and freedom. In this sense, since violence generically, and gender-based violence specifically, function on the three axes of Galtung's triangle of violence / peace (personal / direct / physical, structural / institutional, and cultural), it is imperative that attention be paid to factors that exacerbate and contribute to violence, from issues of development and poverty, to HIV/AIDS.

4. RETHINKING ACTIVISMS

Existing ways of thinking are too often premised on polarity, the kind of thinking and activism that engenders conflict rather than cooperation, and which prohibits or inhibits efforts to seek true transformative solutions for social change.

Activism can be viewed as inherently adversarial, where two sets of 'enemies' square off in battle, with neither side able to claim victory without defeat of the other, in other words a perpetuation of the dominator model, which by its very nature perpetuates violence in a continuous cycle, as evinced by the current conflict between Israel and Palestine. Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha* (truth-force¹³), in which a non-violent mass campaign of non-compliance is waged, was originally conceptualised as an alternative to the idea of 'passive resistance', which implies

¹³ The Hindi word *satya* means love or deity.

passivity and victimhood over agency and action. Instead, *satyagraha* is designed as not merely an alternative to violence or force, but as superior to it.¹⁴

Nelson Mandela's selfless desire to seek alternatives to apartheid without wreaking vengeance on perpetrators of brutality led him to a search for common ground, reconciliation and nation building across ethnicities. Thus both Gandhi and Mandela embody the principles of partnership, and both have proven to be formidable activists in the struggles for equity, justice and peace. Both viewed human rights through the prism of the partnership model, which allows for more creative ways of including human rights in activism.

A key activist who embodies the principles of the partnership model in her struggle for justice and peace is Aung San Suu Kyi.

Her methods of resistance included several hunger strikes while unlawfully imprisoned for several years by the military dictatorship in Burma. Her struggle for human rights is firmly located in the principles of democracy, non-violence and collective discipline. Aung San Suu Kyi also modelled her activism on the ideas espoused by Martin Luther King.

These examples of non-violent strategies illustrate that activism does not need to be violent in order to be effective. To achieve reconciliation between conflicting parties, one needs a redistribution of power, i.e. one party has to voluntarily relinquish some of its power and resources. The dominant party often needs to be *forced* to agree to redistributive justice. However, that force does not need to be violent.

5. CONCLUSION

The construction of identities based on polar opposites, and creation of Self versus Other, engenders oppression, inequality and violence. To get away from this, to get to the root of the violence in all societies, one needs to begin thinking of more harmonious ways of thought and living and being. And move away from domination towards partnership.¹⁵ While patriarchy, and the dominator model, has been around for thousands of years, evidence of societies modelled on the partnership model clearly shows that patriarchal rule is not inevitable, and that other more cooperative possibilities do exist. Historical reflections of non-patriarchal societies and periods of rule help support a belief in, and conception of, forms of existence and societies that transcend patriarchal rule.¹⁶ One should remind oneself that *change is possible*.

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¹⁴ Cf e.g. *Gandhi* by Geoffrey Ashe. And one of many of Gandhi's own writings, including "Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence".

¹⁵ It may be appropriate to acknowledge that both models, when used in this contrasting way, are in themselves binary oppositions.

¹⁶ Think also of times when patriarchy did not exist, for example the time of Amanitara of ancient Nubia (northern Ethiopia/Southern Sudan). She was one of several ancient African queens who ruled but was eventually deposed by others hungrier for power (and more violent).

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