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The Contribution of Women to Peace and Reconciliation

Two major issues involving women have been incorporated into the official discourse on war and peace since the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the UN in 2000 (1), and the passage in 2008 of UN Resolution 1820 on the criminal prosecution of sexualized wartime violence (2). These are the issues of the rape of women as a measure of war, and the participation of women in the construction of peace processes in the context of Women's Leadership. Women experts are incorporated into the international court teams for conflict management, and in specific projects (cf. e.g. Kennedy School of Governance, ISIS Europe), and further training strategies for women from conflict regions are being tested, so that their participation can be secured in the construction of civil structures. "A long, tedious international struggle of women has achieved successes in recent years. At the international level, both in the international tribunals and now at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, perpetrators are being prosecuted judicially for raping women. ... However, the situation of witnesses in international criminal courts is ... difficult from a humanitarian point of view; protection and support are woefully inadequate." (Medica Mondiale, Cologne 2008, p. 11). In an overall accounting, the expert women from many countries at the conference organized in 2008 by Medica Mondiale concluded that in spite of the fact that these criminal acts are internationally, and often even nationally recognized, "women often experience justice systems as inadequate or inaccessible – or even as incapable or unwilling to provide justice to female survivors of rape and other forms of sexualized violence. The inaccessibility of the established justice system is an ongoing problem. These systems are often far removed from the places of residence of women, speak languages foreign to those women, treat women in a hostile manner, and provide no security measures, so that women remain in an unsafe and vulnerable position. Often, participation in legal proceedings is a discouraging experience, and turns the survivors into victims once again." (ibid., p. 33).

This shows that in spite of international recognition of sexual violence as criminal activity, judicial procedures for dealing with such violence is, to phrase it cautiously, often not in a position to do very much to restore the dignity of the women and girls concerned. The fact that it seems so difficult to do justice to the existential human interests of women, even in cases of crimes, may be an indication of the fact of how much more difficult it is to understand societal reality in violent conflicts and wars as power relationships in which gender reality is just as much a constituent part as economic, ethnic nationalistic or religious facts. The primary task is therefore to really root the experience and solution strategies of women as central in conflict transformation strategies.

The international peace movements, by contrast, depend on resistance to war in the conflict regions themselves, but also in the western centres which are involved directly and indirectly in regional conflicts and wars both via the weapons industry and via concrete power interests. But in these multifarious movements and networks, the women's networks have a specific orientation: "It's the perception that militarism, militarization and war are – only in part, but very significantly – driven and perpetuated by gender relations. Economic factors, like oil or diamonds, drive war, yes. Ethno-national factors like the desire to kill all the Muslims in India, or all Christians and animists in Sudan, yes, they too drive war. But gender factors do also. I emphasize also: This is not to substitute a gender analysis of war for the mainstream analysis, but to propose it as an intrinsic, interwoven, inescapable part of the story." "...As far as militarization and war are concerned I think it's safe to say that (1) economic power, (2) ethnic or national power embodied in community, religious and state structures, and (3) gender power, are the most significant and influential dimensions of power." (Cockburn, p. 1, p. 9, 2008). And further, Cynthia Cockburn: "We need to see warfare as social. War may be deadly, but it's rational. It involves a degree of shared understanding between the warring factions. Only if we understand it this way, can we tease out, among the other relations, those of gender."

War as a social fact, she says, is not only embedded in social structures, but could also be considered a systemic fact; moreover, it is possible to see war as a certain phase in a sequence of conditions which operate as a continuum. This could mean for example, that the participants in civil wars

no longer see their goal as being the battle against the enemy, but rather that they have an interest in the continuation of the war and the long-term institutionalization of violence as such. Cockburn reflects on violent conflict and war in the context of patriarchal societal structures, and concludes: "The case rests more firmly on the patriarchal gender relation itself, which is a relation as much between masculinity and femininity as between men and women, a relation of dichotomy and complementarity, hetero-normative, of domination and subordination, characterized by coercion and violence. It's the gender order itself that meshes with the war system in interesting and significant ways." (Cockburn, 2008, pp. 1-5).

Often however, the patriarchal social structures which oppress women also permit them to maintain more subtle social relationships, even in conflict situations. "I know women who exercise leadership not only in NGOs, but also through their own autonomous action at the community level. Precisely because of the gendered way in which they are raised, women have highly developed skills for communication and relationship, and are well practised as bridge builders within the family and community." (Francis, *Open Democracy*, Feb. 2010). Here, women often use subversive tactics to protect their families.

Diana Francis takes up these demands and formulates as the general demand to processes of conflict transformation: "The practitioners and theoreticians of conflict transformation, if they are to be true to their calling, must develop analysis and strategy for transforming the global structures and practices of violence, in a process of global demilitarization that includes minds as well as societies, promoting a very different approach to what is now called 'foreign policy', and a new understanding of power. This is what 'working to scale' requires. It is the only realistic response to the current global nature of the problem." (Francis, *OD* Nov. 2009).

The web discussions on OpenDemocracy address in a concentrated manner the multiplicity of the very different peace movements worldwide. Instead of complaining about their splintered nature, the participants believe that very flexibly and informally organized networks are most meaningful, providing "quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place" (Diana Francis, Sept. 2010). Here, she also addresses the necessity for stronger ties between resistance movements in the development of strategies for solutions: "War resisters and peace policy

advocates must keep finding opportunities to talk to each other and experiment with working together, so that our connections can make us more powerful". (Francis, OD, Sept. 2010)

At the concluding symposium of the Committee for Conflict Transformation Support (CCTS) in 2009 (CCTS Review 41, London, Dec. 2009), Diana Francis presented the results of the work of the CCTS on conflict transformation. She referred to the fact that difference and changes in societal conditions of life are part of the human condition, and that conflicts are therefore often inevitable – especially with regard to fighting injustice and repression. The goal of conflict transformation is therefore not stability and pacification, but rather the well-being and development of societies: "Conflict is potentially constructive, and sometimes necessary to changing things that are unjust. Constructive conflict seeks solutions that address the rights and needs of all who are involved, paving the way for cooperation. Violence contradicts the values of respect and coexistence, so nonviolent methods must be used." (CCTS, 2009, p. 9).

She argues that nonviolent action is not exclusive, but rather inclusive, and gains its power from the participation of the people, both of the weak and of the strong, that it begins with the process of consciousness-raising about the reasons for the existing situation and about the possible collective actions which could change that situation: "No large-scale, well resourced and internationally supported nonviolent action force stands ready to take on such roles to protect and support local people" (ibid., p.11), she points out, but then asks whether it really makes more sense to have armies oppress the entire world? Basically, what is needed is a different understanding of human security and well-being: "We can never be more than relatively and temporarily secure, even those of us who live in the rich world. Learning to live with our insecurity, creatively and caringly, will make far more of us infinitely safer than trying to control the uncontrollable." (ibid., p.11). The major task for peace activists and researchers is, she says, to deconstruct war as a structure. In a chart, Francis counterposes two very different worldviews of "peace building" and "pacification".

While Cynthia Cockburn and Diana Francis address the practice of the peace movements and conflict transformation in the context of a feminist analysis of society, philosopher Judith Butler examined societal power

structures and the basic conditions for war and peace. She assumes that we think and act within certain frames, which are the result of power oriented strategies. It is within the context of these frames that we perceive the lives of others as being destroyed or damaged – or not. Since any limit also includes breaks, the opportunity exists to shift these frames and to raise the question of how our limits of perception can be shifted, for “to say that a life is injurable, for instance, or that it can be lost, destroyed, or systematically neglected to the point of death, is to underscore not only the finitude of a life (that death is certain), but also its precariousness (that life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life). Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the other.” (Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* 2009, pp. 13-14). “Simply put, life requires support and enabling conditions in order to be liveable life.” (ibid., p. 21). Butler distinguishes precariousness and precarity, and points out: “Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. In some sense, this is a feature of all life, and there is no thinking of life that is not precarious – except, of course, in fantasy, and in military fantasies in particular. ... Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.” (ibid., p. 25). For Butler, recognizing precariousness as a basic fact of human life is a prerequisite for developing empathy for the suffering of others. “For populations to become grievable does not require that we come to know the singularity of every person who is at risk or who has, indeed, already been risked. Rather, it means that policy needs to understand precariousness as a shared condition, and precarity is the politically induced condition that would deny equal exposure through the radically unequal distribution of wealth and the differential ways of exposing certain populations, racially and nationally conceptualized, to greater violence. The recognition of shared precariousness introduces strong normative commitments of the quality and invites a more robust and universalizing of rights that seeks to address basic human needs for food, shelter, and other conditions for persisting and flourishing.” (ibid., pp. 28-9). This right, she says, is universal. In the wars currently being fought however, human lives are separated into those “whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives

are mourned, and [those] whose lives are considered non-grievable ... that cannot be mourned because [they] never lived, ... never counted as a life at all." (ibid., p. 38). The reason why we have no right to destroy the other is due to our subjective nature, which binds us as a subject to each other subject, as well as the realization "that we each have the power to destroy and to be destroyed, and that we are bound to one another in this power and this precariousness." (ibid., p. 43).

Butler argues for radical rethinking of nonviolence. Nonetheless: "Violence and non-violence are not only strategies or tactics, but form the subject and become its constitutive possibilities." (ibid., p. 165). And: "Non-violence ... denotes the mired and conflicted position of a subject who is injured, rageful, disposed to violent retribution and nevertheless struggles against that action." (ibid., p. 171). For Butler, "non-violence is not a peaceful state, but a social and political struggle to make a rage articulate and effective – the carefully crafted 'fuck you'." (ibid., p. 182).

But move reflects societal power structures with reference to the war-making capability of our societies, just as feminist peace researchers and activists insist that the social gender constructs of patriarchy are an essential factor for training society for war-making capability. in order to develop the peace capability of a society, it is necessary – and this is where it transcends the classical woman centred approaches – that the threat to human life as a fundamental fact be recognized, a threat which cannot be countered by armaments, walling oneself in, or heroism, since only the recognition of that fact as a basic fact of human existence makes it possible to comprehend "the radically egalitarian character of grievability" (ibid., p. 183) – and thus to permit the opportunity of a change of society towards peace capability and reconciliation.

Butler's philosophical approach forms a matrix on the basis of which concrete analyses and options for action can be organized in new frames, and an extended democratic practice for the development of peace capability can be motivated.

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