



Gender Reconciliation International
Healing and transformation between women and men



Concept Note

Gender Reconciliation Workshop

11-13 February 2016

London, United Kingdom

Introduction

Gender Reconciliation International (GRI) will conduct an introductory Gender Reconciliation workshop for women and men of all sexual orientations and gender identities from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith communities, academics, and activist groups involved in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and gender justice work, as well as religious leaders. The workshop will take place from Thursday 11 February to Saturday 13 February 2016 at the offices of Friends House, London.

In every segment of society, irrespective of race, class, religion, or sexual orientation, women and men grapple daily with the profound impacts of cultural conditioning around gender and sexuality. Moreover, it is the daily acts of violence and micro-aggressions which take place within many intimate relationships that establish the social conditions which bring about manifestations of violence on a greater scale.¹ Given that gender is a central fault-line in all societies, sustainable peace requires the transformation of gender relations. This three-day workshop offers a practical step to confronting and dismantling personal and cultural patterns of gender conditioning at multiple levels so as to address the ways in which men and women perpetuate gender injustice. Through skillful and creative collaboration, participants will gain insights from this process that contribute directly to addressing and transforming gender relations. New relational skills and a culture of deep respect and integrity between the sexes will be fostered, fuelled by heightened mutual awareness of the gender conditioning experienced by both women and men in our society.

Workshop Methodology

Gender Reconciliation workshops apply an experiential learning methodology facilitated in a group or community setting, providing a community-based approach to gender analysis which complements activist, political, and academic approaches. An experiential and reflective methodology shape the techniques employed. The workshop will combine a broad range of modalities necessary for skillful navigation through the sometimes delicate, and volatile, dynamics of transforming gender relations and gender-based violence; always ensuring respect for both women and men's experiences. The workshop will be highly participatory, and will comprise experiential processes and exercises; discussions and dialogue in plenary, small groups, pairs; and debriefings. Through this approach, a forum is provided in which participants can enter into an exploration of their own gender conditioning, and can challenge their assumptions about the other gender through hearing their stories. In this forum, the witnessing and understanding of the pain of diverse gender groups is carefully facilitated. The process requires the fullness of participants' humanity, and participants are encouraged to integrate their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions, so as to create the conditions for genuine gender transformation.

Contextual analysis: Gender relations in the UK

Gender imbalance and associated injustice is a feature of all societies all over the world, including so-called "developed" societies such as the UK. In this country, women and men, and girls and boys, are living with high levels of gender injustice. Twenty-five percent of

¹ Melanie Verwoerd and Claudia Lopes (eds.), "Sexualized Violence in the National Debate: Cross-border observations on India and South Africa", report, Heinrich Boll Foundation Southern Africa, April 2015.

women experience abuse from a partner or ex-partner,² and approximately two women a week are killed by a partner or ex-partner. The intersectionality of gender inequality and race is clear: black and minority ethnic (BME) and migrant women experience a disproportionate rate of this domestic homicide.³ The mortality rate for black African women who are asylum seekers in the UK is seven times higher than for white women, partly because of difficulties in accessing maternal health-care.⁴ Between January and October 2015, 103 UK women are suspected to have been killed by men.⁵ Seventy-two percent of teenage girls experience emotional abuse from a boyfriend,⁶ while 32 percent experience sexual abuse from a boyfriend.⁷ Forty percent of girls in the UK report feeling pressured into sexual activity,⁸ and one in three 16-18 year-old girls have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school in the UK.⁹ Technology has greatly increased the number of young people and adults viewing hardcore pornography, and this activity has been linked to objectification and violence against women.¹⁰ Girls and women in the UK experience high levels of sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces. Over 60,000 girls under the age of 15 are at high risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) every year in England and Wales.¹¹

Women constitute more than 50 percent of the population in the UK, and yet still do not have equal representation in parliament, business, or media. Nor do they have equal pay. The latest annual Global Gender Gap Report found that for the first time in its history, the UK does not appear in the top 20 most gender-equal countries in the world. In 2013 the UK was listed as 18th in the report, but the latest Report, released in October 2014, ranked it at 26th, after average wages for women in the workplace dropped by £2,700 in a year.¹² Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) and gender non-conforming people continue to experience discrimination, hate, and violence in the UK, despite the protection of their rights as enshrined in the Equality Act of 2010. Accurate statistics on violence against these

² Women's Aid, "Statistics: how common is domestic violence", 7 August 2006, <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-articles.asp?section=00010001002200410001&itemid=1280> (accessed on 20 September 2015).

³ UK Feminista, "Facts and Statistics on Gender Inequality", <<http://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/facts-and-statistics-on-gender-inequality/>> (accessed on 20 September 2015).

⁴ Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Health, illness, and life expectancy", website article, <<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/human-rights/health-illness-and-life-expectancy>> (accessed on 20 September 2015.)

⁵ Karen Ingala Smith, "Counting Dead Women", <<http://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/2015-2/>> (accessed on 9 November 2015).

⁶ Christine Barter, Melanie McCarry, David Berridge and Kathy Evans, "Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships", National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), London, 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ DAPHNE III European Commission, "Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR): connecting online and offline context and risks", Briefing Papers, February 2015.

⁹ End Violence Against Women, "Preventing Violence Against Women", <<http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/preventing-violence-against-women>> (accessed on 7 October 2015).

¹⁰ United States Department of Justice, "Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Section 5.2.1 Sexually Violent Material," Final Report, Washington DC, US, July 1986.

¹¹ End Violence Against Women, "Preventing Violence Against Women", <<http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/preventing-violence-against-women>> (accessed on 7 October 2015).

¹² Oliver Wright, "UK drops out of gender equality top 20 after women's wages fall", newspaper article, 28 October 2014, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-drops-out-of-gender-equality-top-20-after-women-s-wages-fall-9821990.html>> (accessed on 30 October 2015).

communities are still difficult to obtain: there is under-reporting because of the continued cultural dominance of heteronormativity. The protection of rights for sexual minorities therefore requires improvement in this country, and is an issue that is still often omitted in discussions of human rights and gender equality.

Men in the UK also suffer the negative impacts of patriarchy and the associated trauma of gender injustice and imbalance. Although most violence against women is perpetrated by men, the majority of male violence is committed against other men. One common cause of male violence against both men and women is in the way masculinity is currently expressed – rigid masculine norms promote and excuse aggression and this has the potential to damage both men and women. Multiple configurations of masculinity exist across time and space, and almost all mainstream masculinities globally compel men to show no pain, no fear, no weakness; to dominate and objectify women, to subscribe to a hetero-normative culture, and to suppress their emotions; which means that many men experience profound loneliness. Other ways in which men's lives are damaged by patriarchy and gender inequality include premature deaths from accidents, homicides and suicides; greater exposure to health risks; less nurturing relations with children; fewer educational opportunities; and damage to interpersonal relationships with women and other men. The negative impacts of patriarchy on men is highlighted through contemporary gender roles that encourage men to equate risky behaviours with being manly—such as violence, alcohol and substance use, the pursuit of multiple sexual partners, and the domination of women—while simultaneously encouraging men to view health-seeking behaviours as a sign of weakness.¹³ Mainstream masculinities across the world tend to promote physical and emotional toughness in men, which can make it extremely difficult for men to live fulfilled, happy lives. They can also cause men to experience severe internal and external conflicts.¹⁴ The imperative is therefore to address and transform underlying gender injustice and unequal power dynamics so as to establish healthy, harmonious relations between all sexes in society.

Transforming Gender and Sexual Injustice

Gender Reconciliation International (GRI) has developed solid expertise in bringing together women and men of all sexual orientations to address and transform gender and sexual injustice. Over the past 23 years, GRI has developed and tested a transformative process called Gender Reconciliation, which has been successfully introduced in eight countries: Colombia, India, Kenya, Croatia, Australia, Canada, the United States (US), and, most extensively, in South Africa. In these countries, GRI focuses its programming within four broad arenas: (1) Community development; (2) Religion, inter-faith, and spirituality; (3) Universities and educational institutions for young people; and (4) Peacebuilding and reconciliation. We also hold workshops for members of the general public in the countries we work in. Workshops have been conducted for groups such as gender and peacebuilding NGOs, local communities, universities, prisons, religious and inter-faith communities, activist groups, therapeutic networks, and Members of Parliament (MPs). The Gender Reconciliation process aligns with transitional justice and truth and reconciliation principles,

¹³ Peacock and Levack The Men as Partners Program in South Africa: Reaching Men to End Gender-Based Violence and Promote Sexual and Reproductive Health, (2004) International Journal of Men's Health, Vol. 3, No. 3, Fall 2004, 173-188, p.176, <https://www.engenderhealth.org/files/pubs/gender/map/map_south_africa_reaching_men.pdf>.

¹⁴ Antonia Porter, "Age-old struggle is not only business of women", newspaper article, Sunday Independent, South Africa, 22 January 2012.

and applies these principles to gender and sexual injustice. Through careful facilitation, workshops provide a rare forum to jointly confront the historical and crosscultural origins of gender oppression and exploitation, and to reach mutual healing and understanding. Workshops connect the personal to the political and vice versa, in part through providing the space for participants to reflect on their gender-related experiences, and to witness the telling of one another's stories, as part of transforming patriarchy in broader society. This requires both courage and humility: to speak one's truth, to open to the pain of others, and to take personal and social responsibility. The Gender Reconciliation approach builds trust and compassionate communication through a skillful combination of interactive exercises, contemplative practices, and group process. By addressing the root causes of gender injustice and patriarchy, workshops can also be considered as a practical means of helping to implement international and regional legislation on ensuring peace and security for women and against gender-based violence, such as the Convention to Eliminate All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action; and United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1325 of 2000 and 1820 of 2008, as well as the more recent UNSCRs on women, peace, and security.¹⁵ Gender Reconciliation workshops also help to implement the UK's domestic legislation against gender-based violence, such as the Sexual Offences Act of 2003, the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act (DVCVA) of 2004, and the Equality Act of 2010, among others.

The bulk of gender activism today focuses either on protecting and empowering women, on transforming men and male socialisation, or on promoting the rights and safety of gender and sexual minorities such as LGBTI communities. The Gender Reconciliation process builds upon, yet goes beyond, the crucial work of these initiatives. It differs from other gender trainings in that it brings women and men of all sexual orientations together for mutual healing and reconciliation in a community setting. Together they embark upon the integral work of mutual transformation to move beyond destructive behaviors and social conditioning, and work toward the restoration of trust, harmony, and joyful collaboration across the gender gap. This approach holds a vast, untapped potential to transform gender relations, and to create compassionate societies. Working through the challenges of gender disharmony with integrity, compassion, and non-judgment, participants routinely report a liberating awakening, and newfound practical skills for transforming gender injustice.

“I have been looking for a long time to find a way to bring healing and reconciliation between women and men...and this work is the answer. We need much more of this work.....” - Nozizwe Madlala Routledge, former Deputy Minister of Health, and Defence, South Africa

In 2013, the Gender Reconciliation methodology was explicitly endorsed by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and Rev. Mpho Tutu, director of the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation. Over the past five years, GRI has been training facilitators in Gender Reconciliation in South Africa and the United States, and elsewhere. New training programmes are due to commence shortly in India, Colombia, Kenya, and Australia. GRI has developed research initiatives with two South African universities – the University of the

¹⁵ Other UN resolutions on women, peace, and security include UNSCRs 1889 of 2009 and 2122 of 2013; and UNSCRs 1888 of 2009, 1960 of 2010, and 2106 of 2013, which specifically address sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town. At UFS, a three-year formal research project commenced in April 2015. The research project was initiated and is supervised by Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela,¹⁶ a globally renowned expert and researcher on forgiveness who is now senior professor in Trauma, Forgiveness and Reconciliation Studies at UFS. The research project is exploring the dynamics of gender transformation initiated by Gender Reconciliation workshops coupled with regular follow up sessions over an eight month period, in order to assess the impact of these programmes and analysing in detail the process of transformation of gender dynamics and relationships that take place during and after the workshops. In July 2015, a second research project was launched in collaboration with the Psychology Department at UWC. This project will implement Gender Reconciliation workshops within the university, and assess their impact in the university setting. Other research projects on the Gender Reconciliation methodology will shortly begin at other universities in South Africa, as well as in the United States.

Requests for Gender Reconciliation in the UK have emerged from various quarters over the past five years. GRI intends that the February 2016 workshop will be the first of several workshops in the UK, and that a training programme for those interested in becoming facilitators of the Gender Reconciliation methodology in their own fields, constituencies, and communities will also take place.

Impact of Gender Reconciliation

Feedback received from participants of Gender Reconciliation workshops in the eight countries where they have taken place indicate that the workshops have had significant impacts on people's lives, attitudes, and behaviours towards the other gender, and, importantly, have had a multiplier effect. Many workshop participants – ranging from Members of Parliament, civil society representatives, to health professionals, community members, and prison inmates – have stated that their exposure to Gender Reconciliation work has significantly changed their lives. They report healing effects within their families, including greater trust and improved communication in some of their most challenging relationships. Numerous participants have given specific examples of how they are applying new skills and knowledge from the workshops to move towards self-healing and to address gender-based conflicts in their lives and communities, including speaking up to a greater extent about gender injustice and oppression in the workplace, in public spaces, and in local communities. Several men reported an entirely new understanding of women's pain, and have said that they are taking responsibility for curbing their own gender-based violence and that of those around them. Many men have described experiencing a positive shift in their attitudes and relationships with their intimate partners. This is particularly significant, given that much of the violence that women experience globally is perpetrated by male partners and friends. Many women have reported developing new insights into men's experiences, and undergoing healing from gender-based violence and trauma. Findings from a research study undertaken in 2011 by Soweto-based Phaphama Initiatives indicate that Gender Reconciliation is a powerful tool for addressing the causes, rather than merely the symptoms, of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. The study concluded that Gender Reconciliation has the potential to alleviate the devastating impacts of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence

¹⁶ Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela served on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as coordinator of victims' public hearings in South Africa's Western Cape province.

within communities.

Gender Reconciliation Workshop, London, UK, 11-13 February 2016

The long-term objectives of Gender Reconciliation International are to contribute towards:

- 1) Transforming underlying gender and sexual injustice and inequality in all countries where GRI works;
- 2) Reducing levels of gender-based and sexual violence, including among communities at particular risk of this; and
- 3) Establishing just and compassionate relations between the sexes.

The February 2016 workshop will:

1. Create a safe forum for the sexes to jointly confront dysfunctional gender and sexuality conditioning in society, and in the workplace;
2. Facilitate skillful acknowledgement, truth-telling, and deep listening in relation to participants' personal histories;
3. Foster new levels of sensitivity and mutual awareness among women and men, and between gender and sexual minorities;
4. Cultivate respectful and authentic dialogue between the sexes on sensitive gender issues, including communication skills for addressing conflicts;
5. Promote new forms of relating between the sexes imbued with mutual appreciation, compassion, and trust; and
6. Build a collaborative network of people who are committed to transforming gender relations, and who are mutually accountable to one another.