5 Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons in Society

The wide presence of guns in all societies, be they peaceful, at war, or somewhere in between, has an impact on men and women in all kinds of communities. Following a largely theoretical discussion on the gendered implications of small arms in society, this section offers some insights from particular case studies that focus on both public and private spheres of society.

5.1 Gender and Attitudes to Small Arms: Implications for Action

Wendy Cukier explores the relationship between small arms, culture and violence with particular emphasis on gender dimensions. Cultural norms are both contributors to and consequences of violence, and small arms usage and proliferation sometimes figures largely into this culture. Small arms facilitate violence and contribute to a cycle of violence, fear and further arming. While a wide range of factors fuel this cycle of violence in many regions of the world, "gun culture" and the "culture of violence" are closely connected. Gun culture is also tightly linked to notions of masculinity and male identity.

Gender and Demand for Small Arms

While violence is not an exclusively male practice, it is linked, along with guns, to masculine identity. Conventional notions of masculinity may also, contradictorily, ascribe the role of protector and defender to men, and in many cultures this role has become symbolized by and synonymous with the possession of a gun.

In the context of domestic violence, women are affected differently by small arms. Some women are most at risk from their intimates: partners, fathers, brothers, sons. When firearms are accessible, the lethality of domestic abuse is heightened. Cukier shows that, according to a survey in Sierra Leone, 91 percent of women are worried about sexual violence, and 39 percent are quite or extremely worried about violence by non-combatants. In Canada, 85 percent of femicides are committed by partners, while this is the case in only 15 percent of male victims. In the examination of incidents of femicide with firearms, the leading country is the United States. In short, if guns are in the home, women are at greater risk of being killed.

Gender, Experience and Attitudes to Small Arms

The psychological trauma associated with small arms and their actual disruption of social cohesion and family safety often affects women much more profoundly than men, given their roles in society and in the family. Attitudes on firearms have shown that even in high-crime areas in South Africa, where more women are killed by guns than men, women are more fearful of guns. In Canada, those who live with gun-owners support tighter gun control legislation. In some countries like the USA, however, the intensity of opposition to firearms legislation and small arms regulation is underpinned by notions of masculine identity.

Small Arms, Gender and the Role of the Media

The link between "guns" and masculinity is (re)produced with particular intensity by media representations of weapons in industrialized countries in which the media is one of the principal conduits of culture. American media, in particular, tend to portray heroes as using violence as a justified means of resolving conflict and prevailing over others. The association between masculinity and guns has been reproduced by a variety of cultural practices worldwide (guns in entertainment, video, commercial ads). This is important in understanding the demand for guns and ways to address this demand.

The gun lobby tends to launch gender-based attacks on gun control advocates. Definitions of who can claim "expertise" about guns tend to exclude women. Gun control advocates are described in terms that are usually used to denigrate women – as "strident, emotional, and irrational." Yet all the same, there are efforts to market guns and the National Rifle Association (NRA) itself to women.

Gun Laws and Culture

Worldwide, most small arms owners and users are male. Men dominate the military and the police. Men also dominate domestic firearms ownership. Women represent a very small proportion of gun owners, but tend disproportionately to be victims of gun violence. This imbalance has been one of the arguments advanced by feminists for positioning the gun control debate in the context of human rights and equity, which asserts women's equal right to live in safety.

The role of firearms legislation in promoting the safety of women has been well established. However, the extent to which violence against women is recognized as a crime varies from country to country. Laws of individual countries both shape and reflect values, and gun control is made all the more complex by the relationships between gender identity and other identities (e.g. national identities): in general, whatever the impact of gender difference is, racial or cultural impacts always tend to be greater.

Gender and Policy Development

Gender shapes the formulation of policy regarding firearms. As men dominate political structures in most countries and global institutions such as the UN, notions of masculinity can have "invisible" effects on the ways in which policy debates and research are constructed. At the same time, gender has shaped the development of advocacy efforts for and against gun control as well as community-based initiatives in response to gun violence. Social gender constructions are used by peace groups, especially those led by women, such as "The Million Mom March." Of course, while there are dangers in adopting the motherhood framework, its efficacy depends on the context. For example, in the Marshall Islands, the notion of motherhood has been useful as a peace tactic. Cukier notes that it is important to keep in mind that masculinity and femininity only exist in relation to, not in isolation from, each other.

Cukier argues that political decision-making (including donor behavior) is shaped by national firearms cultures and reinforced by male-dominated processes. Weak impact on policy processes has been a consequence of (but it also causes) weak impact on research and policy formation. The lack of gender-disaggregated data in official data is a case in point. This leads to distortions in national and UN policy processes and debates, including for instance at the 2001 UN conference on small arms and light weapons. It is still a challenge for women's voices (and men's gendered voices) to be heard in formal peace negotiations and policy development.

5.2 Securing Private Spaces: Gendered Labor, Violence and National Transformation

Jennifer Fish explores the linkages between individual/personal security, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the heavily gendered institution of paid household labor. Through in-depth analyses of domestic labor in South Africa – a nation that continues its struggle to realize a non-violent, non-racist democracy – the particular relationship between gender and personal security is illustrated in the most private and protected domain, the household.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there is rampant structural inequality in labor and domestic work, reflecting a first/third world economic divide within the country. Despite a vibrant women's movement, the transition to democracy, increased international relations, and access to the global economy, poor women are still locked into domestic work, with serious challenges to collective

mobilization. It is difficult to classify the violence against domestic workers as an apartheid/post-apartheid or conflict/post-conflict phenomenon. In addition, and compared to most other industrialized countries, in South Africa hiring domestic workers is considered quite normal, and not only reserved for elite sectors of society. Therefore, the violence that women experience in this highly feminized occupation underscores the need for specific gender analyses as South Africa continues its democratic transformation.

Domestic Work and Home Security in South Africa

Fish found that workers often feel vulnerable in their workplace, the homes of wealthier employers. In contrast, employers felt that having domestic workers present in their homes contributed to the security of their property. While female domestic workers primarily do household work, men work in the gardens. As a consequence, women tend to be much more vulnerable if a house is attacked.

In South Africa, the institution of domestic labor is often referred to as "the last bastion of apartheid." It emphasizes the existence of divisions among women of their race, class and location. Domestic labor is the largest sector of women's employment and women migrate from rural to urban areas in search of domestic employment, which reinforces cycles of poverty, unemployment and workers' limited access to education. Locked in a household in a country characterized by high levels of crime, women workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment from their employers, and to crime from outside the private household. Moreover, there is a large degree of alienation of black woman working in wealthy homes. Workers put their own security at risk while protecting their employers' homes from external threats – which are generally perceived as connected to black men.

The institution of domestic work embodies a striking polarity in relation to perceptions of safety in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, domestic workers are often aware of and threatened by the presence of guns inside the private households where they are employed. Moreover, as Fish argues, workers' fears tend to increase when they are unaware of the specific location of such weapons. Yet an assumed expectation of this particular occupation is the protection of employers' private households from outside threats. This often requires knowledge of the operation of high-technology security systems and continual monitoring of household security risks. Incompliance with these assumed security roles often results in immediate job loss. Therefore, workers are required to risk their own safety to maintain employment, whereas employers consider the presence of domestic workers to be a strong enhancement of their own security through the human barrier created between "outside" threats and the interior private household space.

The Global Context

The exploitation of domestic workers is a widespread – and growing – problem. In some countries (for example, in the Philippines) domestic workers represent the largest export item in the service sector. Women are sent into private homes, often without legal work permits, which leads to even greater vulnerability because of illegal resident status and the loss of corresponding rights and protections.

In Cape Town, groups of domestic workers and gender activists have aligned with an international campaign to increase access to rights within this highly gendered institution. South Africa's national labor union is gradually recognizing the centrality of domestic workers within the national movement to increase labor rights in alignment with the human-rights foundation of the continually emerging democracy.

Implications for Small Arms Policy

In South Africa's current transitional phase – characterized by extremely high rates of small arms and gender-based violence – domestic workers provide a critical service that is rarely acknowledged as part of the formal labor contract. In addition to the assumed work of household reproduction, domestic workers literally provide a human barrier against the threat of violence and small arms in

the protected private spaces of privileged sectors of society. They are in essence live-in human security systems whose bodies mediate the threat of violence in their employers' private households while reifying the race and class divides of the apartheid era. Their economic privilege allows employers to buy a certain "peace of mind" from the threat of the severe proliferation of small arms and violence in South African society.

The case of domestic work illustrates the urgent need to create protective measures for women who continue to face the threat of violence, including rape, and even death in this particularly feminized, exploited sector of labor.

5.3 A Growing Twilight Zone: Private Policing Companies in Israel Endangering Women through Accelerated Militarization and Small Arms Proliferation

In Israel, the presence of guns in public space is totally normalized and therefore invisible. In her research, Rela Mazali focuses on the highly accelerated proliferation of privately owned and operated "security guard" companies, better known in international terms as "private policing" companies. She argues that the spread and growth of such companies deepens Israeli militarization in a variety of ways, including through the acceleration of small arms proliferation. Prolific small arms, she argues, further intensify existing gender discrimination and violence against women.

The Problem and its Dimensions

Between 2000 and 2003, private policing companies were the fastest growing segment of Israel's economy, with a wide prevalence of predominantly male security guards guarding all entrances to public spaces. Since the second *Intifada*, the demand for Israeli private policing has increased in response to new suicide bombings and due to government policies prioritizing and servicing capital and property, realizing a "market" ideology that leads to increased privatization and shifts from social services to the public to services for the business sector. The private policing industry has accordingly contributed to an economic crisis involving repeated government budget cuts.

Mazali argues that the growth of the private policing industry has accelerated the proliferation of small arms. The education system can be considered a "litmus test" to provide corroborating statistics. Several years ago, the guards of schools did not carry guns and parents would often rotate on guard duty. More recently, there has been a shift to armed guards in the schools. This is a dynamic central to the militarization of Israeli society. While the practical capacity of these guards to serve as a deterrent to potential attackers is seriously questionable, parents and the community feel the need for this kind of protection and perceive them, almost automatically, as a protective factor. Many teachers also carry personal guns. Additionally, there has been further naturalization of organized violence and war through the mundane presence of guards. The political culture is, in other words, becoming increasingly militarized, complemented by a population that has accepted militarization as normal and necessary.

The growth of private policing has resulted in irregularities in the processes of awarding government contracts and in breaches of labor law with government support. The Israeli government has allowed the employment of security workers on a temporary status and does not control the payment of below-minimum wages. Exploited and unorganized workers – often from the former USSR and Ethiopia – in the private policing sector are facing poverty, with few other job prospects on the horizon. Efforts to organize are quite weak as yet.

A Gender Perspective on Private Policing

There are a number of gendered aspects visible in the discriminatory practices of the private policing labor market. First, there are unequal hiring practices that come from pre-existing discrimination in the militarized labor market. This is seen in such advertised requirements as, "workers must have

combat experience," a tactic that is likely to exclude women. All the same, most of the guards hired are recent immigrants without clearly documented combat experience. As private security companies are loosely regulated, there is little transparency and weak enforcement of equal opportunity laws. Second, in a depressed job market, the private security sector has been the only site of growth for some years. Since they cannot access jobs in it, women make up an increasing portion of the unemployed. Third, women's own perception of employment in private policing is a significant obstacle, as many women do not associate themselves with guns or guarding. As stereotyped gender roles are prevalent in Israeli society, this has resulted in self-exclusion: most women do not, anyway, apply for jobs in this sector.

Mazali notes that broader army and police cultures have been incorporated into the private policing sector. Among other things, this has led to higher levels of sexual harassment. There has, however, been little public monitoring of harassment in private companies. Moreover, unlike the police and the army, which have policies in place, private security companies are not required to have sexual harassment policies. The military and police have actually conducted exhaustive internal surveys of misconduct, which, however, receive little media attention. No such surveys are known in cases of private policing companies.

These conditions contribute to generally high levels of insecurity for women in Israeli society. In recent years, there has been an increase in gun use in murder cases of women by intimates. In 2003, 25 women were killed by intimate partners. 11 of them were shot, four with guns signed out to security guards. Five of the killers were security guards, and one had been recently laid off. Ironically, security guards are perceived to be protective agents who are supposed to avert danger. Yet, for many women in Israel the private policing industry brings discrimination and danger into their private lives – their families and homes.

Parallels can also be drawn to cases in the United States. For example, studies in the U.S. have shown that women with limited proficiency of the majority language due to immigration or minority identity are taken less seriously by police when they complain of abuse. In addition, they have less access to resources that would help them escape threatening conditions. Additionally, women who are poor and less employable have great difficulty in establishing an independent existence. A final parallel is that domestic violence is two to five times more likely in military than in non-military families.

Drawing from Mazali's findings, there may be international implications to the case of private security in Israel. Often, private policing companies have been a means of exporting violence through transnational military organizations. For example, half of the operational forces of Iraq are sub-contracted from security companies from other countries, such as South Africa. As Israel is very active in this field, a consideration of the domestic impact of private security companies is quite relevant. To keep them in check, international standards such as the UN Code of Conduct on Law Enforcement should be examined for policy implications for private security companies.

5.4 The Role of Women in Gun Violence in Rio de Janeiro

Jessica Galeria focuses on the varied roles of women in violence-riven parts of Rio de Janeiro, a city plagued by extremely high gun death rates and widespread insecurity in a context of drug trafficking and police corruption. She finds that women are key to advocacy efforts to contain this violence, both because of the complex roles they play in, as well as their reactions to, intra-communal violence in this mega city. She analyzes gender approaches to reducing gun violence in the work of Viva Rio, an active civil society organization.

The Brazilian Context

Viva Rio, a civil society movement to reduce violence in Rio de Janeiro, was formed after the Candelaria church massacre in 1993, when eight street children were killed by the police. As an international tourist destination and a national media center, the case of Rio shines a spotlight on Brazil's problems with armed violence, which has produced gun deaths and injuries equal to or higher than many countries that are engaged in officially declared wars. In the context of organized armed violence related to drug trafficking, the "battlefields" are densely populated areas in large cities, and the "soldiers" are mainly poor and uneducated young men living in urban shantytowns or *favelas.* Galeria point out that because men and boys are the main direct victims of gun violence, policy research to date has not considered the situation of women and girls in these communities. When gender issues are considered at all, researchers on small arms in Rio de Janeiro mainly point out that women do not generally use or die by firearms. Some work also considers – if briefly – women as "secondary victims" of gun violence, that is, as those who bear the brunt of economic and psychological consequences of high levels of structural violence and high deaths rates among men.

Gender Implications

Why do men in Rio want to possess guns? Frequent responses to this question include self-defense against violence, in the context of ineffective and/or violent police forces and high crime rates. There are economic reasons for gun ownership, as the gun might be used to secure one's livelihood. There are also power and status issues at play: the gun may be used as a tool to impose individual will when there is no other means for many men to assert themselves.

Interestingly, as Galeria notes, many men believe that guns help them to impress women. Does the gun make them more attractive to women? Galeria found that narco-traffickers in particular are viewed with a certain sense of "bad boy" romanticism, even though most women and girls are aware that the gun violence that is implicit in their work makes them more likely to be maimed or killed. The attractiveness of this stereotype is not visible to poorer women only, but permeates other social classes as well. She concludes that, as a primary focus of disarmament work one should therefore work towards presenting viable social and cultural alternatives to the macho gun-toting man.

Undertaken as part of her research on the symbolism of guns, Galeria's discussions presented many women with the first opportunity to share their perspectives on guns. In her interviews, Galeria noticed that, because firearms are so visibly present in *favela* communities, her respondents tended to articulate their feelings towards guns more as a status symbol than as a killing device. For example, a common expression in these communities, "the bullet eats you up," seems to indicate that bullets, rather than the weapons used to fire them, are seen as the culprits in shootouts. Bullets are seen all to often in the bodies of victims, in walls and on streets after bloody gun battles; guns on the other hand are ostentatiously brandished – and sometimes even borrowed just for that purpose – to command respect and show that the person who holds it has a certain amount of power, wealth or sex appeal in the community.

Differences can be seen in how people understand their relationships with regard to prevalent guns. For example, mothers generally do not want their sons to use guns or become involved in organized armed violence, but young men often see "getting girls" as a big motivator to obtaining a gun. Galeria asked young women whether they feel safer with a boyfriend who has a gun. Interestingly, for some, weapons possession is seen as desirable because of the status or economic kickbacks they may bring, but most respondents were aware that they were actually less secure if their boyfriend had a gun. In this context, women occupy different roles – they can be both victim and active supporter of gun possession. Their support can also go beyond encouragement of male gun ownership – some women participate directly or indirectly in gun-related violence, such as by hiding drugs or guns for others, or using guns themselves in criminal activities.

The Role of Civil Society

There has been a social transformation at the grass-roots level in the city regarding small arms and light weapons. There are now more efforts to get guns out of the household, and some 150,000 crime guns have been destroyed in public ceremonies in the last decade. Well organized in victims support groups or women's rights movements, women have been at the forefront of a national disarmament campaign, which resulted in new federal gun laws. Among other measures, the 2003 Disarmament Statute makes it illegal to carry firearms and sets a nation-wide referendum to ban commercial gun sales in 2005.

Viva Rio, the main reference point for Galeria's study, covers a broad spectrum of activities from political advocacy, to training for women police officers, to public awareness campaigns to change social perceptions of guns, to efforts to disseminate its message through existing sports and recreation programs. In the latter case, the male-dominated "Fight for Peace" boxing club, which works to provide alternatives to armed criminal activities for young people in *favelas,* now also includes women. A major component of Viva Rio's efforts is their communications work, which uses slogans that often involve lighter approaches (such as "only small guys need big guns") or the involvement of soap opera stars in the anti-gun movement. These approaches help in getting the message out to a mass audience. Similarly, alternative models of masculinities are offered in the media: for instance, a very popular rap artist from the *favela* City of God (made famous in a recent movie with the same title), comes across as tough and macho, even though he does not carry a gun and promotes an anti-violence message in his lyrics.

5.5 Small Arms, Gender, and Oral Poetry in Somalia

Zeinab Mohamed Hassan and Katrin Kinzelbach explore the roles of women's oral poetry and political activism in Somalia as they relate to small arms. They provide an analysis of the socio-political and security context in which the poems are recited. Overall, the data available on small arms in Somalia is limited and little is known about the gender dimensions of small arms proliferation. Their study relies on two main sources: a review of quantitative data collected through surveys financed by international agencies, and poetry composed by Somali women. The aim of this dual approach is to generate analysis that is relevant to the work on gender and small arms, while assisting the women, who have been excluded from most small arms related surveys, to speak the messages they wish to communicate. In addition, Hassan and Kinzelbach access a GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) database on security forces and combatants, producing a gender-sensitive quantitative analysis on the small arms problem in Somalia. Although the data is limited, it constitutes the first set of quantitative data on the issue that is disaggregated by gender.

Background on Arms Proliferation in Somalia

When the Somali Army disbanded in 1991, some 40,000 weapons were abandoned. From then on, clan militias ruled over much of the country. In 2002, the UN Panel of Experts Report on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1425 noted that, despite the existing arms embargo, the arms market in Somalia was supplied both by external and internal sources. Arms and ammunition often substituted for cash. An AK-47 assault rifle could be sold for US$ 120-250. Somalia is the classic "failed state" with no central government and, thus, no gun control laws. In the self-declared state of Somaliland in the northwest, UNDP is supporting the National Advisory Council on the Control of Firearms (NACCOF), which is in an early stage of activity. To this date, the traditional system of the *xeer* remains the dominant justice and security system, which also regulates the use of force and includes grades of compensation for various crimes.

Available Data

The limited data available on small arms in Somalia is gender insensitive. For example, in the Somaliland Academy for Peace and Development (APD), UNDP and Small Arms Survey (SAS) baseline assessment conducted in Somaliland, only male heads of household were interviewed. In fact, the survey design itself suggests that all respondents were presumed to be male. One of the questions, for instance, read: "who do you turn to for protection?" Likely choices for women, such as "husband," were not included. The local researchers who conducted the assessment (all men) reasoned that women did not need to be included in the interviews, as women did not have access to small arms and, therefore, did not know much about them. Moreover, it was claimed that it would be culturally inappropriate to interview women. However, as Hassan and Kinzelbach note, at a UNDP-sponsored workshop of the women umbrella organization NAGAAD (Somali for "peaceful resting place") in Hargeisa, Somali women themselves reported on their involvement in the small arms trade. Hassan and Kinzelbach suggest, therefore, that strategies need to be developed on how to respond to local resistance to the inclusion of women in professional research, and how to support women in their own attempts to participate in a societal dialogue on security issues.

In a UNICEF Protection Study, 50 percent of the population argued that violence is common in daily family life. Although the small arms data included in the GTZ registration of security forces and combatants is limited, a number of questions on security and guns were quite useful. For example: when asked if guns serve the function of protecting families, or if guns pose more of a danger, a higher percentage of people responded that guns pose more danger. It is significant to note that even armed women and men felt that way.

The Role of Oral Poetry

As essentially all of the available studies and surveys have been gender insensitive, it is important to ask what role women have played in security-related issues, and how relevant evidence of their input can be generated. Hassan and Kinzelbach find one answer in the gender analysis of the GTZ data. A second answer lies in Somalia's strong poetic and oral tradition. There are separate poetic traditions for men and women; while men use it for political discourse, women consider it as an instrument for transmitting female culture.

In the context of the civil war, women have used their poems to communicate with men. For instance, at the 1993 Borama Conference, which established a national security framework and mechanisms for DDR in Somaliland, women recited poems. Through their poetry, women commented on power relations in society. Although some of the women's poems encourage raids and fights, many of the poems appeal for peace, often through direct confrontation, with statements such as "you men, lay down your arms." Women's aspirations, such as political empowerment, are also reflected in the poetry.

The emotional power of women's poems is linked to the personal experience of loss and the struggle for life. Women are empowered through their poetry, which, in turn, affects the emotions of men, some of whom have laid down their arms in response. Through poetry, women remind men of the war experience, asking them, for instance, why they are still fighting.

The mobilization of women, whether as fighters or as peace promoters, has policy implications. In a tradition of debate through the recitation of poetry, this is one way in which women can use their voices publicly, and in a positive and effective way. Their tradition highlights the importance of attending to customary forms of debate when undertaking consciousness-raising work.

As statistical data (if at all available) can easily disguise reality, other indicators and methods may be more useful in examining the roles played by women in issues such as gun control. The study notes, in fact, that women are not always working in favor of peace. Some poems even incite fighting, or approve cultural values of a belligerent masculinity. Many Somali women have become small arms experts and are involved in the arms trade (due to their ability to move amongst clans).

They are typically also responsible for small arms storage at home, making them not only responsible for safety in the household, but also a participant in decision-making on when guns should be unpacked. The ambiguous roles that women play in advocating peace or war is a useful finding of the research, and emphasizes their agency.

5.6 SALW and Gender in Papua New Guinea

In spite of growing acknowledgment of the need for gender mainstreaming in the international framework of small arms and light weapons, international efforts to combat the spread of small arms often have only a nominal impact on those directly affected by gun violence. Sinclair Dinnen and Edwina Thompson show that this is certainly the case in Papua New Guinea (PNG). They argue that it is important to give more serious consideration to PNG, where the international community – and even the state itself – constitutes a remote presence in the lives of the majority of the population.

Fieldwork in PNG uncovered both important gender differences in perceptions of security, and the gendered nature of gun ownership and violence. Situating the proliferation of small arms in the context of culture, power, and security in PNG, Thompson and Dinnen's study considers how the social and political history of PNG has been impacted by a changing pattern of conflict and violence, in particular by the role of firearms and changes in gender relations. The prevalent gun culture of the past 10 to 15 years can be described as creating an enduring situation of disorder, rather than one of outright conflict. This has had a day-to-day impact on the population, through "raskolism" (gangsterism), tribal fighting, and election-related violence. Gender-related violence is so common that it over-shadows all three of these.

Background of PNG

PNG's colonial history was marked by the presence of Indonesians, a German company, Australians and Christian missionaries. It is a very fragmented society in which communication between communities is difficult. In a population of only 500,000, more than 800 languages are spoken. Today, PNG as a "state" is still largely a fiction, and the government is profoundly weak or absent in large parts of the country. Much of the (oral) evidence indicates that the various communities have always engaged in cycles of warfare and peacemaking, both integrally connected like two sides of the same coin.

The communities were relatively egalitarian as far as men were concerned, but unequal when it comes to relations between the sexes. Deep-seated separation has characterized gender relations in the Highlands. While men and women lived and slept separately, the level of rape was low. The notion that the presence of women pollutes men used to inhibit sexual violence. However, when missionaries encouraged new patterns of living, far higher levels of sexual violence began.

Principal Contexts of Firearms Use

The three principal contexts of firearms use in PNG include raskolism, tribal fighting and election-related violence:

1) Raskolism. The formal economy of PNG is tiny and largely dominated by mining. The fact that land is held in customary ownership, and the presence of some of the most powerful transnational corporations in the world, has served as a recipe for disintegration and violence. In the absence of a functioning state, alternatives have sprung up, including raskolism. Gun violence is symptomatic of the marginalization of young men. Violence against women is very high, especially among intimates (this is not confined to gangs).

2) Tribal Fighting. Tribal fighting flared up just before independence in 1975, with people resorting to self-help strategies due to the lack of state presence or perceived inadequacy of state processes of dispute resolution. Today, prolific small arms have led to more targeted violence. According to many women, guns have increased the level of fear and insecurity. Often, homemade guns are used against women and children. Many children have suffered the trauma of seeing mothers raped. Gang rape has also increased with the increase in tribal fighting. Traditionally, during times of war, men would not sleep with women (due to the "polluting" factor). Now, it is routine for the warring neighbors to rape women in the community they attack.

3) Election-related violence. Elections are often the catalyst for the revival of dormant tribal fights and the generation of new ones. Election-related violence is on the increase in Papua New Guinea, particularly in parts of the Highlands where formal electoral competition has been grafted on to highly competitive indigenous political systems.

In addition to raskolism, tribal fighting and election-related violence, there is much day-to-day violence that does not involve gun use. Although fatalities have increased because of gun-related violence, it is not gun misuse that characterizes the kind of violence people are experiencing on a day-to-day level. Other forms of aggression, such as instances of rape, are growing rapidly. Women sometimes commit suicide after they are raped. Their bodies are simply buried, without much talk. Local and community-based women's groups are trying to combat this problem. Moreover, both men and women experience sexual violence: In a fairly new development, sexual violence against men and boys is particularly widespread in prisons. However, Thompson and Dinnen found that, while it is considered shameful for sexual violence to occur against men, it is not considered shameful for sexual violence to happen against women. Disputes in which a woman is raped are still settled by the affected families themselves without recourse to the state. Official responses (or lack thereof) are part of the problem, and new solutions, using local resources and knowledge, must urgently be found.

5.7 SALW and Gender in Nepal

Chhaya Jha, Geeta Sinha, Shobha Gautam and Subodh Pyakhurel analyze the impact of small arms use on women and men in Nepal. They assess the policy and institutional environment from a gender, social inclusion and psycho-social perspective and identify possibilities for small arms control.

The Context of Conflict in Nepal

With the collapse of the ceasefire and peace talks between the government and Maoist insurgents, Nepal has quickly plunged back into violence that has killed around 10,000 people since February 1996. Both the Maoists and the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) are at present determined to use battlefield gains to secure leverage for future talks. Their positions have hardened. With the Maoists moving to hit-and-run tactics and increasingly taking the war into Kathmandu, and the RNA using their newly upgraded Western weapons and training, the conflict has entered a highly confrontational stage.

Among the root causes of the Maoist insurgency is political and socio-economic discrimination, based on caste, ethnicity and gender. The military response to the insurgency has resulted in widespread abuse of human rights. To compound the situation, while the Maoists portray themselves as the voice of the people, they are often targeting communities with violence. As a result of this volatile situation, many political parties are advocating the restoration of state power.

Gender Relations in Nepal

Compared to men, the status of women continues to be low. This is largely the result of social, political, legal and economic structures that, through policy and practice, discriminate against

women from birth. Women face inequality not only due to social and cultural norms, but also through the law. Women of socially excluded groups such as the lower caste (Dalits) and indigenous people (Janajatis) face further discrimination. Despite a lack of gender mainstreaming in Nepal, there has been a continuing struggle to reduce gender inequality and increase women's meaningful participation in all sectors through policy reform and program interventions in most sectors. Since the 1995 Beijing Conference, the situation of women has been monitored by different governmental and nongovernmental agencies.

Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nepal

When Nepal joined with the British Army, firearms were introduced. Traditionally, firearms were owned by the elite level of society for hunting purposes only. Some studies have shown that by the 1990s, guns started to become connected to the illegal drug trade. The Government of Nepal has received arms from the United States, United Kingdom and India.

Policies on small arms do not include a gender perspective. Women and women's organizations are excluded from the policymaking process, as they are not considered to be stakeholders when it comes to military matters. In reality, the conflict between insurgents and local communities has meant that ordinary women are often caught between the Maoists and security forces.

The Socio-Psychological Impact of Conflict

The ongoing conflict in Nepal has manifested itself in the socio-psychological state of the society. According to Jha et al., 35 percent of women are depressed, sad, and unsure about the future. Men are also depressed and consume increasing amounts of alcohol. However, some gender differences exist, as, for example, 15 percent of the women express psychosomatic symptoms, while only six percent of the men had done so. 38 percent of the women shared that they had increased suicidal feelings while only 16 percent of the male respondents expressed those feelings. 10-20 percent of members of the security force experience aggressive emotions and distress. The phenomenon of depression is alarmingly common. And yet, no proper treatment, such as counseling, is offered.

The psychological dimension is a useful indicator of the hidden impact of weapons. Yet, how can one measure it? Questions raised by the Nepalese team were seen to have great relevance for other societies as well. For example, in post-conflict Somalia, demobilized combatants were to be integrated into a new national army. However, half of these combatants were not mentally fit to serve in the newly formed armed forces.

The Gendered Impact of Small Arms

The escalating Maoist insurgency has forced thousands of women and children to leave their communities. The use of SALW in the armed conflict has disrupted basic services, limited development assistance and broken down family and community networks as men have either joined the conflict or migrated to seek alternative employment to support their families. In many cases, women have been left alone in areas abandoned by men and are solely responsible for the care of children and financial survival. They are experiencing increased psycho-social stress. Other women are professional fighters who support the Maoist faction. Although women have been active in promoting peace, no significant attention has been paid to their efforts. This represents lost potential for local peacemaking capacities, which should be tapped into by state and international programs.