

9

WOMEN, GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA

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Introduction

How are women, their roles and functions imagined in future African post-conflict societies? What are the spaces and places that women occupy in African peace agreements? These are the questions that stand at the forefront of this chapter. Africa has seen a disproportionate number of armed conflicts on the continent since the end of the Cold War (Williams 2016, 5). A large amount of these have ended with the signing of a peace agreement. These peace agreements set out the overarching framework for the peacebuilding that is to take place in the aftermath of the armed conflict, and thus they can be understood as blueprints of the post-conflict society. In particular, they reflect how signatories perceive different groups of individuals and the roles that they should play in the post-conflict society.

The signatories to peace agreements are almost exclusively men. Only 5% of signatories in all major peace processes between 1990 and 2017 worldwide were women (CFR and UN Women 2018). This is in spite of the fact that women's groups and feminist scholars successfully pushed for the adoption of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 in 2000, which focused on the recognition, protection and participation of women in peace and security matters. This demand for attention and action regarding women's roles has developed into a broad-based Women, Peace and Security agenda, which has gathered academics, practitioners and civil society actors under the same (albeit very large) umbrella, where the ultimate goal is gender equality (Wilén 2017). Recognising this development, it is thus likely that the wording and space given to women in peace agreements have evolved since the adoption of UNSC 1325, despite the fact that women are not signatories to the majority of peace agreements.

In this chapter, I explore how women, their assumed roles and suggested functions are interpreted in peace agreements in Africa. Using an inductive approach, I analyse the space, wording, function and roles that peace agreements give to women and gender through a feminist lens and distinguish four categories which reflect how women are portrayed: vulnerable victims, moral peacebuilders, counting women and human rights (and women's rights). While there is a clear increase in the number of references to women and gender in the peace agreements signed after 2000, they draw strongly on essentialist understandings of women. I therefore argue that while we may have passed the stage of "gender blindness", we are still in the phase of gender dilemmas.¹ Moreover, men are still the default setting in peace agreements, while women are perceived as different, requiring special treatment or special protection.

Methodological and Material Reflections

In terms of material, I have drawn the peace agreements analysed here from the University of Edinburgh's PA-X Peace Agreement database (Bell et al. 2020). For the period 1990–2019, this database contains 463 peace agreements from interstate, intrastate, and inter- and intrastate conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. Out of these, only the 130 peace agreements which have provisions on women, girls or gender were analysed. Peace agreements are defined as formal, publicly available documents, produced after discussion between conflict protagonists and mutually agreed to by some or all of them, addressing conflict with a view to end it.

Methodologically, I carefully read all passages which have included women, girls or gender in the 130 peace agreements selected for the analysis with the aim of identifying the wording, function and roles given to women, girls and gender. Thereafter I created four categories which mirror the way in which women are portrayed in the agreements and reflect trends identified by previous feminist research in similar contexts. This may be called an inductive approach, yet the aim is not to create theory per se but to identify and underline reoccurring tendencies in official documents portraying women and gender.

Women and gender are often used interchangeably in various types of documents, including peace agreements, yet gender refers to the socially constructed roles and behaviours associated with men's and women's biological sex (Valasek 2008, 2–3). "Gender" is therefore a concept which concerns both men and women, while "women" refers only to individuals who have the biological sex of women. In this chapter, I focus specifically on how women are portrayed in the agreements, yet such a focus also entails analysing gender roles and gender stereotypes, which are reflected in the wording and spaces attributed to women.

There are methodological limitations to this analysis. Firstly, only the agreements which mention women, girls or gender are examined, which may give the reader the false impression that these provisions are part of all peace agreements. Yet only 130 out of 463 agreements signed during the period 1990–2019 contained provisions on women, girls or gender – less than a third of the agreements. Secondly, as there is no geographical comparison, it is not possible to determine whether African peace agreements represent the norm, or rather the exception, to other continents when it comes to the space and wording related to women. The overarching aim is therefore to get a broader understanding of what roles are reserved for women in the aftermath of conflict, in the peacebuilding process.

Women, Gender, Peacebuilding and Peace Agreements

Women continue to be marginalised in peacekeeping missions, peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes, despite UNSC 1325 drawing attention to women's sidelining in matters related to peace and conflict. Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes worldwide (CFR and UN Women 2018). This is in spite of the fact that there are both instrumentalist and rights-based reasons to strive for a better gender balance following the termination of conflicts. For example, feminist research has shown that states with higher levels of gender equality exhibit lower levels of violence during international crises and disputes (Caprioli 2009) and that there is a strong relationship between the physical security of women and peacefulness of states (Hudson et al. 2008/2009). In addition, newer research has found a strong link between female political empowerment and civil peace (Dahlum and Wig 2018), making women's involvement in peacebuilding crucial.

Rights-based justifications for increasing women's participation have also been put forward by academics who are pointing at women's right not only to participate but also to decide on

the future of the post-conflict society in peacebuilding efforts. Both international institutions and academic scholars argue thus for women's need to be included in peace processes to build a greater post-conflict gender balance and a more inclusive and durable peace (Bouta, Frerks and Bannon 2005; Björkdahl 2012; UN Women, Krause, Krause and Bränfors 2018). As peace accords frame the society that will be built in the post-conflict environment, the inclusion of women in the negotiation of these accords is primordial (Puechguirbal 2005, 4), not only as tokens of good will but as meaningful participants who can increase representativeness, disturb the dominant masculinity and share gender-based experiences.

Often, however, international peacebuilders are likely to either bring their own template for how to build "liberal peace", or to build upon the local elites' vision of how peace should be (re)built. While hybrid versions of the two are the most likely outcome, both of these visions leave limited socio-economic status and power to women, mainly because both local elites and peacebuilders are composed, to a large majority, of men (Chinkin and Charlesworth 2006, 938). Access to peace negotiations remains therefore difficult for women, as the negotiations often tend to begin in secret venues or take place in non-public forums to which only the main protagonists of the conflict are invited (Bell 2013, 2). Out of 130 peace agreements signed worldwide between 1990 and 2014, women signed only 13² (Krause, Krause and Bränfors 2018, 987).

The post-conflict environment, just as the conflict, remains centred around male power systems, struggles, and identity formation (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002). It is, as Handrahan has framed it: a period where "fraternities", both national and international, compete over power (2004, 433). Here again, the distinction between public and private results in lesser influence for women: "the male, public realm is where power and authority is exercised while the private sphere is the appropriate domain of women", and by understanding peacebuilding as mainly an activity in the public sphere, women's influence in peacebuilding is limited (Björkdahl 2012, 290). Women's absence – or at best limited presence – at the negotiation table is visible in the language used in the African peace accords that have been analysed here, language being a key indicator of how men and women are defined within a given society and what roles they are expected to play (Puechguirbal 2005, 3).

Identifying Spaces for Women and Gender in African Peace Agreements

The 130 peace agreements analysed here cover a relatively large time period (between 1990 and the end of 2019) and various types of conflicts from a whole continent. Yet the space and wording allocated to women and gender remain remarkably similar over time and between different countries and regions. Indeed, since Puechguirbal analysed women's roles in four African peace processes almost 15 years ago, very little seems to have changed when it comes to how women are being defined and the roles they are ascribed (Puechguirbal 2005). There is, however, a clear difference when it comes to the references made to women, girls and gender before and after the adoption of UNSC 1325. Out of the total of 463 peace agreements in the PA-X database which cover interstate, intrastate, and inter- and intrastate conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, 144 were signed before 2000 and 319 after 2000. Of the 130 which mention women, girls or gender, 25 were signed before 2000 and 105 after 2000. In short, before 2000, only 17% of all peace agreements mentioned women, girls and gender, while after 2000, that number is 33%. There is thus a clear increase in the space reserved for women, girls and gender in peace agreements after the adoption of UNSC 1325.

In the months before UNSC 1325 was signed, Burundi saw a range of initiatives aimed at the inclusion of women in the negotiations leading to the Arusha Accord, which officially ended the civil war. Amongst the initiatives was UNIFEM, convening the All-Party Women's Peace Conference, which gathered two representatives from each of the warring factions. More than half of the recommendations formulated by the conference were adopted (Bell 2013, 2), giving an indication of how women's inclusion may change the content of peace accords. This also reflects research by Krause, Krause and Bränfors, which argues that linkages between women civil society groups and female signatories positively impact content and implementation (2018, 987).³

Through discourse analysis, I have identified four predominant categories in the 130 peace agreements which address women and/or gender, in the sense that I have carefully read the passages which contain mentions of women or gender. Mirroring the most prevalent interpretations of women in the agreements, and drawing on trends identified in feminist literature related to women's representation in official documents, I have labelled the categories as vulnerable victims, moral peacebuilders, counting women and human rights (and women's rights). In the coming four subsections, I analyse each of the categories separately against the literature on gender, women, peace and security.

Vulnerable Victims

Women are predominantly mentioned in peace accords as part of "vulnerable" populations. Often, women are grouped in the now (in)famous "women and children" category, preceded or followed by demands to protect or to respect the "particularly vulnerable" group. In many instances, this group of vulnerable is enlarged to include different groups of populations. The Dar-es-Salaam Declaration for the Great Lakes Region from 2004 states, for example: "Protect vulnerable groups, women, children, the elderly, the disabled and the sick, the refugees and displaced persons" (p. 4, 27). Similarly, the Arusha Agreement from 2000 puts women heads of families in the same vulnerable population as "juvenile delinquents, traumatized children, child heads of families and the physically and mentally disabled" (p. 81, art. 10).

There are several consequences of framing and grouping women with vulnerable populations. Three will briefly be examined here. Firstly, portraying women as vulnerable and in need of protection reinforces gender stereotypes of women as passive and weak. This undermines their influence and power in the peacebuilding process. Secondly, by singling out women and children as civilians, the "civilians frame" becomes distorted, encompassing some combatants (female and child soldiers) and excluding some non-combatants (adult civilian men; Carpenter 2005, 296). Finally, when women are associated with groups such as the elderly, the disabled or traumatised children, there is an assumption that women constitute a minority sociological category, just as the categories based on age, color, religion or handicap. This categorisation draws attention from the fact that women constitute 50% of the population while undermining the potential of women as independent actors with rights (Puechguirbal 2005, 3).

Gender stereotypes have long portrayed women as the weaker sex, linked both to physical differences with men and to understandings of women as fragile, passive and in need of protection (Shepherd 2011, 506). While it is important not to brush aside the fact that men constitute the majority of combatants in armed conflicts, this does not equate women with being victims or as especially vulnerable. Rather, defining women as "in need of protection" or as "victims" reinforces understandings of war as masculine⁴ and thereby also excludes women from fully participating in rebuilding the post-conflict society. Women and men's different experiences from

war and conflict are important to recognise, and the fact that women's specific experiences from conflict, which long have remained invisible in official accounts, now gain attention is encouraging. Yet, by only singling out women as "vulnerable victims", there is a risk of associating women as dependent on a male entity, thereby buttressing the myth of women as "beautiful souls" and men as "just warriors" (Elsthtain 1987). This undermines women's capacities to act and further marginalises them in peace processes (Puechguirbal 2005, 3). In addition, it locates the responsibility for providing protection with elite political actors, who most often are constituted by a majority of men (Shepherd 2011, 506). This ultimately reinforces men's power and women's subordination.

The automatic association between women and children as civilians, vulnerable and in need of protection also distorts the "civilian frame" (Carpenter 2005). Again, it is important to acknowledge that men are the main perpetrators of violence in conflicts, and thus the automatic association between women and civilians is understandable at a first glance. However, fighters are supposed to distinguish civilians from combatants based on what they are *doing*, rather than *who* they are (Carpenter 2005, 296). This resonates with Puechguirbal's point that women often are defined according to what they are, rather than what they do; De Beauvoir phrased it eloquently in the notion "anatomy as destiny" (cited in Puechguirbal 2005, 4). This "misframing" has repercussions on how armed conflict is understood and handled. For example, men may automatically be assumed to be fighters, and treated as such, while women routinely are assumed to be civilians, even in cases when they are active fighters. This distorts responsibility during the conflict and perpetuates gender stereotypes.

Finally, grouping women into categories encompassing diverse groups, such as traumatised children, the mentally disabled and the elderly hides an assumption that women constitute a minority sociological category, rather than half the population (Puechguirbal 2005, 3). Drawing attention to the diverse experiences of different parts of the population is important, yet by putting women as a category alongside minority groups, they are seen as deviant to the norm, while men are being interpreted as the "default mode" (Cohn 2013, 16). It is also problematic to group women as a category with delinquents, the mentally disabled and traumatised individuals, as these populations often have restricted capacities (or rights) to influence the post-conflict society. Associating women with these populations undermines their possibility to act as independent individuals with a right to shape and decide on the future of the post-conflict society.

Moral Peacebuilders

A recurrent trend in peace accords, as seen above, is that women are defined for what they are rather than what they do. This plays out in a paradoxical way: on the one hand, women are seen as inherently vulnerable and thus as passive victims in need of protection; on the other hand, understandings of women as innately peaceful and morally superior puts them in a position of moral responsibility for the country's post-conflict rebuilding. This takes different forms in peace accords. The Sun City Agreement for the inter-Congolese negotiations from 2003, for example, urged parties to "restore the dignity of women so that they may fully assume their noble roles of wives, mothers, educators, custodians of social values and development agents" (pp. 47–54, 21, iv). This declaration both manages to put the burden on women to be custodians of social values, and thereby regulates their behaviour and firmly establishes women's roles in the private sphere as wives and mothers – and thus outside of the public, political sphere where decisions about the peacebuilding process are taken.

Yet, while women's roles are outside the decision-making sphere in these statements, at the same time, their supposedly peaceful nature is hailed as unique for the peacebuilding process.

Burundi's Arusha Agreement from 2000 states: "Recognizing the unique potential of women to contribute to the healing, reconstruction and development of Burundian society" (p. 86, protocol V). Women are also often grouped with "young people" and civil society when it comes to the rebuilding of the post-conflict society: "recognition and promotion of cultural diversity and appreciation of the contribution made by all the people of Mali, particularly women and young people, in building the nation" (Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process 2015, 3 sec. 1, chap. 1, art. 1).

These quotes reflect the understanding of women as inherently moral individuals, bound by their roles as mothers, wives and daughters to act in ethically responsible ways to end conflicts. This interpretation is mirrored in a quote from a UN study on Women, Peace and Security: "women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the Sudan have drawn upon their moral authority as mothers, wives or daughters to call for an end to armed conflict" (UN 2002, 55). Women are hence seen as the moral vectors of the future post-conflict society. This responsibility, however, rarely materialises in a seat at the table or actual influence on the peace negotiations and the subsequent accord. As observed by Otto, the association of women with peace and moral superiority has a 'long history of keeping women out of power' (Otto quoted in Duncanson 2016, 35).

Counting Women

Quotas in state institutions have become one of the methods aimed at giving women more political power and influence in the public sphere. As peace agreements design the framework which will regulate the post-conflict society, they often contain various power-sharing mechanisms, such as quotas. The Maputo Protocol (African Union 2003), which came into force in 2005, builds upon UNSC 1325 and requires state parties to promote the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action (African Union 2003). While many of the accords examined here do not contain explicit provisions regarding women's participation, some give detailed guidelines. In the Transnational Federal Charter of the Somali Republic, for example, it is written that the transitional federal parliament of Somalia shall "consist of Two Hundred and Seventy Five (275) Members of which at least Twelve Percent 12% shall be women" (2004, 16, art. 29). Less than ten years later, the percentage devoted to women had increased to 30% for the National Constituent Assembly in Somalia (The Garowe II Principles 2012, 3, art. 4), indicating a progression in terms of gender balance. Most accords examined here, which voice an explicit demand for women's participation in larger decision-making institutions such as a national parliament, set the number at 30%, whereas for smaller organs like expert groups, every other person is supposed to be a woman.

Adding more women to ameliorate the gender balance has at times been criticised for reducing the question of gender equality to a numbers game, bypassing the structural inequality that women face (see e.g. Eriksson Baaz and Utas 2012). Some critics have also argued that women delegates at negotiations are not representative of women in society as a whole, and they often belong to the elite (Bell 2013, 4). These are both valid points. Numbers are not enough, yet in order to change the structure, there is a need for a larger participation of women in all institutions, bypassing the often cited critical number of 30%. If women are not integrated into the decision-making institutions, these institutions remain by and for men (Wilén 2019). Similarly, criticism against the unrepresentativeness of women in politics or at the negotiation table may be valid, especially as it cannot be assumed that most women represent all women (Shepherd 2011, 510). However, this critique of not being gender representative is rarely addressed to male politicians or negotiators, who make up the majority of the individuals in negotiations and

decision-making organs (Puechguirbal 2005, 9). Gaining representation for diverse women's groups is a long-term process which is likely to happen gradually.

Human Rights (and Women's Rights)

The fourth and final category identified here as both constructing and reflecting upon the place for women in peace agreements is termed "human rights (and women's rights)". The reason for this is the fact that while several of the peace agreements examined here mention "human rights", some also add a specific mention of "women's rights". This gives the impression that women were not included in the overarching concept of human rights. The Protocol of Non-aggression and Mutual Defence in the Great Lakes Region, for example, states that "the primary responsibility of Member States to preserve the integrity of their sovereignty and to protect the lives and human rights of all persons and all peoples, *including women and children*" (2006, 5, art. 3; emphasis added). Whereas the Mali peace accord indicates that "no amnesty for the authors of war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of Human Rights, including violence against women, girls and infants, related to the conflict" (Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process 2015, 11, art. 47).

The addition of "women's rights" to "human rights" reflects long-standing feminist critique pointing to the fact that the main international organs, established for the promotion and protection of human rights, do not deal specifically with violations of the human rights of women, except in a marginal way (Reanda 1981, 12). Feminist scholars have also demonstrated that until recently, human rights law privileged able-bodied adult men rather than women or children, as women's concerns often are submerged in more global issues (Carpenter 2005, 302; Charlesworth 2005, 1). It is thus likely that the peace agreements analysed here, which specify "women's rights" in addition to human rights, have done so to make sure that women's rights are not downplayed or neglected.

There is nevertheless a risk that this practice of adding "women's rights" to references of "human rights" backfires. Using separate instruments or concepts to deal with specific "women's rights" has, for example, resulted in a narrowing of the global human rights perspective and the relegation of questions relating to women to structures endowed with less power (Reanda 1981, 12) – in essence constructing a "women's ghetto" with fewer resources and lower priority than the "general" human rights bodies (Charlesworth 2005, 1). This can result in "human rights" being interpreted as synonymous only to "men's rights", and "women's rights" being seen as an optional add-on. This therefore appears to be another example of how the wording in peace agreements has gone from being gender blind to illustrating gender dilemmas.

All Those "Gender Dilemmas" and the Complexity of It All

This chapter has examined the wording and context related to women and gender in African peace agreements between 1990 and 2019 from a feminist perspective. Using an inductive approach, four categories have been identified as representative of how women are portrayed in the agreements: vulnerable victims, moral peacebuilders, counting women and human rights (and women's rights). A clear increase in references to women, girls and gender can be noticed in the agreements signed after the adoption of UNSC 1325 in 2000. In addition, the difference before and after 2000 is not only quantitative but also qualitative. In the majority of the agreements signed before 2000 which mention women (none mentions gender), it is only to refer

to the participation of a women's group in the negotiation, not to discuss or identify specific aspects influencing women.⁵

The increase to women and gender after 2000 implies that peace agreements have traversed the period of "gender blindness of the twentieth century to a number of gender gaps and gender dilemmas" (see Duncanson 2016). Indeed, while complete gender blindness may largely be behind us, the peace agreements signed since 2000 display a number of gender dilemmas and gender gaps. When women *are* mentioned in peace agreements, they are often portrayed in roles which draw heavily on essentialist descriptions and gender stereotypes, which risks maintaining and reinforcing gender inequality.

One gender dilemma, which is particularly evident in the texts analysed here, is the tension between identifying women's particular experiences from conflict without reducing them to passive victims. Women's experiences during and after conflict have been ignored during centuries. This includes instances of sexual- and gender-based violence, which have affected women disproportionately. The fact that women's experiences are now recognised is therefore progress towards a more gender-equal society. Yet this does not mean that women's agency should be removed and their identities narrowed down to victims. Thus, whereas the attention is important in the strive towards gender equality, it needs to be reflective of the many different aspects of women's experiences and also recognise that women are not vulnerable individuals themselves: their socio-economic positions are.

Women's roles as moral peacebuilders in the peace agreements is another example of a gender dilemma. Women clearly need to be part of the peacebuilding efforts and should play important roles in rebuilding a society. Thus, the mentions that single out women as essential to peacebuilding efforts are critical. Yet women should not bear the burden of being the moral safekeepers of the post-conflict society, nor should they be held responsible for ending wars which rarely have been started or actively maintained by them. This creates gender-stereotypical expectations on women which men do not have to bear and ultimately reinforces gender inequality.

War and armed conflicts are harmful and deeply disturbing practices which affect societies and their populations in myriad ways. Africa has been the scene of a disproportionately high number of armed conflicts over the past three decades. The peacebuilding efforts that have followed in the wake of these conflicts have often used the peace agreements as the basis from which the guiding lines of the new society have been drawn. Analysing the identities and roles attributed to women in these agreements is therefore important in order to better understand how women are seen and interpreted in peacebuilding efforts on the continent.

Notes

- 1 Duncanson, asserts that "peace operations have journeyed from the gender blindness of the twentieth century to a number of gender gaps and gender dilemmas" (2016, 20) in her book *Gender and Peacebuilding*, and I apply this interpretation to this analysis of peace agreements.
- 2 Here it should be noted that Krause et al. (2018) are not using the same criteria for peace agreements as the authors of the PA-X database, which explains the difference in number of peace agreements.
- 3 The absence of women and a gender perspective from the peace accords in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia is noteworthy, especially given the prominent roles they played in ending the conflicts.
- 4 Feminist scholars have long argued that war is a "masculine" practice, which is fought primarily between men and is associated with what have been considered as typical masculine traits: aggressivity, physical strength, courage and decisiveness (see e.g. Cohn 2013).
- 5 The only exception to this trend is the Lomé Agreement of 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which explicitly identify women as having "been particularly victimized during the war" (Lomé Agreement 1999, p. 18, pt. 5).

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