

# **WOMEN IN PEACE-BUILDING**

*Perspectives of women in Durban.*

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I certify that the content of this research article is my own work, except where otherwise stated or cited, and that the material has not been submitted for any other degree.

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## **REFERENCES**

## **ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS**

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ANC	African National Congress
AWA	Advocacy for Women
AWCPD	African Women Committee on Peace and Development
AWSA	Arab Women's Solidarity Association
DWAF	Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
FAS	Femmes Africa Solidarite`
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/ Acquired immune deficiency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
OAU	Organization of African Unity
RUF	The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone
RSS	Rural Support Service
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WCRP	World Conference on Religion and Peace
WHO	World Health Organization

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## **ABSTRACT**

For centuries, women's opinion on matters of peace building were largely ignored. The importance of women's participation in peace-building cannot be better expressed than in the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 of 2000. This resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the council, calls for the broad participation of women in peace building and post conflict reconstruction.

The primary data aspect of this study was conducted with a diverse group of women based in Durban. Ten women were interviewed with the aim of gathering data about their experiences of peace building and their vision of peace. They viewed their approaches as often distinct from men and believed that the significance of their peace building work is not adequately recognized. What these ten women have in common is courage, tenacity and a long term vision of a world in peace. They view the attainment of peace and a return to normality as everyone's responsibility and everyone's concern. Women, men, politicians and religious and civic organizations should be seen as working together in building peace.

## CHAPTER 1

### About this Research Article

*"I pay tribute to the mothers and wives and sisters of our nation. You are the rock-hard foundation of our struggle. Apartheid has inflicted more pain on you than on anyone else."*

Nelson Mandela, in a speech after his release from prison in 1990.

#### 1.1 Introduction

A largely unexplored subject in the study of peace research is the unique role played by women in building peace. This study has attempted to place women peace activists in the context of peace building and the challenges they faced. In most negotiations among representatives of warring parties, negotiators excluded women from high-level parleys, which society considers male domains and which employ discourses and practices that are closer to men's' reality than to women's (Meintjes, 2001: 89). Many South Africans acknowledge Albertina Sisulu as one of the most significant leaders of the South African liberation movement. She was involved in politics even before she married ANC leader Walter Sisulu in 1944. Over the years she headed the ANC Women's league, the Federation of South African Women and the United Democratic Front. She was imprisoned in 1958, 1963, 1981 and 1985 and banned in 1964. Through it all she raised a large family while her husband was imprisoned 8 times and in 1964 sentenced to life prison along with former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. When asked by the media if sexism holds women back, Mrs. Sisulu response was, "No! In fact that is what has made women stand up and play their role" (Norment, 1994:98). Men disparage women's peace activities by regarding it as only a natural extension of

their nurturing and caring domestic roles as wives and mothers. In order to be heard, one of the participants responded during the interview of this study that, "women need to be higher up in the various structures-within movements, political parties and opposition groups, and they need to be organized, this means enabling women to sit at the peace table, to represent women and to discuss the issues that must be put on the table." Women's wish to be included in peace negotiations is more than a simple demand for a proportional numeric representation. The Graca Machel Study (UN, 1996a; Wessels, 1998), documented the effects of armed conflict upon children, identified women as active agents of peace-building and conflict resolution at grassroots levels and advocated for increased participation at national, regional, international levels.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution urging the increased role of women in UN peace promotion and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution is the first in which the Council focused exclusively on the effects of war on women and girls and acknowledged women as important actors in conflict resolution and nation rebuilding (Anderlini, 2000). While it maybe difficult to define the qualitative differences that women make in peace-building, it is not so difficult to see the concrete results of their actions. For South Africans, writing the new constitution was a crucial step in the battle against discrimination. It provided a lifetime opportunity to establish a system of laws and values that would influence the future of the nation. South Africa is celebrating it's ten years of democracy this year, 2004. In South Africa, the new democratic framework, and especially the protection of civil and human rights embedded in the new constitution, did contribute to creating the conditions for gender equity. Gender



equality groups in South Africa have hailed the inclusion of 12 women in President Thabo Mbeki's cabinet as a ground breaking event for the country. Gender Advocacy programme spokesman Rashid Galant said the retention of 9 women cabinet ministers and the promotion of 3 others was "a step in the right direction". The advocacy programme is spearheading a national campaign called the 50/50 campaign, and is lobbying for 50 percent of women in all government structures (The Daily News, 30 April 2004).

For Norment (1994), although "Women have taken their rightful places in society and are assisting in shaping and building the new South Africa, the task that lies ahead is to make their voices heard in government, homes and business".

## **1.2 Context of the Study**

This study takes place within the context of South Africa's fledgling democracy. The role women played in South Africa's democracy serves as a model worldwide for individual and mass protest for peace and freedom. Democracy sparked hope amongst women and their role in the new South Africa. This study was not to seek times and dates for events of great significance in South African history or indeed to verify the role played by the ten women peace activists, but simply to record and interpret their contribution to peace building.

The limitations that African women face in general are deep rooted, and many inherited cultural and traditional constraints subordinate women and exclude them from the decision-making process. These include the traditional lack of access and control over resources and benefits, including education and property, the myth and tradition that certain

jobs are not for women, the belief that women are supposed to follow rather than lead, and the fact that where there is institutionalization of equality many men only pay lip-service to power sharing (FAS, 1997).

Because women become the markers of cultural identity they are often subject to vigilant scrutiny and, at times, violent discipline. Women writers have been quick to notice however, that in times of national struggle, women have often moved out of their traditional roles. Women who previously have led almost no public life have become community leaders and activists as well as economic providers. These include integrating peace work into everyday life (FAS,2001).

Peace activists are creative in the way they fashion their lives, manage their commitments, avoid burnout's and design and carry out projects. This research will survey the local and international literature on the extent and the effectiveness of women in peace building.

### **1.3 Rationale for the Study**

My purpose in compiling this study was simple. At the end of a degree course in peace studies, it was clear to me that around me, in my own life, were many fine and quiet examples of peace activism. The overwhelming freedom faced by women in South Africa after 1994 elections and the daunting task of conflict management after apartheid, were the reasons that underpinned my decision to choose this topic.

For centuries, women's opinions on matters of peace building were largely ignored. They work behind the scenes and sometimes get little or no recognition for their efforts (Norment, 1994). These women need to be heard, especially their perceptions of the effectiveness of their efforts. The study seeks to obtain data from ten women peace activists

who have a driving sense of hope in action and a commitment to non-violence. Their roles would have included dealing with conflict, seeking social justice for all marginalized people, and taking action which helps to resolve issues non-violently and to contribute to building peaceful communities. For many women peace activists, peace activism is a way of life. This research article aims to present a testament to the women who live their lives contributing to world peace.

In writing this research article, it is hoped that the experiences of the women peace activists, will highlight the significant contribution made by women in the struggle for peace. Furthermore, the 'stories' related by the women could provide hope and motivate other women to engage in or to continue in their efforts to make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities.

#### **1.4 Aims of the study**

Based on interviews with ten women peace-builders, the study seeks to investigate:-

- i) Their understanding of peace.
- ii) Factors which influenced their original commitment to peace work.
- iii) Factors which have sustained their work for peace.
- iv) Obstacles and challenges which they have faced in their work for peace.
- v) Their perceptions of the effectiveness of their work.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

A synopsis of the remainder of this study on women in peace-building is as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews the comparative literature on international support for women as peace activists. A definition of peace and the relevant theories of nonviolence are explored towards a framework for analyzing the lives and motivations of people involved in peace-building and similar work.

Chapter 3 details the methodology employed in generating this study.

Chapter 4 includes the analysis of the interviews with the peace activists based in Durban and reflects on their experiences and their vision of peace. This chapter explores the motivations for peace activism as they perceived them and acknowledges their contributions to peace work.

Chapter 5 will draw conclusive findings related to women in peace-building. The study assesses what lies ahead for women in peace-building and will also assess the peace building interventions and formulate lessons for peace-building agenda. The chapter also concludes with an understanding of the many ways in which women contribute positively to the process of building peace.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Defining Peace- Towards a Peace Building Typology**

*"I regard myself as a soldier, a soldier of peace"*

*(Mahatma Gandhi)*

#### **2.1 Introduction**

South Africa has been marred by a history of human rights abuses, escalating conflict and increasing levels of violence. The high levels of violence which dominate South Africa are, to a large extent, the function of past political, social and economic policies. The apartheid policies of Nationalist government (1948-1994) were based on discrimination and institutionalized racism. Socio-political discrimination and injustice and its associated problems of violence, crime poverty, unemployment and homelessness have contributed to a sense of powerlessness. The legitimized processes of violence inherent in the apartheid regime prescribed and sanctioned behaviours which violated the integrity and dignity of large groups of people within South Africa. One way to frame this, is that the previous government have constructed a version of the referent world that is deemed important to understand outcomes in foreign policy, and they have left out non-white and in particular women's' perspectives (Regan & Paskeviciute, 2003).

South African black women deserve special mention when one considers that they have been traditionally looked upon as victims. As victims they have a right to voice their fears and concerns. Apart from coping with their own trauma, women are often left with the sole responsibility of raising and educating children, earning a living, and caring for the wounded and maimed returning from war (Sesay, 2004).

South African women played a crucial role during the liberation struggle, and their role has been drastically shifted from a call for a democratic South Africa to a shift for survival and building peace. Women in South Africa's faced the reluctance among some to accept them as equal partners. South African women leaders say it will be a long, hard fight to overcome a tradition of sexism in their male-dominated society. "You are not given anything on a silver platter," says Lindiwe Mabuzza, former ANC representative in the United States. "We must educate women, because oppression also affects the victim; and we must educate men against archaic views"(Norment, 1994).

"What is peace?" asks Thandi Modise, chairperson of the Defence Select Committee in South Africa. Modise is a member of the ANC women's executive committee. During the apartheid regime she trained as a fighter, and spent ten years in jail. But in South Africa women have succeeded in securing their place in the decision-making structures post-apartheid and post-conflict. Their involvement has made a qualitative difference to the way South Africa addresses the challenges of peace building, economic growth and political stability and security. There are two important things that we want for any situation that is called peace, she says. "One, there should be stability internally, so that we can move forward socially, economically and politically. In the social sphere women want to make sure that they are secure. This affects the way we look at security. In South Africa, we can no longer think of peace without considering what constitutes security. Am I secure when I cannot walk in the streets at midnight?, "she asks, "definitely no. Therefore can I say that I am at peace? Can I say that I am able to progress economically if I am unsure of what happens in my house



when I return from work? I and other women cannot. So 'peace' has had little effect on our lives" (McKay, 2001).

However, it is critical to include the experiences and perspectives of all sectors of society, especially those who have been working towards sustainable peace and who have been previously marginalized, moving beyond the perspective of those responsible for perpetuating the conflict and violence.

This chapter includes, definitions of peace and in defining peace, the researcher examined the notion of peace, what it is, what it is not, and then examined notions of violence and non-violence. In particular the researcher found it essential to focus on conflict management activities, women and peace-building with particular reference to Africa and South Africa

## **2.2 What is Peace?**

In attempting to define peace building, it is essential to explore common understandings of the notion of peace. There are three principal assumptions upon which this research article is constructed:

- There will always be difference of opinion, interests and needs between individuals, groups and nations, that is, conflict is inevitable.
- Violence is a common way of dealing with conflict and may take physical or more subtle forms example, structural, cultural violence).
- There are many non-violent ways of resolving conflicts and

these can be learned and applied. These are less costly and more effective in actually 'solving' a conflict. A more peaceful society is therefore possible.

Peace theory recognizes several dimensions of violence and peace. In attempting to define peace activism, it is essential to explore common understandings of the notion of peace. Some questions posed here which need to be considered. Is peace merely the absence of war, or is peace, like war, a recognizable phenomenon in its own right? If the latter, what are the attributes of peace? As in war, where violence is perpetrated against victims, is peace enacted by some on others? If peace is a phenomena, where does it begin and end? Is peace received or experienced or practiced? Does peace require a conscious act? For some commentators, peace is purely personal and based on meeting basic needs and desires in safe and sustainable environments. Peace and security for women means the knowledge that they can provide a healthy and happy community environment for themselves, their children and loved ones to live with dignity, fulfillment and the certainty of developing their potential as whole human beings (Shewan in Salla,1995, p. 88).

While other peace researchers warned of the impact on our world of over-population, and raised a fear that should peace prevail in any region, the population would increase exponentially. Respect for gender, cultures, beliefs, differences and race is an essential ingredient of world peace, as pointed out by Shewan (cited in Salla 1995): "If we can break down the sexism, which is so deeply ingrained within society, then we may be on the way to dealing with the demon that is militarism".



Some peace researchers examine peace as an interconnected phenomenon. Franklin (1987) proposes that "inner peace" can lead to effective "outer peace". He believes that by increasing joy and harmony within ourselves, we can affect the levels of joy and harmony in those around us, and subsequently create more peaceful communities. Duties to self, to the family, to the country and to the world are not independent of one another. One cannot do good to the country by injuring himself or his family. Similarly one cannot serve the country injuring the world at large (Gandhi, 1958, p. 120).

Other peace activists place emphasis on examining the link between power, violence and peace. They propose that the 'personal is political', that by living a "politically aware" life and changing our own power relationships, peace can be attainable. Put simply, changing the way individuals exercise power in their own lives, in its productive sense, we directly impact on global peace (Salla, 1998, p.328).

### **2.3 Types of Violence and Non-violence**

Peace encompasses a phenomenon, of many strands of human endeavour and thought such as, the world ecology, race, gender, culture, groups, ages, resources and their allocation, the power of the individual and the power of systems, money and its allocation, and the protection, nurturing, safety and security of individuals and groups. Peace is not merely the opposite of violence and conflict, but is enhanced by an understanding of the basic rights and responsibilities human beings have to themselves, their families, their society and their world.

What is meant by violence? Some would argue that the abuse of power by one against another is an act of violence. There are many theories about the nature of power, its use and abuse. Gene Sharp (1973, p.7) defines two types of power namely social and political, the former being to "control the behavior of others" and the latter to which is wielded for political objectives". Sharp (1973, p.63) posits that non-violent action is the withdrawal of consent by subjects: People do not always do what they are told to do, and sometimes they do things which have been forbidden to them.

Galtung's examination of the three types of violence provides the groundwork for exploration of responses to violence. Society may sanction indirect forms of violence such as abusive violent language, and family or domestic violence. This violence is hidden in the sense that it is socially sanctioned or ignored, leaving victims of the violence disbelieved or devalued. Abusive language and behavior are likely to continue if not addressed. Indirect violence includes the structural violence perpetrated when systems appear to redress violence against women, children and men, but in practice do little to make effective and long-term changes. We need to question whether, by passively accepting the existence of violence in our communities, we are participants in its perpetration? Just as our personal inaction contributes to the perpetuation of violence, so too our personal actions can actively contribute to the creation of peace and the reduction of violence.

In examining peace through the lens of the history of war and conflict, it is equally valid to examine peace through the lens of the history of the absence of war, conflict and disease. The non violence theories discussed in this study was based on the principles on non violence

which included the work of Gene Sharp's pragmatic non violence, the Gandhian approach to find peaceful means of resolving conflict, and Downton and Wehr's (1998) theories on how activist commitment is developed and sustained. The act of building peace (or pacifying) is the work of the peace activists. "Pacifism" is a narrower term than generic non-violence. Sharp (1973), refers to "pacifism" as the belief system of those persons and groups who, as a minimum, refuse participation in all international or civil wars or violent revolutions and base this refusal on moral, ethical, or religious principle. Such person and groups are called "pacifists" (Sharp,1973, p.42).

Non-violent activists appear to be concerned with the positive nature of power and its application towards useful ends, rather than a wholesale rejection of power. Power can be used or abused. The core of non-violent theory and activism is based on an analysis of how power is to be used positively. As many theorist and activist have consistently argued, how we use power (the means) is just as important as the outcome (the ends) of its use. Vigilance about the consistency between means and ends is the constant task of non-violent activists. Gandhi and King were passionate about the necessity of the ends and the means being the same. The route to peace had to be peace. For Gandhi the means used for correcting various social and personal imperfections are as important as the ends themselves. He believed that human social conflict cannot be eliminated altogether, but resolution of them can be achieved through non-violent means. Justice, equality and freedom are laudable goals or ends, but, if violent means are used to achieve them, then the means adopted would be self-defeating (Gandhi, 1958).

It is then equally valid to examine peace through the lens of personal lives lived in truth and commitment to others. A peace activist acts from a moral code in a non-violent manner, by speaking the truth, dealing with conflict, respecting others, seeking social justice for all marginalized people, minimizing personal consumption, sustaining commitment, taking action which help to build non-violent communities(Sharp, 1973).

In addition, Downton and Wehr's study on persistent pacifism compared favourably with this study. Helping others was a moral duty, the activists learned to identify with the poor, to understand the social causes of poverty, racism and sexism, and to feel a comradeship with the oppressed. Commitment-sustaining factors, some of those influences, such as bonding and vision sharing, are located primarily in the activist's membership in group, organization, and network where they live and carry out their work. Others factors like management skills, personal growth and satisfaction and creativity arise from the activists learning and development.

## **2.4 Conflict Management Activities**

In examining peace through a study of conflict resolution, it is essential to understand the main elements of conflict management faced by peace activists. Some of the main elements are preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building.

Preventive diplomacy refers to action that can prevent disputes from arising between parties. It can also prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflict and, in addition, it can limit the spread of the latter should they occur. Among those who embark on preventive

diplomacy are multilateral organizations, regional and sub-regional organizations, international organization and non-governmental organizations (Ogunsanya and Mngqibisa, 2000, 4). The type of preventive diplomacy include fact-finding missions, early warning and conflict analysis, as well as confidence-building trips. These actions are important as they provide insights into the nature, causes and sustaining factors of conflicts. Peacemaking is usually undertaken during the phases of preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping.

Peacemaking includes all mechanisms designed to bring hostile parties to agreement through non-violent means. Peacemaking compliments all the other elements of conflict management, because peace is the most important feature in all stages of the process. For peacemaking to succeed, strategies and solutions must take into account the most affected and vulnerable groups. The role of women in peacemaking needs to reflect their participation in every facet, instead of being merely window dressing for the achievement of political correctness. The employment and opportunities for more women should be given the priority it deserves (Ogunsanya and Mngqibisa, 2000, 4).

Peacekeeping refers to the deployment and interaction of military and civilian components and is centered around the protection of civilians; the provision of basic necessities; the rebuilding of social and political institutions; and the organizing and monitoring of elections.

Peace building refers to post conflict initiatives aimed at addressing the Socio economic issues in order to enhance peace and stability (Ogunsanya and Mngqibisa, 2000, 4), peace building would be more effective if indigenous initiatives and processes-especially those initiated



by women were supposed and integrated into the peace process. Peace building provides an opportunity to link security and development, and also enables the process of political change to be used for Socio-economic rebuilding. Socio-economic rebuilding would be meaningless if broad representation of groups were marginalized. Peace building involves institutional rebuilding or restructuring, and offers an opportunity to give new definitions and functions to regulate society. The issue of broad representation within these institutions has to be raised-marginalized groups must no longer be the victims of discriminatory Socio-political practices (Skjaeler cited in Ogunsanya and Mngqibisa 2000, p.29).

## **2.5 Women and Peace- building with particular reference to Africa**

*"Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights, as generally there is no time, or perhaps, no formal education that would help women record their stories..."* (Mastron & Dyck, 2004, p. 59)

To make peace, women need to blaze a new path based upon our traditional strength of community and caring and to transcend traditional roles and essentialism to include peacemaking. Our challenge as women is to collectively discover what this path might look like, to walk it with one another and to lead the way for men and children (Mastron & Dyck, 2004, p. 60). Some observers argue that women who participate in peace negotiations behave no differently than their male counterparts. They may not represent the views and concerns of women at large; they are often divided along political, racial and ideological lines; and they may not be more competent peace-makers than men (Anderlini, 2000,p.6).

The researcher has attempted to draw upon the experiences and perspectives from women peace activists in Africa, the views expressed here are of a small number of women peace activists. The views of these women will be compared to the Durban based women interviewed by the researcher.

Women and children suffer first and most in violent conflict. Women usually become involved in peace initiatives because of their conviction that peace will create a better life for themselves, for their families and for their communities. However, the ways in which women are involved will depend on the cultures, religions and traditions of the societies in conflict. Women's involvement will also depend on how they are represented and perceived within these structures. Njiro (2002), states that African women produce over 70 percent of the continent's food, manage the continent's natural resources, nurture, care and provide skilled knowledge to eke a living from fragile ecosystems.

Espelung (2003) writes that trust and co-operation are the bedrock of any group of individuals, community or nation. After the genocide, none of these existed in Rwanda. What was left in this country, millions had fled their homes, was fear and suspicion. When the country slowly started to come together, mending its wounds, the survivors discovered that those who normally took the lead in society-the men-were dead, on the run or in jail. For the surviving women in Rwanda, not only had life itself been violated, but the foundations of the society they once knew had been demolished. Paralysed with shock, confused and filled with grief, women were forced to rise and take positions they had never known. They were no longer submissive. "Women must be the pillars of

peace. Each one of us must contribute to the reconciliation and peace in our own communities. We are the bearers of life, life grows through us. It is time to work for our children's future. As we start to interact with one another, we realize that we are all the same." These are the words of Immaculée Mukarugambwa, born on April 6, 1968- the same day on which the genocide began some 26 years later. Today she is one of the many widows of violence. Donnata Uzamukumda and Immaculée Mukarugambwa are two of the many victims of the 1994 genocide. These two women are completely at ease with each other despite their husbands having been on opposite sides. Such relations would have been difficult, if not impossible, just after the war had ended (Espelung, 2003).

Women's efforts to participate in peace negotiations processes have met with more limited success, in part because the obstacles in many cases are greater. Political power usually rests firmly in the hands of an exclusive, predominantly male elite. "Gender is an issue that has little or no interest to the political parties and has even less appeal to the instigators of war", say Senator Piedad Cordoba Ruiz, a staunch champion of both peace and women's rights Colombia (Anderlini, 2000,p.10). A demonstration of this occurred at the Burundi peace talks, where male delegates told the facilitator, "The women are not parties to this conflict. This is not their concern. We cannot see why they have come, why they bother us. We are here and we represent them" (FAS, 2001).

Resistance to women's participation in peace negotiations is evident across regions and sectors of society, and throughout various stages of the transition process. In Bosnia, a former chemical engineer Mevlida



Kunosic-Vlajic, turned parliamentarian and peace activist, says women actively supported the war effort by caring for soldiers and becoming the primary income earners for their families. They were excluded once the peace process began in 1995, however, because they had little understanding of how to strategize politically. Kunosic-Vlajic recalls, "We kept asking ourselves, what is our roles in society now? What is our role in the family? We are not needed" (Anderlini, 2000).

Finally, peace activists in Africa have raised their concerns about sustainable peace, at the grassroots level. Women are not necessarily better connected to the grassroots or more committed to conveying the concerns of marginalized people. As Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King exemplify, men have led some of the world's most powerful grassroots campaigns. Women, like men, may easily become entangled in political, ethnic, religious and other forms of rivalries that may cause them to embrace a partisan agenda. In the Middle East, Hanan Ashrawi and other women leaders have played a pivotal role in maintaining the public space for participation in the on-going peace negotiations. They emphasize that the process of consultation is a means of identifying and prioritizing the core issues, and agreeing upon the negotiable and non-negotiable points from the perspectives of experts, the public and the politician (Anderlini, 2000).

A further concern is that African women bear the impact of multiple levels-juggling more work and household tasks with less income, less access to land and the lack of clean, safe water and sanitation are serious threats affecting life in Africa that need world attention. Women and men are dying of hunger in African countries where fertile land is filled with land mines. There is marginalization of persons living in

fragile ecosystems. Women and men have different susceptibilities to various environmental hazards, but women are further challenged by unequal opportunities to protect and promote their health. Women's human rights and economic security are unattainable without accessible and affordable basic health and reproductive health services. HIV/AIDS is a major threat to Africa's prosperity (Ogunsanya and Mngqibisa, 2000, 4).

## **2.6 Women and Peace building in South Africa**

*"We are tired of sitting on the fence and looking up to the men. We want to be a part of this peace negotiation. We want to be a part of this peace negotiations. We want to be a part of the decision-making policies governing our country".*

Mary Brownell, (Director, Liberian Women's Initiatives, 2000).

## **2.7 The role of women in the struggle for peace**

South African women played a crucial role during the liberation of their country. The Gender Advocacy programme are lobbying for a 50 percent representation of women in all government structures ( Daily News, 30 April 2004). In South Africa, reports on progress towards the development of a post-apartheid society invariably use the benchmarks of housing, education, health and water as indicators that the life of the impoverished black majority is improving. Hemson (2002, p. 24) argues that the rural social setting and gender dynamics hinder rural women's effective participation in water projects. Hemson further states that the subordinate position of women in rural development projects is contested in policy. The 1994 White Paper on Water and Sanitation which set out the vision for the post-apartheid era, argued that 30

percent of the positions of the water committee should be occupied by women, in order to ensure successful and sustainable development, and to give substance to the constitutional prerequisite that women should enjoy a full and proper role in society (DWAF, cited in Hemson, 2002). The departmental prescription that women take half of the seats on water committees has been widely accepted and implemented, but formal participation has not been followed by real engagement. The participation of women in water committees has undoubtedly brought some advance in rural areas. Women on these committees were not free to express their views or participate in decision-making. The women were only there to fulfill the then quota of 30 percent expected by policy and supported by the funding agencies (Duncker, cited in Hemson, 2002). The Mvula study concluded that the participation of women in water committees is purely 'tokenism', has no effect on the decisions being made by these committees, and is not empowering (The Mvula Trust study in 1998; cited in Hemson, 2002).

Hemson (2002), states that the attitude of men towards women's empowerment is an important factor in women being able to consolidate the advances made. Men overwhelmingly support the idea of women's participation and empowerment within the new political climate. They acknowledge that 'men cannot decide for women anymore, they also have opinion which should be considered', and pragmatically. 'Women should be involved in decision-making, otherwise they might reject those decisions made and the process must start over again', but also insist on the male prerogative: "We live by our customs"(RSS, 1998 p. 22). There is evidence of an acceptance of change by men. But there is also evidence that men do not encourage women's participation (particularly by their wives. Despite agreement with the idea of change,

when women are actively engaged in decision-making process, men are reported to react negatively and to feel uncomfortable in sharing power and responsibility with women. Moser (cited in Hemson, 2002, p.31) argues women have the right to participate in projects that profoundly affect their lives, that their participation can make the difference between project success or failure, and that participation gives confidence to marginalized groups previously voiceless in the community. In addition, in South Africa it can be argued that the participation of women in public affairs is a necessary step towards the realization of their citizenship and to overcoming the customary barriers inhibiting their development. It is not without significance that this would also assist in building civil society and entrenching a democratic order in all areas of concern.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Qualitative Approach**

The study utilized a qualitative approach to collect and analyze data. The sample consisted of ten women peace activists based in Durban, who were interviewed for this study. The goal of qualitative studies is to achieve depth, in order to reveal hidden aspects of a research question within the life experiences of people (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher's objective was to probe deeply into the lives of the peace activists to uncover the essential factors, which influenced their role in peace-building. The research will include obvious and more obscure factors as they work together to fulfill the role of peace-building. It is the combination of these factors that is a key to understanding women in peace-building. Because of the small number of activists studied, the research theory of the role of women in peace-building must be viewed as exploratory (Marlow, 1993). Research questions are open ended and require qualitative responses; for example, what are the challenges faced in the role of a peace activists, what contributions women make to building peace and do women in general make a difference in peace-building. Here a qualitative approach is more effective because the answers provide a detailed description of the phenomenon being studied. While this study was derived from a small sample it can nevertheless be important in stimulating qualitative studies in other countries. This study could also become the basis for a large peace activist's research.



### **3.2 The Selection of Participants**

The participants in this study are women peace activists based in Durban and engaged in peace work. Snowball sampling was employed, whereby participants referred the researcher to other potential participants (Marlow, 1993). As a starting point the researcher contacted organizations involved in peace work such as Diakonia, ACCORD and WCRP. The participants interviewed were actively engaged in peace work. Efforts were made to ensure a racially mixed sample (3 Africans, 3 Whites and 4 Indians). The researcher contacted potential participants, explained the study, and invited them to participate. The researcher interviewed participants who volunteered to participate in the study. The process continued until the required numbers of participants (ten) were interviewed.

### **3.3 The Research Instrument**

Qualitative studies typically employ unstructured or semi-structured interviews. For this study a semi-structured interview schedule was used. Semi-structured interviews are defined as those organized around areas of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth (May cited in Vos, 2002, p.298). For this study, a semi-structured interview schedule was drawn up (Attached as appendix 1).

### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has more freedom to pursue hunches and can improvise with the questions. Sometimes semi-structured interviews are referred to as open-ended interviews (Marlow,

1998). The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed picture of the participant's beliefs, interests and perceptions of the role of women in peace-building. A Face to face semi-structured interview design was used to gather qualitative data. The interviewer met with each of the peace activists at their homes or at their place of work. The researcher had the core questions on the interview schedule, but the interview was guided by the schedule rather than dictated by the predetermined questions. The participant felt free to introduce an issue the researcher had not thought of and was allowed maximum opportunity to tell her story. The questions are nearly always open-ended (Vos, 2002).

The questions asked at the interview are attached as appendix 1. These provide the skeleton of the interview. The respondents spent a lot of time 'telling their stories' in order to illustrate or clarify the answers to the questions asked. Much information was gained from these amplifications.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the peace activists. A single interview of about one hour was used to yield sufficient information to produce answers to the researcher's questions. The research interview ensured a high response rate following personal contact between the researcher and the interviewees. Due to the setting of the interview (offices or homes), some recordings were distorted due to the loud traffic noises. The researcher had to immediately write down information after the interview. Interviews took place from October 2003 to April 2004.

The researcher attempted to assess the social life of the individual and their entire background, experiences, roles and motivations as peace activists. Extremely rich, detailed, and in depth information characterize the type of information gathered in this study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Semi-structured interviews have more opened ended responses to questions or prompts. The researcher was able to capture the stresses, concerns and anxieties experienced by women peace activists. The women peace activists where asked to give their opinion and interpretation of events. The researcher was overwhelmed by the remarkable manner in which peace activists were prepared to disclose with confidence their experiences in peace work.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Introducing the women in peace-building**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the ten peace activists of this research study. An attempt to examine the contributions and motivations they have made to building peace within a comparative theoretical analysis. In examining the lives of peace activists, individuals draw upon previous understandings of the world, which are acquired through socialization, such as family, religion and their educational background (Winter, 1989). Participants repeatedly emphasized that their Peace-building work is important and that it should be recognized as such. Women recognized their active involvement in peace-building and occasionally in peacekeeping and conflict management activities. They viewed their approaches often to be distinct from men and believed the significance of the peace-building work was not adequately recognized within South African patriarchal society. As stated in Norment (1994), South African women leaders say it will be a long and hard fight to overcome a tradition of sexism in their male dominated society.

#### **4.2 The Peace Activists**

Ten peace activists were interviewed. The peace activists averaged 20 years in peace work. While they were members of about 16 peace movement organizations, their peace action was largely concentrated in the three organizations ACCORD, WCRP and Diakonia. Seven of the ten women interviewed were active anti apartheid activists. Their work involved political and peace work while the other three interviewed were

peace workers only. Two stated that they were detained and interrogated for their roles as peace-building activists during the apartheid era. Five of the participants were house arrested due to their political activity. Two of the peace activists lost loved ones during the political struggle, whilst resisting the apartheid regime.

Six of the ten women peace activists contributed to solutions to conflicts as trained religious leaders. At present they are active members of peace and religious organization. Their religious organizations main goals were to protect communities from violence and provide service programmes for women and children. The other four were active in political peace-building. They stated that their goal was to help women achieve leadership positions in their community. The programmes offered are designed to help South Africa overcome its history of apartheid, specializing in human rights, equity, leadership, women empowerment and promoting of non-violence.

The question about where their interests and inspiration in political or peace work might have developed gave more depth into understanding their sustained commitment to peace work. Eight of the ten women stated that their religious faiths motivated their work for sustainable peace. Seven of the ten women peace activists stated that their parents were the key figures that also inspired their peace work. Their parents were actively involved in peace work during the apartheid struggle. Interestingly, one of the participants stated that neither her parents nor family were involved in peace or political work. Six of them stated that their awareness of the world's inequities grew over time through reading and studying. All ten activists agreed that their personal experiences during the apartheid struggle and their inspiration by far was former

President Nelson Mandela. Also, the key writers, peace thinkers and political activists who inspired the seven women in Durban in their peace work are Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Luthuli, Graca Machel and Bishop Desmond Tutu.

### **Question 1**

#### **What does peace or peace-building mean to you?**

Although women's instrumentality in Peace-building is internationally recognized, gendered meaning of peace building is poorly understood. This study was conducted to learn from a diverse group of Durban women what peace-building means to them. The participants described peace-building in terms of prevention, being proactive, problem solving, meeting human needs and ending oppression and inequality. The participants also shared this common view that peace-building fosters the ability of women, men, girls and boys in their own cultures to promote conditions of nonviolence, equality, justice and human rights of all people, to build democratic institutions and to sustain the environment. Women in South Africa know that freedom from violence is essential in building peaceful societies. Therefore, the emphasis of women's peace building is to reduce violence and to secure gender equity (Pillay, 2000).

Participants reflected on the meaning of peace and peace-building in the following terms:

*"Violence affects all of us. Peace is a way of life... not just an absence of violence. Peace is much wider than that it is too frivolous a definition of peace. If you can remove those aspect that cause conflict then you can talk about real peace."*

*"Peace-building is a process in getting to ones goal. This process takes time, patience, understanding, courage and commitment...bearing it."*

Participants reflected on taking responsibility for sustaining peace.

*"Peace means working together as one nation... and fighting against, crime, abuse and aids by using youth to spread word of peace... through art...performance of visual art..."*

*"Peace begins with an individual taking responsibility... to say that of the we do have a choice has adults to change that ...and we do have the power and capabilities to change our thoughts... to train them...to train our minds to be more accepting of our self first."*

## **Question 2**

### **What factors were important in promoting your original commitment to peace work?**

The participants said they should acknowledge as part of their self identities that "what I do is peace-building". They realize that too often they were kept in the background and were not sufficiently recognized in peace-building activity. By taking initiative, being assertive, thinking big, taking responsibility and using power they could expand their influence. Further, participants thought women need to support, challenge and trust each other in their peace-building work. They expressed appreciation for their vision and abilities to articulate peace-building processes and identified specific practices, such as networking, and collaboration, areas of women's' strength that they could continue to use within their own organizations.

One participant explained her commitment and determination for political and peace work as follows:-

*"From early days as a little girl and a student...I was very involved with voluntary work, child welfare... and very welfare orientated. My studies in social work blended together with my political work.... although*

*house arrested on many occasions this didn't deter me from continuing my work from home with community projects."*

### **Question 3**

**What factors have sustained your work for peace over time? Are the original motivations still important?**

Eight of the ten peace activists stated that their awareness of world's inequalities grew over time through reading and study. They have developed those beliefs in certain life settings and time periods and from their experiences. Family and religious life during childhood exert particularly strong influences. Helping others, availability, belief and responsibility were factors that described the peace activists sustained commitment to peace work. They had to integrate peace work into their daily lives and used creative outlets to relieve tension, stresses and disappointments. The participants agreed that during the early adulthood years, one is relatively free of other responsibilities and constraints. They are now multi tasked with home, family, religion and peace work. In various ways, these activists mapped out their lives so they could remain involved.

The concept of availability did affect their willingness to stay involved. Two aspects of availability described by Downton and Wehr (1998, p.536), are attitude and life situation. Thus, people become available for collective action when they have been socialized to move in that direction (attitudinal availability) and when their life circumstances provide the time, money and energy for their commitment to activism (situational availability).



One participant viewed this question in an interesting and powerful way, she stated,

*"I wanted to give up many times. But I have come to realize that my victory is closest when I want to give up completely. So I have learnt the art of patience."*

Some peace activists find what they seek in an organization then they stay, while others join for short term goals: to end apartheid or make a personal statement about violence. If and when they achieve the goal they leave. Still others stay for both identity and goals (Downton and Wehr, 1998).

Learning to help others was a moral duty. We are taught at home and at the religious centers to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. We learned to identify with the poor, to understand poverty, racism and sexism, and to feel a comradeship with the oppressed (Downton and Wehr, 1998).

The above statement is aptly reflected in one of the participants experiences:

*"In 1985 the Gandhi Phoenix settlement was burnt down. In 1993 my second son was killed...which was related to the political unrest, to date I don't know how this happened. I'm still actively involved..."*

#### **Question 4**

**What have been the main obstacles and challenges you have faced in your work for peace? To what extent are these specific to women peace builders?**

Being a peace activists can dramatically change an individual's way of life as priorities are shifted to make time for peace work. As issues of oppression and violence polarize attitudes, pressure mounts on the

individual to resolve the dilemma by taking a stand on the ethical issues. The peace activist related how, when directly confronted with violence and social injustice, they were forced to take a stand, then part in protests at the risk of public ridicule, even physical harm.

Marginalization of women has not changed to date in South Africa as stated by one of the participants.

*"More often than not, when peace is at hand, women, even those who have fought alongside men, or struggled for peace in their communities are pressured into stepping out of the public arena, and returning to their traditional roles."*

Women's participation in planning and decision-making remains limited. In the majority of cases, women are unaware of services available to them and gender-based discrimination prevents many women from taking advantage of the available services.

### **Question 5**

**Think back about the peace work you have done over the years. Are there conspicuous successes and conspicuous failures? How do you perceive the overall effectiveness of your work?**

While their victories are important for keeping activist involved, they do find other rewards like the gratification of living in harmony with their non-violence values, the appreciation of others peace activists and supporters; observing other activists living the ethics of non-violence among themselves and with opponents in the community; watching the members of their peace group successfully arrive at a consensus and preserve a feeling of community; learning how better to communicate and organize; and experiencing a more meaningful personal life.

*"I feel a kind of.... fulfillment as a peace activists living a non-violent life while contributing to the creation of a more just and peaceful world..."*

One of the common concepts expressed was the current educational system in South Africa. It is a movement for race to class, this was common view expressed by all participants. In reality South Africa's best schools are for the rich. The segregation and discrimination in schools is silent.

## **Question 6**

### **What is your vision of peace for South Africa?**

The most striking finding was the extent to which peace was viewed, emphasizing processes, behaviours, values and attributes. Participants' perspective were holistic and peace building was seen as closely interrelated to physical, psychological and spiritual health. Participants recognized that their peace-building initiatives were marginalized because they lack power and voice and that what they do is often distinct, but just as important, as what men do to build peace.

The participants' vision of peace for South Africa :-

*"There needs to be unity for us to achieve peace. Culture dictates girl children to a social system that does not always favour us."*

A common view expressed by all participants was that women are the pillar of the family, without whom the family was said to be dysfunctional. Women are associated to peace, so we need to profile women's' work and contribution to peace work more vigorously, so that they receive the same applause as men. Promote the role of women in conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace building.



This participant noted Graca Machel's laudable work with children in Mozambique .

*"My vision of peace in South Africa and Africa is to include notable women in these categories as worthy mediators in resolving conflict. Many women play these roles at home, work and on the field, but their work is hidden and given the plethora of media coverage and international acclaim as they merit."*

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This study represents efforts to learn how women in Durban view peace-building within their own country and culture. They urged that efforts be made to ensure fairness and equal opportunities for women in peace building. A pragmatic outcome of this study was the building of a network of Durban based women peace builders who share common meanings of peace building and have identified the roles, processes and methods they can use.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Lessons Learnt**

The aim of this chapter is to integrate the issues raised in this research article into an understanding of peace building and the interventions made by peace activists. The chapter will also review lessons learned from the peace building interventions made by women peace activists based in Durban.

#### **5.1 Peace building and Women Activists**

This study has attempted to place women peace activists in the context of peace building and the challenges they faced. As discussed, the peace activist has a world analysis, a driving sense of hope in action and a commitment to nonviolence. The essential compassion of the peace activist is hope. They are concerned with the whole of life, not action alone and not intention alone. Their peace activism is a transformative and growing way of living.

They think and act from their moral codes by speaking the truth, dealing with conflict, respecting others, seeking social justice for all marginalized people and taking action which help to build nonviolent communities. They take action and act in a peaceful manner.

It is clear that women peace activists have an important role to play in the context of rebuilding a democratic South Africa. The women peace activists demonstrated their commitment to the initiatives of peace building in practical ways. The challenges of peace building are infinitely more difficult and more complex than is generally recognized. Societies

attempting to build peace face a range of problems on all fronts, all inter-related and all urgent. However, one overshadows and affects all others: the destruction of relationships and the loss of trust, confidence, dignity and faith. If people do not trust each other and lack trust and confidence in government and in the rebuilding process in general, then the best rebuilding strategies are likely to fail. Therefore it would appear that the women peace activists' primary challenge of peace building is centered on the mending of relations in society and with the restoration of trust and faith.

In writing this research article, the actions and lives of the ten peace activists who have given their lives to peace work, are validated so that future activists can learn from those who went before. The list of elements forming the essence of a peace activist as stated in Burrowes (1996), ring true in the lives of the women peace activists interviewed.

Speak the truth:

In the lives of the peace activists interviewed it is evident that they were not afraid to disobey government and law to speak their truths. Unfair laws and injustice of any kind should be opposed.

Deal creativity with conflict in life:

Despite obstacles faced, all the women maintained a sense of humour as a survival strategy. I remember one white peace activist relating how she had all four of her tyres slashed at a rural school while trying to promote peace at a youth gathering one evening. She calmly continued chatting away to the youth, and soon gained their trust and confidence. She had her car repaired and safely escorted to and from the area for the next six weeks.

Learn to deeply respect others:

Respect is essential even in the most difficult situations, such as tense moments during a demonstration when police action might be heavy-handed. The peace activists were polite and to the point. The countless events where the peace activists had to deal with significant conflict, including one participant being house arrested and having her son killed during the political unrest. Her strength was admirable as she met her opposition with grace.

Reassess the patriarchal system:

Ten years have elapsed in South Africa during which we have been governed by a constitution that takes a stand against patriarchy, sexism and forbids any person from being 'unfairly discriminated' against. The participants in this study perceive men and women playing dual roles in the private and public spheres and men still dominating public spheres. One participant stated that the idea of war is patriarchal in essence and that world solutions must be found in the hands of women! Women have a special role to play in order to realize the dream of a peaceful Africa. They should rise up, ignore the differences that divide them and work towards strengthening the values that unite them (Anderlini, 2000). For women to be seen as a force to be reckoned with, common platforms have to be established so that women can come together and raise their voices in the midst of the multitude of male voices.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

From the study the following recommendations can be made: -

Although this study may give rise to more questions than answers, some of these questions provide the basis for further research.

Arguments for women's' inclusion as peace activists must clearly acknowledge the reality that not all women who reach positions of power are active proponents of women's' issues and rights. It is therefore not enough to assume that progress towards gender equality will be achieved simply by increasing the number of women decision-makers and peace activists. Avenues must be sought to build a critical mass of transformational leaders of both men and women who place the goals of social justice and gender equality at the centre of their political motivations (Norment, 1994).

The government should ensure that; all issues relating to women are included in all policies and programmes, and that more women are appointed into decision-making positions. All institutions should include gender sensitivity training in place of employment and in schools. Women NGOs' should acquire skills to be able to take up leading positions and make a persistent effort to remain in touch with grassroots women. They should also acquire information on peace and disseminate it to all sectors of their communities.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The researcher hopes this research article will contribute to the promotion of women's participation in the peace process, not only in Durban but also throughout Africa. The role women and women's groups played during the peace process in South Africa cannot be over-emphasized. Their achievement is a manifestation of what women can accomplish when they decide to seize the opportunity. Women successfully advocated for and promoted the peace process and initiated

policies for equitable access for other women. This was not just because they were women, but because they saw it as their right.



## APPENDIX 1

The core questions to be explored at the interview: -

- *What does peace or peace building mean to you?*
- *Think back to your earliest ideas about peace. What factors were important in promoting your original commitment to peace work?*
- *You have been involved in peace work for a number of years, what factors have sustained your work for peace over time? Are the original motivations still important?*
- *What have been the main obstacles and challenges you have faced in your work for peace? To what extent is this specific to women peace builders?*
- *Think back about the peace work you have done over the years. Are there conspicuous successes and conspicuous failures? How do you perceive the overall effectiveness of your work?*
- *What is your vision of peace for South Africa?*

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