

## Critical Reflection

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following KOFF Gender Roundtable

### **Working with Men to Overcome Violence: masculinity & violence projects in the context of armed conflict and war<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Overcoming violent masculinities in post-war countries**

##### **General observations and examples from the African continent**

Peace work can only be successful if projects and programs include approaches focusing on violent masculinity. In order to reduce the high rates of sexual and domestic violence, to improve the health situation and to implement human rights it is necessary to overcome the mobilization of men as fighters. This includes masculinities in the armies as well as in non-state armed groups such as guerrilla groups.

The escalation of violence starts long before the breakout of wars and continues after peace contracts are signed. Thus, we have to deal with the manipulation of men's self-esteem and the ways of motivating particularly young men and boys to use violence.

In many countries, the political and economic causes of war are interwoven with gender and generational conflicts. Before the outbreak of wars, hierarchies between men of different ages and social status must be taken into account. This was the case in Arab countries, where young unemployed men participated in the revolutions because they had little prospect to get married and build a family of their own, which is part and parcel of establishing oneself as an adult man. Caused by economic, political and social crisis they saw no other option of gaining the social status as an adult man. Similar problems motivated young men in Sub-Saharan countries to join armies or guerrilla groups. In Central and Eastern Africa marriage politics offered only rich elderly men access to young girls as marriage partners. Young low-ranking men were unable to pay the high bride-prices, which are demanded by powerful male family leaders. However, the pre-requisites for being respected as a man were marriage as well as access to land or cattle.

In different African countries, those struggles over limited resources and dependencies on the good-will of elderly men were core issues for the mobilization of poor young men to become fighters in violent conflicts or wars. They followed warmongers like Charles Taylor in Liberia, who tried to recruit them with promises like fighting for justice and equality. Often the misuse of young fighters overlapped with differences based on nationality, ethnicity or religion. The interdependencies among these factors influenced political power struggles as well as men's struggles over their individual access to resources. Thus, analyzing those aspects should not only be of interest for gender experts but for all peace and development planners and practitioners.

In Northern Uganda, warmongers were able to draw on the fact that for decades British colonial rulers had systematically conscribed young men of selected nomadic ethnic groups into the colonial army. Given the

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<sup>1</sup> The critical reflection is based on the experts' presentations given at the KOFF Gender Roundtable on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012 at swisspeace in Bern, Switzerland.

lack of economic alternatives after independence, under new circumstances the colonial legacy of militarized masculinity found expression in persistent patterns of violence. Commanders uphold militarism as the standard for masculinity.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as in the countries in the Horn of Africa warmongers manipulated masculinity by interpreting culturally important norms of social fatherhood for their own purposes. They put pressure on men to protect their female family members and to resort to weapons in order to defend their own honor.

### **Masculinities and violence in civil wars**

During wars in West and Central Africa in the 1990s, in many guerrilla groups, young commanders took over the privileges previously preserved to older, high ranking men. Now it was them who had the power over life and death. In addition, they controlled girls' sexuality and fertility.

Often rapes were initiation rites into guerrilla groups. In addition, the self-image of the fathers, grandfathers and brothers as protectors was attacked and the social cohesion was weakened. Sometimes not only girls but also newly recruited boys were sexually badly abused. They were indoctrinated and trained to become brutal fighters.

Group rapes by soldiers or guerrilla fighters during wars aimed at consolidating the bonds between the combatants. Furthermore, they tried to compensate for their insecurity during fighting through constant closeness to death. Often rapes in war were not isolated events. Instead, they built on violent and oppressive gender hierarchies which were established long before the wars started.

In addition, wars intensified gender hierarchies in many places. Though commanders and combatants impregnated girls and women, they did not take over social responsibilities as fathers. Occasionally female fighters were given weapons for attacks. Many commanders justified these changes of gendered labour division by referring to the extraordinary situation of war. In the same way, combatants referred to the special circumstances of war when they themselves took over "female" duties, like cooking or washing clothes. Many expected a return to "normality" – in the sense of male power and women's submission - after the war was over.

### **Masculinities in post-conflict societies**

After peace contracts were signed, all over the African continent countless demobilized ex-combatants felt disempowered; they continued to use violence to buff up their identities as authoritative. The majority of male ex-fighters did not have the chance to work through their own complex experiences of violence as perpetrators and victims. Thus, viewing demobilized child soldiers in a maternal manner as "misguided children" obstructs the fact that these young ex-fighters were victims on the one hand. On the other hand they had killed people, have had sex with girls and women and produced children like adult men.

Up to now, most demobilization and reintegration programs ignore the creation of masculine cohesion through sexualized violence. Often not all ex-combatants were paid reintegration money, which caused many conflicts. Power struggles between men with different war experiences, of different ages and social status did not only take place in demobilization camps, but in refugee camps, too. In Uganda for example, male heads of families found it very difficult to cope with their inability to protect their families against child soldiers who had humiliated them as adult men. This was often a reason for searching protection in refugee camps. Here, adult men were confronted with the dependency on humanitarian aid and the pressure from soldiers, who controlled the camps. Some army members mistreated male refugees and showed their power and potency by starting sexual relationships with young girls. Many family fathers reacted with domestic violence, because they felt disempowered and humiliated. When we look at hierarchies between men from

different backgrounds, we have to consider the misbehavior of several blue helmet soldiers and development workers, who abuse girls from the local population. Many men of the local population view these demonstrations of virility as extremely offensive behavior and react violently.

In many post-war countries, most of the ex-fighters' hopes for a better future are dashed. Surviving representatives of the old (or new) male elite manage to get their hands on development aid money, using it to create new patronage networks. Substantial inequalities continue, particularly in the distribution of resources. It needs political will to work on the complex hierarchies, tensions and conflicts between men from different ages and backgrounds and to develop innovative strategies in order to secure land rights for marginalized youth, meaningful education offerings and economic programs. Ideally, those approaches are part of inclusive programs on gender, generational and social justice.

### **Innovative approaches**

There are already a variety of approaches by non-governmental organizations which focus on overcoming militarized masculinity, like changing attitudes on violence and manhood. Sometimes they are initiated by women's organizations. In Kenya for example, they no longer help only female victims of violence. In Zimbabwe, South Africa and Rwanda, innovative men's programs are started by Christian men or human rights activists. Often they begin with cultural activities, media work or sports in order to create trust and strengthen the cooperation between young men. They motivate boys, youth and young men to become change agents.

In this context peer group work is of great importance. It creates safe spaces, where members can reflect on social norms, which put a lot of pressure on men. In addition, young former fighters get a chance to work on their specific war experiences as well as their problems as marginalized and often stigmatized men in post-conflict societies.

One starting point is young men's fear of being infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Often HIV prevention programs are only reaching women and girls. In South Africa there are men's health initiatives, which offer training for female nurses in order to improve the communication with men. Some of those initiatives are linked with broader anti-violence and gender programs. Changing the mind set of female nurses is important, because in many places they see men only as perpetrators of violence, not as victims of sexualized torture or as agents of change. Offering better health services to boys and men after wars is a starting point for discussions about partnerships and non-violent problem solving strategies.

Besides this, there is a need for reforming the education sector. Many teachers are overburdened with their job and see former child soldiers who are eager to get access to education as a threat. At the same time, a huge number of teachers abuse their power and authority in order to start sexual relationships with young pupils. Thus, it is necessary to change teachers' training structurally. In Zimbabwe and South Africa men's organizations like Padare – the Men's forum on Gender and the Sonke Gender Justice Network organize workshops for teachers in order to change their attitudes and behavior. In addition, the Democratic Teachers Union in South Africa has introduced a code of conduct for their members. Teachers who continue to misuse girls and beat up boys are expelled from the union. Changes of governmental institutions like schools, police and the justice system are important for reducing violent masculinities structurally and creating trust in post-war rule of law.

Traditional and religious leaders can practice and legitimize violence or work against it. In Uganda, some gender organizations like the Refugee Law Centre started to cooperate with open-minded religious authorities, heads of police stations and lawyers. They have to cope with the problem, that male victims of violence are stigmatized as homosexuals. Homosexuality is criminalized since colonial times. Since 2009, some fundamentalist Christian preachers, members of parliament and the military as well as some journals spread

homophobic messages and disqualify innovative gender and human rights work as a threat to Christian family values.

In Uganda unemployed youth – many are former child soldiers – is recruited by the army to work against political opponents, threats of sexual violence are a strategy to silence opponents. There is a need for linking youth, gender and economic politics. Job creation programs which include approaches of changing violent male behavior patterns systematically can help to stop escalations of politically motivated and gender-based violence.

### Challenges and Policy Recommendations

- **International political dialog, development and peace policies can build frameworks for multi-sectoral programs.** Political dialog can improve the rule of law, it can motivate reforms of unjust law as well as the justice and police system.
- **Security sector reform should be combined with the fight against corruption** and the professionalization of the police. In many countries, the police was – and continues to be – a feared agent of state violence. Particularly young men are afraid of violent police offices. Therefore gender trainings for police officers should include reflections on masculinity and human rights.
- **Building alliances and support networks and the work with men and boys to end violence and corruption in post-conflict contexts:** The majority of innovative initiatives which work with men and boys in post-conflict societies see themselves as alliance partners of women's rights and children's rights organizations. They are courageous, because they criticize corruption and misuse of political power on local and national level. They demand the implementation of human rights, legal reforms and structural changes of unjust societies. Thus, supporting their work and their networking financially leads to long-lasting peace and the democratization of post-conflict countries.
- **Guaranteeing sustainable funding for projects and organizations:** Changes need time and energy, exchange is important to cope with backlashes, hostilities and frustrations. Often innovative approaches are only sponsored as pilot projects. Sustainable finances of projects and organizations are a precondition for staff members and volunteers to continue with their work. Otherwise many will apply for better paid jobs in governmental institutions. Their knowledge and experiences in this tense field would be lost.
- **Reducing sexual violence by working with men and to support organizations which motivate men to become change agents.** This work helps to reduce sexual and domestic violence, youth violence and the continuation of violence over generations. Men, who have learned to define their masculinity in a non-violent way, accept the economic improvement of their wives, are good fathers and teach their children how to live a responsible life. They are role models for other men who want to change their behavior, but don't know how. Thus, analyzing and supporting those change processes has many positive effects far beyond gender issues, particularly if the political, legal and institutional frameworks are considered.
- **Ending female bias based on polarized gendered identities in international legal frameworks:** Besides individual, social and institutional changes there is a need to broaden the focus of international legislation, resolutions, declarations and guidelines. They still have a female bias and polarize gendered identities. Gender Mainstreaming and serious reflections on changes of masculinities are big challenges. In order to gain gender justice and social justice in post-conflict countries radical shifts and detailed exten-

sion of gender policies are the prerequisites for reaching men as change agents in long-term structural changes.

### **Reflecting on Masculinization and Militarization of Peace Work in Israel/Palestine**

The Israeli-Palestinian violent conflict has been going on for decades and has led to growing militarization of both societies and cultures, an influence which characterizes societies in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The joint Israeli-Palestinian peace, refusnik and anti-occupation movements have not escaped this militarization process that their societies went through, but due to their nature as resisting mainstream trends in both societies, militarization appears there in the form of transforming national dichotomies and stereotypes into genderial ones.

In war-torn and oppressed societies for many boys and men the goal of "becoming a man" is as important as the need to fight oppression and injustice. Because peace and social change justice movements are often considered as feminine movements – soft, gentle, non-violent – and men and boys who join them are looking for ways to re-establish their manhood.

Insisting on breaking down the national divides forced on both societies one of the focal praxis in the Israeli-Palestinian movements is joint action. But while many national stereotypes are breaking the need for dichotomy remains and is being transformed into the gender dichotomy.

The [WPP Gender Sensitive Active Non Violence training](#) tries to uncover the problem of gender stereotypes in the peace and social justice movements. It suggests the Non-Violence theory and practice as offering an alternative for a masculinity which is not based on violence. The program works on training men and women as genderial agents of change in their own movements and NGOs, skilled not only in uncovering the problematic of gender stereotypes, but in suggesting alternatives and reshaping their organizations' work practices as much as visions, inserting the gender analysis perspective, in addition to the more common perspectives of human rights, peace building and social justice.

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### **Websites & Links**

<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/>

<http://www.eldis.org/hivaid>s

<http://www.engagingmen.net>

<http://www.engenderhealth.org/>

<http://www.frauen-und-kriege-afrika.de>

<http://www.genderjustice.org.za>

<http://www.genderjustice.org.za/menengage-africa-case-studies-collection>

[http://www.iawg.net/resources/field\\_manual.html](http://www.iawg.net/resources/field_manual.html)

<http://www.ifor.org/WPP>

<http://www.megenkenya.org>

<http://www.menengage.org>

<http://www.mensresourcesinternational.org>

<http://www.padare.org.zw>

<http://www.preventgbv africa.org/content/defying-odds-lessons-learnt-men-gender-equality-now>

<http://www.promundo.org.br/>

[http://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/Bibliothek/VIDC/startseite/VIDC\\_2012\\_Maenner\\_als\\_Taeter\\_und\\_Opfer\\_Leseexemplar.pdf](http://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/Bibliothek/VIDC/startseite/VIDC_2012_Maenner_als_Taeter_und_Opfer_Leseexemplar.pdf)

## swisspeace

swisspeace is a practice-oriented peace research institute. It carries out research on violent conflicts and their peaceful transformation. The Foundation aims to build up Swiss and international organizations' civilian peacebuilding capacities by providing trainings, space for networking and exchange of experiences. It also shapes political and academic discourses on peace policy issues at the national and international level through publications, workshops and conferences. swisspeace therefore promotes knowledge transfer between researchers and practitioners. swisspeace was founded in 1988 as the Swiss Peace Foundation in order to promote independent peace research in Switzerland. Today the Foundation employs more than 40 staff members. Its most important donors are the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss National Science Foundation and the United Nations.

## Center for Peacebuilding (KOFF)

The Center of Peacebuilding (KOFF) of the Swiss Peace Foundation swisspeace was founded in 2001 and is funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and 45 Swiss non-governmental organizations. The center's objective is to strengthen Swiss actors' capacities in civilian peacebuilding by providing information, training and consultancy services. KOFF acts as a networking platform fostering policy dialogue and processes of common learning through roundtables and workshops.

## Critical reflections

In its *critical reflection* publications, swisspeace and its guest speakers critically reflect on topics addressed at roundtables. They both make a note of the arguments put forward during the roundtables and carry on the discussion in order to encourage further debates.