



CIIR

A culture of peace

Women, faith and reconciliation

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Published by the Catholic Institute for International Relations
Unit 3, 190a New North Road,
London N1 7BJ, UK
www.ciir.org

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ISBN 1 85287 313 2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

CIIR is registered in the UK as a charity (number 294329) and a company (number 2002500)



In some countries, CIIR operates under the name of International Cooperation for Development (ICD)

Design: Twenty-Five Educational

Print: APG (APG holds ISO14001 accreditation for international environmental standards)

Cover photo: Members of the People with AIDS Development Association, Uganda, express their sorrow yet joy of life through dance. Photo © Nick Sireau/CIIR

About the authors

Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey are the authors of *Women making a difference* (2001) and *Life out of death: The feminine spirit in El Salvador* (1996). Marigold Best is a former Latin America Programme Coordinator for Quaker Peace & Service. Pamela Hussey has worked with CIIR since 1981.



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Foreword

In our books *Life out of death: The feminine spirit in El Salvador* and *Women making a difference*, we introduced a wide variety of women from El Salvador and the UK whose stories demanded to be heard, but whose voices seldom reached beyond their immediate circles. As authors, we worked on the principle that our own voices should not drown out the authentic accents of the women whose stories had been entrusted to us.

This is the principle on which this Comment has been written and is now offered to those for whom peace in our world is an issue of the first importance, not only for humanity, but also for humanity's only home, planet Earth.

Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey
January 2005

Introduction

Building a culture of peace is perhaps the biggest, the most complicated and the most important issue in the world today, ranging from the international scenario down to the smallest family unit – even down to each one of us. Aung San Suu Kyi expresses this beautifully:

Paradise on earth is a concept which is outmoded and few people believe in it any more. But we can certainly seek to make our planet a better, happier home for all of us by constructing the heavenly abodes of love and compassion in our hearts. Beginning with this inner development we can go on to the development of the external world with courage and wisdom.¹

The importance of the issue is shown by the prominence given to it by every organisation working for true peace and development. CIIR is one of these. They agree too that, without the full participation of women, enjoying equal rights with men, there can be no real peace, no real development, no real reconciliation, in fact no real hope for the world.²

Reconciliation

Our title contains several fine-sounding words which can be deceptive. We start with the last one: reconciliation. Unfortunately, the word has too often been used to mean ‘sweeping past horrors under the carpet’. Canon Paul Oestreicher, in an essay called ‘Reconciliation: A search for its meaning’, says he finds himself using the word less and less:

Reconciliation, to the comfortable and rich who badly need to be disturbed, gives the all too easy assurance of a quiet life. To the oppressed, uprooted, homeless and disturbed it seems to signify that nothing much will change.... The grave injustices in our land and in our world cry out for redress. Between me and a child banished to the streets, between me and the countless mothers whose children die of hunger, a great gulf is fixed. We are not reconciled. So what kind of language can I speak and be understood? In my experience, the language of Jesus makes sense.

Where reconciliation is both a need and a task, I now put that word into cold storage and start to talk about loving enemies.³

The difficulty of loving enemies is shown in the experience of the Jerusalem Link for Women, made up of the Israeli women's organisation Bat Shalom and the Palestinian Jerusalem Centre for Women. Separately and together, they work for peace between their two communities. Describing their programme 'Women making peace', which promotes dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian women, Sumaya Farhat-Naser, a Palestinian, writes: 'When we have lived 50 years knowing each other only as enemies, with pain and bitter experience very much alive on the Palestinian side, it is very difficult to say: "let's sit together and hug". We can't hug.' Loving enemies is much more demanding than that. She continues:

We train both groups, independently, about how to meet, how to learn to respect one another's vision, how to know that there are at least two versions, not one, to every story. Although meeting together is painful, we must learn to bear this pain, to defend ourselves from feeling this pain, and learn how to cross this painful stage. We must address our fears, speak our hopes and visions aloud.... When both sides feel that they are prepared to look into the eyes of the other with respect, to heal, to listen, to understand how to contribute to a logical discussion, to be sensitive in wording, in attitude, then the groups can meet and begin working together.⁴

Peace

The women also have to be clear what they mean by that other fine-sounding word: peace. The Palestinian group has to work in a context of disapproval from much of their community: 'We have a concept in Palestine called "normalisation". Normalisation means the establishment of normal relations with the Israelis. This is strongly rejected – people say: how dare you try to make something normal in a situation where nothing is normal?'⁵ So the Palestinian women always have to assure their community, and make clear to their Israeli interlocutors, that their work for peace does not mean failing to protect their rights and to press for change. This sometimes makes things uncomfortable for the Israeli women.

Gila Svirsky of Bat Shalom (now coordinator of the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace) describes the difference between the two groups:

The Israeli women come to dialogue with Palestinian women so that they can sleep better at night. They can assuage their guilty feelings about being in the camp of the oppressors. On the other hand, Palestinian women come to the dialogue group to prevent the Israeli women from sleeping well at night.... [The Israeli women] want to drink coffee, they want to talk about their children and about good books they've read. They acknowledge the faults of the Israeli government but, at the same time, they want to get past it. But the Palestinians are not past it.⁶

One can well understand both positions.

The Israeli women are at odds not only with their government, but with the mainstream peace movement in Israel, says Gila Svirsky. She claims that the mixed-gender peace movement looks at peace proposals only from the perspective of their effect on Israel's security. This sweeping statement may not be entirely fair, but what she says illustrates the difference between 'cold peace' and 'warm peace' (which we shall return to later on). Svirsky says:

Our methods are different, our goals are different, and our vision of peace is different. The mixed-gender peace movement in Israel seeks a peace of mutual deterrence. This would include closing the border, locking the door, and throwing away the key. No more Palestinians mixing with Israelis.... The Bat Shalom women argue for a culture of peace and mutual cooperation. We argue for a future in which our destinies are intertwined.

This should include some economic integration because, she says, 'we have learned from history that you cannot have two neighbouring societies with such a huge economic gap between them and expect political stability'.

She says the women's peace movement is also different in concentrating on continuous everyday grassroots work to build bridges between the communities, train women and educate public opinion. Courageously, 'Bat Shalom is willing to engage in civil

disobedience.... [The Israeli women] have joined Palestinian protests, thrown themselves in front of the bulldozers together with our Palestinian sisters and brothers, defied laws, pushed past soldiers, put ourselves on the line because we know that non-cooperation with evil is a sacred duty.¹⁷

As well as giving us a beautiful definition of reconciliation – ‘to look into the eyes of the other with respect’ – the approach of these women, working valiantly for peace in a desperately difficult situation, highlights important lessons about trying to build a culture of peace: being prepared to admit the existence of the other; truly desiring real peace and reconciliation which will benefit everyone; being willing to learn and listen; keeping dialogue going; within dialogue, expressing your own hurt and defending your own rights; seeing the vital importance of economic development; working at grassroots level in the everyday world; showing solidarity.

Right relationships

Interestingly, there is no mention of any religious element to this dialogue. The political and human rights issues, the everyday relationships between people, are what matter most. Jesus himself places reconciliation, a right relation with other human beings, above religious ritual when he tells us: ‘So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.’¹⁸ And in *Islam: A short history*, Karen Armstrong sets out Islam’s priorities: ‘Social justice was ... the crucial virtue of Islam. Muslims were commanded as their first duty to build a community (*ummah*) characterised by practical compassion, in which there was a fair distribution of wealth. This was far more important than any doctrinal teaching about God.’¹⁹

In our researches in the field of women and peace building, we have found that the area where religion is given most prominence is that of development – which, of course, is essential for peace. We have so often heard: ‘how are people going to reconcile if they are struggling to survive?’¹⁰ We will talk more about this later on and for the moment just note that ‘religion’ and ‘development’ are also words one has to use with care. Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, in an article on religion and development, observe ‘that there is good

religion, bad religion and very bad religion,' and later add: 'One could also say that there is good development, bad development and very bad development.'¹¹

We must also include in our list of deceptive words the word 'conflict', which is often used loosely as the opposite of peace. Simon Fisher, the founder of the Quaker Responding to Conflict programme, shares his wide experience of peace building and its profoundly spiritual basis in his book *Spirited living: Waging conflict, building peace*. He tells us that, for people working in the field of peace building, 'conflict is not a problem in itself': 'They see conflict as quite distinct from violence, as an everyday phenomenon which is an integral element of any organisation or society and necessary for social and political change. The key problem for them is not conflict but violence.'¹²

This view of conflict is shared by Fatma Amer, head of education and interfaith relations at the London Central Mosque Trust and the Islamic Cultural Centre, who writes: 'identifying differences, understanding why we differ and agreeing to accept these differences and that they are bound to remain will facilitate celebrating, enjoying commonalities, sharing them for the benefit of all'.¹³

Religion can contribute strongly to division, hatred and violent conflict, as in Northern Ireland, or it can inspire people to courageous efforts to build a better life for all. Archbishop Desmond Tutu 'describes religion as a knife', writes Vanessa Baird in an article on violence and religion: 'You can use it to help feed yourself and others. Or you can use it to harm and kill.'¹⁴ You can also use it like opium or like vitamins, as did Andrea, a woman we met in El Salvador who had worked with Base Christian Communities in the 1970s. She explained: 'our evangelisation was not meant to put people to sleep but to wake them up', so that they saw themselves as persons loved by God and worthy of esteem, and not as doormats to be trodden on.¹⁵

Nelly del Cid, a young Honduran theologian in El Salvador, spoke of people awakening to 'discover the force of the Spirit pushing them to fight for life'. 'One's ultimate obedience', she said, 'is not to an often dictatorial hierarchy, but always to what is life giving.... This is where we are really one – we are beyond denominations here.'¹⁶ Elizabeth A Johnson suggests that one should 'consult women's experience ... as a reality check for all religious statements and

practices, recognising truth in those that promote women's flourishing and untruth in those that diminish it'.¹⁷

We also firmly believe that we see signs of the Spirit at work in all the women whose struggle for fullness of life we celebrate, whether they are motivated by religious faith or not.

Violent conflict: the experience of women

At the heart of what we want to share is what we learnt from women in El Salvador who were directly involved in trying to achieve peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of that country's devastating civil war. One experience in particular seems to symbolise the whole problem of reconciliation after a conflict that has not led to changes in the ruling structures.

We were meeting in the small country town of Suchitoto with a group of women who had walked long distances from their villages to be with us and the two American Catholic Sisters who were supporting them in organising women's groups. All had lost many loved ones during the civil war, some of them activists who had been betrayed to the military by a little old woman who was sitting outside on the kerb. The Sisters told us that the women had forgiven her because they knew she had only done it to get a little money to feed her starving family, and they were now trying to help her. It was a pre-election period and during our meeting a lorry with banners and loudspeakers urging support for the ruling right-wing ARENA party came past. The women all rushed out shouting: 'Asesinos! Murderers! You killed our families!' They could forgive the old woman on the pavement, but not the repressive regime which was ultimately responsible for their suffering.

Women are often portrayed as the helpless victims who suffer most during violent conflict – and they certainly do suffer terribly. A Catholic Sister attending the Quaker Responding to Conflict (RTC) programme told us in June 2004 about the women she is trying to help in a rural area of Rwanda:

In any war situation the women ... are always the victims, themselves and the children. The men fight and get killed and the women are left with all the responsibility for the families and the needs of the society. There are many men around, abusing them sexually most of the time. They have enough children, but

because of the culture they cannot say 'No', so they have more; and a lot of them ... die in pregnancy or giving birth, and children die because there is not enough food for them. Some of them were displaced because of the war and now they have to think how they can live again in the place where people had tried to kill them or had killed their husbands....

I ask myself what it is [these women] need now to see life in a positive way, to be able to cope with it now, and move on with life, to be able to say 'No', maybe to say 'No' to men sometimes when they come in the night. But sometimes if they say 'No' they might be killed.... Some of them go to drink just to forget about the problems they have, and when they spend the little money they have on drink their children have nothing to eat. They drink a lot of alcohol without anything to eat to balance it and then they tend to die very easily. Then a lot of them at the moment have AIDS and so they are carrying all those weights. In the middle of this they are filled with fear because of the two sides that were in the war. They say: 'I have seen these people, I can still see these people, I can still hear their voice, I can still see the effects.'

Because there has not been dialogue, because they have not been coming together and things like that to deal with what has been, so how can they live together when they are still carrying that fear of the war? ... And the biggest problem is: 'What can I have to eat today and tomorrow, and how can I live from day to day?' ... They need to come together, chatting and discussing things together. That is what I hope to do when I go back.¹⁸

Women suffer terribly, but they are not helpless. At the National Public Hearing on Women and Conflict in East Timor, a dramatic moment occurred in April 2003 when two women from opposing sides gave their testimonies. Rita da Silva was recounting her experience in 1975 of rape by members of the pro-independence Fretilin political party, when another woman, Victoria Henrique, strode to the front of the auditorium and cried out: 'My sister suffered rape by Fretilin members. And I, a Fretilin member, was raped by UDT members. We suffered the same at the hands of men.'

She embraced Rita da Silva in tears: 'We earned independence, we suffered because of this flag [draping herself in the flag of East Timor].... We are sisters.'¹⁹

The tragic irony is that it is the same violent situations in which women suffer so much that often provide the opportunities for them to take on new roles and discover new potentialities. A Zimbabwean participant in the RTC programme spoke of women being empowered through what they suffered in that country's conflict: 'They have had to go out into the world and face the world and look for the stuff for their families and it hasn't been easy.... All this has brought about an awareness among the women, and they are coming together and building coalitions and groups to try and speak out and work against the system.'²⁰

A Nigerian participant brought up in a family where the father gave the boys and girls equal opportunities was horrified by the different standards she met when she went to school. At university she found it difficult to study because there was so much violence:

You couldn't write exams, you couldn't concentrate because you were thinking: 'Who is passing? Is he carrying a gun?' So I began to think about how women can contribute to society in terms of common values, in terms of making changes, resolving disputes and conflicts in peaceful ways, because I felt the women had some role in society. Yes, the society was suppressive but there were many men in west Africa who never took decisions without consulting their wives. So I thought that the women do have some power and if we use that power in the right way, and even use it among women themselves, we can really make a change. Because sometimes the opposition is not from the men, it's from the women themselves.²¹

We saw for ourselves in El Salvador in 1994 how women had blossomed through having to take on roles of great responsibility in refugee camps and conflict zones during the civil war. In 1988, when the war still had four years to run, one woman testified:

The participation of women in the different tasks is important. They are on the organising committee of the camps, where they have a say in the discussions. They organise family groups; they

feel that women are capable of doing everything the men do ... and more, very often. The men have come to realise that the women have great endurance and a big heart to love. It's great to see how little by little they are overcoming *machismo*.²²

Sadly, once the peace was signed, the women found *machismo* – ‘an aggressive form of masculinity that dictates how men should think, feel and behave to be considered “real men”²³ – was by no means overcome. Instead they were faced with a return to their traditional role. One woman, who had risen to a commanding position in the guerrilla forces, spoke for them all when she said: ‘I don’t want to go back to making tortillas.’ This refusal by men after a period of war or conflict to let women remain in ‘a man’s world’ happens to a greater or lesser extent in most countries, and indeed happened in Britain and the United States after each of the two world wars.

Women as wives and mothers

Sometimes the pressure to maintain patriarchal tradition is so strong that it constricts the scope of women’s efforts to bring about transformation and peace. Often, however, women have been able to find fruitful ways forward through their traditional caring role, particularly as mothers. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs decided to come together with mothers of those who had fought for the Contra. One mother, María, explains:

They feel the same pain that we feel of having lost their dearest possession – their son – whether he was with the *Frente* or the Resistance. One gives birth with pain and raises them with love. We are all mothers. As the Christians that we are, we cannot support this hatred for another mother. We must give them our hands and help those who have most hurt us. We cannot hold on to these hatreds if we want a dignified peace and if we want reconciliation.²⁴

Even in the traumatised situation of Rwanda, described by the Sister we met who was attending the RTC programme, some mothers are finding ways to become ‘mothers for peace’. Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of UNIFEM (the UN Development Fund for Women), has said: ‘In some of the communities that I visited in

Rwanda, it was very touching for me to hear the Tutsi and the Hutu women saying to one another, let's adopt each other's orphans because these are the children of Rwanda. That in fact is the depth of forgiveness that they have come to.²⁵ We cling on to signs of hope like that when we hear, as we did in August 2004, of another massacre of Tutsis by Hutus in the Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi; and when we read of continuing violence and discrimination against women in Rwanda in spite of progress made with the help of international non-governmental organisations.²⁶

Women chatting together and discussing is the first step towards women organising, which International Alert, in their comprehensive and inspiring publication *Women building peace, sharing know-how*,²⁷ describe as the essential 'missing link' in transforming societies and building a culture of peace. A mother in Buenos Aires, desperately searching hospitals, prisons and ministries for her 'disappeared' son during the so-called 'dirty war' in the 1970s, gets talking to the woman sitting beside her who turns out to be in the same situation, and the powerful Mothers (and eventually Grandmothers) of the Plaza de Mayo are born. One of the Mothers, Hebe de Bonafini, explains that, like women in so many countries, 'the majority of us had hardly been to school':

This is a *macho* country.... Women like us lived in an isolated world which finished at the front doors of our houses. We were taught to iron, wash and cook and look after the children, and that politics was for the men.... When you live like this, you don't know what rights you've got, you don't know there's a United Nations, an Amnesty International, a *habeas corpus* ... that is all from another world. We began to read and we began to collect information to help us understand what was going on.

They then realised that each woman's struggle was 'not about one child, but against a system which crushes all opposition'.²⁸

In a parallel situation in Kashmir, writes Rita Manchanda, the Association of the Parents of the Disappeared 'grew out of Parveen Ahangar's untiring personal search for her missing son.... It turned Parveen Ahangar, an illiterate housewife, into a political agent and a key mobilising figure in the revival of civil society political activism for peace in Kashmir'.²⁹

In *macho* and repressive societies women's going to meetings is considered dangerously subversive and they have to talk under the cover of something like a sewing club. It is worth remembering that, in Britain, the Women's Institute (WI) was seen as a big threat by men in its early years. A WI member we heard of remembers her mother having to lie about going to WI – she said she was going to visit her sister but didn't say that her sister was going to WI!

Some societies, however, have more egalitarian structures and even a tradition of women peacemakers. The culture of Nagaland in India's north-east region is very different from that of the rest of India and its people have struggled for independence for many generations, a struggle which became violent in the 1970s until a fragile ceasefire agreement in 1997. The Naga Mothers Association (NMA) strongly supports the peace process and, in the words of Rita Manchanda, has been able to 'put pressure on the Indian government and the armed groups to abide by the ceasefire and find a political solution'. At the height of internecine violence in 1994-95, the NMA launched a campaign called 'Shed no more blood':

... in a symbolic gesture to reject violence, irrespective of who the perpetrator was, the NMA persisted in dignifying all victims by covering each body with a shroud.... The NMA peace initiative turns on the moral authority of the mother.... It is precisely as mothers that women have this space to appeal to the powerful and move them to compassion and shame.³⁰

Traditional (here used in a positive sense) symbolic gestures can be an extremely effective strategy for women trying to bring an end to conflict. When violent fighting between sub-clans broke out in Somaliland in 1992, the women decided to intervene. A woman peace activist remembers:

There were about 300 of us and we tied white bands around our heads – a sign of mourning [white symbolises anger or sorrow in Somali culture]. We marched up and down between the two groups demonstrating and singing moving *buraanbur* or women's poems and songs, urging: 'SNM [Somali National Movement] fighters, remember the bad times you and your families have been through; this is not the day for killing one another!' As we did

this, the men stopped firing. They were shamed by the sorrowful songs directed towards them by their female partners, sisters and in-laws. Within a matter of days a ceasefire had been agreed.³¹

Networking for peace

The women's peace-building activities we have described so far started with women getting together in their own communities in solidarity with each other. How far they can go depends on their being able to build up more solidarity and support locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The story of Wajir Women for Peace (WWP), described by Dekha Ibrahim in *Somalia – the untold story*, illustrates this well.

The large, very dry Wajir district in north-east Kenya is populated almost entirely by ethnic Somalis, most of them nomads living off herds of camels, cattle and goats. In 1992 violent inter-clan conflict broke out over issues like grazing and water rights, to such an extent that in Wajir town each clan appropriated a zone which members of other clans avoided. In the markets women refused to trade with women of other clans. By 1993 normal life had become impossible.

In Somali society women have often acted as messengers and peacemakers between clans, because the fact that they usually marry men from different clans gives them more freedom of movement. So three educated women got together and first visited 16 other educated women from all clans, each of whom agreed to invite more women from their clan to a meeting of 'all women in Wajir who love peace'. Sixty women, both urban and pastoral, came; and Wajir Women for Peace was born.

WWP first tackled the problem of the market women and met with them daily for over a month to talk about the causes of the violence and hatred and how the market women could help overcome them. Many of them joined WWP and the market became peaceful again. WWP went on to try and mobilise women at grassroots level to work for peace.

However, they realised that beyond a certain point it was essential to bring in the men and the local authorities. In 1995 they brought together a whole range of groups (women, elders, youth, business people, religious leaders, representatives of non-governmental organisations, and government representatives) to form the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, which then became a member

of the Kenya Peace and Development Network. (Dekha Ibrahim herself moved into international networking, becoming a co-founder of the Coalition for Peace in Africa and a board member of Coexistence International.)

WWP sent women all round the district appealing to women to help stop the violence. It organised workshops for administrative and religious authorities encouraging them to work for peace. It started a rapid response team to mediate in local conflicts. It is also helping with rehabilitation of ex-militia members by making modest loans to their wives to start small businesses.

Unfortunately, however, the peace-building influence that women can exert does not usually extend to giving them a formal role in community government. Somali women face the same problem as the Naga women mentioned earlier, who, as Rita Manchanda describes, 'still do not sit in the village council of elders where formal political decisions are made.... Traditional notions of public and private space reassert themselves as post-conflict politics becomes more structured and hierarchical, and they block the space for women in institutionalised or formal politics.'³²

Violence against women

In Afghanistan, during the Taliban rule, many Afghan women covertly carried on providing education for women, girls and even some boys. According to one commentator, 'women's secret organisations and networks in Afghanistan were the only functioning organisations that were trusted by the community'.³³ This means that there are large numbers of women in Afghanistan supremely well qualified to play a leading part in the peace and reconstruction process. However, only a very few are in positions of influence, and in the country as a whole there is a horrifying degree of discrimination and violence against women. An example of this hit the headlines in the run-up to the elections of October 2004, when armed men attacked a minibus in which women were travelling into the countryside to register other women as voters. Three of the women were killed.

Sadly, the idea of women playing any untraditional role seems to be unthinkable to many Afghan men. This also leads to women who have been left as heads of households, following the deaths of their husbands in the civil war, being treated as outcasts from society and

often being reduced to prostitution to keep their families alive.

Tina Sideris, a psychologist counselling women who survived violence in war and peace, asks what resources are available to men, in the aftermath of armed conflict, 'to resist violence and construct more positive identities?' She contends that 'states in post-conflict periods do not pay enough attention to masculinity and the threats it has suffered. Society does not offer men an alternative sense of manhood or masculinity ... combatants are generally demobilised rather than demilitarised. Many men have neither the skills nor the opportunities to play a positive role in reconstruction.'³⁴

Women can help at the grassroots level. A Nicaraguan mother tells of efforts to 'demilitarise' men after the civil war:

Reconciliation was not solely the work of the government, but also of families trying to convince and encourage the man to realise that his presence was necessary in the home, that he really should help the woman, because the woman had assumed the role of mother, wife and husband. It began with the smallest step, which was to convince the man of the house, convince the son, the uncle, the cousin, that violence was not the solution. I think this was the greatest task accomplished.³⁵

A number of pioneering projects in different parts of the world have set about helping men to change their traditional ways of thinking about themselves and about women. CIIR has been working in this field since 1994 when it sent Patrick Welsh, an expert in popular education and gender work with men, to work with the Centre for Communication and Popular Education (Cantera) in Nicaragua. Their work on masculinity had started in the early 1990s when women from Cantera 'challenged their male colleagues to take gender seriously, asking how they could be committed to social justice without being committed to gender equity'. This led to the first national conference for men on this issue in 1994, and to the development, from 1995, of training courses for men on masculinity and popular education. Although men face strong social pressure not to change, Cantera's work shows promising results. One course participant said: 'What I liked most [about the course] was that the majority of the men shared the same concern: a desire to change our own depressing reality and improve the way we relate to women.'³⁶

At the other end of the scale international instruments like UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security can be very helpful as a target to aim at and a benchmark to use in human rights education. This resolution was the result of an initiative by the Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, a coalition of international non-governmental organisations which is now pressing for full implementation of the resolution. In a paper titled 'No women, no peace: The importance of women's participation in peace and development', the group calls not only for women to be fully represented in all formal peace processes but for a paradigm shift 'away from weapons-based security towards gender-aware human security': 'Peace must be redefined as not merely the absence of violent conflict but as the positive and creative process of building sustainable societies.'³⁷

Women and men

An ancient Sufi teaching says: 'You think because you understand *one* you must understand *two*, because one and one make two. But you must also understand *and*.' We may think we understand women and men, but we must also understand *and*. A culture of *machismo* is damaging to men as well as to women. There must be a systemic change if men *and* women are to work together towards reconciliation and a culture of peace.

This is something well understood by East Timorese religious leader María Lourdes Martins Cruz. Speaking with Catherine Scott of CIIR's Asia programme, she described how her Maun Alin Iha Kristu (Sisters and Brothers in Christ) community helped to organise women into self-help groups:

We confronted life's problems with regard to husbands, children, education, dowry, health, knowledge of nutrition and traditional medicine and so on. This helped us to no longer feel stupid, it gave us a sense of liberation. We made a strong connection between our lives and our faith. We did not separate boys and girls – instead we try to educate for peace and non-violence. They discuss violence and its roots regularly. We bring up the boys to be non-violent. Men are now joining the Maun Alin community. Men complain that they themselves are not properly prepared for their responsibilities and see the necessity for better education and

training for boys. They want to devote themselves to educating men, strong in the right kind of way.³⁸

In the intensely patriarchal context of Afghanistan, a mental health training project is having some success in persuading men that ‘treating women with respect, caring for them appropriately and ensuring they receive the resources that they need to work effectively has a positive impact upon the care and upbringing of the children within the family.... The community elders are included in the process, so that they can endorse the information being shared, and sanction changes in behaviour as a result. Following such training sessions, the local religious leaders have given sermons about such topics in the mosques following prayers.’³⁹

In East Timor, training sessions held by the group *Mane Kontra Violencia* (Men Against Violence) put questions such as: ‘If you always beat your wife so that she is sick, who will care for her? If you are locked up in prison for beating her, who will look after your children?’ When Mario Araujo, a member of the group, joined a women’s demonstration against the rape of a woman by a group of policemen, he was accused of ‘being bent on destroying our culture’. He says: ‘When people tell me that gender will destroy our culture, then I ask them: “When you send your daughter to school is that destroying our culture?” Of course they say not.’⁴⁰

Women and development

Mane Kontra Violencia argues: ‘How can women rise out of poverty if they are not allowed to go to school and gain an education?’⁴¹ Miriam Galdámez of El Salvador asserts: ‘Yes, *machismo* is a real problem, but nothing’s ever going to change until we have the basic necessities of life: economic security; housing; health and education.’⁴² Peace also depends on development. As Dekha Ibrahim writes: ‘peace and development are linked; without peace, development and economic stability cannot occur, and without underlying economic security, peace becomes impossible.’⁴³

In other words, not just ‘no women, no peace’ but also ‘no women, no development’. All the developed world’s development agencies recognise that supporting women is the most effective way to combat poverty, and they assess the potential benefit to women in all the projects they consider. Mario Araujo believes that it is largely

owing to gender mainstreaming programmes and policies in the development and aid agencies that up to 25 per cent of East Timorese men have changed their attitudes.

All over the world an increasing number of micro-credit projects, along the lines pioneered by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, now make modest loans, mainly to women, to start small businesses and join together in groups to support each other. There is even an award-winning Quaker micro-credit project, Street Cred, working largely with Bangladeshi women in Bethnal Green. These projects develop women's potential, improve the family's finances and also achieve greater respect for the women from the men in their family. They often say their husbands no longer beat them now that they are earning.

However, changes in attitudes based purely on materialistic self-interest need to evolve into a true peace between men and women based on respect for each other's dignity as fully human beings. The difference between material progress and the realisation of full human potential is reflected in different concepts of 'development'. Suzanne Williams of Oxfam describes the tension between 'hard', masculinised forms of intervention and 'soft', feminised ones:

Actions and interventions that are bound by the urgent, which show fast, quantifiable results, and which are predominantly technical in nature, are 'hard'.... Those that are associated with more subtle and cautious forms of intervention, whose results are more difficult to measure and take longer to manifest, and which are predominantly social and cultural in nature, are 'soft'.⁴⁴

All agencies know which kinds of project are easier to find funding for.

Religion and development

In an article in the journal *Development* Wendy Tyndale discusses the role of religion in development. Wendy was the first coordinator of the World Faiths Development Dialogue, a dialogue between world faiths and the World Bank about poverty and forms of development, and she therefore has a broad perspective on the subject. Her experience has taught her that many development organisations and NGOs 'share the perception of religion as an "anti-developmental"

force. Sometimes this is because religious groups foster superstition, rigidly conservative values (towards women or democratic decision-making, for example) or other-worldly views which are inimical to material change (some of the Central American Pentecostal churches see even improved cooking stoves as the work of the devil).¹⁴⁵

Sometimes, however, it can be because religious and spiritually inspired groups have a different vision of what development is about from that of mainstream development theorists and reject the values promoted by globalised capitalism. As Wendy comments: 'Their resistance is not to science and technology as such, but to the attitudes and values such as dependence on consumer goods, a lack of collective responsibility and the trivialisation of life's purpose.'¹⁴⁶

Wendy cites the Hindu *Swadhyaya* (discovery of self) movement in India which is based on the conviction that 'what human beings need is dignity and recognition, which can only come from genuine mutuality and caring, not just from some political programmes of social justice'. She says: '*Swadhyaya* has inspired thousands of villagers with hope and, in bringing spiritual regeneration, has given people the self-confidence to work towards raising their material standard of living.'¹⁴⁷

This is 'good religion' helping to produce 'good development' – and mainstream development organisations, and the World Bank, are increasingly recognising this and trying to work more closely with the religious groups.

Religious groups are also recognised as a potentially key element in the solving of conflicts. On the international level, the World Conference on Religion and Peace was able to play an influential role in bringing about peace in Sierra Leone; at a national level the Catholic church in Guatemala played an important part in ending the 30 years of internal conflict; and at a local level the Muslim organisation Sarkan Zoumountsi (Chain of Solidarity) managed to resolve a dispute between a Christian tribe and a Muslim one in Yaoundé, finally building a footbridge over the canal dividing the two tribes.⁴⁸

When we talk about 'bringing about peace' we need to distinguish between what Simon Fisher calls 'cold' peace, which is the cessation of violent conflict – an essential first step – and 'warm' peace, which involves addressing the causes of conflict. Peace work 'merges into work for the good society':

... we are talking about equal rights for all, happiness, physical and mental health, wellbeing. The task is to work for a world in which those states of mind and body become a reality for people everywhere. We do this first because it is our deepest impulse, the expression of our true nature, of God. We do it also because we know that unless we work at these deeper levels of mind, culture and structure, we do not address the causes of war, injustice and oppression: cold peace easily turns into cold – then hot – war.⁴⁹

Building the footbridge between neighbours is vital. But ‘warm’ peace, like ‘soft’ development, is not always so easy to measure. Joan McGregor, a tutor with the Responding to Conflict programme, described to us some success in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Red Cross sponsored two young people to take part in an RTC course. On their return they trained others and the Red Cross, unusually, took on community peace building as part of its humanitarian values programme. As a result it is now possible to identify some indicators of progress from ‘cold’ to ‘warm’ peace: people who could not bear to speak to each other are now working together and even eating together; young men are returning from the bush to the villages; and women can speak in public.

Signs of hope

When we came back from visits to Central America people used to ask us: ‘Don’t you come home sad and depressed from seeing so much poverty and violence?’ We would reply that, on the contrary, we came home inspired by the courage and hope of most of the people we met. We saw the flames of the Spirit springing up everywhere and wished we could bring back to our own somewhat unhelpful society some glowing embers, of which women seemed to be the main guardians.

We feel the same about the women we have met and read about in preparing this Comment, finding signs of hope almost every day. There is Zemlja Djece, a group helping displaced women and children from Srebrenica to rebuild their lives and integrating children from Bosnia’s marginalised Roma community. Or, in our own country, there is Women to Women for Peace (whose motto is ‘Let there be peace and let it start with me’), whose activities include providing conflict resolution training for Russian women trying to

set up voluntary organisations and, in 2004, hosting a visit of Israeli and Palestinian women to the UK.

We see many signs of hope in the field of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation, even at this time when some strident voices talk of the world splitting along religious/cultural lines. The first time we saw such signs of hope for ourselves was when we were collecting stories of women making a difference and went up to the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham to meet with Marion McNaughton, who is a tutor in Practical Theology there. She described their annual Inter-faith Women's Day which had just taken place, attended by 60 women – Jewish, Christian, Quaker, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist – on the theme of 'women building a multifaith Britain'. She told us:

The theme of the day was the city and the culture and the country that we want to build together. We were saying: 'We're women of faith, of many faiths, and we think that's important. We want to help create a society where all faiths can flourish and affect things.' We bring barriers in with us but they don't stay up long. When you love someone from another faith you can't put up a barrier against them.⁵⁰

In our research for this Comment we have had similar inspiring encounters. At the meeting in June 2004 with the group of participants in the RTC programme, a Nigerian woman described their work across the religious divides between Muslims and Christians:

There is so much violence between these groups and people said 'enough is enough' and we came together to dialogue and see how we can work together.... They needed a space to share their experiences together and find that each was not alone. They shared the same experiences and realised that their religion did not keep them apart but could bring them together.

Another woman in the group echoed this:

How does our faith influence our work? The coming together and sharing the various problems, coming together to pray, helps to share the burden. We feel that we are united spiritually, we have

one goal, we are working towards the same goal and we don't feel alone.... We believe in each other, we are pillars to each other.

They pointed out that this could happen not just between different faiths, but between different Christian denominations. In emergency situations, 'a project is a way of getting people together':

In the past Pentecostals would not like to mix with Roman Catholics and the Orthodox churches would be on one side and the Protestants on the other. But now they have all come together. There is an interdenominational group called Gracious Women where they come together and train, they have activities and so on to try and bring about peace.... All the differences just go to the wayside.⁵¹

Differences also disappeared during a peace march in Jayapura, capital of Papua, on 21 September 2002, the United Nations' International Day of Peace. The leaders of the major religions in Papua – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism – took part (all men, of course, but many women will have taken part and they are very active in the Papuan peace movement). The Catholic Bishop of Jayapura, Leo Ladjar, recounts:

At each stop, a participating religious group led the prayer according to its own belief. The others participated in prayerful meditation. In this atmosphere, we no longer felt the religious divide. The five religious leaders marched in front, holding hands as a gesture of friendship. We carried lighted torches as a symbol of our common mission to bring light to the world. The prayers offered by each of the religious groups gave each of us a different experience of God.

Bishop Ladjar went on to say: 'I am convinced that religions can bring peace if their followers can transcend their institutional religions and converge on a level of faith and experience about Him, the beginning-source-and-destination of humankind.' His fellow faith leader from the Muslim tradition, Zubir Hussein, added: 'the key is to believe in each other, honour each other and to understand each other's faith'.⁵²

Signs of the Spirit

We want to end with an experience we had much closer to home. We were moved to find the same way of thinking being put into practice in north London in a Muslim-led, hope-filled community regeneration project called Faith in the Future (FITF). It is based in Stoke Newington in a street which is almost entirely Orthodox Jewish at one end and almost entirely Muslim at the other, with some Christian churches also in the mix. Our friend Jenny Rossiter, who is a board member of FITF, led us there. She had talked enthusiastically about the work and of her amazement and delight when, as a new recruit, she attended a community event and found Muslims, Jews and Christians celebrating happily together.

When she took us to visit FITF we met its dedicated director, Yahya Hafesji, and his equally dedicated colleague Lema Hamad, who runs their women's programme. This is an important part of their work because there are many women in the area who had very little education and married very young but now have a chance to fulfil their potential and contribute to the community. FITF's special character is that it is a faith-based initiative, the first of its kind, which has won support from government agencies and also works in partnership with Action Aid. Its brochure explains:

FITF as a strategy for neighbourhood renewal harnesses the under-utilised resources and enthusiasm within faith communities. It brings into play the values that faith underpins to provide the motivation within the community to replace the feeling that regeneration has been 'imposed' with a truly people-centric approach.... Faith communities can bring values, commitment, neighbourliness and a rich religious and cultural heritage to the unpopular areas which no amount of security and management systems can compete with.

Yahya Hafesji stressed that they really mean 'faith communities' in the plural, and that all faiths can provide the moral impetus to which FITF can appeal. We hope to keep in touch with this sign of the Spirit.

St Teresa of Avila reminds us that:

Our Lord asks but two things of us: love for Him and for our neighbour.... I think the most certain sign that we keep these two commandments is that we have a genuine love for others. We cannot know whether we love God although there may be strong reasons for thinking so, but there can be no doubt about whether we love our neighbour or not. Be sure that in proportion as you advance in fraternal charity, you are increasing in your love of God.⁵³

The Golden Rule for right relations, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' or 'Do as you would be done by', is to be found in some form in all religions and spiritual traditions. Here are six examples.⁵⁴

Do not treat others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful
(The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18)

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you
(Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:12)

This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you (Mahabharata 5:1517)

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself (The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith)

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbath 31a)

Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain and your neighbour's loss as your own loss (T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213-218)

We thank God for this sign of the omnipresence of the Spirit and pray for the strengthening of what Aung San Suu Kyi calls 'the kindly ties that can serve to bind humankind together in amity and understanding'.⁵⁵

Notes

- ¹ CAFOD 1997 Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture, 'Heavenly abodes and human development', written by Aung San Suu Kyi and delivered by her husband, Dr Michael Aris (London: CAFOD, 1997).
- ² Our Comment expands many of the issues which form the background to Tina Beattie's *A culture of life: Women's theology and social liberation* (London: CIIR, 2000) and we hope it will be a worthy complement to it.
- ³ Paul Oestreicher, 'Reconciliation: A search for its meaning' in *Open hands: Reconciliation, justice and peace work around the world* edited by Barbara Butler (Bury St Edmunds: Mayhew, 1998), p36.
- ⁴ Sumaya Farhat-Naser and Gila Svirsky, 'Making peace as development practice' in *Development, women, and war: Feminist perspectives* (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2004), p276.
- ⁵ As above, p281.
- ⁶ As above, p277.
- ⁷ As above, pp279-280.
- ⁸ Matthew 5, 23-24 (New Revised Standard Version).
- ⁹ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A short history* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), pp5-6.
- ¹⁰ Martina Belic, quoted by Tina Sideris in 'Problems of identity, solidarity and reconciliation' in *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* edited by Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshon (London: Zed Books, 2001), p59.
- ¹¹ Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, 'A Kenyan experience for faith-based transformative action' in *Development*, Vol. 46 No.4 (December 2003), p93.
- ¹² Simon Fisher, *Spirited living: Waging conflict, building peace* (London: Quaker Books, 2004), p41.
- ¹³ Fatma Amer, 'Confronting difficulties' in *Priests & People*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (January 2004), p10.
- ¹⁴ *New Internationalist*, No. 370 (August 2004), p11.
- ¹⁵ Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey, *Life out of death: The feminine spirit in El Salvador* (London: CIIR, 1996), p86.
- ¹⁶ As above, p29.
- ¹⁷ Elizabeth A Johnson, *Women, earth, and creator spirit* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), p25.
- ¹⁸ Responding to Conflict is a UK-based international programme offering skills and strategies for peace building to people from all over the world working in conflict situations. Marigold Best met with four young women participants at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre on 10 June 2004. RTC, 1046 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LJ.

- ¹⁹ Quoted from the Commission on Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in the Report on the National Public Hearing on Women and Conflict, Dili, East Timor, 28-29 April 2003. Public hearings were set up in 2003-05 to deal with crimes committed during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. Indonesia had used the opportunity of a coup by the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) against Fretilin to invade East Timor in 1975.
- ²⁰ Conversation with Marigold Best (see note 18).
- ²¹ As above.
- ²² Pamela Hussey, *Free from fear: Women in El Salvador's church* (London: CIIR, 1989), p36.
- ²³ *Men changing: Power, masculinities and non-violence from Latin America to Europe* edited by Jane Belton and Adam Bradbury (London: CIIR, 2002), p3.
- ²⁴ *Arms to fight, arms to protect: Women speak about conflict*, PANOS Oral Testimony Series (London: Panos, 1995), p215. The revolutionary Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional overthrew Somoza in 1979 to become the government of Nicaragua. The Contra (short for counter-revolutionaries) waged war against the government with support from the United States. The Contra were also known as the Resistance.
- ²⁵ Noeleen Heyzer, 'Humanitarian intervention today: New issues, new ideas, new players', speech at humanitarian conference, Kennedy Centre, Washington, 24 Sept 2003.
- ²⁶ Myriam Gervais, 'Human security and reconstruction efforts in Rwanda: Impact on the lives of women' in *Development, women, and war* (see note 4), p306.
- ²⁷ London, June 2003.
- ²⁸ Quoted in *Out of the shadows: Women, resistance and politics in South America* by Jo Fisher (London: Latin America Bureau, 1993), pp107-8.
- ²⁹ Rita Manchanda, 'Ambivalent gains in South Asian conflicts' in *The aftermath* (see note 10), p107.
- ³⁰ As above, pp109-110.
- ³¹ Zeynab Mohamed Hassan, quoted in *Somalia – the untold story: The war through the eyes of Somali women* edited by Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra (London: CIIR and Pluto Press, 2004), p143.
- ³² Rita Manchanda (see note 29), pp110-111.
- ³³ Elaheh Rostami Povey, 'Women in Afghanistan: Passive victims of the *borga* or active social participants?' in *Development, women, and war* (see note 4), p179.
- ³⁴ Tina Sideris, 'Problems of identity, solidarity and reconciliation' in *The aftermath* (see note 10), p52.
- ³⁵ Anonymous Nicaraguan mother in *Arms to fight, arms to protect* (see note 24).
- ³⁶ *Men changing* (see note 23), p5.
- ³⁷ The text of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 and many other valuable documents are available at www.peacewomen.org.

- ³⁸ Information from Catherine Scott.
- ³⁹ Sian Hawkins, 'Afghanistan: The role of men and boys in gender equality' in *Engendering Peace*, Vol.1 Issue 1 (Spring 2004), available on www.womenbuildingpeace.org.
- ⁴⁰ Mario Araujo, of Oxfam Australia, was interviewed for CIIR in East Timor in June 2004.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Mario Araujo (as above).
- ⁴² Interview while in England for International Women's Day, 1981. Quoted in *My country is the whole world: An anthology of women's work on peace and war*, compiled by the Cambridge Women's Peace Collective (London: Pandora Press, 1984), p224.
- ⁴³ *Somalia – the untold story* (see note 31), p173.
- ⁴⁴ Suzanne Williams, 'Mission impossible: gender, conflict, and Oxfam GB' in *Development, women, and war* (see note 4), p321.
- ⁴⁵ Wendy Tyndale, 'Idealism and practicality: The role of religion in development' in *Development*, Vol. 46 No.4 (December 2003), p25.
- ⁴⁶ As above, p24.
- ⁴⁷ As above, p23.
- ⁴⁸ As above, pp26-7.
- ⁴⁹ Simon Fisher (see note 12), p74.
- ⁵⁰ Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey, *Women making a difference* (London: CIIR and SPCK, 2001), p137.
- ⁵¹ Conversations with Marigold Best (see note 18).
- ⁵² Information from Catherine Scott.
- ⁵³ St Teresa of Avila, *The interior castle*, quoted in *My country is the whole world* (see note 42), p17.
- ⁵⁴ Listed by Wendy Tyndale (see note 45).
- ⁵⁵ CAFOD 1997 Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture (see note 1).



A culture of peace

Building a culture of peace is perhaps the biggest, the most complicated and the most important issue in the world today.

In this Comment, Marigold Best and Pamela Hussey put forward the voices and perspectives of women from around the world who are making powerful and innovative contributions to peace building. Together they provide compelling evidence that the full participation of women, enjoying equal rights with men, offers a real possibility of peace, reconciliation, and development.



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