

# GENDER IN ARMED CONFLICT AND PEACE PROCESSES

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## Abstract

*This article introduces the concept of gender relations and cognate terms such as gender order, gender regime and gender complementarity. It applies them to militarisation and armed conflict, war-resistance and the pursuit of peace. A perceived link between militarism, nationalism and patriarchy is considered as prompting women-only antimilitarist organisation. A distinction is made between peace making and peace building, and women's contribution to the latter is illustrated. Women's life experience, rather than women's nature, is proposed as a source of the social courage and social intelligence that are specially productive in peace building.*

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## Gender Relations and a Gender Analysis

Those of us who research the theme of 'gender and armed conflict' - and there are by now many such researchers in many countries - are often asked 'what difference does it make if you use a gender analysis to study war?' To begin to answer the question, each of us needs to make clear, at the outset, what we mean by 'gender'.

In this article<sup>1</sup> I use the term gender in the sense of a social relation - the relation between 'women' and 'men' as social beings. In this sense the gender relation is one of differentiation and complementarity - masculine qualities are precisely 'not-feminine', and *vice versa*. As well as a relation between people, the gender relation is one between qualities and values, the contrasted and complementary attributes of masculine and feminine, ascribed to individuals and to other phenomena. The gender relation shapes human bodies, behaviours, discourses and cultures. And it is of course simultaneously shaped by and changed through those things.

Jill Matthews, and others after her, have used the abstract term 'gender order' to suggest a systematicity in relations of gender in human society, and a power relation inherent in them, at the large societal scale (Matthews, 1984:13). But of course the particular form taken by the gender relation between men and women, masculinity and femininity, varies from culture to culture, society to society, and from one historical period to another. It is useful therefore to use the term 'gender regime', proposed by R.W. Connell, to specify the set of gender relations prevailing in a given culture, such as that of an organisation or institution (Connell, 1987:120).

In current societies of which we have knowledge, men and masculinity are dominant over women and femininity - but the degree and dimensions of differentiation, complementarity and inequality differ widely. Gender relations could in theory be woman-dominant, or they could minimise difference and inequality between the sexes. But those circumstances would not obviate the need for a concept of gender and gender relations with which to detail a society and its system of power.

A male-dominant gender order in Europe has survived several transformations of the economic system, the mode of production. But the detail of its operation has changed in certain ways. It is appropriate to call the male-dominant system of feudal and monarchical times 'patriarchy': a system characterised by a hierarchy of men whose social power is founded on and derived from their authority as head of family. In the historical shift from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, relations between men changed (and equalised) more than relations between men and women. The gender order of Europe continued to a male-dominant system. But Carole Pateman shows how, along with the shift in class structures brought by capitalism, and in ways of thinking brought by the movement known as 'the Enlightenment', a form of male dominance effected through father-right gave way to one achieved through the dominance of men as such. She suggests the new system might more accurately be termed 'fratriarchy', the rule of the brothers (Pateman, 1988). But 'patriarchy' has remained the popular term for the gender relations we live, so that many feminist thinkers and writers also use it.

As to using gender analytically, I believe it is important to distinguish gender analysis from a simple gender awareness. Gender awareness is always endemic in society, in the sense that a social differentiation between the sexes is taken for granted. It is seen as natural, as deriving from human biological dimorphism (two differentiated biological forms mating for reproduction). Women are viewed as one kind of person, and as 'naturally' engaging in one kind of behaviour and activity. Men are seen as another kind of person, as 'naturally' engaging in a different kind of behaviour and activity. In everyday life, one needs only to comment on gender when the pattern is broken, when someone flies in the face of what is supposed as natural.

This unproblematised view of gender is what I term gender awareness. I would define gender *analysis* as something quite different. A gender analysis begins only with the asking of a feminist question: *why* the difference? The question implies a refusal to accept biological dimorphism as the whole story, and probes for social reasons and processes. A feminist gender analysis follows up this question with an observation: gender complementarity does not result in equality. Women suffer disadvantage, and worse, from gender differentiation. When we observe this we begin to detect a power relation in gender.

Our gender analysis has become more penetrating over time, as we have learned from each other in different countries and continents how male power works now and has worked in the past, in evolving but coherently enduring formulations. We have learned from each other in different political traditions. Socialist women (we could cite for example Zillah Eisenstein (1979) among many others) have shown convincingly how patriarchal power, gender power, interacts with and multiplies economic power (class power) and imperialist power (which is class operating worldwide). Eco-feminists (such as Maria Mies, 1986) have suggested that women and nature are in a sense both colonised by men. Postmodernist feminist scholars (such as Linda Nicholson, 1990) have shown us how important are discourse, representation and symbolism to gender power - and how we get caught up in oppressing ourselves.

### **Bringing a Gender Lens to Bear on Violent Conflict**

How then could a feminist gender analysis shift our perception of violent conflict? As an illustration, I will recount a moment in recent British history. In 1991 there was an outbreak of rioting in some British cities. Some of the rioting had to do with ethnicity. Black minority people had long felt aggrieved by their neglect, their impoverishment, the discrimination against them in British society. Some white people resented the presence of ethnic minorities. These incidents, that were quickly termed 'urban riots', involved looting, breaking into shops, stealing and burning cars. The 'rioters' were in conflict with the police, who were deployed on the streets in large numbers. There were violent clashes.

The newspaper analysis of these events was in terms of race or of age (many of those involved were mere teenagers). It took a feminist journalist, Beatrix Campbell, to point out that the rioters were also *male*, and that this was significant (Campbell, 1993). There was something here about masculine expectations, masculine ways of doing things, masculine violence, masculine cultures. But she took her analysis further in pointing out that the police were also men, who trained and formed their recruits in masculine cultures. Their willingness to 'take on' the young black men (and a lot of them showed considerable relish in doing this) was an expression of

masculinity. Campbell spoke of the lads and the police having a 'shared predilection for masculine company and mastery', and a similar 'compulsion to take control, to overcome' (Campbell, 1993:190). In a way, two groups of males were hyping each other up to more and more violence.

This was not merely an interesting observation. Seeing things this way would actually lead to entirely different, gender analytical, policies for dealing with the situation - a gender strategy. One might, for instance, seek to change police cultures as well as youth cultures.

Having begun with these thoughts about gender and gender analysis, and the example of a local, small scale, kind of violence, I would like to go on to show the kind of phenomena that come to view when we take a gender lens to warfare and peace processes.

One of the questions I would like to address in this article is 'can women contribute to the peace process?' There is a short answer to the question and a longer answer. The short answer has to be 'yes - of course women can and do contribute to peace processes, although they are seldom prominent'. When people are busy trying themselves to end a war, the world watches on their TV screens important people doing serious things, and few among these important people are women. Madeleine Albright has sometimes represented the United States. Hanan Ashrawi was at one time spokesperson for the Palestine Liberation Organisation. But numerically the principal actors are almost all men.

In one sense perhaps we should not be too troubled that women are usually absent from top-level peace manoeuvres. We could in any case be a bit sceptical of the self-styled 'peacemakers'. Very often they are the war-makers themselves – Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, the two men who must be held most responsible for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, were among the signatories of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the fighting in Bosnia. The brokers of peace may be international figures, the President of the United States, the Prime Ministers of certain Western countries, whose strategic and economic interests may have been one of the causes of the collapse into war in the first place.

There is, however, a longer answer to the question 'can women contribute to peace processes' - and it is more interesting. It involves defining 'peace process' to include a great many more activities than top-level negotiations alone, and a lot more moments than the mere signing of a ceasefire. I shall return to that thought in a moment.

Meanwhile, to think about peace we should begin by thinking about war. And not

just thinking about women in war, but about *gender*, about patterns of relations existing in society between the sexes, between women and men, and how these feature in war. War is a highly gendered phenomenon. We might think about some of the phases in the cycle of war and peace, and see how men and women are differently situated in them.

### **The Approach of War: Gender in Militarisation**

Consider the years before armed conflict breaks out – when war is still on the horizon. In preparation for war, a country becomes more militarised. It is possible to see a closer relation between political and military elites, and sometimes the regime may actually be a military dictatorship. Men, and sometimes women, are probably required to serve periods of compulsory military service. The police force grows in size and reach. A rhetoric of national security is prevalent, and there is greater secrecy. There may be new censorship laws, limiting freedom of expression and movement.

As a society militarises it necessarily loses democratic qualities it may have had. And it simultaneously becomes more patriarchal - men, male qualities and forceful leadership are valued more highly. The dominant culture becomes more masculinist. Patriarchy and militarism go hand in hand, and both are always bad news for democracy and for women.

In fact, because of this, we may make the error of thinking militarisation makes its demands only on men. But Cynthia Enloe has written perceptively about how women are involved in militarism and militarisation (Enloe, 2000). She does not mean by this only the first thing that might come to mind: the recruitment of women into the military. Rather, she reminds us that for the military to obtain and keep the number and kind of men in its ranks that officials believe they need, military policy makers are obliged to control women in many aspects of their civilian lives. Very particular concepts of womanhood (she says) have to be sustained if the plans of the militarists are to succeed.

In what way do militarist politicians need to control women? First and foremost, of course, as wives and mothers. Women must support their soldier sons and husbands when they put loyalty to national defence before staying home with the family. And it is the case that military planners want to attract women as recruits to expand national armies – but for the most part not as soldiers, but in routine support jobs. They also need women to take on the occupations normally filled by men, so as to release males to fill the ranks of the armed forces. They need women to work in factories producing uniforms and weapons.

And they need women to love men in uniform. Cynthia Enloe writes about how deeply into a society we have to look to judge whether and how much it is militarised, how deeply it has affected our culture. We even have to ask ourselves: is a man in uniform seen as specially attractive? Does a girl like to be seen on his arm, walking in the street? That is one measure of the status of military in society.

Militarisation is accompanied by high expenditure on arms. This is often at the expense of spending on public services, including health and education that are of particular importance to women, given their customary role in the family. In the main, poor countries spend much more of their national product on arms than rich countries. And the more arms are current in a society, the more volatile the political situation and the more vulnerable the peace - and women. Daniel Volman, thinking about the build up to the recent wars experienced in Africa, points to the massive flow of arms, particularly cheap individual weapons, into that continent in the previous thirty years. He writes, 'Africa today is literally awash in arms, particularly guns and other light weaponry of the sort that have much more impact on thesecurity and daily lives of civilians, *especially women*, than tanks and combat aircraft' (Volman, 1998, my italics).

And as Volman says, women do very directly suffer from the arming of society. Domestic violence often increases as societal tensions grow. It is more common, and it is more deadly, when men carry weapons. In the build-up to the war in the former Yugoslavia, groups providing support to women victims of domestic violence in Belgrade reported a significant increase in phone calls to their help line. They noticed that the violence against women in the home was happening particularly after jingoistic TV programmes, showing militaries and fighting, with exaggerated appeals to national honour (Maguire, 1998). At the same time, in Zagreb, Croatian women were noticing a change in the seriousness of the violence against women in the home, related to more men going armed. They said: 'No more wooden sticks, shoes and other "classic" instruments of violence, but guns, bombs etc... Everybody has weapons' (Boric and Desnica, 1996:136).

It is worth noting in passing that arms dealing involves a shadowy and notably masculine world of crooks and criminals. And often these are the very same men that are involved in the exploitation of local prostitution and the international 'trafficking' of women. This latter trade, involving transportation, buying and selling of women into sexual servitude, a business organised and managed by men, has grown rapidly in recent years, and much of the provision of sexual services is aimed at soldiers, including international peace-keeping forces.

Militarisation is a step by step process, Cynthia Enloe writes, 'by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, and derives its value from the military

as an institution, or militaristic criteria'. But, she adds, what has been militarised can be demilitarised.

So looking at this period before wars even begin, we can already see several ways women can and do counteract the tendencies they see leading their country into war. I think we can rightly see this resistance as preventive work women contribute to peace processes. A woman, even one woman alone, can simply fail to be the kind of 'proper woman' the state wants her to be at this moment. She may be sceptical of the military posturing, be not at all thrilled at the idea of her man wearing a uniform and carrying a gun. She may tell her husband to sew his own buttons on that uniform.

But this one woman can do more if she organises with other women around a feminist antimilitarist agenda. Together for instance they might write in to the media, or phone in to a radio chat show, to complain about cuts in expenditure on social benefits and services due to increased national spending on the military. They might go public in their objection to men bringing guns and grenades into the home. They might organise a 'zero tolerance' campaign against violence by men against women. They might as parents demand the removal of national propaganda from the school curriculum, or a ban on army recruiters coming into schools and showing off their equipment to susceptible children and teenagers.

Women are often the ones who resist the dangerous language that starts to be used in a build-up to war. When nationalism is being invoked by political leaders, there is greater stress on patriarchal familial ideology, deepening the differentiation of men and women, masculinity and femininity, preparing men to fight and women to support them. The more 'nation' and 'people' are invoked as some kind of essential and primordial realities, the more relations between men and women are essentialised too (Yuval-Davis, 1997, Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). Columnists in popular newspapers remind women that biology and tradition make them the natural keepers of hearth and home, to nurture and teach children 'our ways'.

So - we have seen how patriarchy and militarism are linked. But here we can add a third linked element: ethno-nationalism. All three are both ideologies and social structures. All three thrive on, require, enhance and increase men's dominance. All three are perpetuated through masculine cultures. Through their discourses men are reminded that they are the physically strong ones, that their natural job is to protect 'their' women and children. To protect the ethnic nation, too, of course, which is often represented as 'the motherland'. Through this retelling of old gender tales, men are readied to give their lives. And women are readied for losing their husbands and sons, so they will not rebel against the state for sending them to their deaths. Birth-rates come to be seen as strategically important. This kind of dis-

course increased vastly in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s, before the outbreak of war, and it was only women, feminists specifically, who took it seriously as a warning of war.

In these kinds of pre-conflict moments we are discussing, an ethic of 'purity' can sometimes grip people's minds and it can legitimate a political 'purification' of the state, a rooting-out of its internal enemies, and a sweeping away from the land of those people who are seen as alien. The term 'ethnic cleansing' was not used until the Yugoslav wars. But the process, and the ideology, had of course existed in other ethno-nationalist wars before.

Purity is a dangerous ethic for women. In extreme forms of patriarchy men's honour is seen as depending on women's 'purity' to such an extent that women who try to escape this strict code, or who inadvertently fall, or are dragged, from the code of so-called honour, can be killed by their menfolk, and the men do not merely go unpunished but are praised for it (for example Butalia, 1997).

For women, in such circumstances, the threshold of war is lower than for men. A woman experiencing domestic violence might say, 'Don't talk to me about war. My whole life is a battlefield'. We can see here an important point: simply in asserting their own human rights as women, women may rightly be seen as contributing to peace processes.

### **Gender in War and in Opposition to War**

Let us move on now from the pre-war moment, and think about the next phase in the cycle, when a cold war becomes a hot war, when fighting starts. We can see how this is gendered too. We might think of recent wars in Bosnia, in Mozambique and in Palestine. The terrible conflict Cyprus has experienced is likely to have involved a similar gendering.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, men, the majority of them, were caught up in the fighting. Rather few women actually fought, though some were enlisted in support roles. Some men were already under arms when the fighting began, serving in the very big Yugoslav National Army. Those who were not already enlisted were rounded up on the orders of nationalist politicians into militias, forced to join local units in defence of their own town or village. Of course some men actually wanted this war. Some actually conceived the plan and directed war strategy. Some relished the killing. Some raped. (Of the many detailed accounts of this war, I will cite only Woodward, 1995, for instance, and Stiglmayer, 1995.)

The Bosnian war was gendered in another way too. When a population was cap-



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tured by the enemy side, men and women were treated differently. Men were more often simply shot, others were imprisoned and tortured. Women were sometimes held in schools or hotels, converted into brothels, where they were held in a kind of sexual enslavement, and raped continuously over many weeks.

Women in fact were characteristically the 'war victims'. In many ways the Bosnian war was a war waged against women and the feminine. 'Ethnic cleansing' is war against everyday life, involving the specific destruction of the homesteads, animals, gardens, shops and markets that are the basis of family life. Women were the majority of those who became 'refugees' and 'internally displaced people'. These were shockingly unanticipated identities for women who had lived their previous lives in a modern, developed country. Nothing had prepared them for this.

In all wars - and this has been well documented in Mozambique for instance which had a very long and terrible war between 1976 and 1992 (Jacobson, 1999) - men and boy children are the ones who leave the home, and get killed and imprisoned in large numbers. It is women and girls who have the task of helping the very young and the very old to survive in a wrecked economy. Women's strength is pitted in a daily struggle for shelter, food and health. They have to heal themselves and other women after sexual abuse; keep their children safe from unexploded shells and landmines; support each other in the long search for surviving relatives and friends. Eventually, they have to come to terms with the fact that many are never going to come back and that they are now this thing called a 'single parent', and 'head of household'. This has been a gender-specific reality for many Cypriots too.

This difference in the experience of war on the part of women and men accounts for particular kinds of activity by women in response to war. Often women's organisation starts with mutual help, distributing food aid, improving their refugee camps, therapy for rape survivors. But sometimes, even in the middle of a war, women are organising against war. Men may be the typical fighters. But there are always men who refuse to be enlisted into the military. Usually they do this out of a belief that their state or their movement is wrong in what it is fighting for, or that fighting is not the right way to obtain it.

In Israel currently there are not a few Israeli Jewish men of military age declaring themselves 'conscientious objectors', and some Israeli Jewish mothers and wives supporting them. They are refusing combat roles in what they consider unjust actions by the Israeli military against Palestinians. There are several organisations that support these COs. One is called New Profile. Its members are predominantly women, but the membership does not exclude men. New Profile is opposed to the Occupation and to the militarism of Israeli society. Interestingly, notwithstanding the inclusion of men, indeed recognising thereby the gendered nature of

war and war refusal, it calls itself a 'feminist' organisation.

Also, sometimes, when a war is seen as unjust and unwarranted, women actively and publicly organise protests against the pursuit of war by their governments. There is a very old and long-lived organisation (it was founded in response to the horrors of the first world war) called the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*. More recently, and more radically, we have seen the growth of a network of women worldwide called *Women in Black against War*. The author is one of the coordinating group of a Women in Black network in London. Women in Black started in Israel and Palestine in 1985, with weekly vigils against the Occupation. The network spread to Italy where there are many members. And to Yugoslavia: Women in Black in Belgrade bravely demonstrated in the city centre every Wednesday for eight years against the Milosevic regime's role in the wars in that region. There are Women in Black groups in different cities in the USA, in Spain, Belgium and many other countries.<sup>2</sup>

The London group of Women in Black see their role as monitoring the British government's policies and their effects on war processes and peace processes in their own or others' countries. They have often held protest vigils in Trafalgar Square when it was felt the British government was blindly following the USA into military actions, effectively taking Britain into war without consulting British voters. A year-long campaign was organised in 2000 for the ending of sanctions against Iraqi people - which Women in Black consider a continuation of war against Saddam Hussein's regime that is quite wrongly being conducted by means of starving ordinary Iraqis and depriving them of medicines - with particularly dire effects on women and their children.

We have to ask why do women, like those of Women in Black, sometimes choose to organise without men as women opposed to war? It is because they have made a gender analysis of violence. They have detected a link between the occasional violence of war and a perennial violence against women: masculine cultures and patriarchal systems are implicated in both. Gender relations need challenging, such women think, along with militarist relations.

### **Redefining Peace Processes**

These women's anti-war actions can be seen as part of the overall contribution of women to peace processes. But there is a more important, more sustained and less visible contribution that women make. As I suggested earlier in this article, we can see more of women contributing to peace processes if we broaden our definition of these processes. Let us say that when we talk about peace *making* we mean such specific activities as negotiations for ceasefire, 'proximity talks' and confer-

ences for peace agreements. We then need another word for the kind of grassroots work by many ordinary people that goes on in the background, out of sight of the media, even out of sight of politicians, long before and long after those high profile moments of peace making.

Sometimes this grassroots work is called 'peace *building*, or 'building constituencies for peace'. Already thirty years ago Adam Curle was making this kind of distinction in identifying 'development' as one of the key components of work for peace. He meant the restructuring of conflictual relationships from below, community development 'to create as he put it 'a situation, a society or a community in which individuals are enabled to develop and use to the full their capacities for creativity, service and enjoyment. Unless development in this sense can take place, no settlement will lead to a secure and lasting peace' (Curle, 1971).

I believe the decision made recently<sup>3</sup> by Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot women to set up twin non-governmental organisations to further women's activities simultaneously in the two communities, under a bi-communal umbrella, could prove to be precisely this kind of peace-building work through grassroots development.

But I will illustrate with an example from a country I am more familiar with: my own. There is a war in the UK, as some of you know only too well. It is a relic of colonialism, and it is largely acted out in Northern Ireland. But not only there. It affects the Republic of Ireland too. The violence involves the British state and two political movements, the one, associated with Catholics, an expression of Irish nationalism, the other, associated with Protestants, struggling to retain the union with Britain. Northern Ireland, and particularly Belfast, the principal city, is marked by deep territorial segregation and enmity between the two communities.

There are some very ordinary working class women living in the poorer parts of the city of Belfast who have, my research shows, made a very significant contribution to peace building (Cockburn, 1998). Belfast does not have just one line running through it, like Nicosia. It is a patchwork of little districts, either 'Protestant' or 'Catholic'. (I use these problematic words in quotation marks, as I believe we always should use ethnic or national names. They are mere identity tags. Can we know, unless we ask and listen carefully to the reply, what any one person called a Catholic or a Protestant feels her real self and her real belonging to be?)

At the height of the fighting in the eighties and nineties, each of these little Belfast districts was ringed around by a line. Sometimes these have been actual physical walls, similar to the walls in parts of the Nicosia buffer zone, constructed by the British army for purposes of pacification. In other cases the lines were marked with symbolic colours and images, painted on pavements, lamp posts and walls by local

people. When I worked among them in 1996, each neighbourhood lived in fear of its neighbour across the line. These communities were dominated by groups of armed men, feeling the need to defend their own people against the other, or against the British state.

Women told me how they had started setting up women's community centres *inside* the confines of their own sectarian communities. The male political and military leaders did not like this much, it has to be said. Especially when some of these women at a certain moment started to think politically for themselves, instead of letting men, in the customary way, decide what was and what was not thinkable. Around 1991 or 1992, they sensed that a permanent ceasefire had become a possibility. Cross-communal contact looked more possible, and could help to push the peace process forward. The question was: who could afford to step over these dangerous lines? For men it was almost impossible. They were too caught up in political parties and the *military* commands. The women saw that a way forward might be easier for them than for their menfolk. Some of the women's community centres in the different districts (Catholic/Republican, Protestant/Unionist) gradually formed an alliance, supporting each other, working at first, not directly for this dangerous thing called 'peace with justice', but for ordinary everyday things they could talk to each other about. We might read the recent moves among Cypriot women in a similar light.

They found things they had in common as women living in poor housing, as women having to deal with the police, prisons, government departments and local councils, women suffering violence. They learned to be very alert to external conditions, such as how much violence there had been this week. They learned to be sensitive to the level of confidence among them. And so they were able gradually to extend their mutual agenda, the matters they could talk to each other about, from politics with a small 'p', the politics of daily life, to politics with a big 'P', matters of parties, representation, borders, state constitutions.

Some people think the work of women such as these played a significant part in the peace process in Northern Ireland. The process, it has to be said, was unusually consultative. Opinion was widely canvassed. And it was due to the matters raised by women in the consultation, in the coalitions they effected, in the lobbying they did, that notions of equity, fairness and inclusiveness got built into the Good Friday Agreement. Equality, what is more, meant equality between the sexes as well as between ethno-national groups. The Northern Ireland peace agreement is rather unusual in being concerned not only with stopping the fighting but with the *quality* of a future peaceful society.

So Northern Ireland may be seen as a good example of how, in wars that involve

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ethnic communities living adjacent to each other in fear and enmity, sometimes the ground for peace can be prepared by grassroots work in which people of goodwill keep open lines of contact and communication. And women are well placed to be those people - in Cyprus as elsewhere.

Finally it is important to stress that this foundational work by women in the building of a peaceful society is not all 'emotional stuff'. We should not believe those who say 'women are natural peacemakers', 'women are born pacifists' - on the grounds that they are the sex that mainly care for children and nurse the sick. Can we really say women's biology makes us nurturing and sensitive? If we believe that, how do we explain caring men - or violent women? Experience shows that both sexes are capable of almost any kind of behaviour.

It is true however that women do often prove themselves as peace-builders, working at local level, even if they do not often get invited to participate at higher levels. But it is important to recognise that women are not being particularly emotional. Peace building is not a 'soft' option. On the contrary, they are exercising intelligence and courage.

What women in war zones, including Cypriot women, have taught me is that the reason women's responses sometimes differ from those of men is: *women learn from women's lives*. Women's life experience (*not* their biology), the way their faculties have been schooled, gives them a potential for a very special kind of intelligence that I would call *social intelligence*; and a very special kind of courage, *social courage*.

What do I mean by social intelligence? Of course women are people whose intelligence is manifest across the spectrum. Women make good mathematicians, good scientists, good artists. But our lives as women may have taught us a special additional intelligence – intelligence in social relationships. Because we are the ones who have characteristically had responsibility for keeping the family and the community together, while men have characteristically pursued politics, administration and war, we have learned the words and gestures, the thoughts and behaviours, that can foster understanding and heal rifts.

And social courage? Of course women, like men, can show bravery in threatening circumstances. But I am thinking of a rather different kind of courage that women's typical gendered experience of life, women's gendered cultures, may have given them. That is the courage needed to cross those other 'green lines', the ones drawn inside our heads – our own heads and those of 'the other'. To find ways of opening minds and visualising new futures. And the intelligence to do so safely and productively. Many Cypriot women demonstrate this kind of courage and intelli-

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gence in their persistent attempts to establish bi-communal contact and co-operation, and it has been my privilege to learn from them.

**Notes**

1. In March 2001 the author visited Cyprus to facilitate a bi-communal seminar of women on 'Communication in Divided Societies: What Women Can Do'. She arranged for the participation in the seminar of women from three other regions, each of which has, like Cyprus, experienced partition. Thus, women came from the island of Ireland, from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Israel/Palestine to exchange with Cypriot women their experience, as women, of crossing borders and healing divisions.

The seminar was funded by the United Kingdom High Commission and organised by the British Council. Approximately 40 women attended each of the two days, the first at Intercollege, the second at the Cyprus International University. Only ten women however were permitted by the authorities in northern Cyprus to cross the line in each direction, thus reducing the level of bi-communality of the event.

This article is based on the author's introductory address to the seminar, and lectures given the following week at Intercollege and the University of Cyprus. The talks were designed to deal with some issues underlying the theme of the seminar. In the spirit of the seminar itself, illustrative material is drawn from several different countries, wars and partition experiences, as a prompt to fresh insights into women's potential contribution to peace in Cyprus.

2. In 2000, Women in Black were awarded a Millennium Women's Peace Prize by the United Nations agency UNIFEM and the international non-governmental organisation International Alert.

3. The outcome of the bi-communal women's seminar of March 2001 was a decision to establish a non-governmental organisational structure in which Cypriot women would pursue bi-communal and international activity to gain, and put to use for purposes of peace-building, the human right of freedom of movement, contact and communication in Cyprus.

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