# CHAPTER 11

# WOMEN, GIRLS, AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: A GLOBAL ANALYSIS

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Given that the natural birth ratio is 106 males to 100 females, and that females tend to have longer life expectancies, it is shocking to learn that "more than 100 million girls and women are missing" (Sen, 1990, p. 61). Birth ratios of males and females would predict that there should be *more* women living today, particularly in Asia (Bunch, 1995). But in some parts of the world, men outnumber women by 20:1 (United Nations, 1996). To comprehend this staggering problem, 100 million "missing" women is equivalent to the total number of war-related deaths of 100 Pol Pot–initiated famines and massacres in Cambodia (1975 to 1978), 200 of the genocidal civil wars recently witnessed in Rwanda (1994 to 1995), and 2.5 times the deaths of World War II (1939 to 1945) (Sivard, 1996). But how many have even noticed, let alone demanded accountability for, this killing of girls and women? A primary reason for this disregard is that much of the violence

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against women results from structural violence.

In this chapter, we document and analyze socio-cultural, economic, and political structural violence against women from a feminist perspective. For our purposes, structural violence can be divided into two categories: premature death attributed to inequitable life opportunities, and a reduced quality of life in which human potential is diminished (Brock-Utne, 1989). When structural violence happens to girls or women because of their gender, *patriarchal structural violence* takes place (Brock-Utne, 1989). *Patriarchy* can be defined as systems or structures of exploitation that normalize socially constructed gender differences in ways that reproduce and legitimatize male domination (Ebert, 1996). Oppressions are normalized when they are presented as "the way things are"; then, one does not need to be curious about them, let alone try to change them, because they are "typical" or "normal." Feminist theory is useful here because it seeks to reveal and deconstruct human systems and beliefs that are naturalized, paying specific attention to constructions and manipulations of gender, masculinity, and femininity (Enloe, 1993). Understanding patriarchal structural violence means locating and analyzing the socio-cultural, economic, and political systems that perpetrate or condone physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women (Galtung, 1969).

## SOCIO-CULTURAL SYSTEMS

Socio-cultural systems are numerous and diverse. In this chapter, we limit our discussion to patriarchal structural violence in systems and institutions that maintain son preference, inequalities in the allocation of food and health care, and educational discrepancies.

**Son Preference**

The threat of violence begins prior to birth for many females. Social preference for male children is strong in many societies and can result in the premature death or killing of female infants—termed *female infanticide*—a form of direct violence resulting from structural violence. Structures and institutions that play continuing roles in the strengthening of son preference include economic systems such as dowry payments or "bride price" (the payment by the bride's family to the groom's), or cultural beliefs in which sons are seen as the providers for parents in their old age. In much of Asia where the dowry system remains strong, "a family with three girl children might well face financial ruin" (Mongella, 1994, p. 31). Girls therefore are considered a burden, while the birth of a boy is celebrated as good fortune.

Systems and institutions that perpetuate an early devaluation of, and violence against, girls are strengthened by economic systems that pay women less for equitable work, fail to account for nearly half of women's work worldwide, and routinely discriminate against women in the labor market (Waring, 1988). Cultural and religious systems and institutions also perpetuate systems of discrimination against girls through promoting beliefs that privilege males with the perpetuation of the family name, and by mandating male-only roles in the rites of deceased parents and ancestors as, for example, in Pakistan and India. The combination of male preference and political policies can contribute to female infanticide. For example, to curb population growth in China, the government penalizes families with two or more children through tax penalties and state sanctions. In selecting the gender of their child, many Chinese families strongly favor boys over girls; of the 100 million missing women in the world, 50 million of them are from China—a result of both female infanticide and selective abortion (Sen, 1990).

Systems and institutions that maintain son preference and early violence against girls often

beget others that perpetrate violence. For example, the combination of male preference, the devaluation of female lives and labor, and technological advances such as sex determination tests and access to safe abortion have been used to detect the presence of female fetuses. In many such cases, women either choose or are forced by husbands or relatives to abort (Narasimhan, 1993). One study of abortions in Maharashtra, India, revealed that 7,999 out of 8,000 fetuses aborted were female (Jaising, 1995). Some clinics offering sex determination tests and abortion promote the use of these forms of medical technology for patriarchal structural violence. Billboards advertising these services read "Better to spend Rs500 today [the price of a sex determination test and abortion] rather than Rs500,000 at the time of the girl's marriage [the dowry price]" (Narasimhan, 1994, p. 51). Patriarchal structural violence is so normalized in India that advertising campaigns advocating the death of girls was supported by a cabinet minister and many physicians before ultimately being dropped because of the protests of women's rights groups (Narasimhan, 1994).

## Food and Health Care Distribution

Structural violence against girls and women is also evident in food and health care distribution. According to the World Health Organization, girls and women often receive less food and health care services than male counterparts, particularly in developing countries (Bunch, 1995; Mongella, 1994; Newland, 1979; Sullivan, 1995). In India, for example, "girls are fed less and for shorter periods and are not given [more expensive] foods like butter or milk, which are reserved for boys" (Jaising, 1995, p. 51). This practice incurs a health risk because the fats in foods like butter and milk are imperative for the proper development of a child's brain, cognitive abilities, and spinal cord. Along similar lines, 40 percent of women in the developing world suffer from

high levels of anemia, in part because meats and protein-rich foods are reserved for males (Mongella, 1994). This phenomenon occurs not only in the developing world: In both World Wars I and II, American and British governments set up ration plans that reserved meat for (male) soldiers (Seager, 1993).

Governmental policies and practices by large multinational corporations can also contribute to structural violence against women and their families in the area of food production and distribution. In the Philippines, for example, with the government's and the World Bank's blessing, multinational, mono-crop plantations produce enough crops to rank the Philippines the 14th-largest food exporter in the world. However, 80 percent of Filipino children go hungry every day, with 70 percent of the population living beneath the poverty level (Largoza-Maza, 1995). Rates of malnutrition and poverty are intensified for the typical Filipino woman, who has an average of eight children and no access to birth control, family planning, or divorce. Consequently, rural women throughout the world practice subsistence farming. Although there is no exchange of money, subsistence farming does increase the odds that a woman and her children will eat. But according to the World Bank, the way to improve these women's lives is to increase export growth through structural adjustment policies. These "unproductive" women and their children are driven off the land to make room for the new multinational corporations and expanding mono-crop plantations. The women and their families then migrate to urban areas where they contribute to growing unemployment and help fill the pool of cheap labor from which the multinationals draw (Waring, 1988).

In addition to unjust systems of food and land distribution, girls receive fewer health services than boys. Although girls in some locales, such as rural Mexico, suffer from more disease and

illness, boys are taken to the hospital and are given medication and vitamins at a significantly higher rate than girls (Brock-Utne, 1989). Other studies on equitable household distribution of health care provisions show that compared to boys, girls have a mortality rate that is 12 percent higher under one year of age, and 8 percent higher between one and five years old (Jaising, 1995). These rates are exacerbated when the girl comes from groups that experience the most poverty and discrimination, such as the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, 50 percent of whose children are dead before the age of five because of malnutrition and overwork (Schirmer, 1993).

**Education**

One of the most effective ways of increasing girls' access to food and health services is by improving their education. Education has proven the most effective means to address the poverty, malnutrition, and poor health conditions that affect one-fifth of the world's population (Sivard, 1993, p. 31). Throughout the world, education is a means to a better and longer life. However, girls receive less education than boys, even though according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), educating girls "is one of the most important investments that any developing country can make in its own future" (1994, p. 20). Girls are not educated because of beliefs that they will only become wives and mothers and because scarce familial education resources are reserved for boys (another form of son preference); young girls are kept at home to help raise younger siblings and perform other forms of labor to assist their mothers (Narasimhan, 1993; Sivard, 1993, 1996; UNICEF, 1994). Consequently, educational rates are gender biased. Around the world, of all living school-aged children, 14 million more boys than girls are in primary school (UNICEF, 1994), and of the nearly billion illiterate adults worldwide, two-thirds are women (Sivard, 1996).

It is widely recognized that high-quality, basic, universal education is the foundation of world health and economic security. Over time, nearly all other indicators of progress—including nutrition, infant and maternal mortality, family planning, child health, and women's rights—is "profoundly affected by whether or not a nation educates its girls" (UNICEF, 1994, p. 20). While not a panacea, education provides women and girls with at least the knowledge for improving nutrition and sanitation in their homes. Education also enhances women's status in their relationships at home, which increases decision-making regarding family planning, contraceptive choices, and finances. The global results of educating girls and women are lower fertility, lower population rates, lower infant mortality rates, healthier children, and a more productive economy (Mongella, 1994; Sivard, 1996).

## ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Structural patriarchal violence is apparent in economic and labor systems worldwide. Women make up more than half of the world's population, and perform 66 percent of the world's work, often in jobs more physically demanding and time-consuming than jobs held by men. However, women "earn only 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property" (Elliott, 1996, p. 17), and they account for "70% of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor" (United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM], 1995, p. 1). Why?

**Women's (Invisible) Work**

One of the primary reasons women are poor is that the majority of women's work literally counts for nothing. Feminist economist Marilyn Waring (1988) has demonstrated how most governmental accounting systems do not recognize the majority of women's labor because the rules of the

United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA) only count that which passes through the marketplace, i.e., anything that has currency-generating capacity. All countries wishing to be members of the United Nations, or borrow money from the World Bank, or acquire a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), must adhere to rules set down in the UNSNA. Yet these systems' economic policies place no value on peace, the preservation of natural resources, or unpaid labor, including that of reproducing and nurturing human life. Important decisions are made using figures generated from the UNSNA about whose needs are met, how to allocate taxes, which programs receive support and which do not. Some of these decisions literally determine who will live and who will die (Waring, 1988).

While states may not publicly acknowledge women's labor in informal economies, they nevertheless rely upon it. For example, the Philippine's 2000 plan, a joint project of the Filipino government, the IMF, and the World Bank, relies on Filipino women staying in their jobs in the garment and electronic industries, sending home foreign currency from their jobs overseas as domestic and contract workers, and working as prostitutes or exotic dancers. For example, with the closure of U.S. military bases, the Filipino government is now counting on Filipino prostitutes and exotic dancers to switch their client base from soldiers to tourists and international businessmen, in order to continue the flow of foreign currency (Largoza-Maza, 1995). Thus, we can see that governments are often reluctant to challenge patriarchal structures of violence against women because economic and political systems rely on them.

**Military and Social Expenditures**

What work *do* governments value? How *do* they spend their treasuries? When governments allocate resources, especially in large amounts, they provide insights to their priorities. For over half

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of the world's countries, maintaining a military and buying weaponry are higher priorities than the health needs of their citizens; for 25 countries, military expenditures exceed those for education, and for 15 countries, defense is more important than health and education combined (Sivard, 1993). The privileging of militaries over people has staggering consequences (Winter, Pilisuk, Houck, & Lee, this volume). Money spent on armaments in just two weeks worldwide would provide the entire world's populace with safe drinking water.

The U.S. government provides an illuminating example of military spending at the expense of its citizens' welfare. Although the United States accounts for less than 5 percent of the world's population, it spends more than 40 percent of the world's defense outlays. The United States ranks first in the world in military expenditures, military technology, military bases worldwide, military training of foreign forces, military aid to foreign countries, naval ships, combat aircraft, nuclear reactors, nuclear warheads and bombs, and arms exports. Three years after the end of the Cold War, U.S. arms exports were the highest of any country, higher in fact than all "the 52 other arms exporting countries combined" (Sivard, 1996, p. 41). This emphasis on military expenditures comes at a price to the U.S. citizenship. Despite being one of the richest countries in the world, the United States lags behind in social protection, ranking poorly by world comparison in maternal and infant mortality rates (12th and 13th), mortality rates under the age of five (18th), and percentage of school-age children in school (18th). The United States has been sliding steadily downward in these categories since the 1980s (Sivard, 1993, 1996).

Women in particular pay the price for war economies. Inflated military budgets often come as a result of reductions in social services, where worldwide women are most often employed (Turpin, 1998). For example, for the price of 20 MiG-29 fighter planes from Russia, India could

have furnished basic education to all 15 million of its girls who are out of school (UNDP, 1994). When women are employed in the military, it is largely in low paying, assembly-line factory jobs (Enloe, 1993).

Military practices such as maintaining prostitution for servicemen, dropping chemical weapons on rural areas, and targeting civilian populations during conflicts, cause specific harm to women, through disease, cancers, birth defects, and psychological and reproductive disorders (Enloe, 1993; Herman, 1992; McKay, 1998; Seager, 1993). For example, because of the U.S. military's systematic poisoning of Vietnam during the war through the dumping of massive amounts of Agent Orange and Dioxin, Vietnamese women today have the world's highest rates of spontaneous abortions. Rates of birth defects have markedly increased and fetal death rates are now 40 percent higher than before the war (Seager, 1993). Vietnam is not an anomaly: Throughout the world women and their children suffer disproportionately to men in war. Worldwide, they account for 80 percent of refugee and displaced populations, are often targets of rape and genocide, as in the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and suffer from multiple forms of gender-based violence (McKay, 1998).

## POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Political and legal systems in non-democratic countries often maintain and perpetuate structural, as well as direct, violence. Consequently, many liberation struggles are fought to enact changes towards democratic systems. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, and struggles for independence and justice throughout Africa and Latin America, the world has recently seen an unprecedented number of emerging democracies. Unfortunately, democratic systems also have ways of perpetuating structural violence, wherein women and minorities are par-

ticularly impacted.

## Engendering Democracy

Despite the potential of democratic governance, patriarchal structural violence is often embedded in democracy. In the eighteenth century, democracy meant not merely a form of government but a principle of social equality (Arblaster, 1987). However, even the most vocal advocates of social equality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could only conceive of equality among propertied white men. Indeed, "it was their interests that government had been created to serve," and the idea that men could and should represent women was widely accepted and promoted (Phillips, 1992, p. 25). Citizenship was created in the male image. Even today, democracy as a political ideology too often normalizes the male image as "citizen" and encourages others to deny aspects of themselves to conform to some unitary norm, which itself was never gender-neutral. For example, many South African feminists working in the early 1990s to reconstruct their nation were acutely aware that "the universal standing in society which we have been fighting for is that of a 'being with masculine characteristics engaging in masculine activities'" (Bazilli, 1991, p. 11). Clearly, the gendering of democracy and citizenship must be on the agenda if women are to truly benefit from democratic systems of governance.

## Women and the Private Sphere

The male bias inherent in (patriarchal) democracy has led to forms of patriarchal structural violence that relegate "women's issues" to the "private" realm where they become "private matters" that the state does not address. This bias is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the issue of domestic violence, where male bias greatly impairs the ability of police, judges, and lawmakers from rec-

ognizing the violent behavior in the family. "The view that 'as a family matter' battery is less important, is based on men's, not women's perceptions" (Murray & O'Regan, 1991, p. 45). The multiple forms of domestic violence that women suffer have profound physical and psychological effects (Herman, 1992; Kelly, 1993), prompting international calls for domestic violence to be recognized as a form of torture (Copelon, 1994). Governmental support of patriarchal structural violence through its inattention to "private" matters is apparent throughout the world. Until 1991, the murder of a wife in Brazil was legal—it was considered an honor killing and was done to preserve the family's honor because of a woman's transgression. In many areas of the world, men are free to rape their wives with no threat of legal repercussions (Mertus, 1995).

Other examples of government-sponsored patriarchal structural violence include laws and systems that condone particular forms of violence against women, deny women control over their bodies, provide no assistance with child care and maternity leave, make no attempt to remedy child support defaults, and fail to provide unemployment protection to women who work within the "private" realm in domestic service or farm work (Waring, 1988; Murray & O'Regan, 1991). Because governments rarely address patriarchal structural violence or fight for women's rights, progress for women is largely made by women working for the recognition and enforcement of women's rights. As a result, in countries such as Australia, Brazil, Britain, Columbia, India, Sri Lanka, and the United States, violence against women in the home has been identified and some forms of it criminalized (Fineman & Mykitiuk, 1994).

**Women in Decision-making Bodies**

Women must actively participate in creating, executing, and enforcing the laws (Zama, 1991). Feminists continually acknowledge the necessary steps between theory and practice, urging that

action must follow critiques and recommendations. A law may concede a right to freedom from violence, decent health care, legal representation, a clean environment, or a living wage, but if the state refuses to fund or enforce these polices then the right exists only on paper (Bazilli, 1991). The question then becomes, to what extent do women have access to, and control over, the state, its policies, laws, and coffers?

Relative to the proportion of the population they comprise, women are consistently underrepresented, if not absent from positions of political power, all over the world. For example, only recently has women's representation at the national level in the United States climbed to 11 percent, ranking it well below Seychelles (46 percent), Finland (39 percent), Norway (36 percent), Sweden (34 percent), Cuba (23 percent), China (21 percent), and others, and about on par with Angola (15 percent), and Italy (13 percent), both of whose proportions of women in parliament recently fell by 5 percent to reach these numbers. In Australia, Costa Rica, and Greece, as elsewhere, when women are elected and given cabinet posts, their appointments tend to be in the more feminized (and devalued) arenas of family or community concerns, and not in the more the masculinized, powerful, and prestigious departments of finance, treasury, foreign affairs, and defense (Watson, 1990). Such consistent underrepresentation of women in the upper-levels of government cannot be accidental (Phillips, 1991).

Likewise, in the newly democratic nations of East Central Europe, "women's citizenship rights are deemed to be of secondary importance in the current democratization process" (Einhorn, 1993, p. 149). Not only are women forced to take a back seat, but the total number of women in governmental positions is dramatically decreasing because there are no longer party quotas that specify how many women 1should hold office. In former socialist parliaments, where

women once occupied up to 30 percent of the seats, they now hold as little as 7 percent in the new democratic parliaments. As a result, women are almost completely invisible at the highest levels of government, and at the parliamentary level little discussion takes place about the protection or enhancement of women's rights (Einhorn, 1993; Renne, 1997).

The exclusion of women from national decision-making bodies is a form of patriarchy. The men who benefit from their monopoly on power often meet challenges to the status quo of governmental power with strong resistance. For example, the women's movement in India has been pushing for a bill to set a quota of 30 percent for women's representation at the national level. On July 15, 1998, it appeared the bill's supporters had the two-thirds majority needed to pass, and supportive women members of parliament (MPs) attempted to bring it to a vote. Opposing male MPs caused such disruptions, including grabbing the bill from the speaker's hand and tearing it up, that the speaker shelved it for a later vote. Supporters of the bill protested, and failing, tried to have a date set for the bill to be reintroduced, but the speaker would not recognize the women MPs. When a male MP supporter tried to push the case, he was beaten by the opposing male MPs, removed from the floor by security officers, and taken away bleeding in an ambulance (Sullivan, 1998). In this case and others, supporters of a patriarchal status quo literally fight to keep women out.

Electing women who will strive for women's empowerment by dismantling patriarchal structures and effectively participate in government is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition. Male bias in political structures also perpetuates obstacles to women's political involvement based on access to and control of wealth, sexual divisions of labor in the household, division of "public" and "private," and a lack of government programs to support working mothers. In the

highest levels of government, such obstacles include, but are not limited to, working hours, the conditions of assemblies and councils and, particularly in the United States, the financial burden of running for election (where the average U.S. Senate seat now costs five million dollars). Discrimination that limits women from political participation is a form of patriarchal structural violence against women, and these barriers should be addressed and removed by the state.

While governmental efforts are critical, the civil and domestic spheres must change as well. Because constraints on women's political activity result from psychosocial, economic, and political structures, equal representation in legislature or parliament without considerable transformation in social relations is impossible (Phillips, 1991).

## CONCLUSION

The denial of girls' and women's right to food, health care, education, and life, as well as the undermining of their political, economic, and social rights are some of the most damaging and egregious forms of direct and structural patriarchal violence. Women and girls deserve to have their human rights recognized and enforced. The global community must reject all efforts to justify abuse on the basis of culture. While global women's movements have had some effect in confronting violence and reducing inequality, structural violence against women and girls remains pandemic (Basu, 1997). Peace cannot be achieved until both indirect and direct forms of violence are dismantled. As we have seen throughout this chapter, patriarchal systems that discriminate against women and girls contribute to the eventual expression of direct violence. If we are serious about achieving peace, then we must be committed to women's empowerment. As a result, research and activism on women's issues are key elements of any serious peace agenda.