



This issue of the newsletter DAWN Informs is intended to publicize the new DAWN book, titled *The Political Economy of Conflict and Violence against Women: Cases from the South* (Zed Books, London, 2019), and to provide a synoptic version for those, especially from the global South, who may not be able to access it. The book builds on previous work by DAWN in understanding violence against women in contexts of war, conflict and transition. Political economic processes of conflict are tightly knit to the nature of relations between the national and the global economy in post-colonial nation states in the global South, and they also shape the aftermath of post conflict transition, reconstruction, recovery and peace. The rich and varied insights presented here compel us to interrogate and nuance existing frames of analysis that have sought to understand violence against women in conflict and war.

## POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CONFLICT

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### 2 Introduction

Framing a South Feminist Analysis of War, Conflict and Violence Against Women: the value of a political economy lens

5 Political economy of conflict and violence against women in Sri Lanka: the construction of the financially responsible woman

9 Ending violent conflict and violence against women in Papua New Guinea's Highlands Region: the state, extractive industries and civil society

13 Rural women in Colombia: from victims to actors

17 "Entrenched Peripherality": Women, political economy and the myth of peacebuilding in North East India

20 Re-imagining subversion: agency and women's peace activism in Northern Uganda

25 The Prism of Marginalisation: Political Economy of Violence Against Women in Sudan and South Sudan

# Introduction

## Framing a South Feminist Analysis of War, Conflict and Violence Against Women: the value of a political economy lens<sup>1</sup>

by Kumudini Samuel and Vagisha Gunasekera

This collection of essays builds on previous work of DAWN in understanding violence against women in contexts of war, conflict and transition. What became clear from our past work was that war and conflict consist of complex, multi-layered internal and global political economic dimensions. This underlying web of political economic processes of conflict is tightly knit to the nature of relations between the national and the global economy in post-colonial nation states in the global South. Hence, as much as these processes are deeply enmeshed in the causes and consequences of war and conflict, they also shape the aftermath of post conflict transition, reconstruction, recovery and peace. These rich and varied insights compelled us therefore to interrogate existing frames of analysis that sought to understand violence against women in conflict and war. This collection of case studies, in many ways, is a modest attempt to challenge ourselves to 'read' or 'map' how patterns of violence against women are produced and reproduced in the broader relations between national and global economy, as well as in the political (and military) relations of conflict shaped by prevalent internal and external ideological and political paradigms and geo-political contentions. The volume is dedicated to Vijay Nagaraj, intellectual, activist and co-author of the essay on Sri Lanka, who died tragically before the book was completed.

### OUR POINT OF DEPARTURE: DOMINANT VIEWS ON VIOLENCE IN PEACE MAKING AND PEACE BUILDING<sup>2</sup>

The feminist struggle to surface sexual violence and rape out of the private realm succeeded in politicising sexual violence as an act related to social power. The acknowledgement of violence against women as a crime at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 was a moment of victory for transnational feminist activism. As a result of victim and witness narratives that unfolded at the international criminal tribunals in the 1990s for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and elsewhere, sexual violence was

“...patterns of violence against women are produced and reproduced in the broader relations between national and global economy, as well as in the political (and military) relations of conflict...”

established as an integral part of war not merely an effect of it (Henry, 2013; Copelon, 1995; Charlesworth and Chinkin, 2000).

This articulation and the exceptional attention to wartime sexual violence, despite its critical importance, within the feminist and rights discourses and international criminal law (Lorentzen and Turpin, 1998; Skjelbæk and Smith, 2001; Moser and Clark, 2001; Manchanda, 2005; Giles and Hyndman, 2004) have had 'unintended consequences' (Henry, 2013:97) that merit further study. Concerted efforts by feminists at local and global levels to convince national and international policy bodies to acknowledge violence against women as a crime, have also led to a developing critique of how violence is framed in the context of war and conflict. The continued fixation on sexual violence against women in conflict by international criminal law is that it imputes a hierarchy of gravity to some crimes over others and silences 'alternate narratives' (Henry, 2013). It also results in sidestepping other types of direct physical and psychological violence and structural violence.

It has also been argued that ethical and political wrongs and systemic injustice within the broader socio economic contexts of war and conflict, as well as the impact of global capitalism on causes and consequences of war, are little recognised or dealt with by international criminal law and trials rarely administer substantive justice for women seeking post war recovery (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007; Rees and Chinkin, 2016). This often entails obscuring the adverse effects generated by neoliberal models of development,

which tend to be the cornerstones of post war reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts (Bergeron, et al., 2017).

Feminists have also identified neoliberal economic interventions inherent in contemporary international peacemaking and post war reconstruction as a critical challenge to sustainable peace, which must include a transformative gender agenda. In light of this, we must nuance this analysis to include a political economy lens that is integral to how gendered security is viewed and addressed. This research needs now to take into account the challenges of war-torn economies and post war recovery that factors in women's lived realities, entrenched inequalities and survival strategies. Hence, the purpose of these es-

says is to use a political economy framework or lens to study violence against women by taking structural inequalities into account, contributing thereby to a nuanced and better understanding of, and more effective responses to, gender-based violence against women in conflict and war.

### THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL ECONOMY FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

In order to push beyond the current impasse related to our understanding of violence against women during war and conflict, the first step is to think differently about war and conflict. Even today, there is significant consensus around the idea that war and conflict are an aberration from the 'normal', and that these conditions indicate a 'disturbance' of otherwise smooth-sailing and non-violent political, economic, social and cultural processes. When war and conflict are treated in this manner, "post-conflict recovery" automatically entails achieving "normal conditions of the economy" which are assumed to be non-violent.

At this point we draw from David Moore (2015) and Karl Von Holdt (2014) who offer a framing of war that takes into account the structural nature of violence. Their ideas are similar in that war and conflict are conceived as moments of eruption in "an ongoing course of class, ideological and political formation in the context of accumulation processes" (Moore 2015:2). Feminist political economy is useful in unpacking the gendered nature of violence inherent in domestic and global political economic structures as

they relate to war and conflict (True, 2012: 44). Also significant are gendered analyses of political economies of war highlighting the historical and contemporary, local and global, political and economic relations that form, produce and reproduce violence, as well as the way in which wars magnify and reshape gender identities (see Raven-Roberts, 2013). Reviews of accumulation by dispossession by critical feminists point out that women, nature and people of impoverished countries make up the base upon which the processes of capitalist accumulation have been historically established, and their subordination and exploitation continue to be essential premises underlying the reproduction of the current model, and therefore, it is crucial to understand the interactions, both historical and present, between the sexual, social, and international divisions of labour. Important to this analysis is the understanding that violence is at the heart of social organisation, and gender relations and violence are mutually constitutive (Confortini, 2006).

A political economy analysis compels us to understand how the multiple crises generated by economic globalisation and development, resultant macro-economic policies, trade liberalisation, economic deregulation, together with financial and climate crises and militarisation pose new challenges, particularly for women (Seguino, 2010; Sen and

and some have approached writing about the political economies of violence against women in their own countries as much (or more) from lived experience and experiential insights as from formal or scholarly research, which we consider entirely valid and in keeping with feminist epistemology.

The essays call for situating violence against women within historic and contemporary political and economic structures and relationships, both at the national/sub-national level as well as the global level. The essay on Colombia provides a richly textured understanding of the political economy of the country's longstanding and complex war, its class dimensions and the marked differences among the three-armed protagonists, shedding light on rural women's important, yet unrecognised role as crucial actors during the war, and as agents of change. The case study on Papua New Guinea (PNG) focuses on the role of foreign-owned, environmentally devastating extractive industries in exacerbating gender and intra-community inequality and facilitating the build-up of arms and conflict, with terrifying implications for women. The essay on Sri Lanka demonstrates that the 'icon' of the 'self-employed woman from the war-affected area' is part of the global drive towards financialisation and traces the violence inherent in gendered processes of 'responsibilisation' that in turn reinforces

dered form. Militarisation is one such mode of control. This creates a 'state of exception' in which citizens are reduced to 'bare life', or stripped of the ordinary rights of citizenship (Agamben, 2005), impacting adversely in the long term on democratic rights such as freedom of expression, association and mobility, among others. Together with armed conflict and civil war, militarisation has played a major role in shaping and changing women's lives. Contemporary wars occur in the sites of the most severe social divisions, concomitantly generating multiple forms of crisis (Laurie and Petchesky, 2007).

**[b] The sexed body and the 'other' in war and conflict:** Many of the essays discuss how war and conflict shape and reinforce historical and entrenched forms of sexuality. In PNG, 'big man' culture valorises men and armed violence remains the norm to resolve old and new conflicts. Perpetrated by warriors, enraged spouses and opportunistic hosts of displaced populations, rape persists as a weapon, and justice frameworks introduced by new norms of peace appear unable to deter entrenched practices of militarised masculinity which sanction the use of physical and sexual violence in the control of women (Cox, this DI).

**[c] Gendered economies of war:** Some essays move away from the over-determined focus on sexualised, ethnicised and militarised violence against women, which is the predominant narrative of violence experienced by women in war and conflict. The authors draw attention to neoliberal globalisation that has transformed processes of accumulation by dispossession, leading to multiple forms of gendered structural violence in times of war and peace. These essays move the discussion away from the essentialist framing of women as victims of violence and war and men as its perpetrators.

Weaving through all the essays, explicitly and implicitly, is that accumulation continues to be buttressed by gendered ideologies that maintain women's unpaid care work in the home, which is a prerequisite for the productivity of the male in the public sphere. Such gendered structures and processes produce and reproduce violence by restraining women's public participation and promoting their subordination and inequality both in the home and society, thereby making them more vulnerable to both direct and structural violence.

**[d] Sexual division of labour, family, household and the male provider:** It is well known that during conflict and war the status quo of families and communities dismantle, bringing about shifts in power and status as women assume roles and responsibilities conventionally perceived to be the preserve of men. The essay on Uganda discusses the multiple vulnerabilities of women as well as the destabilisation of masculine dominance and the opening of spaces of partial power for wom-

**“The essays in this DI call for situating violence against women within historic and contemporary political and economic structures and relationships.”**

Durano, 2014). These realities of the global political economic order are often absent or overlooked in analyses of violence against women. The case studies, which form the essays of this DAWN Informs (DI) expand on - and illustrate the violence embedded in political economic arrangements of some of the strategic sites or locations where structural economic forces come into play, intensifying the conditions for increasing the magnitude of violence against women. As the authors note, their approach to gendered violence during war, conflict and its aftermath is to see the continuities and discontinuities of the gendered dimensions linked to patriarchy and the impacts of differential political economic arrangements beyond the temporality of war. Together, these essays make a case for nuancing and complicating these perspectives, which in turn would strengthen analyses on violence against women and conflict.

These essays are written by feminists from the global South, diverse in their background, experience, and academic and disciplinary orientations. They work in different political, economic, social and cultural contexts

particular gender ideologies. The case of the North East region of India highlights state repression, militarisation, 'othering' and cultural violence as modes of control and gendered violence in three sub-national conflicts and their protracted peace processes. The case study on Sudan and South Sudan discusses the complexity imposed by multiple and overlapping religious and customary structures of social control. The essay on Northern Ugandan women's community peace initiatives examines both the gendered socio-economic and political shifts that occurred as a result of the war as well as the ways in which women's agency attempted to subvert patriarchal norms.

A number of themes emerge from the essays, which are briefly discussed here.

**[a] Militarisation:** gendered violence in a 'state of exception': In most case studies, the authors observe that patriarchal power and territorial prerogative over women's bodies, coalesce with salient modes of power and control inherent in struggles for territorial claims, which in turn produces and reproduces structural violence of a distinctly gen-

en as conflict related shifts in roles and responsibilities reconfigured family structures and opened up agentic spaces for women.

Some essays discuss issues stemming from the reinforcement of customary laws which are often given primacy over general laws, particularly regarding land ownership and affairs related to the family. For example, the Indian Constitution allows states such as Mizoram and Nagaland to frame their own laws in a manner that aligns with their patriarchal customary laws. Authors signpost to the danger of overlooking changes to family

as linked to patriarchy and the impacts of differential political economic arrangements beyond the temporality of war.

Each feminist writer pegs her/himself to a particular mode of power and control, and this determines how they 'read' and 'map' violence. The essays do not all claim to carry out feminist political economy analyses. They do, however, engage with certain elements of a 'political economy method' in analysing violence in key 'strategic sites' (Ertürk, 2009; True, 2012). The authors discuss how conditions of war and conflict

Ertürk, Y. (2009). *Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Human Rights Council, Eleventh Session, Agenda item 3, A/HRC/11/6/Add.6 23 June 2009 <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/docs/A.HRC.11.6.Add.6.pdf>

Giles, W. and Hyndman, J. (eds) (2004). *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. CA: University of California Press.

Henry, N. (2014). "The Fixation on Wartime Rape: Feminist Critique and International Criminal Law." *Social & Legal Studies*. 23 (1): 93-111.

Laurie, M. and Petchesky, R. (2007). "Gender, health, and human rights in sites of political exclusion." *Global public health*. 3 (Suppl 1): 25-41.

Lorentzen, L.A. and Turpin, J. (eds) (1988). *The Women and War Reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Manchanda, R. (2005). "Women's Agency in Peace Building: Gender Relations in Post-Conflict Reconstruction." *Economic and Political Weekly*. 44/45: 4737-4745.

Moore, D. (2015). "Conflict and After: Primitive Accumulation, Hegemonic Formation and Democratic Deepening." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*. 4 (1): 1-21.

Moser, C. and Clark, F. (eds) (2001). *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. London: Zed Books.

Seguino, S. (2010). "The Way Forward in the Wake of the 2008 Global Economic Crisis: Does the Stiglitz Commission Report Go Far Enough?" Concept paper prepared for DAWN Development Debates.

Sen, G. and Durano, M. (eds.). (2014). "The remaking of social contracts: the promise of human rights," in Gita Sen and Marina Durano. *The Remaking of Social Contracts. Feminist in a Fierce New World*. London: Zed Books.

Skjelsbæk, I. and Smith, D. (eds) (2001). *Gender, Peace and Conflict*. London: Sage.

True, J. (2012). *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Von Holdt, K. (2014). "On Violent Democracy." *The Sociological Review*. 62 (2): 129-151.

## NOTES

1 We acknowledge with gratitude the contribution made to the first drafts of this chapter by Ambika Satkunanathan and Ayesha Imam. Ayesha Imam helped coordinate the early stages of this project and participated in the inception workshop that discussed the framework for the research.

2 Peace making generally refers to peace processes and peace building generally refers to post accord/agreement peace work. For UN definitions in the context of peacekeeping, see <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology>. "Peacemaking generally includes measures to address conflicts in progress and usually involves diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement." And "Peacebuilding aims to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is a complex, long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace." The case studies featured in this DI refer to both processes.

“...contemporary wars and armed conflicts are intrinsically connected to the control over productive resources, which in turn reproduces and normalises gendered violence inherent in economic relations.”

structures and household economies during war and conflict. They argue that reinforcing customary laws and practices (which assumes traditional family structures based on the male provider) during and after conflict, pushes women to the brink of vulnerability.

**[e] Women, violence and peace building:** Several case studies discuss peace building processes where violence is given a meaning beyond sexual violence against women. The essay on PNG discusses women's peace initiatives in the highland province of Jiwaka, detailing how women have challenged chauvinistic traditions of conflict mediation, negotiation and planning for future development. Refusing to contribute to the payment of effective war taxes appropriated by men, women have secured their savings against the constant demand by husbands for the purchase of weapons and ammunition to continue tribal warfare.

## CONCLUSION

These case studies place special emphasis on the centrality of violence in social organisation and its role in producing and reproducing the gender order, and conversely on how the gender order in turn justifies and reproduces unequal and violent power relations in society, which are firmly anchored in overlapping patriarchies. The essays set out a context for political and economic relations that span historic modes of accumulation and dispossession, centring on those that buttress contemporary war and conflict and continue in the aftermath of war, to argue that conflict and war cannot be treated simplistically as a deviation from the 'normal'. As the authors note, their approach to gendered violence during conflict and its aftermath is to see the continuities of the gendered dimensions

change the gender division of labour within the family and the communities and the violence associated with such transformation. Many of the essays also frame contemporary wars and armed conflicts as intrinsically connected to the control over productive resources (Ertürk, 2009), which in turn reproduces and normalises gendered violence inherent in economic relations. Hence, a case is made for feminist political economy analysis of war and conflict as it enables us to understand how political economic relations both produce and perpetuate the continuum of violence faced by women before, during and after war. The case studies unpack relations of violence in certain strategic sites, all with war and conflict in the background, and produce rich, contextually-grounded accounts that depict multiple inequalities controlling women's sexuality and status in society and entrench their political and economic marginalisation. The thick accounts offered by the case studies not only enrich the broader body of literature on gender and conflict, but also challenge, with empirical evidence, the conventional notions that women are merely victims of war.

## REFERENCES

Bergeron, S, Cohn, C & Duncanson, C. (2017). "Rebuilding Bridges: Toward a Feminist Research Agenda for Postwar Reconstruction." *Politics & Gender*. 13 (4): 715-721.

Charlesworth, H. and Chinkin, C. (2000). *The Boundaries of International Law: A Feminist Analysis*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Confortini, C. (2006). "Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies". *Feminism, Alliance, Peace and Change*. 31 (3): 333-367.

Copelon, R. (1995). "Gendered war crimes: Reconceptualizing rape in time of war." *Women's rights, human rights: International feminist perspectives*. 197-214.

# Political economy of conflict and violence against women in Sri Lanka: the construction of the financially responsible woman

by Vagisha Gunasekara and Vijay K. Nagaraj

This paper attempts to map relations of violence embedded in political economic arrangements that tread through times of war and periods before and after. Combining a political economy approach with concepts of structural violence, the authors argue that the fixation on extreme forms of gendered nature of violence during times of war and armed conflict, such as systematic sexual violence that takes place within heavily militarized milieus, often overlooks continuities in violence in women's every day economic lives. There is a call to step back, observe and understand gendered violence within the political economy of war and conflict, where "expropriation of vital economic and non-material resources and the operation of systems of social stratification or categorisation that subvert people's chances for survival" (Anglin, 1998) continue, albeit, taking different forms.

The paper frames war and conflict as moments of eruption in "an ongoing course of class, ideological and political formation in the context of accumulation processes" (Moore, 2015). This framing deviates from the dominant understanding that portrays violence as a phenomenon produced solely by war or conflict, thereby erasing the tracks of continuity of structural violence that pre-date the temporal boundaries of war-time. The authors couple this framing of war with critical feminist ideas of accumulation by dispossession invoking the contention that the globalisation of capital should be re-understood as a moment of primitive accumulation that is very significantly gendered. Drawing from the likes of Maria Mies (1987), for in-

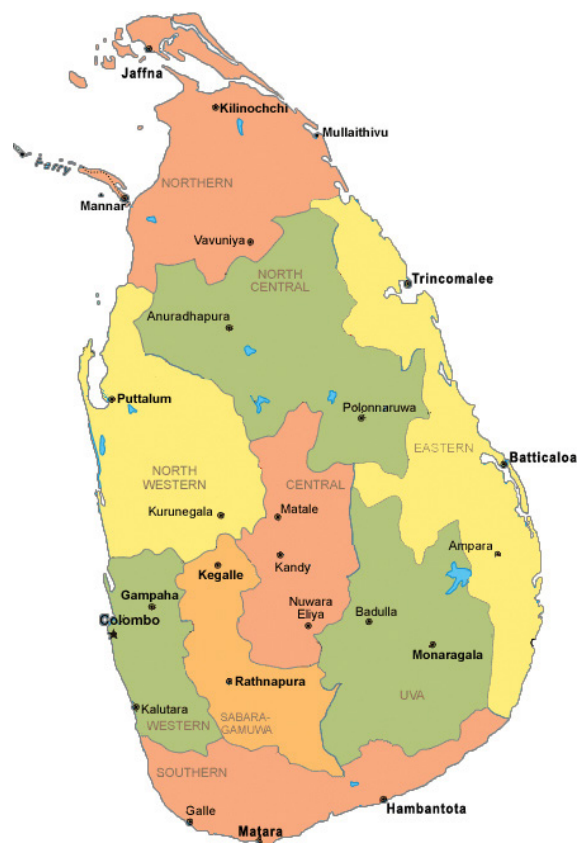
stance, the authors identify women, nature and people of impoverished countries as locations of extraction and dispossession. Therefore, the sexual, social and international divisions of labour often represent hierarchies of both work and workers trapped in relations of violence. Hence, this paper links concepts of structural violence and accumulation by dispossession within the broader political economy of war and conflict. The authors advance the view that foregrounds gendered political economic relations at the centre rather than the war and the conflict itself. They argue that such a 'centering' of political economic relations enables us to place war and conflict in perspective rather than accord them the over-determining status they so often enjoy in contexts like Sri Lanka. Grounded in the post-war context of Sri Lanka, this paper essentially argues that the dynamics of mutual accommodation and constitution involving gender and violence can be mapped in terms of distinct and gendered relations of violence, specific modes of accumulation and dispossession, as well as certain modes of power and control. Such an approach or framework will in turn be useful, we hope, in understanding the mutually constitutive nature of gendered violence and political economic relations in the context of war and conflict.

## CONTESTING 'GROWTH AMID WAR' THESIS IN SRI LANKA

The authors contest the treatment of war and conflict as a deviation from the 'normal' which entails the association of "post-con-

flict recovery" with achieving - or stemming from "normal conditions of the economy". This view, they argue, advocating the 'return to the normal', fails to account for the violence that pervades 'normal' economic and political arrangements. It portrays violence as a phenomenon produced solely by war or conflict, thereby erasing the tracks of continuity of structural violence that pre-date the temporal boundaries of war-time. This view also renders a distorted image of the spatial arrangements of violence, by often confining violence to spaces of combat. This depiction of war and conflict, which often forms the basis of post-war and post-conflict 'reconstruction', hence fails to account for how war and conflict conditions reproduce spatial, economic and subjective relations of violence. It is this view of war and conflict that frames Sri Lanka's trajectory in terms of the stark dualism of 'growth amid war'.

Drawing from Venugopal (2003), the authors contend that the conflict in the North and East of the island "has in different ways been an enabling factor for much contested economic reform process in the south" (Venugopal, 2003). The unfolding of the economic reforms in Sri Lanka coincides with the advent of the neoliberal framework integrating economic liberalisation, globalisation, free trade, democratisation and governance spearheaded by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>1</sup>. The social dislocations emanating from the liberalisation process were institutionalised into the civil war<sup>2</sup>. Geographies of war were physically separated from locations of production.



Sri Lanka. Source: Survey Department of Sri Lanka (2015)

Spatially, this led to a geographic separation of the primary theatre of war in the north and east from the primary theatres of production, located in the west, central hills and the south of the country<sup>3</sup>. In reality the war cushioned some of the negative effects of reforms, partly because the security sector absorbed labour<sup>4</sup> due to a rapid expansion of employment opportunities<sup>5</sup>. In the meantime, the increasing ethnicisation of economic competition in the shadow of an authoritarian and majoritarian state not only fostered horizontal conflict on ethnic lines, it left the trade union movement all but defanged.

The authors argue that these divisions often represent hierarchies of both work and workers trapped in relations of violence. The starkest of these hierarchies in Sri Lanka are represented by the Hill Country Tamils—oppressed caste Tamils brought by the British from southern India beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to work on their coffee plantations, which later shifted to tea. Tea has long been a major export earner for Sri Lanka and continues to account for more than half of all agricultural exports in terms of earnings<sup>6</sup>. Throughout the decades of war the plantation sector remained an inner periphery generating valuable foreign exchange earnings that helped stabilise the economy. However, the Hill Country Tamils are the worst off amongst Sri Lanka's four main ethnic groups. Hill Country Tamil women, who make up virtually the entire tea-plucking workforce, are at the very bottom of this hierarchy and suffer patriarchal and ethnicised violence.

Next up in the hierarchy are domestic workers. Plucking tea and serving as domestic workers for middle- and upper-class households in urban centres are often the only two options available for Hill Country Tamil women in Sri Lanka. The authors point to the lives of domestic workers to illuminate the violence inherent in the gendered public-private sphere division of labour, supported by gender ideologies that hold women primarily responsible for unremunerated, and often invisible, unpaid or poorly remunerated work

in the private sphere (Okin, 1989; Federici, 2004; True, 2010). With more and more women from the middle classes joining the formal labour force in Sri Lanka, Tamil women from the Hill Country or Sinhala women from rural areas stepped into the role of the housewife. This “housewifisation process” as Mies (1998) observed, has involved exploitation and physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated on the women by both men and women of the upper-class household. Domestic work underlines that oppression and domination is produced and reproduced not only in the legal and formal but also informal and illicit economies.

The authors turn next to women workers in Free Trade Zones (FTZs) and female migrant workers to elaborate the transformation of the nature of paid work and a redefining of social relations in favour of capital, shaped by processes of neoliberal economic globalisation. The decisive neoliberal turn in Sri Lanka's economic policy orientation came in 1977, accompanied by massive repression of trade unions and escalating levels of violence against the Tamil minority in particular. The country's FTZs, the focal point of the textile and garment industry with 70% of its workforce female, is a legacy of this era. FTZs became central to securing Sri Lanka's place in the global apparel value chain but on the back of becoming a privileged enclave of capital exempt from the normal tax and labour regimes. This set the stage for yet another set of enclaves in which the social contract was underpinned by coercion and violence especially of young women largely from the rural and peri-urban hinterlands who entered FTZs in large numbers. The large-scale emigration of women workers as domestic labourers to the oil-rich Middle-East formed yet another labour enclave during the war years.

Using these gendered labour enclaves, the authors set the stage to map gendered violence during and in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's war, in a way that allows one to see the continuities in the gendered dimensions beyond the temporality of war, and recog-

nise them as linked to patriarchy and the differential impacts of economic globalisation (True, 2010).

## GENDERED ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION: THE CASE OF SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN IN PASSIKUDAH

The authors formulate a framework of gendered violence in political economic arrangements that pervade times of war and peace by examining one gendered ‘enclave’ in the current Sri Lankan political and economic landscape - self-employment of women, bearing the hallmark of ‘post-war livelihoods’. They rely on qualitative empirical evidence collected intermittently throughout a period of three years from 2014 in Passikudah, a small coastal town on the eastern seaboard of Sri Lanka, to demonstrate the mutually constitutive nature of gendered violence and political economic arrangements and structures.

Self-employment through home-based livelihoods and micro-entrepreneurship is an important part of post-war political economic vision, especially for women. It is not, however, entirely new; the Sri Lankan state actively promoted self-employment programmes in the post-1977 period to assuage the effects of the liberalisation strategy in rural areas and as part of a broader Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) package that aimed at creating employment opportunities whilst removing the burden of employment creation from the state (Ruwanpura, 2000). This “bottom-of-the-pyramid” development strategy expanded in scope in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 and in the arbitrarily determined post-war period post-2009. It was rebranded as a “post-war development strategy”, a way out of poverty for the war-affected, and in particular for women-headed households in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Today, the microfinance industry is a multi-billion-rupee enterprise, with many institutions recording more than 100% in profits.

Passikudah, the authors observe, is characterised by the imposition of a capital-intensive resort economy on a landscape of precarious primary production in fishing and agriculture that is already infused with local inequities. The resort economy has made its wage labour attractive even as or precisely because it undermines other forms of primary production (e.g. fishing, agriculture, labour work in coconut plantations) as a secure livelihood.

For women in Passikudah, working in the tourism industry carries certain reputational risks, as resorts, hotels and guesthouses are seen in a negative light by the local community. They are viewed as spaces catering to human vices, especially those of male ‘others’, which generates narratives of ethnic and cultural contagion (Gunasekara, et al., 2016). In this context, the authors contend,



self-employment has become the de facto livelihood for women, and also some men in Passikudah. The authors point to gendered relations of violence embedded in women's self-employment in war-affected Passikudah by zooming in on a few life histories.

## SET UP FOR FAILURE

Micro-credit and micro-finance are key modalities through which self-employment schemes are supported, portrayed as an economic space that is inherently empowering. While disbursement is quick and efficient, there is little useful guidance on what to produce. Prospective entrepreneurs are given training on making items that are already in abundance in the market (like soap, camphor balls, or incense sticks) or which have little to no market value.

It is typical for self-employed women to move from producing one product to another within a span of six-months. When we first met 'Rama', she was making soap at home; and seven months later, she moved to making murukku (a local fried snack) because she couldn't sell any of her soap bars. They tend to encounter a lack of consumer demand for their goods, given that the customer base is their own impoverished neighborhood. Several women entrepreneurs told us that venturing outside of their village carries risks, as markets are a gendered terrain. Navigating and negotiating one's way through markets entail facing various forms of gendered violence and social control. For example, a woman peanut-seller said that many men make sexual advances to her when she is in public spaces conducting business on a daily basis.

Women also have to negotiate with their husbands or male partners to conduct business outside of the home. 'Valli's daily mission is to sell her homemade sweets as quickly as possible and return home before the husband is back from his work day. At times when she returned home late, the disciplining by the husband came in the form of blows and kicks. Many other women related to this reality. It is hardly surprising that most self-employment ventures fail, trapping the women in vicious cycles of indebtedness that drive them further into poverty.

Even in the handful of relatively successful cases, self-employment has worked primarily to enable diversification and spread risk rather than enabling the capital accumulation to facilitate a transition out of precariousness (Gunasekara, et al., 2016). These realities interrogate some of the underlying assumptions of entrepreneurship and the promise of prosperity vis-à-vis self-employment of women.

## REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER ROLES

On a few occasions, authors observed microfinance loan officers on motorbikes on visits to the villages where they dispense

loans and collect repayments. Meetings regarding group loans followed a strict regime. A group of around ten or sometimes fifteen clients would gather together and sit in a circle, around the young, male loan officer. On some occasions, the meeting would begin with an oath uttered by the women in which they promised to use the money for the wellbeing of their families and make their repayments on time.

This repertoire, the authors argue, enforces a particular construction of the "financially responsible woman" and a reinforcement of gender roles: the male loan officer embodies the promise of finance for the woman and her family, alongside an arsenal of mechanisms both material and symbolic to hold her accountable. The woman borrower is held responsible for setting up a viable self-employment venture, and ensuring and prioritising the wellbeing of her family in the prescribed roles of mother and wife, intrinsically linked to the reproductive burden placed on her, which is also built into the oath they take.

When their home-based livelihood ventures fail and the women are unable to repay loans, the consequences of indebtedness are serious and even tragic; news items from war-affected areas linking suicides to indebtedness have become commonplace now (Wijedasa, 2014; Gunganeshan, 2017). Women who are late on payments often face intimidation and harassment from loan collectors who commonly practice door-to-door marketing and loan collection (Gunasekara, et al., 2016; Gunasekara, et al., 2015). Aside from the physical and psychological dimensions, this type of violence also has a subjective dimension that is less explored: women face reputational risks because intimidation and harassment take place at their own doorstep, in the community in which they live. This type of violence reached such chronic levels in the Eastern province that in 2014, the District Secretary of Batticaloa banned weekly house visits to collect loan instalments.

The authors point to the construction of the financially responsible woman as a dynamic of neoliberal policies, cleverly scaffolding the rhetoric of individual responsibility in order to mask the increasing divestment of state services (e.g. safety net programmes, food stamps, etc.), and turn social reproduction entirely over to individual families, in this case to women, or sell them on the market. They further argue that this is a move to maximise the returns from unpaid labor of social reproduction within the family and the limited expenditure on the social wage outside the home (Vogel, 2000). The construction of the financially responsible woman, in this case, becomes central to the processes of accumulation; and the self-employment and micro-finance combination becomes a socially accepted mechanism for extracting wealth and resources from poor people, particularly women.

## RELATIONS OF VIOLENCE: SPATIAL, ECONOMIC, SUBJECTIVE AND SEXUAL

Deriving from accounts of gendered violence in the self-employment in Passikudah, the authors identify four interconnected yet distinct relations of violence against women workers in this area of the economy: spatial, economic, subjective and sexual.

They posit that the spatial organisation of a women's work determines its visibility, thereby producing specific forms of vulnerability. During the war-time environment of fear, where men were vulnerable to abduction, murder and forced recruitment, women were better able to navigate through checkpoints to access markets; but the attendant risks meant this too was not always a reliable or secure channel. As a result, primary production - fishing or agriculture-based - became a subsistence or a survival economy. Women's work became spatially organised in a way that enables strict surveillance and control. For example, most women from Passikudah resorted to self-employment or domestic work, operating within the confines of homes, and laboured under the watchful eyes of their husbands and other male kin. The modes of control and power embedded in these spaces makes women vulnerable to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and offers no redress mechanisms.

Violent economic relations are deeply embedded in these modes of production in the value chains of self-employment. In self-employment of women in Passikudah, financial returns are low, work arrangements are precarious and working conditions are hazardous and sometimes indecent. The work day of a domestic worker or woman struggling to maintain her household by doing a micro-enterprise is more than 20 hours. Laws that mandate minimum wage and employee benefits do not apply to de facto entrepreneurs and they are also often left out of state safety net programmes such as Samurdhi.

Considering women's work as part of the moral economy, the authors observe subjective or psycho-social relations of violence. For example, the pressure for women to generate income for the maintenance of their households invariably means that to some degree their roles as mothers are compromised. Women's home-based livelihoods, in this regard, are encouraged as they contain the woman within the home, and therefore are thought of as activities that don't impinge on their roles as mothers. However, by confining women to domesticity vis-à-vis home-based livelihoods, the risk of domestic violence increases. And as studies have shown, physical and psychological disciplining or control of women by their husbands adds to the burden of earning an income and taking care of the household that women have to endure, effec-

tively creating a triple burden (Jayasekara & Najab 2016).

Women working outside their homes face serious reputational risks based on moral panic around sexual fraternising. While some women may overstep these boundaries despite malicious gossip and character assassination, most others stay bound by the rules of the moral economy in order to maintain a reputation as a 'good', 'virtuous' woman. Self-employed women have become targets of this moral panic particularly because of transactional sex as a bargaining chip in negotiating access to working capital, inputs of production, credit and markets. Some self-employed women in Passikudah were trapped in highly exploitative sexual transactions where they negotiated sex as repayment for debt and interest of loans.

## CONCLUSION: MODES OF POWER AND CONTROL REPRODUCING RELATIONS OF VIOLENCE

This case study unpicks gendered relations of violence (spatial, economic, subjective, sexual) vis-à-vis one mode of accumulation and dispossession – self-employment – in an attempt to illuminate certain broader economic, political and ideological forces that are enmeshed in this complex web and which continuously reproduce violence. The authors refer to these forces as 'modes of control'. The context in which these modes of control currently exist is what we know as 'neoliberal globalisation'.

Capitalist restructuring in the past four decades has forced women from the home to the public area, to work ever-longer hours to maintain the household. By the mode of control that the authors refer to as 'responsibilisation', women's work in the public sphere continues to carry the stamp of undervalued, informal and unwaged work that she performed in the private sphere. The 'responsible' woman, the ideological driving force of micro-credit, labours in a context unregulated and free from labour laws, and like housework within the home, it is unending and functions throughout the 24-hour day.

The authors' main contention is that underpinning the self-employment economies examined in this paper are regimes of sexual order and security that were and are maintained through coercion and violence. But considering the coercion and violence in isolation, for example as discrete acts of sexual violence or violence against women and girls, as the transitional justice agenda mostly does, fails, firstly, to address the structural conditions producing such violence. Secondly, such an approach invariably ends up relying almost exclusively on individualising responsibility and victimhood and actually risks fragmenting the possibility of collective political struggles to resist and transform such conditions.

In the post-war period, women in the North and East who are the preferred targets of microfinance lending and other debt-driven self-employment schemes, are forced into a socio-economic space where deeply gendered ideas of women being more reliable, responsible and compliant borrowers have tied them into home-based employment, leaving them vulnerable to multiple layers of structural violence.

## REFERENCES

- Anglin, M. K. (1998). *Feminist perspectives on structural violence, Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 5:2, 145-151, DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.1998.9962613.
- Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York: Autonomedia.
- Guganeshan, M. (2017). "Easy access to credit triggers violence against women in Sri Lanka". *Colombo Telegraph*. May 9, 2017. <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/easy-access-to-credit-triggers-violence-against-women-in-sri-lanka/>
- Gunasekara, V., Philips, M., and Nagaraj, V. (2016). "Hospitality and Exclusion: A study about post-war tourism in Passikudah". London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Gunasekara, V., Najab, N. and Munas, M. (2015). "No Silver Bullet: An Assessment of the Effects of Financial Counselling on Decision-Making Behavior of Housing Beneficiaries in Jaffna and Kilinochchi". Colombo: The Centre for Poverty Analysis.
- Jayasekara, P. and Najab, N. (2016). "The Political Economy of Violence: Women's Economic Relations in Post-war Sri Lanka". London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Mies, Maria (1987). *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London: Zed Books.
- Moore, D. (2015). "Conflict and After: Primitive Accumulation, Hegemonic Formation and Democratic Deepening". *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*. 4 (1): 1-21.
- Okin, S.M. (1989). *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. United States: Basic Books.
- Ruwanpura, K. (2012). "Ethical Codes: Reality and Rhetoric – A Study of Sri Lanka's Apparel Sector". Southampton, UK: University of Southampton.
- True, J. (2012). *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Venugopal, R. (2003). "The Global Dimensions of Conflict in Sri Lanka". Paper presented to the conference on "Globalisation and Self-Determination Movements": Pomona College, 21st – 22nd January 2003.
- Vogel, L. (2000). "Domestic Labour Revisited". *Science & Society*. 64 (2): 151-170.
- Wijedasa, N. (2014). "North in a Debt Trap". *Sunday Times*. December 7, 2014. <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/141207/news/north-in-a-debt-trap-131679.html>

## NOTES

- 1 The global development industry made economic liberalisation a key conditionality of concessionary loans under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) offered to salvage declining economies of the Global South. Sri Lanka's subscription to SAPs during this period led to a shift in foreign policy towards the US-bloc, which in turn resulted in an unprecedented wave of foreign aid sponsored public sector investment projects. Contrary to the expectation that the degree of unrest and conflict would diminish as a result of reduced state intervention and a consequent increase of employment and economic opportunities, there was an intensification of political conflict during this period of transition which eventually culminated in a civil war in 1983.
- 2 After two decades of an economy driven by import-substitution policies, Sri Lanka entered a period of economic and political transition in the 1977-83 period with the election of the United National Party (UNP) led government. Led by Mr. J.R. Jayawardena, the government halted import-substitution and instituted an extensive programme of trade liberalisation, private sector deregulation and discontinuing of many welfare provisions that were historically employed by the ruling elite to buy and maintain social peace (Dunham and Jayasuriya 2000). While marked by a significant rupture in economic philosophy and arrangements, this period of transition not only inherited, but also reproduced many of the political and economic legacies of the 1950s and 60s. The transition from a plantation export based economy to a public-sector based, import-substitution economy in the mid-1950s coincided with Sinhala-Tamil confrontation over uneven development and political power (Venugopal 2003). The two decades of government regulation (1956-76) of private sector enterprises, banking, and external trade, and nationalization of key industries such as finance, ports and oil, led to a dependency on state patronage to access scarce employment opportunities and private-sector contracts and permits, and determined the location of public-sector industries, dry-zone irrigation and resettlement projects (Gunasinghe 1984).
- 3 The Free Trade Zones (FTZs), tea plantations both dependent on female labour, and most tourist destinations located mainly in the west and the south, were well-insulated from the direct effects of the war.
- 4 The UNP government struggled at maintaining the initial pace of liberalization. As economic growth slowed, the state became the 'employer of last resort' and security sector expansion pushed Sinhala youth from rural peasantry and fisheries communities to enlist in the military (Venugopal 2003, 32). The increased militarisation of the state under war-time conditions fuelled authoritarian powers of the state to quell any serious political disturbances (ibid.). These conditions and the absence of transparency in many transactions created avenues for large-scale rent extraction in the war economy (Athukorala and Jayasuriya 2012, 11). As a result, many privatization measures were executed in ways that favoured businesses with links to the state and government officials that engaged in corrupt practices (i.e. commissions).
- 5 Which by 2001 accounted for over five percent of total employment and a much higher percentage of formal sector employment for Sinhala men (Venugopal 2003, 32).
- 6 [http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics\\_n\\_docs/latest\\_news/press\\_20150507ea.pdf](http://www.cbsl.gov.lk/pics_n_docs/latest_news/press_20150507ea.pdf)



# Ending violent conflict and violence against women in Papua New Guinea's Highlands Region: the state, extractive industries and civil society

by Elizabeth Cox<sup>1</sup>

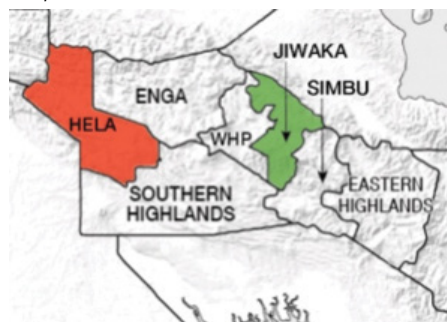
Papua New Guinea (PNG) comprises a National Capital District, twenty-two, largely rural, provinces and a post-conflict, Autonomous Region (Bougainville). The three most remote Highlands provinces host vast gold, oil and gas projects, are heavily militarised, sites of armed conflict and remain among the most dangerous places in the world to be female. National progress towards ending violence against women (VAW) includes new, hard-won laws – the outcome of four decades of civil society led advocacy and activism. But the state is yet to demonstrate political will and provide budgets sufficient for successful implementation of VAW laws and strategy and key state actors and projects on VAW remain aid driven and dependent.

Since PNG's independence (1975), a succession of male-dominated governments forged an extractives-dependent economy that runs counter to constitutional national goals and directive principles that prioritise equitable, sustainable and inclusive development. The revenues of several extractives-led 'boom decades' have been squandered and most citizens live without roads, electricity and safe water supply. Rates of maternal mortality, corruption and crimes of violence against women (VAW) are ranked among the highest in the world (WHO 2015, Transparency International 2017). Political and fiscal governance have worsened and the delivery of basic services has declined as dependence on extractives has increased. The state relies on Australian Aid, and controversial Extractive Industry (EI) Tax Credit Schemes to camouflage worsening health, education and law and justice systems.

Jiwaka and Hela are PNG's two newest provinces. Established in 2012, they join five other provinces of the populous inland Highlands region – home to forty percent of PNG's total population of over eight million. Hela and Jiwaka share a legacy of violent patriarchal cultures, tribal conflicts and coercive control of women. Both provinces are challenged to develop infrastructure, civil service and civil society necessary for viable future social and economic development.

**Hela** has vast natural resource wealth and expanding, large-scale extractive industry projects (oil gold and gas that have been exploited for many decades). But its human development indicators are poor, civil society virtually non-existent and basic services barely operational.

**Jiwaka** has a strong agricultural economy in which women's food production, distribution and trade are pivotal. It is also home to a strong, women-led, local NGO, that for more than a decade has been advocating a future free from violence, built networks of women human rights defenders and a strong foundation for broad-based citizens movement for peace.



The seven provinces of the Highlands Region of Papua New Guinea

The three most remote of PNG's seven Highlands provinces of which Hela is one are heavily impacted by large-scale gold, oil or gas projects. Fly In/Fly Out (FIFO) operations are staffed by highly mobile, predominantly male, expatriate and national employees. High security EI enclaves are surrounded by displaced and expectant landowning communities and mushrooming makeshift settlements of inter-provincial EI migrants building livelihoods on informal trade, alluvial mining, and sex work. Global contractors provide tight security for EI plants and personnel, and extractive companies heavily subsidise local police operations. States of Emergency are frequently declared, involving increasingly continuous deployments of special military and police units to prevent disruption of 24/7 EI operations.

Women in PNG's EI impacted communities have frequently raised their voices against their exclusion and their ongoing experience of old and new forms of violence. The World Bank and EI corporates have responded with successive iterations of 'Women in Mining'

programs that claim to support women's political and economic empowerment, but essentially offer little more than outmoded, inappropriate training for the domestication and small-scale enterprise of local women. They do not strengthen women's agency to effectively advocate their priorities, needs and concerns – including the ways in which EI projects exacerbate their experience of conflict and violence in both public and private domains.

## PATRIARCHY AND WAR – ENDURING AND RESURGENT

Colonial exploration into the Highlands interior (1930s), reported large, patriarchal and agricultural societies with complex economies and cultures built on cycles of war, peace, compensation and exchange. Australian colonial administration of the Highlands region commenced in the late 1940s, five to seven decades after the colonisation of coastal and island regions. Peace was enforced and a smallholder coffee industry was encouraged, and ultimately consolidated and controlled by emerging Highlands 'big men' capitalists.

Post-independence politics and an extractive-based economy stirred up powerful new aspirations and expectations, and contributed to a resurgence of new, and increasingly armed and deadly clan and tribal conflict – where the triggers, weapons, stakes and rules of engagement have dramatically changed.

Anthropological studies in the Highlands report high levels of coercive and violent male control over women's fertility and productive labour. Fathers and brothers arranged the early marriages of pubescent girls to men offering the highest brideprice and most strategic economic (land) and political (war) alliances. Defiant, resistant and non-conforming women and girls were subject to extreme physical punishment, stigmatized and banished from family and community. Female suicide was not uncommon. Today patriarchy, violent conflict, child marriages and polygamy remain powerful norms in post-independence Highlands. Resource projects provide the cash that fuels inflation of brideprice and purchase of guns that intimidate reluctant parents or resistant brides. Girls who resist may resort to sex work along the Highlands Highway – meeting a demand of mobile male truck drivers, landowners and workers, security and police personnel who derive incomes directly or indirectly from extractive industries.

Patriarchy is not codified in law and is at odds with fundamental constitutional provisions on equal rights and participation, yet it remains the most powerful norm in the operation of contemporary political and economic institutions. Most land in PNG (97%) remains customary-owned. State mecha-

nisms and processes dealing with extractive industries regard men (only) as customary landowners, justifying exclusion of women from direct receipt of royalty and equity benefits. Most conflicts are over land and are mediated in a traditional manner, while petty civil and criminal offences are adjudicated in custom-based village courts.

**“Most conflicts are over land and are mediated in a traditional manner, while petty civil and criminal offences are adjudicated in custom-based village courts.”**

Contemporary tribal conflicts conflate ancient and emerging tribal, economic, political issues and alliances are increasingly youth-led and involve smuggled high-powered weapons, local ‘hired guns’ (mercenary marksmen) snipers. They are symptomatic of the social alienation, political manipulation and economic betrayal of remote, rural and neglected populations that have been convinced that giving over their land to exploitation of mineral and petroleum resources will translate into transformative local wealth and prosperity. Clans and tribes competing for the crumbs that might fall from feeding extractive corporations, readily fall into conflict with each other. Women are increasingly targeted and executed in ways that were not permitted under traditional rules of engagement (Arigo, 2017).

Tribal conflicts internally displace large numbers (IDPs) who are forced to take refuge with neighbouring host tribes. Living from the land and resources of others incurs ‘traditional’ debts that increase IDP women and girls’ vulnerability to opportunistic, sexual predators and crimes of sexual violence are committed with impunity. Impotent and emasculated displaced men become desperate to raise cash, purchase arms and conduct revenge attacks to reclaim their land and women. Warlords emerge, obligate all males to fight, impose local levies to buy arms and compel women and girls to use their hard-won, small incomes to engage in risky illegal trade in ammunition (Be’Soer, 2012).

## **JIWAKA’S WOMEN LEAD A MOVEMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE**

Jiwaka Province was created to give the Whagi people neglected since independence, greater political representation and improved service delivery. Jiwaka does not have extractive industries, but it has a strong wom-

en-led civil society and a proud, educated and enthusiastic younger generation, monitoring provincial governance through social media.

Jiwaka has an agricultural economy, a declining coffee industry and straddles the Highlands Highway. Jiwaka’s women-led food production and trade is regarded as informal, insignificant and rarely ‘counted’ although it

is the backbone of Jiwaka’s local economy, ensuring family livelihoods and fostering inter-provincial trade along the Highlands Highway (Be’Soer 2012).

Since the 1980s, large-scale EI projects in neighbouring provinces have indirectly impacted Jiwaka through employment of its men. Too many are absent husbands and fathers, returning on monthly leave to binge-drink and womanise with their male relatives. Male landowners and employees from the gold, oil and gasfields of neighbouring provinces visit Jiwaka regularly in search of new, often under-age brides, offering inflated brideprice and gifts in what is more like modern-day trafficking than tradition (Voice for Change, 2015).

Jiwaka’s leading local NGO Voice for Change (VFC) is a home-grown women’s rights organisation, established in 2003 to serve female farmers. Early programs enabled women to manage and control their incomes. Many members shared experiences of systemic spousal physical and psychological violence, including neglect resulting from polygamy and absenteeism. Many had also experienced long years of internal displacement resulting from ongoing tribal conflicts and had endured harassment, rape and forced marriages while living on other tribes’ land and resources.

Members had long struggled to control their incomes, because husbands and male relatives, frequently commandeered their cash to purchase arms and ammunition for revenge attacks or to finance male-led peace ceremonies, extravagant brideprice payments and political campaigns. Securing a divorce in village courts entails paying brideprice payments back to the husbands’ relatives.

By 2008, VFC leaders were building new knowledge regarding the impact of Highlands tribal conflict on women and the local economy and strategized to end violence and discrimination (Be’Soer, 2012).

When the new province of Jiwaka was declared, VFC was already analyzing the gendered impact of conflict, stockpiles of high-powered weapons, the alienation and anger of male youth and mobile men commuting to and from neighbouring extractive industry enclaves. Understanding these as base causes of violence against women they were galvanised to work to end impunity, to control their own incomes and to access justice. VFC has built rural response services throughout the province to stem VAW. Increasingly, women participate in early intervention to prevent minor disputes escalating to full-scale armed tribal fighting; they advocate for capping brideprice and ensuring fair and realistic customary compensation payments, so that peace and normalcy can be rapidly restored.

## **HELA WOMEN’S TRIPLE TRAUMA: EXPANDING EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY, UNCHECKED ARMED CONFLICT AND EXTREME VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Hela Province is home to several ethnic groups, who share common ancestry and mythology. It is a remote and under-developed with limited administrative or civil society links to the rest of the country. It was established as a province in 2012 to meet local male leaders’ specific indigenous worldview and aspirations for unity and identity. Hela’s patriarchy, armed conflict and VAW are well documented (MSF 2011, 2016) and civil society is minimal and in decline.

Hela Province is resource-rich, but among the poorest performing in social and economic development. Many of its peoples (formerly Southern Highlanders) have been impacted for decades by large-scale oil and gas projects that provide significant state revenues and power PNG’s largest gold mine in neighbouring Enga Province. Numerous high-tech, high security EI plants in Hela’s remote areas require frequent deployments of police and military special forces to put down landowner protests/ ‘tribal fights’ that threaten the 24/7 oil and gas operations.

Hela’s political transition into a new province coincided with negotiations to start up the Papua New Guinea Liquefied Gas Project (PNG LNG) on Hela customary land. Joint venture partners EXXON Mobil, Oil Search and Santos, promised huge economic benefits to the state, the Province and local male landowners. The state in turn promised economic transformation to benefit all citizens of PNG.

The construction phase of the US\$19 billion gas project imported a large, foreign, skilled workforce (80%) and established, in record time, a huge gas processing plant and 700km overland and underwater pipeline. National employees (20%) held mostly short-term unskilled and security roles. Wages for work-



Women Human Rights Defenders from Hela, Jiwaka and Simbu, brought together by Urgent Action Fund Pacific late 2018. Photo by Elizabeth Cox.

ers, land use compensation and relocation were paid promptly during construction and significantly boosted local men's stocks of smuggled high-powered weapons.

Gas exports commenced ahead of schedule, mid 2014. However due diligence processes – for accurate identification of landowners, obtaining their free, prior and informed consent, facilitation of mandatory Incorporated Landowner Groups (ILGs) and inclusive negotiation of locally-led benefit-sharing agreements were accelerated and have been

their own people in unprecedented armed terrorization of civilians, in the guise of tribal conflict (Arigo, 2017).

Oil and gas operators have used tax credit schemes to build new infrastructure in Tari, Hela's administrative centre, but human capital and a vibrant local economy have failed to materialise. Workers' barracks have been looted, new women's resource centres have been burnt down in landowner protests, and gun proliferation has created a heightened state of anarchy and lawlessness.

against women and the inevitability of increased VAW with the advent of large gas projects. Hospital data confirmed physical trauma was the most common cause of hospitalisation and death. Men's injuries resulted from tribal conflicts, while women's injuries resulted from husbands, fathers, brothers and co-wives committing grievous bodily harm. The Village Court system was overwhelmed and dysfunctional, district court services were absent, police human and financial resources were inadequate and the prison was neglected and not operating. Judges, state ministers and donor representatives visiting Tari town needed armed state security services. (Kopi, 2011). In recent years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has documented and responded to the escalation of tribal fighting, mostly on post-conflict, humanitarian missions. ICRC resurgent tribal conflicts as small-scale warfare, where increasingly armed combatants target civilian non-combatants, women and children (ICRC described, 2017).

**“With state interests focused exclusively on extractive industries and no local civil society to inform, educate and protect people's rights, Hela is hell for women.”**

seriously compromised. Throughout, women were ignored as stakeholders, participants and beneficiaries.

In early 2018, Exxon announced plans to almost double the facility's export capacity to 16 million tonnes per year. Yet the state still cannot decide who should receive royalties and equities and what form of cash benefit distribution will prevent the further escalation of armed conflict (Filer, 2016; Main, 2017). The combined outstanding royalties now owed to Hela landowners from past and new resource projects have reportedly reached billions. Anger and protest is mounting. Police and military are continuously deployed to protect oil and gas plants and heavily armed, angry young men turn in on

### **HELA, WITH NO CIVIL SOCIETY, IS HELL FOR WOMEN**

Men's violence against women in the 'new' and more remote Hela Province ranks among the worst in PNG, comparable to the world's worst conflict-affected regions. Tari town and Hela Province are considered too violent for international NGOs or volunteers to reside and operate in (MSF 2011, 2016, Arigo 2018). With state interests focused exclusively on extractive industries and no local civil society to inform, educate and protect people's rights, Hela is hell for women.

OXFAM reported Hela's lawlessness and impunity in the face of deadly armed conflict among men, extreme forms of violence

There are few local NGOs active in Hela. EXXON scholarships for International Women in Management training and Oilsearch's small grants to local women leaders and its own staff have not stimulated the formation of local women's rights organisations. Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) established for the Southern Highlands Province in 2003 is associated with a local church, has worked with OXFAM and now with ICRC.

Hela women and girls cope daily with multiple levels and layers of trauma from new forms of deadly, armed conflict; extreme, often fatal gender-based violence. They are too preoccupied with their personal security and

safety to protest their political and economic exclusion from local EI project planning and benefit sharing. Their situation worsened in February 2018, when a powerful 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck the PNG Highlands. With its epicenter at Exxon's key gas plants, the quakes triggered landslides that buried villages and destroyed infrastructure. Hundreds of people were killed and injured, and thousands were traumatised and displaced. Women who were moved to rudimentary safe shelters were suddenly more exposed to gangs or armed youth. Gas Plant operations were restored in less than a month, but for most of 2018, aid-funded law and justice consultants and INGOs suspended their fly in/ fly out activities. And the aid-funded police VAW response unit has fallen badly behind schedule (Arigo, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

This essay examines the role of the state, the extractive industries and civil society in confronting patriarchy and ending violent conflict and the high incidence and severity of violence against women and girls that characterizes the PNG Highlands Region. It focuses on PNG's 'two 'new' Highlands provinces. The Jiwaka case shows how women-led civil society can influence social and economic development, by informing, educating and mobilizing citizens' demand for peace and an end to violence against women. Hela province is also 'in formation' but is pre-occupied and disrupted by the violence and instability surrounding established, remote high-tech oil and gas plants as well as the unfulfilled promises of PNG's latest and largest extractive Industry project. The dramatically worsening conflict and crimes of violence against women in Hela Province, made worse by the proliferation of high-powered weapons and recent natural disasters, takes place parallel to but without affecting highly profitable and expanding gas harvest, processing and export. Visioning a highlands province such as Hela without war and violence seems impossible in the context of extractive industries, where the state has absolved its duty to serve citizens, and where fragile local NGOs with no financial or moral support, cannot operate effectively.

Development and change in the neighbouring, new Jiwaka Province, stands in stark contrast. Free from the political promises, pressures and male contestation of promised cash incomes, Jiwaka's women have had the space to organise, discuss and reflect on the traditional gendered divisions of labour and relations of power and the gender-specific consequences of conflict. Their growing movement for equality, development and peace is home-grown and grounded. The guns have not gone away in Jiwaka and the conflict has not stopped altogether, but a new women-led community conversation is ongoing - informing citizens about the constitution and laws, gender equality, women's

agency, men's accountability and a new vision for a prosperous province free of war and conflict. A modest project is underway that has allowed a successful broad-based team of human rights defenders and peace mediators in Jiwaka host and help a counterpart team from Hela. Working through a series of information, training, mentoring and coaching sessions, Voice for Change is confident that building bridges of mutual solidarity and concern will strengthen the women of Hela.

Australia's gender-equality targeted development assistance window and the Corporate Social Responsibility programs of Australian oil and gas corporates profiting from Hela's resource projects, pose as champions and innovators to end violence against women. Extractive industry tax credits and corporate social responsibility programs finance politically-directed projects. While mobilizing relief in times of disaster and, more recently, claiming to spearhead national efforts to advance gender equality and end violence against women they are portrayed as solid corporate citizens and important partners for development. But where their wealth is sourced blood washes over the women, girls and children caught up in new forms of armed warfare, armed male protest and the most abhorrent and extreme levels and forms of violence against women and girls.

Hela Province cannot achieve peace, equality and sustainable development while its armed tribal conflicts and extreme violence against women are ignored by the state. Extractive industries' Corporate Community Development and Corporate Social Responsibility can literally patch up the collateral damage in EI impacted communities but they will not halt their highly profitable operations to ensure peace and inclusive, locally-led social development. Their humanitarian or health services cannot substitute for accountability of the state and citizens to end armed conflict and violence against women. Without this foundation, extractive industries may continue to partner Australian aid programs, please a corrupt PNG state and boost the profitability of five thousand Australian companies still doing business in PNG, but they will condemn women in Hela to spiraling terror, death and destruction, leaving the province as a gaping black hole of anarchy and violence over which plans are drawn for ever more gas, gold and oil projects.

## REFERENCES

Be'Soer, L. (2012). 'Leveraging Women's Rural Leadership and Agency', Fifty-sixth Session of United Nations Commission on the Status of Women [online] 27 February - 9 March 2012 New York. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/panels/panel2-Lilly-Be-Soer.pdf> [Accessed on 3 December 2017].

Filer, C. (2016). 'The Intractable Problem of Landowner Identification in the PNG LNG Project: An Historical Perspective'. State, Society and Governance in Melanesia SSGM seminar, 12 September, Stable URL: [https://devpolicy.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/events/attachments/2016-09/smlm\\_seminar\\_sept\\_2016.pdf](https://devpolicy.crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/events/attachments/2016-09/smlm_seminar_sept_2016.pdf) [Accessed 10 January 10, 2017].

International Committee of the Red Cross (2017). Spears to semi-automatics: The human cost of tribal conflict in Papua New Guinea <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wo4uf-fXsUk> [Accessed December 2017].

International Committee of the Red Cross (2017). The old ways are gone: Papua New Guinea's tribal wars become more destructive. <https://medium.com/@ICRC/the-old-ways-are-gone-papua-new-guineas-tribal-wars-become-more-destructive-ade38205196f> [Accessed December 2017].

Kopi, M. (2011). Violence and Insecurity in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea [online] [https://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/Tari-report-final\\_2011.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/Tari-report-final_2011.pdf) [Accessed on 6 September 2017].

Main, M. (2017). Papua New Guinea gets a dose of resource curse as ExxonMobil's natural gas project foments unrest. Australian Broadcasting Corporation [online]. 10 March 2017.

[http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-10/png-gets-a-dose-of-resource-curse-from-exxonmobils-lng-project/8343090?WT.mc\\_id=newsmail&WT.tsrc=NewsMail](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-10/png-gets-a-dose-of-resource-curse-from-exxonmobils-lng-project/8343090?WT.mc_id=newsmail&WT.tsrc=NewsMail) [Accessed on 5 December 2017].

Médecins Sans Frontières (2011). Hidden and Neglected: The medical and emotional needs of survivors of family and sexual violence in PNG [online] <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2011/06-15-Papua-New-Guinea-Sexual-Domestic-Violence%20report.pdf> [Accessed on 5 September 2017].

Médecins Sans Frontières (2011). Hidden and Neglected: The Medical and Emotional Needs of Survivors of Family and Sexual Violence in PNG. Port Moresby: Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Stable URL: [www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2011/06-15-Papua-New-Guinea-Sexual-Domestic-Violence%20report.pdf](http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2011/06-15-Papua-New-Guinea-Sexual-Domestic-Violence%20report.pdf) [Accessed on 5 September 2017]

Médecins Sans Frontières (2016). Return to Abuser: Gaps in Services and a failure to Protect Survivors of Family and Sexual violence in Papua New Guinea [online]. <http://www.msf.org.au/sites/default/files/attachments/msf-pngreport-def-lrsingle.pdf> [Accessed on 5 September, 2017].

Transparency International (2017). Perceptions of Corruption Index

[https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2017](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017)

Violence against Women and Girls in Jiwaka Province, Papua New Guinea'. Voice for Change Community Survey Report, [https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/20160203-Voice-for-Change-WEB\\_FinalSmall.pdf](https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/20160203-Voice-for-Change-WEB_FinalSmall.pdf) (accessed 5 November 2017).

World Health Organisation (2015). Maternal mortality in PNG.

[http://www.who.int/gho/maternal\\_health/countries/png.pdf](http://www.who.int/gho/maternal_health/countries/png.pdf)

## NOTES

1 Alice Arigo of Hela province and Lilly Be'Soer of Jiwaka province, long-term frontline human rights defenders committed to ending violent conflict and violence against women in their respective new provinces, were key informants for this case study.

# Rural women in Colombia: from victims to actors

Cecilia López Montaña  
María Claudia Holstine

Writing the chapter, for the forthcoming DAWN book on which this essay is based, was a labour of love and struggle, yet an effort completely justified because Colombia is living another difficult period. Today, without any basis other than political ideology, the new government chooses to define a well-documented armed conflict as terrorist attacks. Should this prevail, our victims will disappear becoming mere casualties of terrorism. The entire nation loses with that, but especially women; millions of campesinas who moved from victims to outstanding actors in this long and cruel war.

Of many documents written by national and international experts about this nation's war, few approach the intrinsic causes behind gender-based violence against Colombian women and only within the traditional definition of sexual violence—rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, etc. In fact, Gender-Based Violence Against Women (GBVAW) is rarely considered in its widest conception since those analyses tend to overlook economic, social, political, and cultural aspects related to the situation of women in war.

Negative gender bias about female war victims, their contribution, the costs they bear, their new roles, and their involvement both in war and peace are part of the universal inequality that prevails between women and men around the world. The numerous ways in which women engage in and are affected by armed conflicts are often unnoticed by analysts who limit their view to the sexual abuse these women suffered. The economic, social, and political conditions in which women live are usually set aside under the covert hypothesis that they play a minimal role in their societies. In that sense, there is no dissent concerning the situation of Colombian women; they seem to follow the book; their experience is strikingly like that of women in other wars. Yet, simply by widening the spectrum of analysis to include a political economy approach redefines the costs these women paid and their contribution to peacebuilding.

## I. COLOMBIA'S CONFLICT IN A NUT SHELL

Colombians still struggle through "the intricacies of a sixty-year-old internal conflict where

drug trafficking and terrorism act as one, where a significant change in values of the population goes hand-in-hand with government corruption, with countless national and international actors involved, and with considerable economic and political interests at play... issues never seen all at once in the history of any other country" [Cueter 2015, 24].

After signing the Final Accord with the FARC, Colombia began its long walk towards peace with few truly understanding the war's context, its roots, its actors, or how deeply its facets hurt Colombians, and especially, how it impacted women. The truth is that women are not mere victims but essential actors; but the actions undertaken to fortify this new-found peace counters that title by excluding them from this important process.

## A. WHEN DID IT ALL REALLY BEGIN?

One of the most controversial issues surrounding this conflict is its beginning; a central factor to identify and truly resolve it. Numerous civil wars between liberals and conservatives from the 18th century up until the 20th are key to understanding the violent nature of Colombia's past. Colombia suffered La Violencia (1948-1958), described by Guzman et al. (1962, 405) as "...a time of bipartisan cruelty where violence became a social process; where political elites quieted those who disagreed with their views." The seed for guerrillas in Colombia grew as a result of ferocious attacks against liberals perpetrated by chulavitas, the Ospina's Conservative government's secret police. To face it, simple liberal peasants armed themselves to protect their communities and lands; but they were not guerrillas per se.

This war ended with the peace agreement Frente Nacional (1958-1974) where power was shared between the leading political parties but excluded leftist movements. President Lleras Camargo [1958-1962] appointed Liberal peasant armed groups as rural military police during the first of these governments, but under the following Conservative rule of Guillermo León Valencia [1962-1966] a ruthless attack by 16,000 Colombian and American soldiers devastated Marquetalia, where the entire combatant leftist group resided: a total of fifty men and two women [Verdad Abierta, 2013]. Five survived to return months later, fully armed and with seventy-five men to announce the formation of the FARC (1964).

The most coherent explanation for why it is so difficult to agree on when the war began rests in the one constant actor throughout different historical moments of the nation's violent past; the guerrilla groups. Few see the changing nature and characteristics behind their actions, and even less so, the changes within the group that went from liberal armed peasants, to governmental rural military police, to finally, a revolutionary group financed by drug trafficking.

From 1968 to 1980, there are no registered acts of guerrilla war; lack of funding is a possible explanation for the silence. But in 1982 the FARC came back stronger, with 3,000 men ready to face the Colombian military. Their actions were no longer just ideological but also propelled by the duty to guard its financier's business, drug trafficking and valuable routes out of Colombia. A different conflict was born; one no longer only political, but rather financially motivated.

## B. WHO IS FIGHTING WHOM?

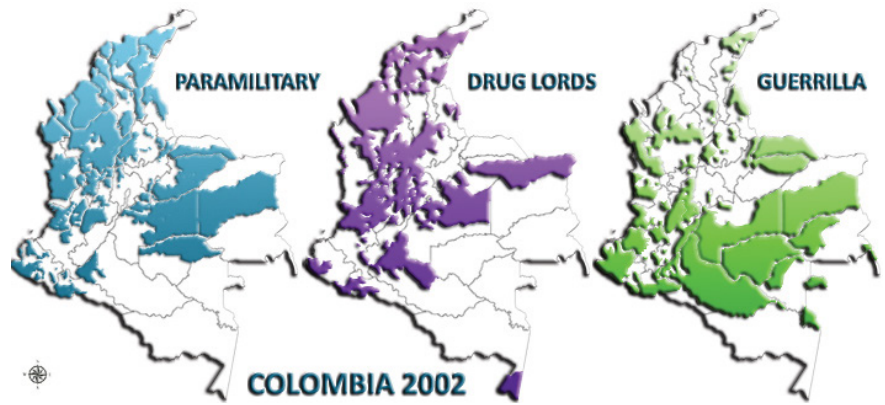
To understand GBVAW in Colombia it is important to differentiate the groups at war and to understand what motivated their violent actions against women. Crandall [1999, 223] claims that, "even those who make a career out of tracking events in this Andean country are often unable to clearly differentiate between the currently active belligerent groups, let alone their goals, funding sources, and degree of popular support." That is why it is difficult to grasp not only the role of all perpetrators involved, but especially, how each swiftly shifted from friend to enemy and back, depending on the geographical location or social status of the person asked.

Establishing that the guerrilla is not the only enemy in this war is paramount to fully understanding violence against women in the Colombian conflict for they endured cruelty and different forms of brutality at the hands of at least two other armed forces. The most ruthless group emerged when sectors of the elites, including multinational corporations, financed paramilitary forces to protect their lands and activities from guerrilla's tax or to avoid kidnapping. Paramilitary groups are even older than the oldest guerrilla group. A key but unrecognized perpetrator was the Colombian Military Force committing heinous crimes against the rural population without reason or explanation. The Military Forces and the paramilitary shared their support for the establishment, but most importantly, patriarchal values are most prominent in their actions.

## II. PATRIARCHAL MEN, FACELESS WOMEN

In patriarchal social structures men are providers and women caregivers; but two new dimensions are added for rural women in Colombia. The first, intrafamilial violence, affects rural women from a very young age. They withstand some form of physical transgression from fathers, brothers, husbands, or other known males [INML, 2015]. The systematic violence is suffered in private, and in women's minds, the abuse they receive is normal, a lesser kind of violence; albeit one that creates angst and does not provide a space to deal with the physical or mental consequences.

The second is caused by the government; its laws, social and economic policies, and



Source: Cueter, Nicolás (2015). *Caught between the War on Drugs and Guerrilla Warfare: Colombia's Road to Peace*.

institutions' narrow-minded understanding of patriarchal values. Up until 1988, rural women could not own land. As a result, very few rural women perform agricultural duties, but are over represented in informal services [DNP 2015a]. Rural institutions are still as patriarchal as rural men. Public social policies emphasize the role of women as weak and defenseless caregivers, reinforcing men's role as needed protectors more than providers. As a result, loans were for men not women, technical assistance ignored women's interest or need for them. For these reasons, "Colombian rural women are the poorest of the poor in the country" [López M., 2011], entering the war vulnerable; easy targets for perpetrators.

### A. APERTURA, A DANGEROUS OXYMORON

Gates et al. [2012, 1720] believe that, "conflict has clear detrimental effects on poverty, hunger, primary education, reduction of child mortality, and on access to potable water." However, Colombia disproves this claim. Through the war, its economy experienced continuous economic growth, except for one year [BanRep, 2016]. Social advances were significant as well, even in the rural sector where poverty decreased from 61.7% in 2002 to 38% in 2016 [DANE, 2017]. Yet, too many continue to be very poor, and the growth experienced cannot hide that the different facets of this confrontation did affect development in the country.

Furthermore, two economic governmental decisions joined ranks with the war and are equally at fault for the devastation endured by Rural Colombia. Their greatest economic impact widened the rural-urban gap, which speaks directly to how much faster urban centers developed and grew not having to battle the war threatening rural Colombians.

Cueter [2015] explains that "globalisation touches the heart of the conflict [for] the 1990 Apertura, the country's globalisation initiative was a process that forced Colombia out of its self-contained economy into the open market." Following the Washington Consensus, President Gaviria [1990-1994] ignored the

productive base of the country when implementing a rather quick and unplanned Apertura. As a consequence, small producers lost one million hectares while large scale agriculture spread over the land peasants lost. However, because of it, "the relationship between entrepreneurs and paramilitary evolved from protection to expansion" [Ibid.]. The goal was to force campesinos out of their land and displacement figures rose just as agribusiness production flourished.

"Decentralisation plays a very important role [in] the escalation of the conflict" [Mantilla 2012, 55] for the Apertura transferred all public resources assigned to health, education, and public services to regional administrations. In 1991, electing Mayors and Governors by popular vote also transferred political power to the regions. Paramilitary groups imposed their own candidates to take over decentralised funds.

### B. RURAL WOMEN, THE EPICENTRE OF A WAR?

The better-known tragedy of Colombia is the immense number of internally displaced people as a result of the war: over seven million. The Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) [2017] shows that women are 51.3% of the total displaced population, a small difference with regards to men, but not enough to speak about a systematic persecution against *campesinas*, nor to consider displacement a GBVAW crime for entire families, as a group, who flee violent areas affected by the war's.

Threats appear as a key victimising factor for its links to familial displacement, but its small number of reported cases compared to the displacement cases shuts down the former as a viable cause for the latter. This pattern repeats itself from land dispossession through all other victimizing factors, unambiguously proving that men and women suffered as much, except in four cases; men endured more improvised Explosive Device injuries, torture and forced recruitment, and when it comes to sexual violence, the crimes were primarily perpetrated against women.

The official data collected on victimising acts during the conflict, limits gender-based violence to reported sexual violence cases only.

Notwithstanding this, it is not surprising that in a war with too many armed groups with strong patriarchal values, rural women account for 92% of the 18,356 sexual crimes recorded; yet of those, only 1% are girls, ages 0-11 and 2% ages 12-17. According to the Prosecutor General, 45.8% of sexual violence attacks are by paramilitary, 19.4% by public forces, and 8.5% by guerrillas [Colombia Reports, 2015b].

Overall, threats rather than sexual violence against women are statistically more of a reason for displacement. How is it possible? Colombian history shows that sexual violence against *campesinas* is not just derived from war but intrinsic to the rural culture. However, this is a very loose generalization that lumps all victimisers into one group, clearly veiling the extent of the horrific acts of violence against rural women, but especially, it overtly conceals the reason behind why and how women shifted from victims to actors in this war instead of being destroyed by the sexual transgressions they endured.

Paramilitaries used diverse forms of sexual violence against women. They redefined gender roles as protectors and the protected. For them sexual violence was a method, and women the means to enforce it turning women into the most efficient weapon in this long-lasting war.

Albeit rural men are perpetrators at home, their role as public protectors is a vital characteristic as well. The inability to stop acts of GBVAW against their women in front of their communities destroyed their masculinity. The protectors covered becoming worthless. Women tuned out to be the Achilles heel of rural men. All paramilitaries needed to control entire areas of the country was to publicly expose men's inability to protect their women, and in doing so, they successfully destroyed patriarchal men and forced entire communities out of wanted land.

Furthermore, having political and fiscal control over many towns led to another form of paramilitary GBVAW that redefined the line between my women and my enemies' women. They harshly enforced upon their women old patriarchal values restricting how they

dressed, the length of their hair, and especially, their sexual conduct dividing campesinas between forced mothers and prostitutes to maintain cohesion among troops as well.

Colombian military forces used similar methods against civilian women. Sexual attacks by soldiers are conclusively more harmful and damaging to women for they represent the highest authority; men that once vowed to protect civilians with their own life. Their sexual abuse increases women's vulnerability and fear, quickly equating the transgression to having no one left to protect or defend their lives. Colombia's forensic authority confirms that in over 50% of the 219 rape cases officially reported between 2008 and 2010, victims indicated that the offender was either a police officer or an army soldier [INML, 2015].

Guerrillas' did not "use sexual violence to impose social and territorial control over everyday activities of women" [CNMH, 2013]. The abuse against civilian women attributed to the group are isolated cases and do not follow specific patterns or reasons. This bears the question: what protected civilian women from sexual violence from the FARC? Perhaps the answer is in the 40% female combatants living with males in a supposedly more gender equalitarian troop, the only one that incorporated women. Given that guerrilleras were charged with community relationships, to partake, condone, or ignore sexual violence against civilian women would jeopardize that role.

### III. FROM VICTIM TO ACTOR

Conflicts around the world identify women as victims. One of the problems of limiting the condition of women during conflict to that of victims is the implication that women—and the abuses against them—are nothing more than casualties of war; a term indicating "temporality in the victim's condition, ..., with a hidden message that conveys that innocent citizens are victims 'by chance, accidental[ly], without much thought or premeditation...'" [Cueter 2015, 81]. In Colombia the crimes against women were not simply fortuitous nor accidental.

#### A. WOMEN IN ARMS

A very common stereotype is that during war, "all men are in militias, all women are victims" [Enloe 2004, 99]. The existence of female combatants in guerrilla groups is documented since the 1970s, and women entered the Colombian Military Forces in 1976 [ENC, 2015]. They arrived late to combat, and their role as members of different armed groups are revealing.

Paramilitary groups are still reluctant to incorporate women in their forces believing that femininity is at odds with military life [Otero, 2006]. They completely reject the idea of women in combat, basing their skepticism on women's inability to fight fearlessly. A handful of paramilitary women became



Photo: <http://blogpinceladas.blogspot.com/>

commanders, but their only charge was controlling other women [Acosta, 2015]. The Colombian Military only authorized women to take part in active combat in 2012 [Vergel 2012, 236], perhaps to shield them from the sexual atrocities military personnel perpetrated against civilian women.

FARC opened the doors to women the most. They entered their ranks in two ways: [1] by force when girls were kidnapped to be indoctrinated, or [2] by buying into a very equalitarian speech promoting equal rights and tasks for combatants, both men and women. The FARC women carried guns and actively participate in battle. Care duties were distributed equally among genders, but females were the only ones with mandatory sexual duties; a directive tantamount to rape.

Despite the enormous differences among these three-armed forces, the percentage of women combatants within armed forces is a symptom of each group's perception of women, its explicit policies, and implicit norms on female participation. What is indisputable is that independent of how progressive the group's gender equality speech was, in the end, even those most forward-thinking reverted to traditional patriarchal values trying to control what women can or cannot do.

Colombian society labels all these women as victims, since many find it unfathomable to accept that some guerrilleras chose that life and willingly participated in combat, completely diminishing that by choosing to partake in the war as soldiers, they "overcame feminine stereotypes and breached unsurmountable frontiers previously forbidden for [them]" [Wills 2005, 63]. Women in arms are perhaps the best example as to how women moved from victims to actors in the Colombian conflict, but they are not the only ones who did so.

#### B. THE QUIET RISE OF CIVILIAN CAMPESINAS

While women in arms were fighting for their career choice to be respected, civilian rural women undertook a different path; one where their voices became their weapon.

Their struggle amidst patriarchal values began long before the war ferociousness. Civilian campesinas struggled to be included in men's rural movements during the 60s. They fought for their right to defend care activities, but they were underestimated and ignored as political subjects [DDP, 2014].

In the 80s, amidst the intensity of the war to protect coca routes, these women played vital roles claiming economic and political rights through their own movements. The government recognized the need to formulate specific strategies for campesinas. After four years of their unstoppable pressure, the Agrarian Law 30 of 1988—reaffirmed in 1994—mandated men to add their women's names as equal owners in their rural property titles [Colombian Congress, 1988].

Rural women's activism amplified during the 90s. Soon after the return of paramilitary groups turned the war against civilian campesinas for the first time. The escalating viciousness fortified female voices and protecting their loved ones and their communities increased their exposure forcing concrete actions from their government. Its delayed response and the violence caused by Military Forces sent to protect them, awakened women to the power that political status offers. Afro rural women became the first female group ever invited to participate in drafting the 1991 Constitution [Ibid.].

The enactment of Law 731 of 2002 granted rural women access to public goods, agrarian benefits coverage, and opened a real space for their political participation [Colombian Congress, 2002]. Their most important accomplishment was the enactment of the Law 1448 of 2011 for it finally acknowledged Colombia's long-lasting war and its victims. Unfortunately, this Law fails to recognize the crucial role of campesinas as the force behind vital State mandates transforming the lives of all Colombian women.

Unfortunately, their noticeable steps forward slowed down when paramilitaries silenced their voices by targeting their movements and forcing their decline [Ibid., 35]. However, to single out perpetrators as the only culprits for the demise of campesinas' movements without mentioning the role of the State would not honour the lives of the women who died fighting for their rights, families, and communities.

#### C. WOMEN, THE ROAD FOR A RURAL WAR TO ENTER CITIES

Rural areas were the battle ground of this long-lasting conflict. But this war did come to the cities through a very unexpected channel: women. Displacement forced over seven million rural men, women, and children to arrive suddenly and consistently to towns and cities unprepared to receive them. This was not an easy transition for those rural families who found themselves empty handed, in the middle of fast-moving cities, too different

from their origin. The government's initial emergency response was relatively quick; but finding long-term solutions to integrate them into urban life or to help them return to their land is still slow.

Rural women showed again their innate flexibility to adapt to harsh environments and new situations. While men struggled because their expertise was useless in urban centers; women rose to the occasion quickly by taking advantage of the high demand for their field of knowhow: care services. But women confronted a new wave of GBVAW when frustrated and unemployed displaced rural men saw their campesinas empowered, gaining economic autonomy, taking the role of providers. The consequence: domestic violence among displaced people is higher than among those still living in rural areas [Ibanez et al., 2011].

Drug trafficking, another facet of the war albeit not always recognized as part of it, also impacted women. "The darkest side of narco-beauty gave rise to an inexplicable form of human-trafficking-by-consent when... 'girls and young women from rural villages, or even lower-class neighbourhoods, [were] taken by force or in agreement with parents to be "pimped" to perfection; or when they themselves took the initiative to go to the big city to "make it big,"... to have their economic issues resolved by a rich man" [Ibid.]. In essence, "the drug culture's legacy intended to lose the woman by making women more invisible, to induce men to see objects with curves first, to replace education with beauty."

## IV. RURAL WOMEN, COLOMBIA'S STRENGTH

This war fought in Rural Colombia fits no category or theory. Its multiple complex scenarios demand an open mind to realize the relationship between Political Economy and GBVAW. To arrive to a clear understanding of this war, one must analyze first the roots fueling the conflict, and then, the Colombian men. What propelled these women to become actors rather than just victims? The answer is perplexing, but what is indisputable is that these women tore down **five traditional paradigms**:

**First: Sexual Violence destroys women.** Campesinas stood up quietly but decisively against violence and were responsible for what Stewart [2010, 2] calls, "complex networks of pro-peace movements." Rural women's achievement are measured by the numbers of national laws enacted on their behalf.

**Second: Conflict did not affect gender roles.** In this war, patriarchal norms worked harder against rural men than against campesinas. Paramilitary forces turned women into effective weapons of war that swiftly destroyed rural men's masculinity and entire communities.

**Third: Economic policies are neutral in terms of gender and GBVAW.** The Apertura joined forces with the conflict, and negatively impacted women by renewing old alliances between landowners and paramilitaries, which gave rise to displacement.

**Fourth: Public policies are neutral in terms of gender or GBVAW.** Decentralisation joined forces with the war opening the door to different forms of GBVAW.

**Fifth: Gender roles rivalry stems from Competitive Globalisation.** In Colombia gender-role rivalry is ruthless among displaced men and women. A crushed masculinity caused harsher GBVAW.

## V. FINAL THOUGHTS

Colombian rural women's astonishing shift from victim to crucial actor in the conflict would not be fully understood without including economic and social perspectives, but especially impossible without the contribution of men's weaknesses.

Unaided and quietly, these women influenced change in an entire nation, not just for themselves but for future generations of rural and urban women alike. They are a message to the world about the need to look beyond the obvious when it comes to the study of women and what affects their lives.

## REFERENCES

Acosta H., Cindy Lorena (2015). "Violencia Basada en el Género y Guerra: Mujeres, Violencia Sexual, Desplazamiento Forzado y Restitución de Tierras en el Departamento del Magdalena 1999 a 2012." *Criterios - Cuadernos de Ciencias Jurídicas y Política Internacional*, 8, no. 2. Bogotá: Universidad de Buenaventura.

Banco de la República (2016). *Indicadores Económicos*. Bogotá: Banco de la República. URL: <http://bit.ly/1UY9hIQ>.

Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2013). *Basta Ya! 1-434* Bogotá: Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación.

Colombia Reports (2015a). "Understanding Colombia Conflict: Inequality." In *Peace Process*, Online: Colombia Reports. URL: <http://bit.ly/2nAbP3v>.

---- (2015b). "Who Commits Most Sex Crimes in Colombia's Conflict." By Guggenheim, Julia, & Alice Bradshaw-Smith, Online: Colombia Reports. URL: <http://bit.ly/2nrLLJ>.

Colombian Congress (1988). *Law 30, 1988 - Otorga Facultades al Presidente de la República*. 38.264, Diario Oficial No. Law 30. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República.

---- (2002). *Ley 731 de 2002 - Normas para Favorecer a las Mujeres Rurales*. Law 731. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República.

Crandall, Russell (1999). "The End of Civil Conflict in Colombia: The Military, Paramilitaries, and a New Role for the United States." *SAIS Review* 19, no. 1. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.

Cueter, Nicolas (2015). "Caught between the War on Drugs and Guerrilla Warfare: Colombia's Road to Peace." *Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS)*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.

Defensoría del Pueblo (2014). *El Conflicto Armado y el Riesgo para la Mujer Rural*. Sistema de Alertas Tempranas Bogotá: Torre Gráfica.

Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2015). *Tercer Censo Nacional Agropecuario*. Online: Gobierno de la República. URL: <http://is.gd/nENfxm>.

----(2017a). *Exportaciones - Junio 2017*. Boletín Técnico. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República. URL: <https://bit.ly/2H2BoVy>.

----(2017b). *Presentación Resultados de Pobreza 2016*. Presentación. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República. URL: <http://bit.ly/2wObGOV>.

Departamento Nacional de Planeación (2015a). *Saludar la Deuda Histórica con el Campo*. Marco Conceptual. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República. URL: <http://bit.ly/1RlxgFC>.

----(2015b). *El Campo Colombiano: Un Camino Hacia el Bienestar y la Paz. Misión para la Transformación del Campo TOMO 3*. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República.

Ejército Nacional de Colombia (2015). *Mujer Militar; Igualdad y Liderazgo*. Online: Gobierno de la República. URL: <http://bit.ly/2nCFfV4>.

Enloe, Cynthia (2004). "The Politics of Masculinity and Femininity in Nationalist Wars." *On The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in the New Age of Empire*, Ch. 7. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gates, Scott, Håvard Hegre, Håvard Moksleiv Nygård, & Håvard Strand (2012). "Development Consequences of Armed Conflict." *World Development* 40, no. 9. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier.

Guzmán Campos, Germán, Orlando Fals Borda, & Eduardo Umaña Luna (1962). *La Violencia en Colombia: Estudio de un Proceso Social*. I of II. 1-458 Bogotá: Editorial Tercer Mundo.

Herrera, Natalia, & Douglas Porch. (2008). "'Like Going to a Fiesta' - the Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-Ep." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4. Online: Taylor & Francis Online. URL: <http://bit.ly/2vzeXSU>.

Ibáñez, Ana María, Margarita Gáfaró, & Valentina Calderón (2011). "Desplazamiento Forzoso, Participación Laboral Femenina y Poder de Negociación en el Hogar: ¿Empodera el Conflicto a las Mujeres?" *Documentos CEDE*, no. 45. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes.

Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (2015). *Violencia Sexual en Colombia*. Forensis. Bogotá: Gobierno de la República.

López M., Cecilia (2011). "Diseño y Formulación de Políticas para las Mujeres Desplazadas." *On El Reto Ante la Tragedia Humanitaria del Desplazamiento Forzado: Superar la Exclusión Social de la Población Desplazada*. Primera Ed., Ch. 11. Bogotá: CODHES.

Mantilla V., Silvia (2012). "Economía y Conflicto Armado en Colombia." *Latinoamérica* 55, no. 2. Mexico: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. URL: <http://bit.ly/1W0khVN>.

Otero B., Silvia (2006). *Colombia: Las Mujeres en la Guerra y en la Paz*. Lo Femenino de las FARC y de las AUC. Online: ReliefWeb. URL: <http://bit.ly/2nnumvY>.

Registro Único de Víctimas (2017). *Red Nacional de Información*. Online: Gobierno de la República. URL: <https://bit.ly/2uZIZNI>.

Stewart, Frances (2010). "Women in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations." *Development Cooperation Forum*. Nueva York: UN Economic and Social Council.

Vergel, Carolina (2012). "Entre Lutte Armée Et Féminisme: Quelques Reflexions À Propos Des Femmes Combattantes en Colombie." *Revista Derecho del Estado*, no. 29. Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia.

Wills, María Emma (2005). "Mujeres en Armas: ¿Avance Ciudadano o Subyugación Femenina?" *Análisis Político*, no. 54. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. URL: <http://bit.ly/2grif3J>.



# “Entrenched Peripherality”: Women, political economy and the myth of peacebuilding in North East India

by Roshmi Goswami

The North East of India has been a region of protracted sub national conflict spanning several decades, during which a thriving war economy was built up. This case study explores the peace processes in three different contexts within the region and Goswami questions whether they have aimed at ending deep rooted social and gender inequalities and ensuring justice, or are mere ‘settlements’ within a patriarchal framework that simply continues entrenched inequalities. In other words, she asks: do they provide any evidence of an attempt at ‘social transformation’ or achieving gender justice?

## CASE STUDIES: CONFLICTS AND PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

Among the three cases discussed is the Indo-Naga conflict, which is one of the longest running in all of South Asia, dating back to the forced inclusion of the Naga Hills into British India in 1881. It escalated in 1951, when a plebiscite resulted in ninety-nine per cent of the population voting in favour of Naga independence. In 1958 the Indian State equipped its armed forces with unbridled powers to repress the independence movement, through the enactment of The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, which operates to-date and is used to impede the fundamental rights of citizens. Since then, Nagaland has witnessed years of extensive and intense counter-insurgency operations by the Indian State, which include combing operations, arbitrary detentions and burning down of entire villages, all marked by extreme levels of violence and brutality.

Naga women have been especially and strategically targeted –raped, sexually abused and brutalised to teach the ‘insurgents/rebels’ a lesson as well as to break them psychologically. Many of the instances of

brutalisation took place inside or in the vicinity of churches, which were sacred sites held with immense reverence and awe by the recently converted Nagas. These violations deeply hurt and crippled the psyche of a people who were known to be extremely protective of their women and children and historically had a fairly elaborate defence structure, manned by the most able and bravest warriors. For the Indian State and its security forces, the intensity of the sexual violence was determined in part by the ‘othering’ of the peoples from the peripheries. Clearly different in appearance, food, culture and religion from ‘mainland India’, the ‘othering’ of the Nagas was easy.

In 1997, the government entered into a ceasefire with one of the two main factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the Isak-Muivah faction (NSCN-IM). A similar ceasefire agreement was signed with the SS Khaplang faction (NSCN-K) in 2001. After eighty rounds or so of talks, a Naga Framework Agreement (NFA) with the Indian Government was arrived at in 2015. However, this much awaited Naga peace agreement has been shrouded in deep secrecy with no clarity on what it actually contains and the status of the controversial Naga unification demand.

Civil society organisations like the apex tribal council, Naga Hoho, the Church and women under the aegis of the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) have played remarkable roles in brokering peace and stopping fratricidal killings among the different armed factions. While the NMA's role in determining the terms of the ceasefire agreement is especially laudable, it has also moved beyond the immediate cessation of violence to questioning deeper structural issues of violence against women and continues to advocate for women's more substantive engagement in state building.

Like the Naga struggles, the Mizo aspirations for autonomy and self-rule also predates Indian Independence, but came to a head in the

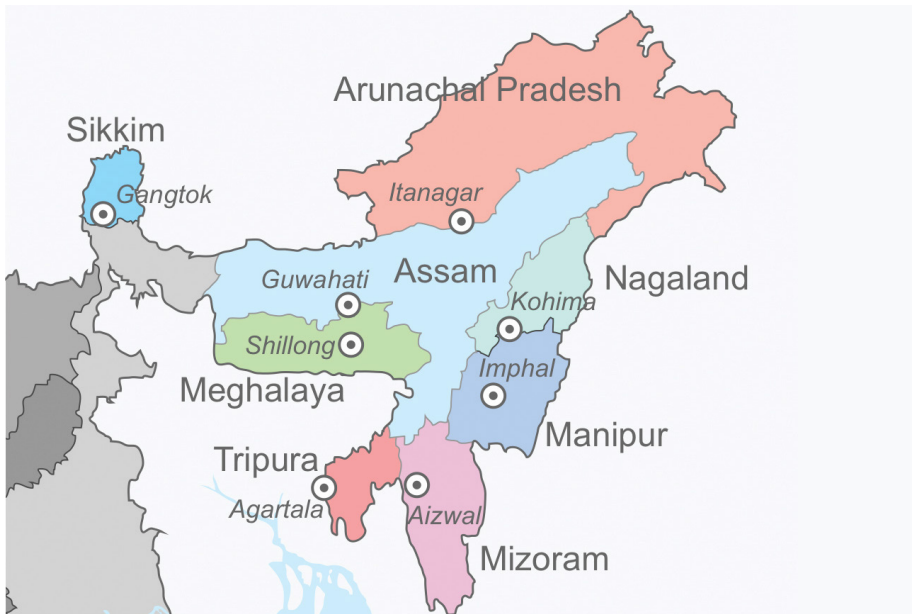
sixties, when the Mizo National Front (MNF) led a secessionist movement aimed at establishing a sovereign Christian nation. It lasted until the Peace Accord or the Memorandum of Settlement was signed in 1986. The MNF movement too was met with extremely brutal and hard-hitting counter-insurgency operations by the Indian State. The Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955 and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 were invoked, proclaiming the entire Mizo district as ‘disturbed’. This enabled and provided impunity for arbitrary arrests, detentions and killing of innocent persons, brutalisation and extreme humiliation of the menfolk, plundering of villages, and rampant rape and sexual abuse of women. The most significant operations were the air strikes by the Indian air force using incendiary bombs on civilian territory against its own citizens, unprecedented anywhere in the country.

The other deeply subversive operation was the massive regrouping of villages into larger units (Scheme of Grouping of Villages) carried out by eviction and coercive resettlement, under supervision of the military. Resistance to this scheme was met with brutality and gross human rights violations: women were raped, crops were torched, old villages were burnt, and the new settlements kept under the control of the armed forces. The grouping resulted in traumatic upheaval with the Mizo community; a suffering that is referred to as ‘spirit wound’. About 5,200 villages (nearly eighty percent of the rural population) were affected. There was heightened surveillance, breakdown of traditional knowledge and of access to forests beyond permitted limits; consequently, an entire community who were self-sufficient farmers became totally dependent on the Government.

As large numbers of unmarried women volunteered in the MNF, women were held in great suspicion by the Indian military and therefore went through much harassment at their hands. The brutal gang rape of two young women by security forces in 1966 is a well-re-



Photo: Amnesty International



North East India. Source: wikipedia.org

membered case. In retaliation for an MNF attack on a convoy of the Indian Army, villagers were herded together and their homes set on fire by the army; two women, daughters of prominent community leaders, were held separately in a hut where soldiers took turns in raping them. The entire Mizo community and women in particular suffered silently as there was no institution where the victims could seek justice or redress. It was these crimes and violations that prompted various women's groups to come together to form the powerful Mizo Hmeichhia Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) that vowed to work for and fight for the collective rights of Mizo women.

The origins of the conflict in the state of Assam date back to 1978, with a mass student movement that led to armed resistance against what it perceived as State terrorism and economic exploitation, and in 1979 formed the United Liberation Front of Assam or ULFA<sup>2</sup>, a self-proclaimed revolutionary political organisation engaged in a liberation struggle. The violence of ULFA has been equally matched by the violence and aggression of the Indian State. In a clear message of superior strength, 'combing and search operations' by the security forces were most often accompanied by sexual violence, extreme intimidation and looting. Almost all the reported cases were in far flung rural areas of the state -the peripheries of the periphery. Interviews with women ex-combatants show that many women who were only marginally involved with ULFA became fully fledged members following actual atrocities or due to the fear of atrocities (Goswami, 2015).

The ULFA has dallied with the call for peace at different moments, particularly with the formation of a People's Consultative Group (PCG) in 2005. Eminent feminist writer, the late Dr Mamoni Raisom Goswami, played a pivotal role in influencing the ULFA towards peace negotiations. The PCG held three rounds of dialogue with the government

over a period of one year but the process collapsed. Finally, peace negotiations took a more definitive direction in 2009 after the arrests of top ULFA leaders and greatly facilitated by eminent citizens of Assam.<sup>3</sup> Despite opposition to the peace talks by one section of ULFA, the peace negotiations which began in May 2010, with one woman member in the ULFA team, have been ongoing.

## THE PERIPHERAL 'OTHER' AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Despite increased international attention, in the 'peripheries' of India sexual violence by security forces continued with absolute impunity. In the North Eastern region, it has been deployed to establish dominance and supremacy of the nation state, to torture and humiliate the people into submission, as well to punish groups who challenge the idea of a homogenous unified Indian nation state.

Sexual violence has a grievous and corrosive effect on society, intimidating and terrorising not just the victim but also families and entire communities. It manages to denigrate and destroy the communities targeted because social and cultural structures are so deeply intertwined with constructed ideas of gender and notions of purity/impurity of women or of her being the property of the male. In conflict contexts it is essentially an assertion of power and superiority, grounded in a complex web of gendered socio cultural preconceptions and politically driven, and in many instances in the three contexts cited 'of making punishment a spectacle' (Foucault, 1995). For the men of the tribal communities of North East India, deeply bound by the cultural and social mores of tradition and customary practices, sexual violence against the women of their communities is the ultimate humiliation and the destruction of their constructed highly prized masculinity.

The Indian armed forces, however, are not the only perpetrators of sexual violence; mass

rapes of women have taken place in remote villages of the periphery by militant outfits to either establish supremacy over a rival outfit or to teach an entire village a lesson. The protracted peace process and peace times amongst the Nagas, for instance, has created concentric circles of peripherality and in that 'peripheral other' women continue to be the most vulnerable other.

In the ongoing peace talks between the ULFA leaders and Indian Government there is a clause on the disappeared members of the outfit, but none for the survivors of sexual violence. In interviews conducted with women members of ULFA it is clear that for the case of women combatants, victimhood is closely intertwined with notions of agency and justice and, therefore, needs to be understood and addressed taking that complexity into account. The level of brutality they experienced, however, also surfaces a deeper, more insidious and misogynist justification -that of teaching a lesson to a woman who has transgressed social norms in choosing to be associated with a militant group (Goswami, 2017).

Sexual violence in North East India has been particularly facilitated due to the operation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 (AFSPA) which was first used in 1960 to curb the Naga struggle as a temporary measure, but has remained in operation in different parts of the region for over six decades. This has created a legal regime that has spawned impunity for the armed forces, allowing them the use of any strategy or tactic without the constraints of legal principles or constitutional safeguards. Strong advocacy for its repeal has continued, including from international human rights bodies such as the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee.

## THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S QUEST FOR JUSTICE

It is increasingly acknowledged that to ensure justice, especially in post conflict transitions, affected people must have access to political procedures and a voice in decisions that affect their lives. However, gender justice is the first to get bartered away either for the sake of morality or for political and economic expediency. This is facilitated by the fact that women are not perceived as individual persons but rather as the valuable property of a family or the carriers of the cultural identity of a community.

## PEACE ACCORDS PROTECTING DISCRIMINATORY CUSTOMARY PRACTICES

An important premise of both the Naga and the Mizo peace negotiations has been a commitment to respect and protect customary practices, many which are the sites of deep structural inequalities, as they sustain un-

equal gendered power relations. Among others, the customary laws of both these highly patriarchal communities deny women land and inheritance rights and a role in decision-making. They could be said to embody what Galtung refers to as cultural violence, as they are cited to justify or legitimise structural violence and deny women their personhood.

Mizo women under the aegis of the MHIP have had to fight a long and tough battle for inheritance rights and right to political participation, which has resulted in some degree of victory. Likewise, Naga women under the aegis of NMA have fought to bring about change in the extremely gender discriminatory customary laws, as well as a long battle for inclusion in political decision-making.<sup>4</sup> The Nagaland Assembly initially passed the Nagaland Municipal (First Amendment) Act in 2006 providing for thirty-three per cent reservation of seats for women in urban local bodies; but the government under pressure from tribal men took recourse of the special Constitutional provisions under Article 371(A) and passed a resolution that reservation for women would be in conflict with customary law. The High Court upheld the state government's position and the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) went in appeal to the Supreme Court, where a final order is pending.

## JUSTICE PREMISED ON EQUALITY

The conflict contexts in North East India lucidly illustrate how the complexities of justice, inequalities and transitions are especially intractable when it comes to gender. How do women imagine justice, how do they negotiate and manoeuvre their multiple and often conflicting identities and how do they balance justice with social and political commitments in communities involved in protracted armed struggles and resistance? Clearly the Naga women's imagined justice for sexual violence would imply an acknowledgment of women's personhood and justice premised on notions of equality, not through the patriarchal lens of protecting property and women's bodies.

Drawing from the analysis of Galtung (1969) and Farmer et al. (2006) and applying it to transitions, Mathew Evans elaborates that social injustice and structural violence are in fact synonymous and denote a condition in which violence occurs; not merely because of direct actions of specific individuals against others, but rather because of structural social arrangements embedded in political and economic organising of the social world, which constrict the agency of its victims and cause injury of a deep nature. For the Naga and the Mizo women the social arrangements of their respective communities are embedded in the structured customary laws and practices which have been constricting their agency as full members of their communities. So while justice for sexual violence is important, in a moment of political transition acknowledging

and correcting this systemic and entrenched discrimination is an essential step in implementing guarantees of non-discrimination and gender equality.

## POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GENDER JUSTICE: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

Not only do systems of wars and armed conflicts exacerbate existing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities, but they also have far-reaching human rights implications for women. To therefore address the impact of violence on women exclusively through the lens of direct sexual violence is insufficient. An emerging approach that is closely linked to the realities, needs and expectations on the ground in a post conflict period is that of transformative justice which entails a "shift in focus from the legal to the social and political, and from the state and institutions to communities and every-day concerns" (Gready and Robins, 2014). Transformative justice, in particular in a post-conflict context is therefore of special significance for women and other marginalised communities, for in its essence it implies a process of transformation of oppressive hierarchies and discriminatory social structures and of the possibility of positive peace.

Like most well known and well-documented peace processes, those in the region are characterised by being top down, male led and essentially power driven transactions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the recent Naga context. The reality from the three North East India contexts underscore the need to move out of this patriarchal transaction mode and aim at something that is truly transformative. This would necessarily entail a focus on local needs and priorities by ensuring voices of the marginalised are heard, participation and ownership enhanced, process as well as outcome prioritised and unequal and intersecting power dynamics challenged. And as such, the Naga women's struggle for women's reserved places and right to political decision making at this juncture of Naga history is of paramount importance.

Gready's arguments resonate with the feminist discourse that making a distinction between the private and the public depoliticises the domestic. This has led to the marginalisation and invisibility of everyday violence perpetrated against women, notably violence occurring in families and communities, which is rooted in structural causes. Judicial processes, while important, reduce women to their injury in a violation and is perpetrator-centred, rather than discussing the gendered power relations that lead to violations. Denial of a range of rights for women under the Naga and Mizo customary laws is a manifestation of gendered power relations. Gready contends that, by explicitly acknowledging and seeking to challenge inequalities linked to power and hierarchy, and by argu-

ing that human rights are defined by struggle and born of experiences of deprivation and oppression, rights are cast in explicitly transformative terms (2014). A transformative justice approach necessitates changing all that reinforces existing social and economic hierarchies of power, including affected communities as agents in shaping the agenda for policy and practice; and focusing on addressing socio economic injustices and structural roots of present injustices. This is the change that can remove stereotyped boxes of peripherality and the discriminatory 'othering' of peoples and individuals.

## REFERENCES

- Evans, M. (2016). "Structural Violence, Socioeconomic Rights, and Transformative Justice", *Journal of Human Rights*, 15, 1-20, DOI.
- Farmer, P. E., Nizeye, B., Stulac, S., and Keshavjee, S. (2006). "Structural violence and clinical medicine", *PLoS Medicine*, 3(10), 1686-1691.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Galtung, J. (1969). "Violence, peace, and peace research", *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Goswami, R. (2015). *Of Revolution, Liberation and Agency: Aspirations and Realities in the Lives of Women Combatants and Key Women Members of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)*, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, New Delhi.
- Goswami, Roshmi (2017). "The Price of "Revolution": Who determines?"
- Gready, P. and Robins, S. (2014). "From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice", *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 8, 2014, 339-361, doi:10.1093/ijtj/iju013T.
- ## NOTES
- 1 In July 1997, the Baptist Church organised the Atlanta Peace meet where the NSCN leadership accepted initiatives to start an unconditional dialogue process
  - 2 According to the Government of India, ULFA is classified as a terrorist organisation banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in 1990. Concurrently, GOI started military offensives against it, named Operation Bajrang November 1990, Operation Rhino September 1991, Operation All Clear December 2003 and Operation Rhino 2 led by the Indian Army. The anti insurgency operations still continues at present under the Unified Command Structure
  - 3 It was led by eminent intellectual Dr Hiren Gohain, which formed a state level convention, 'Sanmilita Jatiya Abhivartan' which called upon both New Delhi and the ULFA to come forward for the negotiation table without any pre-condition and delay.
  - 4 Nagaland is the only state in the country that has never had a woman MLA. While every village and tribe has its own women's wing, there are no women on the village council and the apex decision-making body of Naga tribes, the Naga Hoho, too has no women's representatives.

# Re-imagining subversion: agency and women's peace activism in Northern Uganda

Yaliwe Clarke and  
Constance O'Brien

Based on data from sixteen in-depth interviews and nine focal groups with people who were involved with community peace organisations between 1998 and 2015, this article highlights the complexities that underpin women's peace initiatives in northern Uganda. It shows that women have displayed a sense of agency and resilience in their efforts to establish community support groups and organisations that addressed the socio-economic and psychological impact of war, with very few resources at their disposal. It also interrogates the extent to which women peace activists addressed structural violence and subverted patriarchy within an existing liberal peace building framework.<sup>1</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF COLONIALISM, ETHNICITY AND MILITARISM IN UGANDA

Since independence in 1962, Uganda has experienced contested peace (in central Uganda and some parts of Southern Uganda) alongside armed conflict in the West Nile, the northern districts of Gulu and Kitgum

and some parts of Apac district. The roots of the war can be traced back to the early 1900s, when the British colonial administration pitched dominant ethnicities in the North against those in the South, and gave one ethnic group political and economic leverage over other ethnic communities and kingdoms.

Amone and Muura (2014) state that there was significant investment in education and infrastructure in the south of Uganda, considered the productive zone, with little or no such investment in the north of Uganda, considered the labour zone. This stimulated a flow of migrant labour from northern parts of Uganda, especially Kitgum, Gulu, Lira and parts of West Nile to the central region. These migrant labourers were closely monitored so that their tribal origins were not lost, and once their work was finished they were required to return home to their 'tribe'. Thus the north became little more than a reserve for migrant labour and military recruitment in an ethnicised form of rule.

At independence, the British handed over the country to a politically divided society in which the king of Baganda, representing southern communities, formed a weak alliance with Milton Obote, who was politically aligned to communities in the north. In 1966, Obote broke away from this alliance and assumed political authority of the whole country, heavily relying on the state army in which one commander, Idi Amin, held political sway. With Amin's military takeover in 1971, all ministers were sworn into the army as officer-cadets and militarism was further institutionalised. With this rising militarisation of the state grew a new socio-economic "class" of military men and their female companions. Due to previous colonial recruitment practices, most soldiers were from ethnic communities in the north, coming from the West Nile, and were known as 'Nubians'. Those who were not part of this class struggled on the margins of a militarised political economy.

With the takeover of state power by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement

in 1986, political power shifted back to the south. For 20 years there on, 1986-2006, the Acholi region suffered from war with subsequent rebel groups, most notoriously the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) taking up arms against the government and attacking the civilian population. At the same time, government troops were guilty of gross human rights violations. It is estimated that more than two million Acholi were living in camps for internally displaced for several years during the conflict.

## THE MICRO-POLITICS OF UGANDAN WOMEN'S PEACE BUILDING EFFORTS

According to Mulumba (2002:113-4) "Women's involvement in peace efforts in Uganda's most recent history dates back to 1985 when Tito Okello seized power in a coup. At this time the National Council of Women organised over 2,000 women to demonstrate on the streets of Kampala for peace and against the mistreatment of women by the military." Women's activism around issues of legal rights, peace, reproductive education and health issues, credit schemes, disabled women and land rights became established and grew exponentially after the National Resistance Movement took over in 1986. Women such as Betty Bigombe, a former Minister of State in charge of Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme, undertook initiatives to end hostilities as early as 1995. She went into the bush for face-to-face talks about peace with the leader of the LRA Joseph Kony and in December 2004, mediated talks between the Government and the LRA rebels.

A government led formal peace negotiation process<sup>2</sup> to address the conflict in Northern Uganda started in 2006. The peace talks between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) took place in Juba, Southern Sudan, with the support of the Government of South Sudan (GOSS). The government negotiation team of 2008 comprised only of men with one or two women members of parliament who acted as observers. There were only two female LRA representatives who had a limited role in the negotiation process. Given this under representation, women's organisations formed a coalition aimed at ensuring that women's perspectives and demands would be taken into consideration during the talks. This process was called the 'Juba Peace Caravan'. According to Musoke (2012: 12): "With over 100 women activists at the start of the journey, the caravan aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing Ugandans to support the peace process and to strengthen solidarity with the war-torn communities of Northern Uganda". Other women's groups were formed as a response to immediate livelihood needs that were caused by the armed conflict. For instance, in response to an increase in widows and orphans, the National



Association of Women's Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU) started a child care centre and assisted in the resettlement of women ex-prisoners of war. Uganda's Women's Effort to Save the Orphans (UWESO) also sought to respond to the need of children orphaned by the war.

This article is based on a study that examined the work of six women's community peace organisations in northern Uganda.

Findings reveal four themes that stem from research participants experience of the war and the peacebuilding efforts they undertook: shifts in patriarchy as a result of abduction, displacement and the erosion of family structures; war as an opportunity for women's agency and the subversion of patriarchy; subverting economies of patriarchy through micro-credit and land; women's agency in re-socialising masculinities.

## SHIFTS IN PATRIARCHY: ABDUCTION, DISPLACEMENT AND THE EROSION OF FAMILY STRUCTURES

A combination of high levels of forced recruitment of men by fighting forces, rape and forced marriage of girls and women, looting of cattle and other property, mass displacement, violence and loss of livelihoods contributed to a destabilisation of masculine roles and identities and of men's (hetero-normative) dominance over social and material stability amongst the Acholi and Langi societies<sup>3</sup>.

Ownership and control of land was central to men's power, associated with their role as fathers, uncles and elders of patrilineal clans. Thus many men stayed behind in rural areas in an attempt to fulfil their role as protector of land and property, while women moved into towns with their children to seek protection. Masculine authority was also undermined in the mid-1990s when the Ugandan army forced approximately two million people in rural Acholiland into "protected villages" i.e. IDP camps. With no land to till or cattle to herd, most men resorted to excessive consumption of alcohol and gambling.

Research on suicide rates amongst men in these IDP camps in Northern Uganda (Kizza et. al. 2012) revealed that most suicide cases were as a result of men's sense of lost dignity and social worth. Their self-esteem was further impacted upon when they realised that their wives and daughters were selling sex to survive. Some were forced to witness their women and daughters being raped by government soldiers or by the LRA; others were further humiliated when they themselves were raped by government soldiers. The following diagram illustrates the displacement of men and women as a result of the war in Northern Uganda. The subsequent effects of abduction and the erosion of family structures mobilised women to collective peace efforts.

Table 1: Women's Peace Organisations: interviews and focus groups' informants

Organisation	Locality	Year Est.	Individual Interviews-key informants	Focus Groups FGs	Number of informants per Organisation
Women's Peace Initiative - Uganda (WOPI)	Lira	2003	3 founder members 1 Staff member	2 focus groups consisting of 39 beneficiaries	43
Women's Advocacy Network (WAN)	Gulu	2011	1 Founder member who was also a staff member	1 focus group consisting of 9 beneficiaries	10
People Voice for Peace (PVP)	Gulu	1995	1 founder member	None	1
Kitgum Women's Peace Initiative (KIWEPI)	Kitgum	1999	2 founder members 4 staff members	6 focus groups consisting of 29 beneficiaries	35
Kitgum Concerned Women's Association (KICWA)	Kitgum	1998	1 Founder member 2 staff members	None	3
Live Again	Kitgum	2006	1 Founder member who is also a staff member	None	1
<b>Total number</b>			<b>16 individual interviews</b>	<b>9 FGs</b>	<b>93 informants</b>

Source: Yaliwe Clarke, Phd research in progress, 2017.

## DID WAR CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN'S AGENCY AND THE SUBVERSION OF PATRIARCHY?

Findings from this study indicates that there was a slight expansion of women's power largely due to the fact that the war radically transformed the social conditions that shaped gender norms, predominantly amongst Acholi and Langi communities. Widowhood, forced marriage, and an increase in the number of orphaned children meant that women suddenly experienced a widening of their material and maternal responsibilities, inadvertently increasing their sphere of influence in the clan. This expansion of material, as opposed to discursive power, occurred within and beyond their fathers or husbands' lineage. There was a broadening of older women's previously implicit power as mothers, aunts and sisters-in-law or diviners.

Women and girls abducted or separated from their families for several years were forced to marry members of militia groups whose children they bore from rape. Children born in captivity faced various challenges, namely: those who lost touch with their biological fathers or were rejected by their stepfathers were taken in by their mother's paternal clan; those who got separated from their families or were rejected by their mother's paternal clan ended up being supported by other women. All women who founded community peace organisations referred to an urgent need to assist large numbers of destitute children within their families and the communities in which they lived. For ex-

ample, at the height of the war in 2003, one woman who later founded a women's community peace group, hosted up to 36 persons in her house. She formed the peace group so that she and other women could garner collective efforts to assist these large numbers of people they took care of.

Thus many women replaced men's previous materially dominant role as provider and protector of the family. By looking after orphaned children, grandchildren and children of other members of the extended family (brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles) their maternal role expanded at a time when there were minimal socio-economic resources available. Also, the everyday chaos of overcrowded IDP camps meant there was an inevitable mixing of clans and sub-clans within a confined space resulting in shifts in patrilineal ties as well as a general loss of social control.

One particularly vulnerable group of women were those who were abducted to become "wives" of men in LRA and returned with children born during captivity. According to Annan et. al. (2011: 883) up to twenty six per cent of female youth aged fourteen to thirty five were abducted during the war. Indeed, the war economy relied on abductions to both literally and figuratively reproduce child soldiers for militia groups. Patrilineage ties became diluted and disrupted as a result. Of the six organisations included in the study, the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) established in 2011 was solely founded by women who were formerly abducted.

When these women returned from the "bush" they had to endure further trauma of being stigmatised, ostracised and subjected

to violence by their own families and the larger community.

*"I do remember that before WAN began, life was very difficult because people did not like us in the community. First of all if you came back from the bush people thought that you are the one who committed the crimes that LRA did. People in the community blamed us or all the crimes that the LRA committed". (Focus Group Discussant 1, founder, WAN, December 2013)*

*"The children we came back with were not allowed to play with other kids. If the kids fought when playing they said the cen [ghostly vengeance] from their fathers disturbed them and that is why they beat other kids. ... I was so sad when the child was insulted and on the other hand I looked at the problem I was going through. I was sick and could not do anything. It was painful". (Focus Group Discussant 8, founder, Women's Advocacy Network, Gulu, December 2013)*

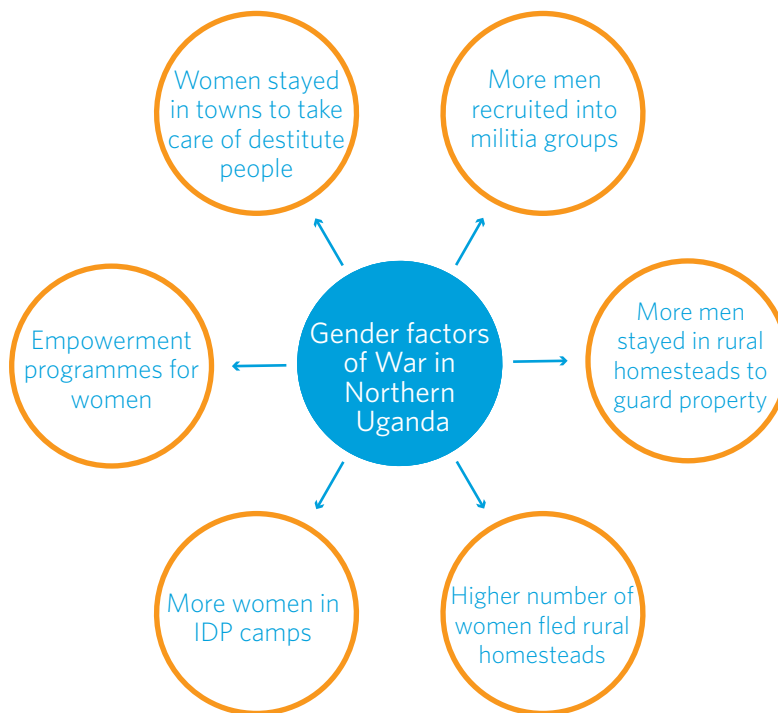
The women's ability to found peace groups in the midst of such stigma, violence and social flux reveals their resilience in crafting individual and collective options for themselves and the communities around them. Women took on new social positions that contested men's power and shifted certain patriarchal constructs of femininity. Further subversion of patriarchy occurred in women's ability to provide for the material wellbeing of their families and the broader community.

### SUBVERTING ECONOMIES OF PATRIARCHY: MICRO-CREDIT AND LAND

One prominent way women were able to support communities was through micro-credit schemes and small-scale income generation activities. In the early stages of formation of the peace groups, peace building efforts began with collection of food from friends and family. This later moved into more institutionalised approaches such as the establishment of small businesses like juice making, tailoring, trading in food stuffs, rearing of animals, wine making, mushroom growing and bee keeping. Some of these businesses later developed into saving or micro-finance/credit schemes that allowed women to work in groups, save collectively, and share financial risks.

Several organisations in Kitgum such as KIWEPI, KICWA and others who were not core to the study combined the income generation projects with savings schemes often termed 'Village Savings and Loan Associations' (VSLA's) that were mostly funded and coordinated by CARE International. As of 2013, CARE had helped facilitate the establishment of 27,222 VSLA groups in rural Uganda, representing over half a million people. The report states that up to fifty two billion Ugandan shillings, about nineteen million dollars, had been saved (Lowicki-Zucca et. al, 2014).

**Diagram 1: Gender Flux – Displacement of Men and Women**



Women described the expansion of their ability to provide for people around them as contributing towards peace, and explained that the benefits of these initiatives were evident in changes to their social positioning. They had an improved capacity to take care of their families and to deal with the trauma of displacement as well as other psycho-social impacts. Their involvement in these peace collectives shifted their status in a positive way both socially and economically.

Overall, it seems income generation projects and saving schemes nourished local forms of association. The extent to which they fostered associational life that recognised and transformed oppression through collective consciousness and resistance is difficult to assess. Amina Mama (2014:37-8) is rather sceptical as to whether women living in war contexts or the aftermath of war can actually address the broader structural roots of oppression, yet this study gives credence to the fact that some shifts had occurred. The attempts at micro credit schemes provided a means of livelihood essential for their survival.

With regard to land, women were still denied access and ownership. They generally do not inherit land from their fathers since when they marry they take on their husbands' clan names. In the Acholi sub-region, land acquisitions are particularly sensitive, occurring in the wake of long-standing displacement of the majority of population and the resultant confusion about boundaries. Their resettlement has been further complicated by speculation about the presence of oil (Sjögren, 2014).

In this study, land ownership remained a major issue for women even during the post-conflict context. Abducted women had major difficulties in reintegrating into the

community since no land was allocated to them, and child-mothers who did not know or could not find out the clan of the father of their child could not inherit land. As explained by a staff member who works for a national women's legal rights NGO, these children were also not easily integrated into their fathers' clans:

*"At the time that we opened the office, women were generally being denied land. Widows, unmarried women, married women. We heard a lot of women being thrown off their land ...because they were staying in the camps so they did not know where their husbands came from. At the time we opened the office, there were very many women who say 'I am looking or I was told that my husband comes from this area'. And 'I have gone there and no one is giving me land'. That becomes an issue because one, you have been married, probably you got married within the camp. You do not know where this man comes from so we have issues of demarcation. You married the man, he died, he was buried in the camp, so now you trying to trace his roots". (Key Informant M, staff, FIDA, February 2015)*

One respondent, a staff member of Isis-WICCE (a women's organisation based in Kampala) who has worked with many women's peace groups in Northern Uganda expressed the imagined possibility of shifting land ownership to women:

*"To start with children that were born in captivity there's need for a shift, the mothers must also be allowed to have ownership, to be seen as valued stakeholders of the land and as valued parents and therefore can actually pass on their clan to their children and that is really fundamental in Africa. So patriarchy is alive and kicking and so you*

need to have a shift where people will say, “let’s create some exceptions” and have these children who were born probably out of rape and out of abduction and these are not children who chose to be born like this and the mothers would have loved to have a clan and the reality is that they don’t know who the father is”. (Key Informant V, former co-director, Isis-WICCE, February 2015).

The study found that with the destabilisation of masculine dominance, spaces of partial power for women opened up in the way family structures became reconfigured. Thus the tension between agency and structure is evident; agency is constantly being subverted by structural realities that may give the impression of shifting at the surface level but remains deeply immovable and ingrained at other levels. Thus it would seem that intractable patriarchal norms relating to land are still non-negotiable. Women, however, made several attempts to contend with new possible masculine roles.

## WOMEN’S AGENCY IN RE-SOCIALISING MASCULINITIES

When questioned about the links between gender equality and peace, founders of the women’s organisations expressed an awareness of both patriarchal (structural) and cultural oppressions beyond that which the war either reinforced or (re)created. Some women activists argued that the roots of violence in the community are linked to Acholi customs of manhood during and after the war. In this regard, two groups, Kitgum Women’s Peace Initiative and Women’s Peace Initiative-Uganda, established projects aimed at changing masculinities in the domestic sphere through establishing men-only projects that valorised men who performed “peaceful” masculinities. KIWEPI’s interpretation of “peaceful” masculinities included five themes: men who were not violent in the home; men who did not abuse alcohol; men who financially support the family; men who assisted with household chores; and men who allowed their wives to make some decisions in the home. Community members were invited to vote for men who demonstrated that they lived up to all of these five core themes and were awarded special recognition through an award ceremony in which they were officially named as Lacor Makwiri – role model men. It would appear that women’s attempts at re-socialising masculinities was constrained or circumscribed to their immediate experiences of gender based violence and lack of material provision.

Another peace group in Lira, Women’s Peace Initiative Uganda (WOPI-U), implemented a community based awareness project on gender based violence called SASA! They trained a larger number of men as compared to women using a methodology that aimed at creating “...a critical mass committed to and able to create social norm change” (Abramsky et al., 2014). According to Abramsky et al.

(2014: 122) “The central focus of the intervention is to promote a critical analysis and discussion of power and power inequalities -not only of the ways in which men and women may misuse power and the consequences of this for their intimate relationships and communities, but also on how people can use their power positively to affect and sustain change at an individual and community level”. The SASA initiative points to an actual change in violent masculine behaviour of a community member that the peace group worked with. Whether or not such change can or will be sustained is dependent on a variety of factors. The SASA project is fairly new and not all informants were directly involved in the project.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that women in this study did not directly address the political ethnicised roots of the war but rather focused on addressing economic and psycho-social consequences may well have been a modus operandi of choice given the situation in which they found themselves. They chose to adopt the features of a “coping economy” (Peterson, 2008) and operated within and sometimes beyond a survivalist mode. Ethnic divisions were a major source of conflict that could not be easily resolved; women rather focused on the reconfiguration of families, a marginal renegotiation of ethnic/clan boundaries, and a recasting of masculinities away from ‘war’ violence. Central to these social re-positionings was a heavy reliance on micro savings and income generation projects that provided for the material needs of families and the most vulnerable in the community. Despite these radical efforts, women’s ownership of land still remained bound by patriarchal clan systems and customs. Thus whilst they made some gains in occupying previously masculinised spaces such as being material providers, they were blocked from shifting power dynamics inherent in land ownership. Further analysis would be needed to show intersections between patriarchy, Uganda’s neoliberal political economy as well as entrenched ethnic divisions between Northern Uganda and the rest of country. As Confortini (2010: 4) says, there is need for more “feminist curiosity” about how

“patriarchy in all its varied guises, camouflaged, Khaki clad, and pin-striped – is a principal cause both of the outbreak of violent social conflicts and of the international community’s frequent failures in providing long-term resolutions to those violent conflicts”.

## REFERENCES

Abramsky, T.; Devries, K.; Kiss, L.; Nakuti, J.; Kyegombe, N.; Starmann, E. & Michau, L. (2014). ‘Findings from the SASA! Study: a cluster randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of a community mobilization intervention to prevent violence against women and reduce HIV risk in Kampala, Uganda’, *BMC medicine*, Vol 12, No 12, 122.

Amone, C. & Muura, O. (2014). ‘British Colonialism and the Creation of Acholi Ethnic Identity in Uganda, 1894 to 1962. The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History’, Vol 42, No 2, 239-257.

Annan, J.; Blattman, C.; Mazurana, D. & Carlson, K. (2011). ‘Civil war, reintegration, and gender in Northern Uganda’, *Journal of conflict resolution*, Vol. 55, No 6, 877-908.

Confortini, C. (2010). ‘Feminist Contributions and Challenges to Peace Studies’, *International Studies Association Compendium*.

Hendricks, C. (2011). *Gender and security in Africa: An overview*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Oslo.

Hudson, H. (2012). ‘A double-edged sword of peace? Reflections on the tension between representation and protection in gendering liberal peacebuilding’, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol 19, No 4, 443-460.

Kizza, D.; Knizek, B. L.; Kinyanda, E. & Hjelmeland, H. (2012). ‘Men in despair: a qualitative psychological autopsy study of suicide in northern Uganda’, *Trans-cultural psychiatry*, Vol 49, Issue 5, 696-717.

Lowicki-Zucca, M., Walugembe, P., Ogaba, I. & Langol, S. (2014). ‘Savings groups as a socioeconomic strategy to improve protection of moderately and critically vulnerable children in Uganda’, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 47, 176-181.

Mama, A. (2014). ‘Beyond survival: Militarism, equity and women’s security’, *Development and Equity: An Interdisciplinary Exploration by Ten Scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America*, 29-46.

Mulumba, D. (2002). ‘The Women’s Movement and Conflict Resolution in Uganda’, in Tripp Ali Mari and J. C. Kwesiga (eds), *The Women’s Movement in Uganda: History, Challenges, and Prospects*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala.

Musoke, Nabukeera. H. (2012). ‘Women Making a Difference to the Juba Peace Negotiation Process’, unpublished paper, Isis-WICCE, Kampala.

Peterson, V. S. (2008). ‘New wars’ and gendered economies, *Feminist Review*, No 88, 7-20.

Scully, P.; McCandless, E. & Abu-Nimer, M. (2010). ‘Gender Violence and Gender Justice in Peacebuilding and Development’, *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol 5, No. 3, 3-6.

Sjögren, A. (2014). ‘Scrambling for the promised land: land acquisitions and the politics of representation in post-war Acholi, northern Uganda’, *African Identities*, Vol 12, No 1, 62-75.

## NOTES

1 Liberal peace building has been the dominant policy frameworks of international development organisations such as the UN and World Bank. It has been criticized by feminists (Hendricks, 2011; Hudson 2012; Scully et al., 2010) for not addressing the patriarchal structural violence that is embedded in the very idea of the state.

2 Peace process here refers to a formal state-led negotiation and reconciliation process that is paralleled by a number of other mechanisms to address the conflict, including the Amnesty Law, International Criminal Court, the African Traditional Mechanism of Mato Oput. Since these mechanisms are parallel to the peace negotiation process, it is important to mention them as each mechanism largely affects the progress of the other.

3 Here we use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of masculine dominance that defines it as a social world that lends itself to objectification that is entirely constructed around an androcentric world view –an archaeological history of masculine unconscious “...which constitutes women as symbolic objects whose being (esse) is being-perceived (precipi), has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely, symbolic dependence”. (2001: 66)

# The Prism of Marginalisation: Political Economy of Violence Against Women in Sudan and South Sudan

by Fahima Hashim

Sudanese and South Sudanese women have been subjected to many forms of violence varying from structural, physical to mental. Contributing factors include family, local communities and the State. This article will identify the main socio-economic, political and cultural factors contributing to the emergence and perpetuation of violence against women in conflict prone areas, such as South Sudan and Darfur. It will also examine the role of political Islam and the state in justifying and promoting these forms of violence.

Using the premises of feminist political economy which highlights the masculine nature of the integrated political economic authority structure (True, 2010), this article will map the various forms of structural violence faced by women in the North, and South<sup>1</sup>. It will explore socio-cultural norms, patriarchal family and marriage institutions, institutional violence inherent in the enforcement of Islamisation laws and policies, and violence in conflict, displacement, and racism.

## BACKGROUND: THE STATE FAILURE

Violence, civil wars and political instability compounded by dogmatic interpretations of Islam have plagued Sudan since its independence from the British in 1956. Such turbulence was a direct result of the post-colonial state that was built on a history of colonial exploitation of the area's resources rather than its development. The British bequeathed power to an elite group who came predominately from the Islamised and Arabised elements of the riverine social groups,

who formulated a very narrow form of state identity based exclusively on their interpretation of Islam and on Arabism. This identity ignored other social, cultural, religious and linguistic components of the country, which led to their overt marginalisation and exclusion from major decision-making. Separation of South Sudan in 2011 was but one result of the narrowly defined state identity that was brought together under the centralised state by physical and ideological force. As a result, women from all walks of life have been negatively affected by the failures of Sudanese state formation, especially under the rule of the current government from 1989-to date.

The Sudan was ruled under the Anglo-Egyptian administration between 1898 and 1956. Despite being administered as one country, the British followed widely divergent policies in governing North and South. This dual system reinforced Arabism and Islam in the North and encouraged Southern development along indigenous African lines, while

al norms and traditions, especially in rural areas, marginalise women from being involved publicly or engaging in any political or social activities (Makuei et al., 2018).

During the conflict of 1983-2005, gender-based violence was widespread in South Sudan, especially physical and mental abuse. There was also rape of women and men. This occurred against a background of traditional practices including 'girl compensation' and forced prostitution/sexual slavery. Domestic violence was an accepted norm and early marriage commonplace, with 45% of girls married before they were eighteen and 7% married younger than fifteen. Polygamy is another norm and traditionally only men can ask for divorce and the wife's family are obliged to pay back the bride price (South Sudan Human Development Report, 2015). The social position of Southern Sudanese women is shaped by tribal cultural traditions. Their place is in the home as wives and mothers and their status further diminished by chal-

**“Many victims of rape and their families are deeply traumatised, since rape specifically aims at terrorising and subjugating entire communities and affects their social fabric.”**

introducing Christian missionary education and embryos of Western civilization in the South. For the British, Sudan was effectively two countries in one (AfDB, 2011). However, the most significant factor of concern in the separation of the North and South, which continued to affect the relationship between the two peoples, was the colonial concentration of economic, political and administrative development in the North at the expense of the South, thereby creating severe socio-economic and political discrepancies between the two regions (ADB, 2011). There were, in fact, many factors that affected the possibility of building one nation.

## SOUTH SUDANESE WOMEN'S STATUS OF MARGINALISATION

Women in South Sudan are shaped by the social and economic existence of being one of the world's Least Developed Countries devastated by decades of conflict (1955-1972 and 1983-2005). Women are 48% of the population and the majority of the country's population - 72% are under thirty years. South Sudan has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world; 1 in 7 women are at risk of dying from childbirth or pregnancy (Makuei et al., 2018). Only 27% of the adult population literate and only 16% of women over 15 years are literate. UNICEF estimates that 70% of children aged 6-17 years have never been enrolled into school. Cultur-

lenges such as lack of education, poverty and conflict. Despite this women in the South are an important economic force in agriculture, food production and cattle herding (Hall and Ismail, 1981).

Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), South Sudan has at least formally recognized the importance of women's role and contribution to the peace negotiation processes, albeit slim. They have therefore set explicit laws and policies on gender equality. The Transitional Constitution and Bill of Rights 2011 provides guarantees for the equality of men and women. It recognizes the historic inequalities between women and men in South Sudan and sets out 25% Affirmative Action quota for women in legislative, executive bodies and political participation. As a result, women currently comprise 26.5% of the National Legislative Assembly (No Safe Place, 2017).

## SOUTH SUDAN WOMEN: MARGINALISATION, CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) from South Sudan, especially those who lived in the North faced multiple levels of discrimination. In addition to poverty, women in particular faced many cultural challenges such as forced assimilation, e.g. practicing FGM to gain cultural acceptance (Abusharaf, 2009). The majority lacked skills to compete in the





Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at Zam Zam camp outside El Fasher, Sudan. Photo ID 180277. 05/06/2008. Zam Zam, Sudan. UN Photo/Tim McKulka

job market in Northern Sudan and so, many worked as food sellers and engaged in trades prohibited by Shari'a law such as alcohol brewing and sex work (ibid.). Unsurprising therefore the majority of women incarcerated in North Sudan prisons were from the South, Nuba mountains, South Blue Nile, Abyie and Darfur and they were also subject to flogging and fines (Clancy, 2012).

However, the suffering of women did not hinder them from setting peace as a priority on their agenda. The Southern refugees in Kenya and Uganda managed to organise and form groups including Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM) chapters (Ahmed, 2014). For the first time, women of the South fought in the front lines with men for the independence of South Sudan and engaged in solidarity and support work among the displaced.

## PATTERNS OF DISCRIMINATION IN DARFUR: RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR

Darfur had suffered a different level of conflict and discrimination since 1980s, which was mostly associated with under-development and resources. However, in the current conflict particularly between 2003-2005, women were increasingly subject to mass rape and sexual violence (Fricke and Khair, 2007). More than 600,000 were killed and over 2,000,000 people were displaced.

Many victims of rape and their families are deeply traumatised, since rape specifically aims at terrorising and subjugating entire communities and affects their social fabric. It was used as a weapon of war. Indeed, violence against women in Darfur has been woven into everyday life and is poignantly

2009). Men, on the other hand, have to provide only the amount of grain they need for their own consumption. This allows them to grow cash crops such as irrigated citrus fruits to trade, or to engage in wage labour since they are expected to pay for anything that costs money such as clothes, utensils, etc. In

“...the suffering of women did not hinder them from setting peace as a priority on their agenda.”

underscored by a woman from north Darfur: “When we leave the camp to fetch for fire wood we prefer to go as women rather than sending our men. When we go we only get raped but when our men go they get killed, we would rather get raped and come back” (Hashim, 2009).

The Darfuri women are known for their significant economic contributions and their participation in market and agricultural economies, particularly as handicraft sellers, food and construction work. Women are the major economic providers in many parts of Darfur, therefore occupying public spheres. Their main role is to feed their families therefore they have larger fields in which they grow crops (millet and sorghum) and larger grain storage rooms than their husbands (Hashim,

order for men to earn this money they spend a great deal of time outside their villages while women take care of daily life inside the village. Women are the de facto ‘keepers of the land’. In practice women need to have some income and men are not always around to provide when the need arises. This has led to the misconception among men in the North that Darfuri men are not responsible enough because they do not control their women (Hashim, 2009).

Learning from the women of South Sudan, the Darfuri women showed an effective presence in peace negotiations and insisted that there should be real representation for women in all matters concerning their lives and their families.



Uganda. Source: gov.uk

## WOMEN OF NORTHERN SUDAN: THE PRIVILEGED

Like many Muslim societies governed by Islamic law North Sudan is fundamentally patriarchal in nature, and it is exclusively controlled by men whose key role is to maintain the household economically and socially. However, the women's subordinate position in the North began to change with the introduction of education for girls during colonial rule and was used as a vehicle towards emancipation (Hall & Ismail, 1981; Badri, 2009; Hale, 1996). By the early 1930s, women tended to be employed as nurses and midwives, and community health workers. This employment was considered suitable and was socially acceptable, albeit with some reluctance. During the independence struggle in the late 1930s to early 1940s, women in the North began organising and forming their own trade unions. By the early 1950s, some women began to join the Communist Party, which at that time was the only political party that opened its doors for women to join. Soon after, the Women's Union (WU) was formed to be the first umbrella organisation for Sudanese women to work collectively (Ahmad, 2014).

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: PREVALENCE AND MANIFESTATIONS

Most of the forms and patterns of violent behavior have been embedded politically, culturally and economically by the community, family and the state in Sudan. Specific forms of violence have been enforced by restric-

tive Islamic laws, such as stoning, flogging, forced veiling, restriction of mobility in public sphere. Other forms of violence against women include forced marriage, marital rape, domestic violence and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), as well as the implications of the ongoing conflict of which the state is an integral part, such as displacement, rape and sexual violence used as a weapon of war, abduction, ethnic violence, forced prostitu-

**“The introduction of the Hijab, and the approval of male guardianship for travel in and outside the country, minimised women’s access to equal benefits such as housing.”**

tion, and trafficking, etc. Access to justice is complicated and almost impossible due to the system of impunity, especially among state actors i.e. police, security, army and militias; the ambiguity of some articles in the 1991 criminal code; the stigma of violence, especially sexual violence; lack of case documentation; and lack of disaggregated data on violence against women.

## INSTITUTIONS OF OPPRESSION

The extended family plays an important role in the position and situation of women and sharp role distinctions between women and men continue to exist. Most social life and activities revolve around the family and are

primarily the domains of women. The extended family in Sudan is not only the locus of women's oppression, but also one of support. Marriage is another crucial institution that thwarts the life of Sudanese women. Marriage allows both women and men to gain access to the work of the other in the gender division of labour, child bearing, and social reproduction and social recognition and prestige (Gruenbaum, 2006). In addition, marriage is the only legitimised institution where women can be sexually active to fulfil their sexual needs. The minimum age of marriage is equated to the age of discretion, which is ten years, which is tantamount to child marriage. The 1991 Personal Status Law, Article 75 stipulates “the wife will be declared disobedient if she leaves the matrimonial home without legitimate justification, i.e. work outside or visit her parents without the husband permission” (Musawah, 2009).

Since 1989 the Islamist government has taken steps to curb the rights of women in the name of Islamic propriety. Women were dismissed from public service, especially women in the legal and medical professions, ministry of labour and journalism (Africa Watch Report, 1993). In addition, women street vendors in the informal sector were violently attacked and prevented from working. The regulatory measures that the Islamists pushed during the early 1990s shows their preoccupation with women's appearance, dress, conduct, laws, policies, state regulations, decrees and order (Nageeb, 2004). These measures were specifically stressed by institutions such as mosques, the media and the school system and implemented by the public order courts, police and security services (Nageeb, 2004). Men as social and religious guardians are

also entitled to correct women's conduct according to state regulations or to Muslim men's 'correct' sense (ibid).

In addition, the new military government has been aggressively imposing an Islamised program in the South, naming it Jihad (holy war) and forming new 'Arab only' militia groups named the Popular Defence, backed by the army (ibid). Women supporting the Islamist project condoned the Jihad war by providing assets including personal gold and money and serving food for the Mujahideen (Hale, 1996). Violence against women by the Popular Defence, Sudanese Army and the Sudan People Liberation Army (South Sudan group that fought for peace and equality) was not documented, and violence against

“It is difficult to talk about political economy and women’s inequality in a context like Sudan and South Sudan in isolation from global inequality and its neoliberal means and mechanisms.”

women during the 1983-2005 period was not highlighted in the international media. This new formation was considered a threat to the social and cultural fabric of the non-Arab groups in Sudan, especially in other parts of the country including Darfur, Abyie, the Nuba Mountains and south Blue Nile (Kameir, 2012; Tonnessen, 2017). This forced Islamization with more restrictions against women did not happen in a vacuum, and was created to derail women’s contribution to the economy and to strip them of rights gained in the 1960s and 70s. Since the early 1980s Sudan was forged and shaped by restrictive social, economic and political patterns with the introduction of the Sharia’ laws known as September Laws. The introduction of the Hijab, and the approval of male guardianship for travel in and outside the country, minimised women’s access to equal benefits such as housing which for example is only available to the bread-winner who is now the husband. Such moves jeopardized women’s access to economic rights.

In September 2000 the Governor of Khartoum issued a decree that restricted women’s rights to employment, despite the fact that women’s right to work was gained in the 1960s, together with the right to equal pay, maternity leave and pension by the early 1970s (Ahmed, 2014). He issued a decree banning women from working in hotels, restaurants and gas stations. He justified this move as a means to dignify women and situate them in the right place as per the “... civilisation project of the nation and in line with our traditions and values of our religion” (Ahmed, 2014). The justification highlights the Islamist’s reshaping of gender roles at the public level.

The Public Order Law, which was passed in Khartoum State in 1996 which is emblematic of the politicisation of ethno-religious identities (Arab-Islam), is also an authoritative statement on the status of minority cultures living under Sharia law, as well as women (Abusharaf, 2009). This law was passed to curb practices that the government considered un-Islamic and people who do not comply with it are taken to courts. The law covers a range of activities. It affects women’s employment and enforces Islamic dress (hijab), banning women’s traditional wear (Abusharaf, 2009). The types of offences that take women and girls before the court are indecent dress, selling liquor and obscene acts. Once South Sudan seceded in 2011,

Khartoum lost 75% of its oil revenue and the Sudanese government started to expand the number of public order courts across the country to aggressively expand revenue collection. Sabir Saeed, a lawyer said there are now 22 public order police courts in Khartoum alone and in almost every town across the country (Nuba Reports, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult to talk about political economy and women’s inequality in a context like Sudan and South Sudan in isolation from global inequality and its neoliberal means and mechanisms. For both North and South Sudan, conflict was one of the main catalysts of the deteriorating position of Sudanese woman as well as the key instigator of gender-based violence. Legal discrimination, be it under Islamic laws or customary law, controls women’s mobility and restricts their public lives. This clearly shows that Islam is not the only tool used to discriminate against women. Social norms, the extended family, tribal rules, and marriage are also effective in imposing on women certain limitations. Whether Christian or Muslim patriarchal norms have more power over women’s social participation. These norms have taken different forms such as forced/child marriages, the preference of males over females, the stigma around issues of sexuality, sexual violence and reproductive rights.

## REFERENCES

Abusharaf, R. (2009). ‘Competing Masculinities: probing political Disputes as Acts of Violence against Women from Southern Sudan and Darfur’. In Hassan, S and Ray, C. (ed.), *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan, A Critical Reader*. New York: Cornell University Press.

AfDB. (2011). *The Political Economy of South Sudan: A Scoping Analytical Study*. Abidjan: African Development Bank (AfDB).

Ahmad, M. (2014). ‘The Women’s Movement in Sudan from Nationalism to TransNationalism: Prospects for a Solidarity Movement’, PhD thesis, York University, Toronto.

Badri, H. (2009). *Women’s movement in the Sudan*. 2nd ed. Omdurman, Sudan: MOB Center for Sudanese Studies.

Clancy, D. (2012). *Falling through the cracks. Reflections on customary law and the imprisonment of women in South Sudan*. SIHA Network: vision printer.

Fricke, A. and Khair, A. (2007). *Laws Without Justice: An Assessment of Sudanese Laws Affecting Survivors of Rape*. Washington, DC: Refugee International.

Gruenbaum, E. (2006). *Sexuality Issues in the Movement to Abolish Female Genital Cutting in Sudan*. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 20(1), pp.121-138.

Hale, S. (1996). *Gender Politics and Islamization in Sudan*. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 14(2), pp. 51-66.

Hall, M. and Ismail, B. (1981). *Sisters under the sun: the Story of Sudanese Women*. Essex, England: Longman Group limited.

Hashim, F. (2009). *Sudanese Civil Society Strategizing to End Sexual Violence against Women in Darfur*. In Hassan, S. and Ray, C. (ed.), *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan, A Critical Reader*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Kameir, E. (2012). *Perspectives on the Political Economy of South Sudan*. African Development Bank, Fragile States Unit.

Makuei, Gabriel, Mali Abdollahian and Kaye Marion (2018). *Optimal profile limits for maternal mortality rate (MMR) in South Sudan*, *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 18:278 <https://doi.org/10.1186/>

Musawah (2009). *Home Truths: A Global Report on Equality in the Muslim Family*. [online] Selangor: Musawah, pp.52-53. Available at: <http://www.musawah.org/sites/>

Nageeb, S. (2004). *New Spaces and Old Frontiers*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books.

No Safe Place (2017). *No safe place a life time of violence for conflict affected area South Sudan*. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~mcs/gwi/>

Nuba Reports. 2017. ‘Courts Target Poor Sudanese Women with Extortionate “Morality” Fines’, Nuba Reports, 1 December, [www.newsdeeply.com/womenandgirls/articles/2017/12/01/courts-target-poor-sudanese-women-with-extortionate-morality-fines](http://www.newsdeeply.com/womenandgirls/articles/2017/12/01/courts-target-poor-sudanese-women-with-extortionate-morality-fines) (accessed 6 May 2019).

South Sudan Human Development Report 2015 (2015). *South Sudan Human Development Report*. UNDP, <http://www.ss.undp.org/>

Tonnessen, L. (2017). *Enemies of the State: Curbing Women Activists Advocating Rape Reform in Sudan*. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 18(2), pp.148-155. Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/>

True, J. (2010). *The Political Economy of Violence Against Women: A Feminist International Relations Perspective*. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 32(1), pp.39-59.

## NOTES

1 In respect to South Sudan, this paper covers the south until independence in 2011 (from 2005-2011) and does not include the eruption of the internal conflict in 2013.



### **SURFACING THE AGENDAS OF THE BLUE ECONOMY - PANEL ORGANISED BY DAWN AND PANG IN FIJI**

DAWN in collaboration with the Pacific Network on Globalisation hosted a panel in Suva, Fiji, on February 28th, titled "Blue economy: evolving development framework or smoke and mirrors?" The objectives of the panel was to bring together various stakeholders from civil society and academia to share their perspectives on the Blue Economy development discourse.

### **THE SDG AND FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING - BY GITA SEN**

This paper by Gita Sen, published on December 2018, draws on the author's and DAWN's experiences of feminist engagement with United Nations processes. It was produced for UN Women's flagship report "Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", released as part of the UN Women discussion paper series.

### **GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: EMERGING ISSUES - BY ANITA GURUMURTHY, CECILIA ALEMANY BILLOROU, NANDINI CHAMI**

This paper by Anita Gurumurthy, Cecilia Alemany Billorou and Nandini Chami is part of the Digital Justice Project. It focuses on digital technologies and points at the need of framing a feminist development agenda in relation to the post-human context. The paper outlines a strategic road map focusing on new legal-institutional frameworks and data governance models.

FOLLOW US: [@DAWNFEMINIST](https://twitter.com/DAWNFEMINIST)    

#### **PUBLISHED AUGUST 2019**

**Issue Team:**  
Kumudini Samuel  
Natalia Uval  
Damien Gock

#### **PHYSICAL ADDRESS**

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)  
Global Secretariat,  
JP Bayly Trust Building, 193 Rodwell Rd,  
Suva, FIJI.

#### **DAWN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Cai Yiping  
Cecilia Alemany  
Corina Rodriguez Enriquez  
Gita Sen (General Co-coordinator)  
Kumudini Samuel

Florenca Partenio Hibist Kassa  
María Graciela Cuervo (General Co-coordinator)

#### **DAWN BOARD**

Celita Eccher  
Claire Slatter (Chairperson)  
Sarojini Pillay  
Sin Joan Yee  
Vivienne Taylor

#### **DAWN GLOBAL SECRETARIAT**

**Administrator:**  
Sharan Sindhu  
**Program Officer:**  
Mereoni Chung  
**Finance Officer:**  
Nai Sassen  
**Junior Admin/ Finance Officer:**  
Mei Veramu  
**Junior Research Officer:**  
Damien Gock  
**Admin/ Finance Assistant:**  
Ana Rakacikaci



DAWN Informs is published by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of feminist scholars and activists from the economic South, engaged in feminist research, analysis of the global environment, working for economic and gender justice, and sustainable development.

This newsletter can also be viewed at:  
[www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/archive/newsletters](http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/archive/newsletters)