

CHAPTER I

There Is No Aftermath for Women

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We wondered what to call this book and how to refer to the period that follows a ceasefire. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) prefers the term 'war-torn societies' in order to emphasise that 'the challenge of rebuilding societies after war is much more complex and difficult than the task of putting an end to fighting' (Stiefel 1999:5). The World Bank and several United Nations specialised agencies have set up 'post-conflict' units; but some critics argue persuasively, as does David Moore (2000:13), that

the concept of 'post-conflict' [is] an excuse for the main development agencies and international powers to devote fewer resources to the amelioration of complex political emergencies in the third world and to allow structural adjustment policies to reign as usual, instead of the supposed dependency inducing tendencies of welfare humanitarian assistance. To label war as peace is not only Orwellian, but also it justifies implementing shock therapy to create the market cure for war.

Our problem over the title was compounded by what we learned at the workshop and conference on which this book is based. At the workshop on 'West African Women in the Aftermath of War', held in Dakar, Senegal, in December 1998, at the conference on 'The Aftermath: Women in Post-war Reconstruction', held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-22 July 1999, and at the meeting of the African Women's Anti-War Coalition that followed on 23 July 1999, we learned that there is no aftermath for women (Meintjes 2000; Pillay 2000; Turshen 1999; Turshen and Alidou 2000). One participant asked, 'How clear are the boundaries of these kinds of wars when

there's so much misery, violence and exploitation after the war?' (Malathi de Alwis, conference participant). Evidence confirms that the gender violence women experience in wartime increases when the fighting dies down (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998; Ibeanu, this volume); and clearly there is no one aftermath because the scenarios following war are as various as the conflicts themselves (Turshen, this volume). Even within a single country, the aftermath of one war, for example the liberation struggle in Algeria, was different from that of another war, for example the Algerian civil conflict of the 1990s. Also, we wanted a title that would reflect what we have come to believe: the post-war period is too late for women to transform patriarchal gender relations.

One of our objectives in organising the conference on the aftermath, which gathered together one hundred activist and academic participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the Caribbean and from national and international governmental and nongovernmental organisations, was to provide a new theoretical understanding of women's experiences in war-torn societies. Our point of departure was dissatisfaction with many of the reconstruction programmes, which are based on one of two approaches. Judging by the literature, agencies base their assistance on an assessment of either human needs or human rights. The needs-based approach to post-war socio-economic rehabilitation prioritises social and material needs, emphasising humanitarian assistance. The rights-based approach to post-war political reconstruction gives priority to political reorganisation – to human rights, justice and equality, elections, pluralism and participation – often defining human rights in the narrow sense of civil and political liberties to the neglect of economic and social rights. During the transition from war to peace, or from military dictatorship to democracy, the rhetoric of equality and rights tends to mask the reconstruction of patriarchal power, despite recent emphasis on women's human rights.

Although both rights and needs are important aspects of creating an environment for post-war reconstruction, neither is adequate, either alone or in combination, for the task of enabling women to realise substantive advancement. Neither approach recognises the real need women feel for social transformation rather than the reconstruction of the past. Many women desire to use the opportunities

that arise in periods of conflict to remove traditional gender restrictions permanently (Becker, this volume). For them, as for us, true transformation encompasses a political economy open to women in ways that recognise their social and productive roles and contributions, as well as their desires as sexual beings. Equity and social justice are two aspects of this transformation, but it would be incomplete without recognising the particularity of women's sexuality and the way society has, in the past, shaped sexual mores to determine women's secondary status in civil society. Substantive equality means a fundamental shift towards the provision of specific rights related to women's gender roles, for example reproductive health rights, rights to further education and affirmative action.

Breaking Down the Category 'Women'

The first problem we confronted in the conferences was that of our identities: who were we and whom did we represent? No woman lives in the single dimension of her sex; we cannot assume that because we are all women we will make common cause. Gender is a social construction and to specify one's gender automatically entails questions about relations of race, class and political power, whilst war adds the dimensions of conquered and victor. Conference participants sidestepped this predicament and in their discussions concentrated on a narrower issue; they made clear by their example and by their reports that the women who live through war and conflict do not fall into a single group. Not only their experiences differ but also their connections to the conflict, and these experiences and connections determine their position in the aftermath (Bop, this volume).

Some women take up arms or enter soldiery behind the lines; their experience in the aftermath is linked to their training for war, the conditions of demobilisation, and the availability of services, especially for the disabled. Other women join organisations and take up new roles as mobilisers (for war or for peace) in their communities. Ogoni women were actively engaged in the struggle for greater local control of oil revenues and for the clean-up of pollution; as a result the Nigerian state targeted them specifically for violent reprisals (Ibeanu, this volume). Rita Manchanda (this volume) points to the ambivalence that feminists and peace activists display towards women

militants and fighters; they tend to see them as used by patriarchal nationalist projects rather than as acting on their own. So some women undermine the new identity of others in the aftermath. Sondra Hale (this volume) points out that although Eritrean women fighters were indeed icons of liberated women, the pressure on former fighters to revert to traditional norms at the end of the war threatened to undo many of their gains.

The majority of women do not take up arms, and perhaps many 'do not identify with the objectives of the war, or feel alienated from the mechanisms of war, its apparent irrationality and its destructive consequences' (Sorenson 1998:11). These women also do not form an undifferentiated category. Women with access to wealth are able to leave when their safety is threatened; they may return after the war, relatively unscathed. Most women are too poor to emigrate; when they stay on alone, they assume tasks formerly assigned to men. Those whose men return will fare differently in the aftermath from those widowed by the war. Some women remain at home wishing for an early end to the conflict; afterwards they may want to return to what they perceive as the stability of pre-war arrangements. In some urban areas women may be relatively safe and have access to vital information and resources in wartime; for them the end of fighting will be different from the experience of women who found themselves in the cross-fire and had to hide or flee. In remote rural areas, some women were abandoned by their husbands, preyed upon by soldiers and rebels, or cut off from intelligence and food markets. In the aftermath they are the most deprived and destitute of all. Women who ran away to escape fighting and became internally displaced persons may have been sexually assaulted in the camps or abducted by rebels. This last happened to women and girls in Gulu who were kidnapped by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. The internally displaced do not have the benefit of refugee status given to those who cross international borders and come under the jurisdiction of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Repatriation is also not a uniform experience. In Rwanda the reception of women identified with the vanquished Hutu was not the same as that reserved for Tutsi returnees.

This list is not comprehensive and of course the duration of the war and the level of weapons technology employed are two more factors

that condition women's experience of conflict and the aftermath. We hope this review indicates the great diversity of women in war-torn societies and shows how limiting the response of international agencies is when survivors are lumped together in one category.

Women's Wartime Gains and Potential for Post-war Transformation

Across these diverse groups of women in varied situations we noticed a common feature. Whereas most women experience loss in war, some unexpectedly make gains (Bop, this volume). It is a paradox that war offers opportunities for women to transform their lives in terms of their image of themselves, their behaviour towards men and towards their elders, and their ability to live independently. Again and again, we felt constrained to acknowledge the pain and suffering that women encounter:

Women left behind whatever they had and ran for security. Sometimes they left their children behind or threw them into the river because they couldn't cope anymore. These women didn't have a wrap or blanket to cover their children. So in Angola we know only the losses of assets and lives. Still today there are women who have nothing to eat – they look for food in rubbish bins. (Faustina Navele Chiungue, conference participant)

With some fear that our audience might think we were disparaging women's undeniably painful wartime losses, we decided to examine what women gain.

According to Manchanda (this volume), writing about the many conflicts raging across South Asia, 'conflict opens up intended and unintended spaces for empowering women, effecting structural social transformations and producing new social, economic and political realities that redefine gender and caste hierarchies'. She cites the emergence of Naga women as agents for peace in the fifty-year nationalist struggle in India's northeast, and she gives the examples of unarmed Naga women daring to protest against military rampages, entering into negotiations with the army to minimise the impact of violence, and managing community survival. Clearly women's wartime experiences, so frequently portrayed in terms of victimisation, offer the potential for social transformation. Equally clearly,

transformation is not just about conditions or structures, but also about internal processes of consciousness, of creating words and language that will provide women with a sense of their own agency (Mladjenovic, this volume).

In the wake of civil conflict, most people seem to crave stability. They are exhausted, yet face multiple tasks of rebuilding that demand tremendous energy. If war-torn societies are to bring about renewal and achieve a successful transition to peace, they must generate the necessary resources or become dependent on international aid. Women are key resources in the process of rebuilding society (Merlet, this volume). They have already shown their creative abilities in assuring their families' survival during wartime. Peace-builders are an important group because they give examples of how the seeds of transformation can grow. The question is, how can these grassroots groups be institutionalised to become forces for change in the aftermath? If they are institutionalised, are the terms of that process traditional or are they progressive and transformative?

Belief in the transformative potential of women's experiences is linked to recognition of both the historical specificity of wars, which differ from one country to another, and the particularities of many groups of women within war-torn societies. What kinds of survival strategies do women adopt when men become the targets of war and go into hiding or when men leave home to fight? Documenting what women do to survive in wartime is one way to make women's potential visible (Turshen and Twagirumariya 1998).

The Failure to Consolidate Wartime Gains

Why don't women realise their potential and sustain wartime gains in peacetime? Why and how is transformation rolled back? Women say they feel they are different during periods of conflict and that they act differently, but that society does not allow them to live differently in periods of reconstruction. Why? The historical record confirms that societies neither defend the spaces women create during struggle nor acknowledge the ingenious ways in which women bear new and additional responsibilities. As Manchanda (this volume) notes, women's activism in managing survival and community-level agency is predictably devalued as accidental activism and marginalised post-

conflict, as politics become more structured and hierarchical.

Martina Belic, an invited speaker at the Johannesburg conference, said we are wrong to assume that the changes in women's wartime roles are dramatic. In reality – at least in the experience of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia – women were still fulfilling their usual caretaking roles, for the men who were fighting and for their families, as well as for other women who were victims of violence. Manchanda (this volume) has another interpretation: she believes the shifts in gender roles brought about by the upheaval attendant on conflict are dramatic, but that 'the impulse to women's social transformation and autonomy is circumscribed by the nationalist project, which constructs women as purveyors of the community's accepted and acceptable cultural identity'. She concludes that the return to peace is invariably conceptualised as a return to the gender status quo, irrespective of the nontraditional roles assumed by women during conflict. Malathi de Alwis (this volume) discusses yet another dimension of this issue: how Sri Lankan women use their roles as mothers to stage public protests and in so doing overturn simple generalisations about mothers being victimised or idealised.

The reasons women regress in the aftermath are various. It seems likely that many do not consciously internalise or conceptualise the changes in their roles; without a conscious translation, there can be no concerted effort to defend women's opportunities and gains in peacetime. If women do not transform their sense of themselves during conflict, they cannot defend themselves when, in the wake of war, men reassert their claims. Sometimes, even when women recognise changes in themselves, their perception is negative. One explanation of this negativity emerged at the International Tribunal on War Crimes Against Women held in Tokyo in December 2000, where it became clear that women blocked from testifying about their experience, women who were silenced and censored, could not experience long-term healing. One Chinese woman collapsed when she was prevented from showing her wounds to the audience at the tribunal. A Burundian woman collapsed when she described how her family had rejected her. The refusal to allow a trauma counsellor to help this woman uncover the moment of being overwhelmed amounted to a double silencing. The result was an unsatisfactory closure, the significance of which was a reassertion of shame and the

idea that the telling was in itself unacceptable. At the same tribunal, the Dutch women who were held in Japanese concentration camps described how they had an opportunity to recount their experiences immediately after the Second World War. The Dutch people did not see them as transgressors and did not turn their stories into shameful projections that transmuted sexual torture into an attack on the honour of their menfolk. Rather, they were heroic survivors, praised, honoured, pitied, given sympathy and empathy. The reparations paid by the Japanese in compensation gave them recognition that was vital to their healing.

One variable at the heart of the failure to consolidate wartime gains is community. The collective strength of women and its opposite, isolation, whether geographic isolation or the lack of a framework for concerted action, was a dominant theme in our discussions. Refugee camps give some women an opportunity to work together and learn leadership skills, but this community may be lost and the momentum dissipated when women are repatriated and dispersed. Fighting together as soldiers also offers women camaraderie, which may be lost in demobilisation when fighters are dispersed. Women who mobilised civil society for national liberation – in Eritrea, in Mozambique's war against the Portuguese, in South Africa against apartheid, in Algeria against the French, to name a few liberation struggles – found large communities, sometimes extending beyond national borders, but activists found they could not sustain these support networks after the victory. Women who work for peace at the grassroots level, often at the peak of atrocities and instability, create a local sense of community, but they rarely reach national prominence. Women's activities in community or church groups ... are often labelled "volunteer", "charitable", or "social" even though they have a political impact' (Sorenson 1998:10).

For each group of women the changes experienced in wartime open the possibility of transformation. The question to ask in each context is: how is the seed of transformation planted, what causes it to grow or to lose its capacity to grow? We came to the view that the reconstruction phase is too late for women to assert themselves. The real opportunity for planting the seeds for transformation is during wartime, in conditions of conflict. This is why the African Women's Anti-War Coalition, the group that formed spontaneously during the

Dakar workshop and met after the Johannesburg conference, is so important: its strategy is to build upon and harness the transformative experiences of wartime, before reconstruction plans are fixed (Pillay 2000). The recognition of this timing makes strategically vital the reconception of conflicts and transitions as opportunities for gains to be made. During the upheavals of war women begin to move into new power relations; afterwards they risk becoming stuck and concentrating on their losses.

The Political Economy of Violence against Women

Violence is another of the variables that determine whether women will be able to consolidate wartime gains. Participants at both conferences spent a good deal of time analysing the nature of violence before, during and after war (Pillay, this volume). Some women believe that there is a continuum of violence in these three periods; others see wartime violence as a distinctly different phenomenon (Sideris, this volume, Chapter 9). Here we wish to draw attention to a subtext that runs through the three periods – the relation of violence against women to sexual control and the allocation of resources.

Many African and Asian societies distribute resources to women on the basis of women's purported 'virtue': 'good girls' – unmarried virgins, faithful wives, and celibate widows – qualify, whereas 'bad girls' – promiscuous women and women who were raped – don't. We interpret virtue in this context as a denial of women's sexuality. Underlying this denial is the rejection of women's autonomy. We say this because most women do not have access to resources in their own right; their fathers, husbands and sons control their access, and women's endowment depends on their relations with these men.

Wartime conditions – the absence of men, the penury of resources, and the violence against women – turn many good girls into bad girls. During war, women are caught up in the kinds of struggles over large and small assets that have dominated many of the recent African conflicts; in this strife the politically and militarily strong try to wrest assets from the weak. Rape figures importantly in the strategy of asset stripping by displacing populations from contested lands (Turshen 2000). Rapists strip women not only of their economic assets (food, clothing, jewellery, money and household furnishings) but also of

their political assets, which are their virtue and their reputation. When women admit to rape by the 'enemy', they lose the respect and protection of their family and community. Yasmin Sooka, a human rights lawyer serving on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and an invited speaker on the opening day of the Johannesburg conference, said it was 'imperative to do more work to deconstruct rape and sexual assault during times of conflict'. She spoke about 'honour' and noted that men regard the violation of women as a slight upon men's honour. Women who admit to having been raped besmirch the honour of their men. Many communities reject these women and throw them out; in this sense women have lost their lives and many feel they might as well be dead. Indeed, men often kill women who return with children born of rape, and women's suicide rates are high.

Another analysis sees this talk about honour as men's justification for killing or excluding women who were raped but not as an explanation of their behaviour in wartime when they are under military orders. In Marxist terms, honour is a superstructural explanation that remains in the realm of culture. At the base is what men stand to gain by systematic rape and the act of rejecting rape survivors' re-entry into the community. There is an interesting paradox not explained by the honour argument: on the one hand, communities will fight to protect their women, and families see rape as so awful that only the death of the rape victim can restore the family's honour. But on the other hand, rape was invisible in national and international courts and the law afforded little legal redress for this crime until very recently. What makes it possible to explain this widely observed double-faced attitude to rape is the recognition that patriarchal societies regard women as property and that the value of this property resides in women's productive and reproductive labour.

Many changes take place during war but they rarely have a lasting effect on the sexual division of labour. Some women return from war determined to maintain their newfound freedoms. They meet with a backlash against their attempts to redefine their rights. Violence intensifies because women have changed and are demanding autonomy. Gender and generational conflicts over how to reorganise livelihoods in war-torn societies emerge and break women's resistance. In the aftermath, men use violence against women and women's fear of

violence to reinforce their hold on women; they compel women to comply because they need to re-establish or preserve control over wealth and resources and, above all, over women's productive and reproductive labour. This control is the crux of the struggle over women's claims to equality and autonomy. Realizing that their access to resources depends on society's conviction that they are virtuous, women succumb to denying or leaving behind their wartime gains. The power to decide that women conform to sexual norms and thus deserve access to resources may reside in chiefs and clan heads, in such family members as husbands, mothers-in-law, and older brothers, or even in unrelated gangs of women (as happened in Europe after the Second World War when older women punished girls for having sexual relations with enemy soldiers).

The conservative backlash that takes place after war has its roots in the older generation's attempt to reassert control and re-establish 'traditions'. In material terms, tradition encodes the ways in which people organise their social existence, including production and reproduction. For the older generation, which depends on the young for survival in old age, it is imperative to re-establish the customary flow of wealth from young to old that obtained before the war. In the context of re-establishing livelihood, the older generation finds it particularly important to control young women. Their sexist view of women as commodities persists. Indeed, their view of sexuality is the first tradition they want to reconstruct, and they may use violence to do so.

Myths about Identity, Problems of Solidarity and Reconciliation

War brings many changes in the social construction of womanhood and manhood (Sideris, this volume, Chapter 4). In reaction to the fearsome dangers of battle and the unrelieved machismo of military life, men romanticise the mothers and wives they left at home; they construct stereotypes of femininity bearing little or no relation to the masculine roles that circumstances have forced on women. The clash between reality and the idealised vision of womanhood may be bitter in the aftermath, especially if women like and want to retain their new identities and men want to preserve the pre-war prerogatives of

domination. Men may manipulate another, parallel, romanticisation – that of the male war hero – and use it to burden women with guilt; however hard women's lives were during the war, the myth maintains that there's no comparison with the hardships of battle. If a wife's subordination is a sign of respect for her husband's manhood, and if defeat has challenged that manhood, then men will reject empowered women and try to bury women's gains along with the dead.

The backlash against women's wartime identities is documented, yet we don't fully understand why gender roles revert in the aftermath. Why, for example, do women experience men as so powerful that they can't object to forced abortion or the abandonment of babies conceived in rape? Are men as transformed by wartime experiences as women are? Not all wars are about the kind of change that national wars of liberation propose, and not all national wars of liberation advocated the liberation of women (Bop, this volume). And in the aftermath of liberation wars, there is no systematic process of deconstructing racism or patriarchy – not even in South Africa (Meintjes, this volume). Most wars are about greed and do not require men to transform their relations with women. So the challenge for us is to deconstruct gender relations.

Men fighting wars that problematise identity may burden women with the cultural symbols of the religion/nation/ethnic group their leaders say is under attack, even as women are reaching out to build solidarity and construct peace across those very lines (Mladjenovic, this volume). In the aftermath, men returning with hatred for the 'enemy' may clash with women who have gained a new understanding of their community and a wish for reconciliation.

Whether men's fantasies or women's realities prevail depends on who controls the myths and the making of identities; the institutions that govern social and behavioural norms – the religious institutions, the schools, the different levels of the state – do not change. Who prevails also depends on what purposes the myths serve. Some are used to exclude categories of people from the material benefits of the new political dispensation. Reconstruction plans are usually blind to gender issues: men don't see the need for gender transformation and women are excluded from planning.

Power and Authority in the Aftermath

What is the role of religious institutions in the process of reconstruction? Does the way religious leaders treated women before and during the war have an impact on women's ability to transform their status in the aftermath? In Rwanda, a country dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, abortion remains illegal despite the desperation of many women who became pregnant after rape. In South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church, which long found legitimating arguments for apartheid in the Bible, apologised to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for its racial politics but continues to uphold its sexist views on women. In Algeria, under pressure from Islamic religious leaders, the government adopted laws based on the *shari'ah* to control women, over the vociferous objections of women who fought in the war for independence.

Religion is just one of the institutions that determine whether the old ways will be consolidated or new ideas will be diffused in the aftermath. Whether a conservative backlash develops depends in part on who is in control at the local level. Another determining institution is that of chieftainship. In parts of Mozambique, traditional chiefs are back in office and have the power and authority to settle disputes; they have legal power as well as control of the cultural symbols (Harrison 1996). They can define transgressive behaviour and decide who may obtain resources, such as land and water, as well as who has rights and who should be excluded from the community. Women depend upon the good will of chiefs, who have the power to define them as virtuous or undeserving.

The role of international agencies may be more significant than that of governments, especially if war has weakened the state to the point of total dependence on foreign aid. The impact of international intervention on women is felt at every level. Agencies that run refugee camps and insist on dispersing repatriated populations to their pre-war areas of origin may unwittingly undermine some of the gains women made in the camps. By creating a sense of community, women often established new identities and relationships in the camps and came to understand that women have human rights. Such new ideas are important in changing relations between women and men. Male refugees asked, why should women be protected in the camps since

men beat up women before the war and would continue to do so afterwards? Some refugee camps provided an opportunity for men to learn different normative behaviours, a new vision easily lost if there are no social controls or incentives to sustain the changes in peacetime. The experience of transformation in the camps is a collective one, and many women believe that by remaining together they have a better chance of maintaining and building on their gains. At the Dakar conference in December 1998, women from Sierra Leone and Liberia demanded that they be allowed to stay in the new environments they had created. They understood that if they separated they risked facing the post-war backlash alone, and they feared the conservatism that is the hallmark of women's post-war experience.

Life in refugee camps can provide a model for women's leadership in the aftermath because many women become agents of change in the camps. To disperse them is to lose the power of transformation. Whilst we conceive of refugees as agents of change, it is important not to romanticise the experience. Not all camps provide opportunities for innovation. If women organised and created their own institutions in the Polisario camps, they were firmly under men's control in the Rwandan camps. How long people spend in camps and the attitudes of the host country and population toward refugees are also factors in whether the camp experience is positive or negative.

Outside forces are also important in establishing new rules for employment, trade, and property relations, all of which war destabilises. Of the three, property relations may be of greatest immediate importance to women because few hold deeds, and in many customary regimes, land use rights revert to a husband's family after his death. Widows are vulnerable to eviction, and in several countries women have organised for legal reforms to ensure their entitlements. But when external forces seize economic power from traditional authorities in the reconstruction of war-torn societies, the reforms they recommend may work against women. In the eyes of the World Bank (1998), 'post-conflict' African nations present international financial institutions with opportunities to create a 'market-friendly' environment; their primary advice is to universalise property rights. Preliminary data on the privatisation of land suggest that it seriously disadvantages women, who lose access to this prime agricultural resource (Gray and Kevane 1999; Turshen 2001).

War also sweeps aside democratic mechanisms of accountability; governments at war give way to secrecy and use the national emergency as an excuse to suspend civil rights. Corruption follows this path, and the workings of government become less and less transparent to women because they so rarely hold office. Research is needed to establish whether a culture of corruption is especially liable to thrive where governments grant amnesty for war crimes. What is the relation between amnesty and impunity for violence, particularly violence against women?

Our Vision of a Transformed Society

Do women have a vision of the society they wish to live in after war and armed conflict? Many people say that since 1989 and the crisis of socialism, women and men have no ideal to strive for and the little vision that exists is contested. Societies focus in the aftermath on finding the truth about atrocities and on the reconciliation process; this diverts women from looking at the advances they made during war and distracts them from creating new blueprints. Because public rewards go to those who died, women's advances – the survival strategies that kept families alive and communities together – are erased from the historical record. In 1945, post-war European and American ideology emphasised motherhood and stressed the need for women to return to their domestic roles as wives and mothers. There were no medals or monuments to women who replaced men in the workforce during the Second World War, and no special acknowledgement of women partisans who fought in resistance movements.

Our vision is not equality with men but the full equity that would pertain in the context of new gender relations. What we want goes beyond equality to the transformation of social relations. We believe that women must acquire fair access to resources in their own right, and that the struggle in the reconstruction period is precisely over the terms of women's entitlements. Our desire is to describe the conditions that favour social transformation and to outline our vision of a society that respects women's autonomy and bodily integrity.

The studies presented in the second part of this book document women's struggles for transformed social relations in various post-conflict situations, in Haiti, the Balkans, Asia, and several African

conflict zones. The common post-war pattern the world over has been the re-creation of patriarchal dominance in new forms, whereas these chapters corroborate women's belief in the necessity of challenging the old order and creating new democratic institutions. The authors document and analyse women's survival strategies and post-war activities, enabling us to identify the seeds of transformation and showing us the important role of solidarity with women in conflict zones. In the aftermath it becomes incumbent upon us all to develop conscious strategies that help women build on their activities and find ways of incorporating new gender relations in democratic societies.

CHAPTER 2

Women in Conflicts, Their Gains and Their Losses

CODOU BOP

Africa is the continent most ravaged by wars in our time. Some wars have been fought over long periods, lasting, as in the case of Sudan, more than forty years. The bright lights of the media fall on a few, but many remain unknown and neglected. Wars of the poor, they use cheap but deadly arms such as land mines and light weapons, and their victims are counted in tens of millions.

Wars are the subject of numerous studies and conferences; their causes and their effects on regional and local economies and on populations are well known. Yet although the media repeatedly provide information that describes the tough conditions women endure to survive, particularly in refugee camps and on the roads of exile, they constantly ignore the actions women take as principal actors. The image conveyed, which endures in the onlooker's memory, is that of women as losers and victims. Such an image has serious consequences for a true awareness of the differential impact of conflicts on women and men and impedes the recognition of endogenous solutions that women propose.

Such a view explains the feeble actions taken to diminish the consequences of war for women, actions most often left to humanitarian aid organisations. The result is a continual marginalising of women, whose contribution researchers still largely ignore and whose influence official policies do not recognise.

It is widely accepted that women lose in wars, but important questions remain in need of answers. Are women always losers, and are they so collectively? Because they do not comprise a homogeneous