

Re-imagining Women's Security
Research Briefing Paper,
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Introduction

This project will contribute to an understanding of the role and experiences of women in contemporary post-conflict societies by means of an examination of the gendered meanings of security. The study will be undertaken through a research partnership between the University of Ulster and Democratic Dialogue and with research associates in South Africa and Lebanon. The project is funded under the ESRC 'New Security Challenges' Programme
<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/researchfunding/securitychallengesprog.asp>

Focus of the Study

The study will engage in a comparative investigation on how political transition in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Lebanon has impacted on the security of women, particularly in reference to the outworking of the peace agreements in each context. By the outworking of peace agreements we mean the structures (e.g. institutions, legal structures), mechanisms (e.g. proportional representation), and relationships (e.g. coalitions, networks) that have been the product of the peace agreements in each context. We are conscious that other outworking of the peace agreement may be present, but we will restrict our view to the structures, mechanisms and relationships. To this end, we will comparatively inquire into how these outworkings have impacted on the socio-economic, personal, and civil and political, dimensions of security for women.

We will examine, analyse and compare in each of the three societies under investigation:

- (a) the meaning of women's security in political, economic and social terms;
- (b) the differing levels of women's participation in decision-making
- (c) the different strategies used to effect change for and by women
- (d) the extent to which increases in crime and gender-based violence during or after the transition has impacted upon the security of women's lives.

Definition of Human Security

The *Commission on Human Security* (2003)¹, which has moved the discourse on security away from a states-based, militaristic perspective, begins with the premise that achieving human security requires not only protection but also a strategy to empower people to fend for themselves. Development theorists argue that if a gender dimension in development practice is not included the consequence will be to increase gender inequalities. The DAC (1998) guidelines for gender equality and women's empowerment in terms of

¹ *Human Security Now*: Commission on Human Security, an initiative of the Government of Japan, supported by the United Nations, co-chairs Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, New York, 2003.

development co-operation make plain that promotion of gender equality is a broad societal issue that women and men need to address in partnership. With respect to women and armed conflict, it has been accepted by international practitioners, most notably the United Nations in its adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in 2000, that gender equality is central to peace building and reconstruction.

Gendering the concept of human security will be grounded in the lived experiences of people – both men and women – in recognition that there are qualitative differences in how security is perceived. Bringing a gender equality perspective to the discussion will help to broaden our understanding of both security and insecurity and the relationship between security, conflict and empowerment.

In defining human security we will consider two vital questions. Whose security is being considered? How do gender inequalities and differences affect people's ability to articulate their security needs and mobilise resources to meet those security needs? The processes of building peace and women's empowerment may be conflictual rather than harmonious. This study will evaluate structural factors that may reduce women's participation in reconstruction while maintaining a conceptualisation that views women primarily as agents of change, not withstanding their subordinate status in many areas of society in all three case studies.

Methodology

(A) Comparative Focus

When examining notions of security, empowerment and participation and their meaning and relevance to women in post-conflict societies, there will inevitably be both similarities and differences between the cases studied. By identifying what is common or what distinguishes one case from the next a good comparative study contributes to scholarship and bridges the gap between universalism and particularism. The comparative methodology that underpins this project will afford us the opportunity to see what is shared between three complex and often very different societies (Northern Ireland, South Africa and Lebanon) as well as facilitating the discussion of specific events, institutions, attitudes and relationships in the light of different historical, political and social backgrounds. Comparing sharpens our powers of description and can contribute to the 'inductive discovery' of new theory and the development of public policy. Moreover, comparing is arguably the best antidote to ethnocentrism, since exposure to other cultures highlights the danger of intellectual occlusion.

The value of drawing parallels between two or more societies remains largely dependent upon the choice of cases made and for this reason it is of importance that the decisions to use particular examples is justified. Northern Ireland, Lebanon and South Africa are apposite objects of empirical analysis. The three societies share a number of important attributes – independent variables – which can be treated as constants, thereby adding strength to the research design. Each society has experience of violent inter-

communal conflict and is now attempting to emerge from that conflict following a negotiating peace agreement. All three share a number of similarities:

- i) they are all coming out of conflict
- ii) they possess structures established to implement peace agreements that stand outside the formal government machinery
- iii) they possess extensive equality legislation
- iv) they have established equality machineries independent of political parties
- v) civil society has been taken seriously and has had a significant influence on the negotiating process

In addition to the similarities each of the case studies chosen are different in a number of crucial respects. The significance of any project, the methods used, its viewpoints, and results, will depend heavily upon finding examples that allow the researcher to draw both analogies and contrasts. Indeed, the very logic of comparison refers to the fact that the cases to be examined are not only similar in a large number of independent variables which one wants to treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other. The three societies selected vary significantly in four dimensions:

- i) Social and economic development
- ii) The ethnic, racial and religious mix at the centre of communal conflict
- iii) The trajectory of the conflict
- iv) The extent to which the origins and nature of the conflict and the goals of transition remain contested.

Examples of these four distinctions include the fact that the Gross National Income per head (Atlas method) in Northern Ireland is \$US20,000 (population 1.7 million), in the Lebanon \$US3,990 (population 4.4 million) and South Africa \$US2,550 (population 43.6 million).² Lebanon is a multicultural, multiethnic society with four dominant religious faiths embracing Islam and Christianity. Northern Ireland is a bi-cultural white society with less than one per cent of its population drawn from other ethnic groups and is polarised religiously within Christianity and politically along strong sectarian fault lines. South Africa is a multicultural society, where political power is held by the predominantly black community while most of the wealth is held by the minority white society. While in both the Lebanon and South Africa there was a shared narrative of the nature of the conflict and the goals of transition, in Northern Ireland there was no shared agreement on the nature of the conflict and only limited agreement on the goals of transition.

(B) Data Collection Techniques

In the three societies we will:

² <http://www.worldbank.org/data/databytopic/GNIPC.pdf>. The figure for Northern Ireland is estimated as 25% of the UK figure.

- Conduct ten interviews in each country with a selected number of key people in politics and those involved in peace-building organisations and institutions.
- Carry out at least nine focus groups to explore issues around security and empowerment with the following groups of people –
 - 1: Women in economic reconstruction
 - 2: Women in NGOs
 - 3: Female Party activists
 - 4: Male Party activists
 - 5: Women in public life
 - 6: Men in public life
 - 7: Male Ex-combatants
 - 8: Female Ex-combatants
 - 9: Victims
- Produce a gendered audit of post-conflict development focusing on the outworking of peace agreements in terms of mechanisms, structures and relationship building.

In each of the components the research will be highly focused in terms of the people selected, the questions asked and the issues explored. The gendered terrain is too large for one small project. The aim therefore is to emphasise the comparative element of the research and to draw out the similarities and the differences in the three countries on key selected areas and issues. The key issues can be conceptualised in the form of a matrix with the dimensions of the outworking of peace agreements running along the top of the matrix and four selected areas in which they have impacted upon the security of women running down the matrix (See Figure 1)

	Dimensions of the Outworking of Peace Agreements		
	Structures	Mechanisms	Relationships
Areas of Impact			
Socio-economic			
Personal security			
Civil participation			
Political participation			

The research will explore for the four selected substantive areas, the extent to which the outworking of peace agreements has produced new structures, such as new institutions (e.g. gender commission; equality laws), new mechanisms (e.g. proportional representation, quotas), as well as changes in relationships (e.g. new networks, lobbying groups, NGOs, etc.). It will then assess the impact and outcome of these changes on women's security and empowerment. For example, has the use of quotas (mechanism)

enhanced women's empowerment in terms of civil and political participation? Has a Domestic Violence Act (structure) increased levels of personal security for women? Has lobbying increased women's socio-economic power?

Based on an initial audit of mechanisms, structures and relationships, an interview protocol will be designed. This will be piloted in two focus groups in Northern Ireland. A finalised protocol to guide the focus groups and interviews, broadly similar in each context, will then be developed.

(C) Indicative questions for each substantive area of research

Socio-economic

Has the economy expanded or contracted?

Has inequality grown or has it been reduced?

Has women's participation in the economy increased or decreased?

Have women now greater or less access to resources such as food, water, energy?

Have social protection policies expanded or declined?

Do women entrepreneurs have greater control over decision-making within the family?

To what extent do they feel secure in their physical environment – at work and at home.

Personal security

Has women's freedom of movement increased or declined?

Has women's physical safety both in the home and outside improved or declined?

Has women's freedom over bodily integrity increased or declined?

How do women view masculinity and violence in their communities?

How do they protect their children?

Civic participation

Do women have a greater right to public participation?

Are women resourced to participate in civil society?

Has women's actual participation in civil society changed?

What do they consider to be the barriers to women's greater participation?

Political participation

Do women have a greater right to political participation?

Has women's actual participation in politics changed?

What do they consider to be the barriers to women's greater participation?

Project Partners (Institutions and Researchers)

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- Professor Monica McWilliams, University of Ulster
- Professor Gillian Robinson, University of Ulster
- Brandon Hamber, Democratic Dialogue
- Dr Margaret Ward, Democratic Dialogue
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Dissemination

A report on gendered notions of security, comparative lessons, on-going problems and best practice regarding the role of women in public life in the three case-studies will be produced and seminars in all three countries will disseminate the findings at local level. In addition, an international conference will be convened in Northern Ireland to ensure dissemination across the broader international community.

Timetable

The project commenced in January 2004 and will be completed by December 2006. The fieldwork for the project will begin over summer 2004.

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