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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST AND STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE - AN NGO PERSPECTIVE

The subtitle of the symposium at which this paper was first presented, “Reflections on the Past and Strategies for the Future”, cannot readily be applied in the analysis of violence against women. It presumes that we have reached a certain point from where we can ascertain “the past” and where “the future” can be mapped out. It connotes a linear construction of time which feeds into the concept of progress where a continuum of events unfolds episodically leading to a certain end result. This is certainly not the case for the issue of violence against women. Despite the fact that it was placed firmly on the global agenda in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, as compared to the First World Conference where it did not rate a single mention, the reality has always superseded rhetoric. In an age where we possess the technology to do our banking, order a pizza and marvel at the wonders of the Uffizi Gallery at home through the internet, women in both the North and South are still trapped within centuries-old power relations and dealing with little-changed expressions of brutality. In this respect, we are still living the past in the present. This article will briefly examine representations of violence in our society and analyse the discourse on violence in four main documents produced from the United Nations World Conferences on Women.

It is a truism to state that violence is normally conceptualised in terms of murders, wars and riots, and people tend to associate violence against women with images of females being beaten up or raped. This focus on the physical manifestations of violence effectively curtails the debate and therefore limits the extent of the interventions necessary to effect real changes. The treatment of violence in our society is essentially “*superficial, out of proportion, trivialised, individualised and one-sided*”.<sup>1</sup> Ideology, cultural prejudices and legal codifications all serve to define violence in the public imagination. As such, the prevailing discourse on violence systematically reinforces a narrative code which places a premium on certain representations of violence while rendering others invisible. Consequently the front page of our newspapers are given over to the riots in Los Angeles (1992) and the bombing in Atlanta (1996) while the massacres of Indians in the Amazon Basin and child labour in the Third World are relegated to a few lines in the inside columns. The ideological and cultural prejudices inherent in our society manifest

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1 Salmi, *Violence and Democratic Society: New Approaches to Human Rights* (Zed Books, London 1993) p4. Emphasis original.

themselves in the massive publicity given over to the violence inflicted on the four Belgian girls who were victims of a paedophile ring while the thousands of Nepali girls trafficked into brothels in India are ignored. The world's attention is forced onto the genocide which took place in the Former Yugoslavia but the plight of one sixth of the population of Bhutan, comprised of certain ethnic groups systematically forced out of their own country, is forgotten.<sup>2</sup> Our perspective on violence is also revealed by the fact that while multinational corporations continue to inflict environmental harm with impunity, we face imprisonment if we wilfully damage just one component on their property. We need to interrogate the representations of violence in our society before we examine the issue of violence against women if we are to move beyond the current restrictions of the debate.

If we accept the fact that violence is an avoidable action which violates human rights in its widest meaning, it is possible to classify violence into four main analytical categories - direct violence, indirect violence, repressive violence and alienating violence.<sup>3</sup> Acts of direct violence are the most commonly emphasised in the discourse on violence. Direct violence "refers to acts of deliberate violence resulting in a direct attack on a person's physical or psychological integrity".<sup>4</sup> This includes homicide (genocide, murders), as well as physical or psychological suffering (kidnapping, torture). Indirect violence is a category which covers "harmful, sometimes even deadly situations or actions which, though due to human intervention, do not necessarily involve a direct relationship between the victims and the institution, person or people responsible for their plight".<sup>5</sup> Examples of this include the infliction of "silent violence" on the 10 000 human beings who die of starvation every day and the 500 million who suffer from chronic malnutrition.<sup>6</sup> Other examples of indirect violence can be witnessed in the common practice among US and European multinationals which peddle "a wide range of toxic products to Third World countries that are banned in their home countries because they can induce cancer, genetic malformations or miscarriages".<sup>7</sup> Even modifications of the social and economic environment which bring about "a substantial deterioration of living and health conditions"<sup>8</sup> fall under the category of indirect violence. Repressive violence "relates to three groups of fundamental rights: civil rights, political rights and social rights".<sup>9</sup> The most common form of this is the violation of the freedom of the press and of the right to belong to a trade union or to go on strike. Alienating violence is "the deprivation of a

2 *Bhutan - Forced Evictions and Human Rights, A Documentation on Human Rights Violations in the Kingdom of Bhutan, Particularly on Forced Evictions, Forcible Exile, Demolition of Houses and Systematic Ethnic Cleansing* (Peoples Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan 1995).

3 Salmi, *Violence and Democratic Society* p17.

4 As above.

5 As above.

6 At p18.

7 At p19.

8 As above.

9 At p20.

person's higher rights, such as the right to emotional, cultural or intellectual growth".<sup>10</sup> Examples of this include policies or actions which deny certain ethnic groups their right to express their identity freely, as well as the forced integration of so-called "primitive" tribes into the mainstream of society. The social ostracism of homosexuals is also included in this category. Needless to say, it is not uncommon to find the various types of violence enacted simultaneously. Although violence is clearly a social phenomenon which goes beyond blood and bruising, the representation of violence in our society has been limited to portrayals of "direct" violence to the exclusion of the other categories of violence. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that the issue of violence against women has primarily centred around sexual assault and domestic violence.

As mentioned earlier, the first United Nations World Conference on Women (WCW) held in 1975 did not articulate the issue of violence against women at all. It was only during the second WCW held in 1980 that it was discussed in the context of "Battered Women and Violence in the Family".<sup>11</sup> By the time the third WCW held in 1985 came round, the relevant section was entitled "Abused Women" and limited to three sentences. It was only in the fourth WCW held in 1995 that violence against women was accorded the status of a "Critical Area of Concern". An examination of the representation of the issue yields expected results. The Copenhagen document (1980) clearly focuses on women within the context of the family, as indicated in the heading of the section: "Battered Women and Violence in the Family". Women are not accorded an individual identity, but are classed together with "children and the elderly" as being vulnerable to "violence in the home".<sup>12</sup> "Battered women" must be saved not because they are women and human beings, but because such violence represents "a grave problem for the physical and mental health of the family as well as for society".<sup>13</sup> Although it is acknowledged that "institutions" are also places where abuse occurs, member states are asked to adopt measures which pertain specifically to domestic violence. The Nairobi document (1985) refers to the necessity for governments to "affirm the dignity of women" and goes one step further than the Copenhagen document by calling on governments to suppress "degrading images and representations of women in society" and adopt "educational and re-educational measures for offenders".<sup>14</sup> There is a separate section which deals with "Women Victims of Trafficking and Involuntary Prostitution" which acknowledges that "[f]orced prostitution is a form of slavery imposed on women by procurers".<sup>15</sup>

The Beijing Document (1995) offers the most comprehensive overview of violence against women when compared to the other three documents. For the first time in the WCW, a

10 At p21.

11 *Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace* (United Nations, Copenhagen 1980) Part 5, p67.

12 As above.

13 As above.

14 The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women para 288.

15 The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women para 290.

definition of violence against women is offered which echoes that found in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women which was passed by the General Assembly in 1993. Unlike the other documents, the Beijing Document outlines various steps which the international community, governments and NGOs should take to “eliminate violence”. On the surface, this appears impressive and a significant step forward. However, a closer examination of the text exposes the ambiguity and limitations which revolve around the issue of violence against women. One of the most revealing paragraphs in Section D of the Beijing Document, which highlights the problematic representation of violence against women, is paragraph 116 which states that “women in poverty ... destitute women ... displaced women ... women living in situations of armed conflict, foreign occupation, wars of aggression, civil wars, terrorism, including hostage-taking, are also particularly vulnerable to violence”.<sup>16</sup> The question which immediately springs to mind is: how can these women who are already clearly victims of violence, be “particularly vulnerable to violence”?

The preamble of Section D in the Beijing Document articulates several features of violence against women, stating amongst other things, that “[i]n all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture” as well as the fact that “[t]he low social and economic status of women can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against women”.<sup>17</sup> It is also worth reiterating the definition of violence which reads:

The term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these statements which allude to all categories of violence (direct, indirect, repressive and alienating), the discourse on violence against women is constrained within the confines of violations against women’s sexual integrity and their role within the family. As such, the examples provided of violence against women focus on rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dowry-related violence, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the actions recommended to eliminate violence against women primarily centre around two aspects, that is, the implementation of gender-sensitive laws and enforcement practices which do not discriminate against women, and the community education which needs to occur to break down gender stereotypes. This approach must be interrogated as it compartmentalises violence into a convenient category

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16 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Section D para 116.

17 At para 112.

18 At para 113.

19 At para 113(a).

which ignores the dynamics of violence as an integral factor which underpins the framework of our society.

It needs to be emphasised at this point that there is no doubt about the fact that domestic violence and sexual assault are pandemic. In France, 95 per cent of victims of violence are women and 51 per cent of these suffer violence at the hands of their husbands. In the United States, more women are injured in domestic violence incidents than in car accidents, rapes and muggings put together and the US Surgeons General have warned that domestic violence poses the single largest threat of injury to adult women in the United States. In a study of 80 abused women in Costa Rica, 49 per cent reported being beaten during pregnancy. In Bangladesh, women who are killed by their husbands account for 50 per cent of all murders. The Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission found that 67 per cent of rural women and 56 per cent of urban women have been victims of spousal abuse. In South Africa, a woman is raped every 90 seconds, totalling approximately 320 000 women raped each year. Over 100 000 women are raped in the United States annually. Between one-in-five and one-in-seven women will be a victim of rape worldwide.<sup>20</sup> The women's movement can take much credit for putting these issues on the global agenda and forcing universal acknowledgment of the problem.<sup>21</sup> Only fifteen years ago during the second WCW, the representatives from the Ukraine stood up before the world to proclaim that domestic violence does not occur in their state. No government can today can make such pronouncements. Despite these gains, we need to recognise that there is a concerted effort to contain the discourse of violence against women to a narrow agenda which excludes the fundamental roles played by the globalisation of the world's economy and militarism in perpetuating violence. Although, for instance, a statement is made in Section D of the Beijing Document that "low social and economic status of women can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against women",<sup>22</sup> there is no analysis of the mechanisms of the economy and the violence inflicted on women by certain economic policies. While there is mention of armed conflict, there is no examination of how the arms trade and the culture of militarism engender violence against women. These omissions are not accidental. Limiting the scope of the discourse on violence against women will ensure that no substantive intervention can take place to change the power dynamics which shape the political and economic agenda.

It may be pertinent to pause at this point to examine the different forms of violence against women. While it may be consequential for women living in the North to institute gender sensitive laws and educate the judiciary, there are millions of women for whom the courts will not matter as their next meal is uncertain. One-fifth of the global population lives in

20 United Nations, *The Advancement of Women: Notes for Speakers* (Dept of Public Information, United Nations, New York 1995) pp62-63.

21 Address by Radhika Coomaraswamy, Seminar on Conflict and Development in South Asia, Women in Conflict Resolution and Preventive Diplomacy, 2-4th August, 1996, Kalutara, Sri Lanka.

22 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Section D para 112.

extreme poverty and of these 1.3 billion people, up to 70 per cent are women.<sup>23</sup> There is even a new phrase which has been coined to describe the situation: "the feminisation of poverty". This is by no means exclusive to the South. In the United States, approximately 75 per cent of all poverty is concentrated among women, and in the Netherlands 70 per cent of all single mothers with dependent children will slip below the poverty line without welfare payments.<sup>24</sup> Women who live in poverty face malnourishment and injury to their health. They suffer from nutritional anaemia which makes child-bearing more taxing and difficult, as indicated in the statistics that half a million women die each year just from maternity.<sup>25</sup> While it is simple to frame laws to charge husbands who abuse their wives, it is not as simple to deal with the economic violence of capitalism. When the United Nations itself, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), imposes economic policies which perpetuate violence against women, the challenge is to broaden the way "violence against women" is represented. The infamous structural adjustment programmes inflicted on countries in the South have resulted in even more hardships in the lives of the people with women being most affected. Take for instance the case of Chile which the World Bank and the IMF have claimed as a success story. A closer examination reveals that nearly one third of its population live in extreme poverty and income inequality has not been reduced. The majority live with "poor health care, education, inadequate or no social security, and the spreading social disintegration, increasing violence and crime".<sup>26</sup> Women are being forced to take on low wage jobs in order to feed their families and, unprotected by collective negotiated contracts, they earn 50 to 60 per cent less than men.<sup>27</sup> What is even more disturbing is the effect which IMF and World Bank intervention has on the stability of a country. In the Former Yugoslavia, for instance, the macro-economic restructuring imposed by both the IMF and World Bank led to the systematic destruction of the country and the subjugation of a people: "[h]yperinflation, frozen wages, soaring unemployment, and cuts in health and social services were the consequences of [the] policies. Real incomes were 30 percent lower in 1980 than in 1979."<sup>28</sup> The ethnic divisions are not the cause of the conflict which has resulted amongst other things, in the mass violation of women's rights.

It is important to highlight the role of multinational corporations in circumventing laws and ignoring adherence to standards of human rights in their operations. Their practices also engender violence against women, directly and indirectly. Women working in electronic assembly lines set up by Japanese conglomerates in Malaysia have succumbed to mass

23 United Nations, *The Advancement of Women* p22.

24 At p23.

25 Vickers, *Women and War* (Zed Books, London 1993) p92.

26 Ariyabandu et al, "Structural Adjustment: The Small Producers' Dilemma" (1995) 20(10/11) *Economic Review (Columbo)* 3 at 16.

27 As above.

28 Bruin, *Root Causes of the Global Crisis: Origins of Social Disintegration, Human Rights Violations, Environmental Destruction, Conflict, and War in the International Economic System* (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and INHURED International, Geneva & Kathmandu, 1996) p14.

hysteria as a result of their highly restrictive working conditions. Illegal female migrants in the United States are exploited by well-known multinational corporations. First hand accounts of such exploitation reveal appalling working conditions where lunch times are limited to three minutes and repetitive strain injuries resulting from long working hours ultimately put an end to paid employment.<sup>29</sup> While women are being harmed as a consequence of working for multinational corporations, there are also millions affected by toxic products targeted specifically at women. Silicone breast implants are a case in point. The harmful effects of contraceptive products on women's health have also been exposed and drug companies have flouted ethical considerations by using women in the South as guinea pigs to test their products without their consent. These forms of violence against women are never articulated as such despite the fact that women suffer physical and psychological injury from the practices of these corporations.

There are some who may claim that it is not only women, but also men and children, who suffer from economic violence, thereby negating the economic link of violence against women. This can be refuted by a closer examination of the definition of violence against women. It refers specifically to "gender-based" violence which results in "physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women".<sup>30</sup> Considering the fact that economics as practised is clearly (male)gender-based and not gender-neutral, with the results disproportionately harming women, there is no doubt that poverty, starvation, malnourishment, suffering and injury caused by economic policies and practices are manifestations of gender-based violence against women. As women are already discriminated against in society, the (male)gender-based economic policies and practices serve to disadvantage women further. The example of women in Africa will also provide evidence of this fact. Women produce 78 per cent of the continent's food on subsistence plots to which the vast majority hold no title. However, the (male)gender-based policies ensure that they receive only 2 to 13 per cent of the technical assistance and training provided by extension services.<sup>31</sup> The link between economic policies and the exploitation of women is clear. When discrimination against women and the commodification of the female gender co-exist with poverty, we witness the flourishing of trafficking in women. Millions of women and girls are trafficked to service the sex industry annually and, of these, at least one million are girl children.<sup>32</sup> Strategic Objective D3 of the Beijing Document which focuses specifically on trafficking in women does not mention the need to improve economic conditions as a preventive measure and instead makes general statements about resorting to the legal framework to solve the problem. As to how genuine even this is can be gauged by the fact that the governments of the world are to only

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29 As told to the author by a former employee of Johnson and Johnson based in California, 1994.

30 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Section D para 113.

31 United Nations, *The Advancement of Women* p20.

32 At pp68-69.

“consider enacting legislation aimed at preventing sex tourism and trafficking”.<sup>33</sup> There is a great resistance to articulating the causes of trafficking in women and this leads to complete inaction on the issue. Although there is a vague statement urging governments to “[t]ake appropriate measures to address the root factors”, none of these are mentioned and the suggestion offered is to “[strengthen] existing legislation”.<sup>34</sup>

Unless the economic disparity between and within nations is addressed, the exploitation of women and the attendant violence against women will continue unabated. A study tour to the Philippines undertaken by a group of women from Australia and New Zealand in 1995 found that the sex tourism industry “thrives on the poverty of the Philippines, and on the racism and sexism that exist in Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines”.<sup>35</sup> Australian men with capital are actively participating in the sex tourism industry as owners and operators of such outlets as bars and nightclubs, hiring girls as well as women. The Beijing Document does not deal with the fundamental question of the economics of the traffic in women, preferring instead to focus on “comprehensive programmes designed to heal and rehabilitate” the “victims of trafficking”.<sup>36</sup> The complete lack of real engagement with the issue is also demonstrated by the fact that no measures are recommended on dealing with trafficked women who may have been “rescued”. In India, for example, Nepali women and girls “rescued” from brothels are classed as illegal migrants, despite the fact that they did not choose to enter the country in the first instance, and are deported without any consideration of the fact that they may not be able to return to their villages due to the “shame” and “disgrace” of having been sexually “tainted”.<sup>37</sup> In Burma, women and girls who have been deported by Thai authorities face prosecution as criminals for having illegally left the country and worked in Thailand despite the fact that they were trafficked and endured sexual slavery.<sup>38</sup>

The other major omission from the discourse on violence against women is the role of militarism in perpetuating violence against women. Despite the fact that “peace” is one of the three major themes of the United Nations WCW, its analysis is severely restricted and no connection is made between militarism and the endurance of armed conflict in the world today. Although the Beijing Document acknowledges that women suffer violence disproportionately during times of armed conflict, it is most revealing that the discourse does not signal any intention to see the end of armed conflict as an ultimate goal. In the

33 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Strategic Objective D3, para 131(e). Emphasis added.

34 At para 131(b).

35 *Confronting Sexual Exploitation: Campaign Against Sex Tourism and Trafficking in Filipino Women, Report of the Participants from Australia and Aotearoa/NZ* (Centre for Philippine Concerns-Australia, Brisbane 1996) p5.

36 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Strategic Objective D3 para 131(d).

37 *International Conference on Child Sex Abuse, Victim Protective Investigation and Trial Procedure Mumbai, 22-24 February, 1996* (Neergaurav Research and Development Foundation, Mumbai, India 1996).

38 Campaign notes from the International Women’s Development Agency (Victoria).



section on "Violence Against Women", we see such language as the "elimination" of violence against women. However, there is no articulation of the need to "eliminate" armed conflict in the section on "Women and Armed Conflict". The headings of the strategic objectives point instead to the inevitability of armed conflict: "Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation", "Reduce excessive military expenditure and control the availability of armaments", "Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations" and "Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace".<sup>39</sup> Although there is mention of the need to "[w]ork actively towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control",<sup>40</sup> it is not listed as a main "strategic objective" under which recommendations can be made.

It is also revealing that the section on "Women and Armed Conflict" does not provide a comprehensive breakdown of the effects of armed conflict on women. Despite the breakthrough in the acknowledgment that rape in war constitutes a war crime,<sup>41</sup> and the fact that women and children make up some 80 per cent of the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons,<sup>42</sup> there is no comprehensive articulation of the social, economic, physical and psychological suffering and injury which women have to endure as a consequence of armed conflict. Although it is acknowledged that women suffer "displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, and ... are victims of acts of murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict",<sup>43</sup> there is no attention paid to the effects of armed conflict on the lives of women after the cessation of conflict. There are women in Vietnam today, for instance, who still live with the impact of Agent Orange in their lives. They have given birth to weak babies which subsequently succumb to death, and are caring for husbands debilitated by exposure to the toxic chemical. The following extract gives an idea of the suffering faced by some women:

I remember 1985 the most. We were destitute then. All three children and my husband were sick and had to stay in bed all the time. [My] three daughters were blind. They couldn't feed themselves. [They] peed and defecated in bed all the time which made the house smell horrible. No visitor could stand it. The mats and beds were rotten. I had to have my children and my husband nested in the corner of the room with dry leaves. They looked like a herd of pigs.

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39 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Strategic Objectives E1-E4.

40 At Strategic Objective E2 para 143(f)(i).

41 At Strategic Objective E3 para 145(d).

42 At para 136.

43 At para 135.

I was extremely desperate. ... My eldest daughter died in 1986, the third in 1987. The second child went blind and her muscles shrunk, and then she died. ... The war took everything away from my family. I lost my husband, my wealth, my happiness, my future and my love. All the money I'd earned has been spent on medical expenses. The aftermath of the war was so severe. The chemical war was so terrifying and devastating.<sup>44</sup>

The experiences of women *in* armed conflict situations, let alone *after* the conflict, are not elucidated fully in the Beijing Document and this shortcoming severely curtails the planning of initiatives to address the situation. This has repercussions for such issues as compensation as it is more convenient and less expensive to ignore the after effects of conflict in the lives of women than it is to articulate what these effects are and then be forced to make reparations. The extreme reluctance to deal with the impact of armed conflict on women is exemplified in the case of the so-called "comfort women". This subject has been adequately covered elsewhere.<sup>45</sup>

What is also of importance is the omission of the acknowledgment that armed conflict is a manifestation of the culture of militarism which engenders violence against women. Without an analysis of militarism and how it organises our economic, social and cultural interactions, efforts at eliminating violence against women will be severely hampered. The World Council of Churches has defined militarism as an outcome of a process of militarisation in which "military values, ideology and pattern of behaviour achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of the state, and as a consequence the structural, ideological and behavioural patterns of both the society and the government are 'militarized'".<sup>46</sup> The material manifestations of militarism include wars, military intervention such as that which took place in Iraq recently when the United States bombarded what it claimed were military installations, and the foreign occupation of East Timor by Indonesia and Tibet by China. The institutional forms of militarism include the existence of the armed forces and the guaranteed access of the military to the nation's budget. Equally important is the ideological manifestation of militarism and this includes "a dissemination of military values, symbols and language among the civilian population which promotes acceptance of hierarchies, nationalism which defines the 'other' as enemy, violence as a legitimate means of resolving conflicts, and strict division of proper masculine and feminine roles".<sup>47</sup> Given the scope of this paper, greater emphasis will be

44 Bennett, Bexley & Warnock (eds), *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: Women Speak Out About Conflict* (Panos, London 1995) pp174-175.

45 See for example Dolgopol & Paranjape, *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal* (International Commission of Jurists, Geneva 1994).

46 Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, *Disarmament Prospects and Problems* (World Council of Churches, Geneva 1992), quoted in Vickers, *Women and War* p39.

47 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Women and Militarism* (WILPF Essays No 1, 1994) p2.

given to the examination of gender and how the representations of the masculine and the feminine are integral to the enterprise of militarism, and in perpetuating violence against women.

Militarism is contingent on a particular construction of manhood and specific ideas about masculinity which are often juxtaposed against ideas about femininity. Stereotypical masculine characteristics like aggressiveness, bravery, endurance and discipline are demanded of good soldiers and any stereotypical feminine characteristics such as nurturing and compassion are belittled and weeded out in the training of soldiers. The military depends on conformity and strict adherence to a code of masculinity and this is witnessed in the treatment of homosexuals in the armed forces. Men are socialised to aspire to characteristics of manhood which are epitomised in the good soldier, and boys in schools are drilled into the expected stereotypes which they must fulfil. The construction of masculinity is therefore “not just incidental to militarism, but is actually essential to its preservation”.<sup>48</sup> Militarism depends on men believing that they are the stronger sex and therefore ideally suited to protect their womenfolk and country. As such, it is not surprising to find that there is a direct link between the socialisation of men and the stereotyping of women and violence against women.

Proponents of the belief that pornography is an articulation of violence against women will find ample evidence in its connection with militarism. The use of pornography in the military clearly “demonstrates the link between misogyny and military ‘preparedness’” and examples of this include the “showing of pornographic videos to British troops heading to the Falklands and American soldiers before bombing raids during the Gulf War”.<sup>49</sup> During the war in the Former Yugoslavia, pornography was used as a “tool of genocide”.<sup>50</sup> Not only were women systematically raped, they were also filmed. A survivor of a rape/death camp reported the making of pornography of her rapes as follows:

In front of the camera, one beats you and the other - excuse me - fucks you, he puts his truncheon in you, and he films all that. ... We even had to sing Serbian songs ... in front of the camera.<sup>51</sup>

This is not an isolated incident. The seamless continuity between commercial pornography which proliferated in the Former Yugoslavia before the war and the violence in the rape/death camps found expression in the use of the former in the camps. Survivors of rape/death camps reported that pornographic images pervaded their camps and “piles of pornographic magazines” were reportedly found in the bedroom of Borislav Herak, a

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48 At p5.

49 At p7.

50 MacKinnon, “Turning Rape Into Pornography: Postmodern Genocide” (1993) 4 *Ms* 24 at 27.

51 As above.

captured Serbian soldier who confessed to scores of rapes and murders.<sup>52</sup> Sexual violence against women also occurs during “peace” time, and is particularly associated with the presence of military bases. Foreign military bases in Southeast Asia, for example, have created and exacerbated the conditions which promote prostitution. Subic Bay in the Philippines is a case in point. When the base was in operation, the small fishing village exploded with 700 bars and clubs, and 20 000 prostitutes catering to the thousands of US marines and soldiers.<sup>53</sup> Even Okinawa has witnessed countless rapes of Japanese women at the hands of US troops, the most publicised recently being the gang rape of a twelve year old girl. UN peacekeepers are not exempt. By the end of their operation in Cambodia in 1992, the number of prostitutes (many of them children) had risen from 6000 to 20 000 because UN soldiers had created such a demand. Women in Australia have not escaped either. During World War II and the Vietnam War, women were raped when servicemen stopped over for rest and recreation leave.<sup>54</sup> Even in this present age, Australian women are not immune according to reports in Western Australia where US troops still conduct their rest and recreation. The Beijing Document does not make any reference to the perpetration of violence against women in these circumstances.

It is worth noting at this point that the treatment of violence against women in connection with the military is not viewed with the same degree of importance as the purchase of military equipment. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (Australian Section) undertook a campaign to institute, amongst other things, a code of conduct for the training of US troops in Australia in March 1997. The Australian Government claimed that no action needed to be taken to protect women against violence as the agreement signed with the United States Government “covered” the relevant ground. A closer examination of this document, technically called the “Status of Forces Agreement”, which was signed in 1963, reveals a detailed articulation of protocols dealing with items such as cars and household goods belonging to US troops but no mention of protocols dealing with sexual abuse. While there is complete inaction to protect women in Australia, it is ironic to note that the State Government in Queensland acted to liberalise their prostitution laws in time for the visit of US troops to ensure that the men would not be unduly prosecuted.

Apart from the direct violence inflicted upon women by the culture of militarism, what is less recognised is the indirect violence associated with it. Although the Beijing Document states that “excessive military expenditure” affects people living in poverty who are deprived because of the lack of investment in basic services,<sup>55</sup> this critique does not in any

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52 At 28.

53 See Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Pandora, London 1989) pp86-87.

54 “It’s not only men in uniform who pay the price of war” in Rigg & Copeland (eds), *Coming Out! Women’s Voices, Women’s Lives* (Nelson in association with the ABC, Melbourne 1985) p113.

55 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch II para 15

way address the fundamental mechanics of military spending. In the first instance, the use of the term “excessive” to denote some level of censure is ambiguous as it does not define what constitutes “excessive” spending, and it also contradicts the statement calling for complete disarmament as it implicitly sanctions a non-excessive level of military spending. In addition, this statement does not reflect the fact that it is not only people living in poverty who suffer from military spending, as the deterioration of social capital has repercussions for society in general, and women in particular. The world currently expends about one trillion US dollars on the military every year. The cost of providing clean water, retiring the debt of developing nations, providing shelter and health care, preventing global warming, stabilising the world’s population, halting ozone depletion, eliminating starvation and malnourishment, eliminating illiteracy, preventing soil erosion and providing clean, safe energy can be met with a quarter of that sum. By withholding spending on these activities, women continue to live in situations of violence as their health and psychological well-being are compromised and harmed.

It is clear that violence against women is perpetrated in many forms. Although great attention is being paid to the category of sexual abuse and domestic violence, there needs to be a proportionate emphasis on the forms of “silent violence” inflicted on women through the economic system and the culture of militarism. In addressing violence against women, we are also faced with a difficulty which we need to acknowledge. The spectrum of socio-economic-cultural situations facing the women of the world inevitably results in different priorities and definitions of problems. It is no secret that the hegemony of the North has ensured that the global agenda has been shaped according to its self-interest, and we need to guard against the trap of falling into the same pattern in our interventions. Although there are benefits to be gained from the insights of postcolonial discourse on the question of the legitimacy of speaking for ‘the Other’, it is dangerous for us to engage in the false premise of postmodernism where the concept of the collective is debunked. If we are to engage in feminist interventions to change the status quo, there must be concerted action to bring the different voices together to speak the language of protest because women are ‘the Other’ in the patriarchal order. To enhance the strength of feminist interventions, there needs to be more dialogue between women across nations and within nations. Also of importance is the interaction which must occur between grassroots organisations and academics as the latter play an important role in shaping intellectual debate. These steps are crucial in our efforts to eliminate violence against women.

The Beijing Document makes one salutary statement concerning the realisation of a society free of violence. It reads: “[d]eveloping a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to the challenging task of promoting families, communities and States that are free of violence against women is necessary and achievable”.<sup>56</sup> However, the resistance to bringing a “holistic and multidisciplinary approach” to bear is strong. There is still a great reluctance to view women’s issues and violence against women as an integral part of the

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56 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Ch IV Section D para 119.

functioning of society. The small gains which already have been made are constantly under threat, as witnessed by the fact that, in the lead up to the Beijing WCW, conservative governments queried the use of the word "gender" despite its widespread use in UN documents. Other delegates bracketed many resolutions which were agreed upon in the Nairobi Document during the various preparatory committee meetings. The aim of being "holistic and multidisciplinary" is belied by the fact that disarmament is not seen as a women's issue and the section which was most heavily bracketed in the whole document before the Beijing Conference was Section E: "Women and Armed Conflict". It is sobering to note that despite the rhetoric contained within the Beijing Document for the necessity of change, the rhetoric of the world's governments and the institution which brought the document to fruition, there has been little positive movement to realise the vision of a violence-free world. The encumbrances of the past are still present and there is much work to be done.