Peacebuilding as a Gendered Process

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Peacebuilding is frequently viewed in terms of post-conflict societal reconstruction without consideration of cultural context and gender. Using a feminist participatory methodology, this study investigated South African women's understandings of peacebuilding and how these are mediated by gender and context. Sixteen women engaged in dialogue over 2 days. Thematic analysis of the recorded dialogue provided insight into how the 16 South African women leaders understand their efforts to build a more peaceful society. The findings pointed to gender- and context-specific aspects of peacebuilding. Most of participants' peacebuilding activities occurred outside of the aegis of national governmental institutions and their peacebuilding priorities focused less upon structural rebuilding and more on processes, people, and relationships. One of the important priorities was the prevention of violence toward women. Whether these findings are gender-specific and contextually unique are topics for future research.

International bodies and governmental organizations typically view peace-building in terms of post-conflict reconstruction of societal infrastructures and action-based approaches to peacemaking and structural rebuilding of institutions and infrastructures is frequently emphasized (e.g., see Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, 1997). Infrequently addressed within these discourses is that peacebuilding is both culture-specific and gendered. Recent research indicates that people build peace utilizing processes that are meaningful within the contexts of their own culture. Furthermore, women may have distinct

issues and processes from men (Anderlini, 2000; Mazurana & McKay, 1999; McKay & de la Rey, 2001; McKay & Mazurana, 2001; United Nations [UN], 2002).

Although peace psychologists have explored the significance of non-Western cultural peacebuilding traditions and practices, few have investigated the intersection between culture and gender within distinct national contexts. Emergent discourses within peace psychology and other disciplines acknowledge the importance of gender as a marker of social difference, a response to women's historical exclusion from disciplines such as psychology, peace studies, and international relations (i.e., McKay, 1995, 1996; McKay & de la Rey, 2001).

Gender and Peace

Even though feminist scholars have stressed how women have been historically excluded from disciplines such as psychology, peace studies, and international relations (see, for example, Alonso, 1993; Bohan, 1992; McKay, 1995; Snitow, 1989; Sylvester, 1987; Tickner, 1992), we are consistently reminded that thinking about gender has yet to become integrated into the mainstream thinking within these fields (McKay, 2003). Also, we have observed a lack of emphasis within the field of peace psychology of the intersection between culture and gender within distinct national contexts.

In this study, therefore, we examined the intersection of culture and gender in one cultural context, South Africa. Our intent was to gain insight into how peacebuilding may be both gendered and culturally specific. We wanted to understand peacebuilding priorities from the perspectives of South African women who defined their work as encompassing peacebuilding. We also wanted to understand what meanings these women attributed to peacebuilding and the processes they defined as important to peacebuilding work and to compare these meanings with those commonly used within international forums. We emphasize peacebuilding in contrast to peacemaking, which emphasizes processes such as negotiation, mediation, and the development of peace accords that end armed conflicts (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).

Meanings of Peacebuilding

Although discussions about peacebuilding most commonly occur within international discourses, use of the term "peacebuilding" has become ubiquitous at all levels including within grassroots groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and/or UN bodies. How peacebuilding is defined by these actors varies as do the actual processes and activities they use (Mazurana & McKay, 1999).

International bodies and governmental organizations typically view peacebuilding in terms of post-conflict reconstruction of societal infrastructures and action-based approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding (Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Canadian Center for Foreign Policy Development, 1997). Increasingly, peacebuild-

ing functions are embraced by a broad variety of personnel—from local to international organizations. For example, Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, a Nigerian diplomat who is special representative of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to head the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) asserted that peacekeeping includes peacebuilding and that peacekeeping is far more than preventing fighting: "this generation of peacekeeping. . .is only peacekeeping in name because it involves peacemaking and peacebuilding" (Sierra Leone: IRIN interview with Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, 9 July 2002). More commonly, however, meanings of peacebuilding focus upon nonmilitary functions intended to restore or enhance peace within a given country or region.

Galtung (1976) often has been credited with introducing the idea of peacebuilding as distinct from peacemaking. In his conceptualization, peacebuilding consists of an infrastructure within and between nations that offers alternatives to and removes causes of war. An international emphasis on peacebuilding was promoted when former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali (1992) defined it within his influential treatise *An Agenda for Peace*. In it, Boutros-Ghali differentiated between peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. He emphasized the importance of structural peacebuilding in the post-conflict period, stating its functions: "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 8).

As the concept of peacebuilding took hold, meanings tended to emphasize this structural approach. For example, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) defined peacebuilding

> as the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict. The overarching goal of peacebuilding is to enhance indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence. Peacebuilding may involve a number of activities, including conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and postconflict reconstruction. (Ruecker, 2000, p. 1)

Over time, the structural orientation of peacebuilding has been expanded upon by those who view peacebuilding as encompassing equality and social justice, improved relationships, and meeting of basic needs (Fisher, 1993; Lederach, 1995a, 1995b). Prevention, proactivity, human needs, and eradication of oppression and inequality are all approaches peace psychologists have used in discussing peacebuilding, all reflecting concern with human processes (Abu-Saba, 1999; Christie, 1997; McKay, 1996; Wessells, 1992). Yet, peace psychologists have given little explicit attention to women's views of peacebuilding within their own cultural contexts.

Mazurana and McKay (1999) examined gender and meanings of peacebuilding at UN, NGO, and grassroots levels and concluded that women's peacebuilding is culturally and contextually based and usually located at community and regional levels. Women's peacebuilding interests are likely to be shaped by local and regional concerns. For example, in Sierra Leone, West Africa, women in the Mano

River Women's Peace Network collaborate across national boundaries of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone to foster reconciliation and lasting peace between their countries (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2000). Women resist effects of militarization in the Philippines by opposing the establishment of military detachments and supporting declarations that the community be a demilitarized zone (International Alert, 2000). In South Korea, women are challenging patriarchal norms and practices by advocating against the pervasiveness of militarism and linking it with violence against women, prostitution, and sex trafficking (McKay & Mazurana, 2001). These examples reflect women's oft-emphases upon reconciliation, demilitarization, and calling attention to gender-specific violence and reducing its prevalence.

Increasingly, international actors such as the UN Security Council, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Women Waging Peace, International Alert, and International Fellowship for Reconciliation Women's Peacemakers Program have promoted the critical importance of women's peacebuilding and advocated that women must be included in all aspects of peacebuilding. They argue that women must be central actors in developing peacebuilding initiatives, their influence must not be confined within local and regional women's organizations, and women must be equal participants in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation programs (Anderlini, 2000). The UN Security Council, in October 2000, unanimously adopted Resolution 1325. The Resolution advocated broad participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. It called on all actors who negotiate and implement peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective in considering the needs of women and girls post-conflict and in supporting local women's peace initiatives and indigenous conflict resolution processes. Also, women's involvement in the implementation of peace agreements and their participation at decision-making levels was emphasized (Security Council Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1325, 2000). Resolution 1325's emphasis on human security has served as an impetus and focus for women's peacebuilding activism, which is increasingly understood as culturally specific and gendered in its processes (UN, 2002).

Situated within this context of culturally specific and gendered notions of peace and peacebuilding, our article discusses a qualitative study in which we collected and analyzed data about how a group of South African women understand peacebuilding. Principles of feminist research and participatory research methodology were used in the design of the study.

An issue that has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny and debate within feminist research concerns the role and responsibilities of the researcher in the research process, with special reference to relations of power between the researcher and the researched. Feminist researchers have tried to transform the knowledge-power relations by examining the power relations set up through the research method itself. Many creative strategies have been used to mitigate and challenge

the power relations set up by the research itself. In the broader literature, the shift from designating people as subjects to participants or interviewees reflects an attempt to do research "with" as opposed to "on" people (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). The effort to create nonhierarchical relationships between the researcher and the researched has often resulted in attempts to incorporate participants as co-researchers by engaging in dialogic analytical exchange. This goal informed our thinking about our study of women and peacebuilding in South Africa.

Methodology

Planning

During the planning process, we met with a number of constituencies and individuals and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to learn of their interest and support of a feminist action research project focusing on women and peacebuilding. In all cases, support and keen interest were expressed. Several of these individuals subsequently became members of an advisory group. The methods and procedures were designed by the coinvestigators in consultation with an advisory group to provide guidance throughout the planning process. The group was composed of South African leaders, which meant that, as researchers, we lost direct control of the research agenda. Three half-day meetings with the advisory group led to the organization of a 2-day residential workshop, which constituted the venue for data collection.

Participants

The workshop followed a participatory process, which brought together 16 women leaders in South Africa. A call for applications was sent to organizations with peacebuilding interests, and participants were selected with the intention of bringing together a diverse group of South African women who were involved in peacebuilding. These women came from a range of organizations including religious organizations, human rights groups, and community-based organizations. As individuals they represented diverse ethnic backgrounds, regions, religions, and ages. The age range varied from 24 to 58 years; the group comprised Black, White, and mixed race women who live across the nine provinces of South Africa. In terms of religion, the categories represented were Christian, Jewish, and Muslim.

Data Collection

The residential workshop was held in a meeting hall of an elementary school, a setting that provided a quiet atmosphere for both plenary and breakout sessions. The

workshop process was dialogic and, by this, we mean that participants were active contributors throughout the workshop, helping to shape the agenda. The 2-day program was structured into sessions that focused on the meanings of peacebuilding, real life experiences of peacebuilding, and challenges to achieving a peaceful society. The workshop was facilitated by two women identified by the advisory group. One facilitator worked in the field of conflict resolution and the other, a psychologist, headed a trauma counseling center. The researchers participated in the workshop, with one being the recorder and the other a participant observer. Periodic consolidation of ideas and participants' evaluation of workshop processes sometimes resulted in refocusing the workshop's direction so that overall research objectives would be accomplished.

At the beginning of the workshop we explained that our research objective was to gain a better understanding of the concepts of peace and peacebuilding. In response, participants were invited to share their expectations of the process. Participants agreed that their main objective was to discuss the question of how women who directly engage in peacebuilding activities view the meaning of peace. From their perspectives, an additional objective was to learn from others, to listen and share experiences, and to form networks with others doing peacebuilding.

Using a dialogic model, the workshop format was designed to facilitate participant interaction, be flexible, and provide direction for research objectives (Lather, 1988). Participants engaged in experiential activities, small group discussions, and group brainstorming. For example, in one exercise participants were each given five cards to write down a sentence or words that best described their understanding of peacebuilding. These cards were placed on a board and through a process of group discussion were clustered into themes. The participants were then randomly assigned to one of the four small groups who were asked to brainstorm the meaning of each theme.

Data Analysis

With the permission of the participants, the proceedings were recorded on audio and videotapes. Workshop proceedings, both plenary and small group sessions, were taped, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative methodology. Field notes, participants' drawings, workshop worksheets, and participants' evaluations provided additional data.

Qualitative examination of data involves a relatively higher use of words than numbers, pays attention to meanings rather than preferences for behaviors as observed, and refers to hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis-testing research (Silverman, 1993). Using Creswell's (1998) distinction between three main approaches to rigor in qualitative research, as researchers we followed a process of verification checks. Each researcher independently conducted thematic

analysis of the data. The researchers then compared and verified each other's analysis with reference to the transcriptions. This was followed by a check for correspondence across the two researchers' accounts.

Results

The themes reported here emanated from the joint analysis of the co-researchers using verification and correspondence checks as described above.

Meanings of Peacebuilding

The conception of peace as a process was pervasive. There was consensus around the image of peace being a process that "is a long, long road." A drawing exercise that involved small groups that were asked to illustrate meanings of peace and peacebuilding produced the images of a symbolic journey as the essence of peacebuilding. Interestingly, the image of a journey was represented in the drawings of all groups in the form of symbols of roads, trains, and wheels. People were seen to be involved in different parts of the journey but to sustain the initiative, a common vision was considered to be important.

Another critical feature identified by the group was the need to address basic needs. The participants emphasized that building peace entails the satisfaction of basic needs such as the need for food, water, and shelter. It was pointed out that in a context where basic needs are met, people are more likely to develop an appreciation of differences of culture, race, ethnicity, and religion. There was a lengthy discussion on the question of how to address basic needs and the significance of encouraging a culture of sharing resources. Questions such as, "Should all needs be addressed at once?" were debated in some detail. This focus on basic needs speaks directly to the most pressing issue in South African society, namely, the eradication of poverty.

Another issue that related directly to context was the identification of communication skills as necessary to keep the process of peacebuilding moving. The Constitution of South Africa, 1996, declared a multilingual society with 11 official languages. In such a context, it is perhaps not surprising that communication was accorded high importance. But, acknowledgment was made that the journey will involve conflict. This, in itself, was not viewed negatively as participants indicated that conflict is inevitable; however, it was noted that it needs to be handled constructively.

Although the centrality of process has been widely noted in the literature on peacebuilding (e.g., Lederach, 1995a, 1995b), the view of peace per se as a process is hardly documented. This view contrasts with the notion of peace as a state or outcome. Furthermore, as the workshop discussions evolved, the participants noted that peace as a process, is "about men and women and how they

relate to each other." This definition surfaced when domestic violence, one of the most pervasive forms of violence in post-apartheid South Africa, was discussed. Participants recognized that "the Domestic Violence Interdict Act which is . . . in a way part of that enforcement of peace. It's just that we haven't, we don't use it in these terms."

Gender and Peacebuilding

The inclusion of domestic violence in a discussion on the meaning of peacebuilding may be specifically related to being women. For South African women, this is a critical concern (Maitse, 2000; Vetten, 2000). As we indicated in our review of the literature, definitions of peacebuilding have not sufficiently embraced the significance of gender and cultural factors. Participants showed an awareness of the limitations of current definitions in use by mainstream organizations. This was illustrated when one of the women said:

> I think that at this time we should just hug ourselves, to affirm ourselves, in the things that we believe in as women and what was portrayed here just doesn't come out in workshops with men, it doesn't! It doesn't, it's not there!

These participants were highly conscious of the ways that women are excluded from peacebuilding. The discussions pointed out that men are typically at the center with women positioned on the periphery. There was agreement that ". . . women are not involved in the process. We are like involved in the background but when it comes to the actions, we are only the recipients." Men were seen as "in control of the process and so on, with their guns and stuff."

According to the workshop participants, it is the responsibility of women to ensure that these gender inequalities are changed. Participants acknowledged that they were not doing enough to position themselves more prominently in the process. But, it was argued that in order for women to achieve the desired changes, there also "has to be an acceptance of peace as an internal, emotional process."

Emotional Components

This theme covered the emotional aspects of peace, such as love and forgiveness. The emotional component of peace was identified as being more important to women than to men. In describing a particular incident in which communities that had previously been in conflict were brought together in a workshop to promote peace and reconciliation, a participant noted that "The people who were the most ashamed [about involvement in the perpetration of violence], of course, were the women." In contrast, the men reportedly showed little emotion.

Other emotional components that were named included collaboration, support, and trust. The importance of networking and providing support for one another

were emphasized. There was a call for "support from one another," but it was noted that "In order to do that, we need to know who is out there so that we know that we are not alone." Some dialogue occurred about the need for trust to enhance the capacity of women to support one another as examples of women competing with other women were described.

Workshop participants recognized that their peacebuilding initiatives were constrained through lack of power, voice, and recognition by self and others and that what they do differs from what men do to build peace. Women realized that although peacebuilding work at community levels is important, they need to work at all levels, involving themselves at macro and formal peacebuilding structures so that women's perspectives are integrated within mainstream peace processes. Hence, there was a great deal of discussion on strategies for achieving changes in gender relations.

Change Strategies

A strong point of consensus was that public recognition and value must be accorded for the numerous ongoing activities that women *are* involved in. It was noted that:

> . . . we have to devise ways, and we haven't discussed what those ways are exactly, but we are going to devise ways to get women's involvement recognized and valued. And that would be part of the peace-building process because there's a lot women are doing within the peace-building process that is going unrecognized.

The importance of using whatever limited power women already have to achieve change was emphasized, as shown in these extracts by two women:

[First extract] "If we're not sitting on executive boards, there are other strategies and powers that we have access to. And we're talking about the withdrawal of marital rights." [Second extract] "Women can bash their pans in their homes when there's domestic abuse happening. So there are small things that can be done that are very powerful."

The role of men in achieving change was also discussed, with the agreement that women cannot act alone but that men can play a valuable role as change agents. Participants committed to involving men initially in small ways. One woman described how she would begin:

> Within my own organization . . . that's a little bit more daunting. I shall certainly be sharing the experience of these two days with them and then include the male members; it would be very good to get an awareness for them, too, to realize what's been going on.

Practical Strategies for Building Peace

During the second part of the workshop, participants focused on methods for enhancing their peacebuilding strategies. Foremost among these identified

methods was the need for a greater emphasis on peace as opposed to violence. Participants lamented that in South African society, violence and trauma are foregrounded in public discourses, rather than peace and peacebuilding. The need to change the public mindset from the negative to the positive was identified as important. In order to achieve this, several strategies were suggested. These included staging peace exhibitions, sewing quilts for peace, a peace train, and a national peace ribbon. Again, the women emphasized that these strategies would only be achievable through building partnerships and networks.

Discussion

Using feminist participatory methodology, this study investigated understandings of the concept of peacebuilding and how these understandings may be mediated by gender and context. The findings provide insight into how the 16 women leaders who participated in a dialogic workshop understand their efforts to build a peaceful society. Of particular interest, is the inclusion of domestic violence in a discussion on peacebuilding. Violence against women is a widespread social problem in South Africa. A recent national survey reported an overall prevalence of 20% in a relationship lifetime with women twice as likely to be assault victims as their male partners (Dawes, Kafaar, de Sas Kropiwnicki, Pather, & Richter, 2004). This figure also showed a clear link between race, poverty, and domestic violence, thus providing some evidence that the manifestation of this type of violence is not unrelated to apartheid. Yet, domestic violence is not typically viewed as a key aspect of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Another noteworthy finding is that the women participants' peacebuilding activities occurred primarily within local and regional grassroots women's groups and NGOs. This finding confirms previous reports that women's peacebuilding actions and areas of focus are often unrecognized by the broader national and international community because women have little power within these structures. (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2000; Mazurana & McKay, 1999; McKay & Mazurana, 2001). Also, as suggested by the participants in this study, women may contribute to their own lack of visibility because they fail to identify the significance of their peacebuilding work or because they are more concerned with *doing* peacebuilding than with promoting their own work.

Why does it matter whether women participate in broader peacebuilding initiatives? Advancing women's global status demands that they be co-architects with men of re-emerging post-conflict societies. We think that women's national, regional, and international involvement fundamentally shapes how peacebuilding projects and processes develop. Further, we find that within existing definitions of peacebuilding, emphases upon human processes and human needs typically is lacking; yet our research within South Africa, reported in this article, indicates that, in this context, the satisfaction of basic human needs is a main

concern of these women's peacebuilding work. Another important component of the participants' peacebuilding is prevention of violence, especially violence toward women. These issues are not confined to South Africa but exist throughout the world. Whether these are priorities for women in other contexts is a topic for future research.

One of the unique features of this study was the attempt to undertake a method that minimized the traditional hierarchical power relationship between the researchers and the researched. After many years of working at this challenge, most researchers acknowledge that given the politics of how research is carried out, a complete reversal of the relations of power is unlikely. The researcher is typically positioned inside an institution, the research agenda is often molded by the availability of funding and, for the researchers, personal motives and gains are associated with completing the research. We acknowledge that in this study, all these issues were applicable. However, instead of merely seeing the power relationship as fixed and unidimensional, this study provides an example of how the power relations between the researcher and the participants may operate in dynamic and multidimensional ways.

Despite being innovative with respect to the relationships between the researchers and the researched, this study has several limitations. Like most qualitative studies, the main focus was on meaning. Through an analysis of meanings of peacebuilding, this study succeeded in generating the basis for hypotheses on the gender- and context-specific nature of peacebuilding that need to be further investigated using different methodologies. Such research should include comparison samples of men and data from different national contexts. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in future research endeavors will contribute to the development of a more robust understanding of the influence of gender and context on peacebuilding.

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