

THE POWER OF DISCOURSE IN PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES: POSITIONING MASCULINE AND FEMININE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

It is sometimes argued that conflict is mainly a male world. Men are simultaneously perpetrators of and active agents resolving problem of conflict. In peacebuilding, it is usually men who are considered peacebuilders; women are rarely taken into account as active subjects in peacebuilding agreements. However, much feminist research has shown that women also have roles as peacebuilders during conflict. This article attempts to show the role of both women and men in the peacebuilding process, not as political negotiators but as subjects who use their power of discourse in everyday life and in the negotiation and construction of peacebuilding. This paper looks at the different linguistic approaches used by men and women from different social classes and religions to contribute to conflict resolution. Several questions are to be answered: how are women and men from different social classes and religions actively present in the peacebuilding process? What discourses do they constructively use to resolve conflict? This research was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis; empirical data was taken from the case of the conflict in Ambon.

Key words: Masculine, Feminine, Language, Discourse, Peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Peacebuilding can involve men, groups of men, women, or groups of women (Punkhurst, 2000). In studies of gender and conflict, there are differing views regarding who may be considered a peacebuilder in conflict situations. Some of the literature holds that men are perpetrators of and actors behind conflict (Hutchings, 2008; Harstock, 1989), whereas women have important contributions to building peace (Goldstein, 2001). In her book *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (2007), Cynthia Cockburn, a feminist and anti-war activist, explains the important role of women in peacebuilding. Her research experiences throughout the global and interactions with more than 250 pro-peace women illustrate the important role of women in peacebuilding. El-Bushra (2012), a researcher with International Alert, argues:

A number of assumptions about the relationship between men, women and violent conflict are common in peacebuilding. For example, it is often said that women are the first and main victims of conflict, and are at the same time the most active advocates for peace; that a type of solidarity exists between women that transcends social and political divisions. One view is that the archetypal

distinction between nurturing womanhood and aggressive masculinity is real, that male aggression is genetically and hormonally determined (i.e. by sex not gender), and that war is by definition "war against women" (El-Bushra, 2012:7)

Other research, such as the theoretization of masculinities (Connell, 2005), has underscored that it is not only women who become victims and act as peacebuilders. Such research has called for a new perspective regarding men's involvement in the peacebuilding process. Saferworld, in its 2014, writes:

Where this is the case, Saferworld suggests that peacebuilding efforts can and should address this by taking steps to promote notions of masculinities which favour nonviolence and gender equality. A number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have developed programming approaches for engaging men and boys to promote gender equality and non-violence which have made demonstrable impacts on the lives of men and women. International donors, policymakers and NGOs should consider how such approaches can be developed to help build peace (Saferworld, 2014:i)

Men also become victims in the conflicts perpetrated by men. Extensive conflict experience indicates that they, men, can also become peacebuilders.

In much research on peace and peacebuilding, the focus has been on political, social, and anthropological approaches. The fact that peace is characterized by support from activists has reinforced and supported research which offers solutions and input for future peacebuilding efforts. Much research conducted within, for instance, the context of the United Nations has also given attention to best practices for peacebuilding in different parts of the world.

One element of peacebuilding that is frequently ignored is language. Language, though an important part of human lives, is frequently seen simply as a *lingua franca*, a tool for communication and for the promotion of political interests. However, language offers important contributions to understandings of peacebuilding, as it holds an important role as a social practice. In *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough (2001; 1995; 1992) emphasizes the importance of language used and language variability in understanding the social context. Language variability explores the connections between language and different categories such as social class, gender, and race. Fairclough explains (1995:11):

Certain categories which have been of key importance in the analysis of social structure will of course do badly on Schegloff's criteria for analytical relevance, including social class, power (in a social structural rather than a situational sense) and ideology. Analysis of discourse practice, by contrast requires such categories. We can best see this in relation to what I want to call hidden variability. Various approaches to

discourse analysis, including not only conversation analysis but also, for instance, the Birmingham school (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), ignore an important type of variability in language use (discourse)

The interconnections between language and other social categories—in this case, gender—are thus important aspects for consideration, particularly given that previous research has exposed specific patterns in conflict and violence which are related to the peacebuilding social practices of men and women. If peace is gendered, is this apparent in the language used by men and women when they look at peace? What language use differentiates men and women in their conceptualization of peace?

This research attempts to identify the interconnections between the discourses of peace which are produced, consumed, and reproduced by men and by women in the context of post-conflict Ambon. This research utilizes the Critical Discourse Analysis approach in an attempt to examine the interconnections between linguistic practices, discursive practices, and social practices.

In the context of linguistic practice, what type of language—including wording, alternative wording, and sentences (Wijsen, 2013)—is frequently used by subjects to express their pro-peace and peacebuilding views? At the discursive practice level, intertextuality is examined in greater detail, attempting to answer what other texts are used by informants to explain or convey their pro-peace and peacebuilding views. Meanwhile, social practices refer to the practices which are performed by informants as a means of supporting their own statements regarding peace and peacebuilding.

Research on peacebuilding for this paper was conducted in Ambon together with researchers from the Graduate Institute, Geneva under the leadership of Professor Elisabeth Prugl, as well as a team from Nigeria.¹ The researchers in the first phase in Ambon included Elisabeth Prugl, Jana Krauss, Rahel Kunz, and Henry Myrntinen, Piia Branfors, from the Switzerland team, Wening Udasmoro and Arifah Rahmawati from Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia and Mimidou Achakpa and Joy Onyesoh from Nigeria. Research in Ambon was conducted in six villages: Batu Merah, Wayame, Paso, Poka, Hitu, and Mardika. A total of 73 interviews were conducted, as well as two focus group discussions in each village. This paper only looks at one village, Batu Merah, which was selected as it was one of the sources of the Ambon conflict. The Ambon conflict was triggered by fighting between two youths from the villages of Batu Merah and Mardika. Batu Merah has also been selected because it has not been seen as a village which promoted peace, but rather as a provocateur of conflict. Other villages have been viewed differently: Wayame, for instance, has become a well-known example of a village which found peace under a project spearheaded and managed by men, in which women appear to be swallowed by male hegemony; while Poka has become known as a village with a high level of women's agency. Batu Merah, which has long been

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considered the point where the conflict was ignited, has been selected to better explain what aspects of language are manifested by men and women in discourses of peace. This paper is a small part of a larger research project which is planned to be conducted over a period of six years. In this paper, I introduce some interviews. The initial of the interviewees is used for their personal protection.

Peace and Optimistic Views

Women show specific **discourses** regarding how they develop their arguments regarding conflict and peace.

In 1999, I was active with the Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia (Lakpesdam NU; Institute for the Research Into and Development of Human Resources; a unit of the Nahdlatul Ulama). How were women's roles at the time... I can say that women acted both *to extend the conflict*, and *to make peace*. At the family level, *when a youth wanted to go to war, he'd stop if his mother said no. The husbands were like that too. Economically, women generally served more to further peace*, through their neutral zones. *Women birthed the peace*, because *reconciliation occurred only after trade had begun in the markets* – pioneered by women. Because these transactions occurred, reconciliation could begin. *During the conflict, there were several "pasar kaget"* (spontaneous markets, established when there are large-scale activities); these were dominated by women, and through them *the conflict could be calmed*.²

In M.S.'s discussion, the **linguistic practices** include several **alternative wordings** which are used to explain how women promoted both conflict and peace. Meanwhile, the **discursive practices** indicate that mothers and wives were consulted and helped determine whether or not someone would take an active role in the conflict. Owing to women's role as a source of reference and suggestion, the informant considers them to have been significant peacemakers. This is because the women's decisions to not support their husbands' or sons' decisions to "go to war" were important in reducing and preventing conflict. At the **social practice** level, women were involved in reconciliation through non-political channels, namely through simple economics, as manifested in their interactions at the markets and other places of business. This quote shows optimism regarding women's roles as peacemakers, referring to their open spaces within the economic sphere in which they could freely interact with other women despite the ongoing conflict.

Regarding peace, unlike M.S., a man named M.T. presented a different view of peace and economic issues. The following is quoted from an interview conducted with M.T., who is a societal leader in Batu Merah.

The conditions at the time, well, *people didn't think that Maluku could be peaceful again*. That's because in 1999 a lot of things happened, and

² Interview with M.S., a woman activist from Batu Merah.

so *people thought that Maluku would never again have peace*. But, the government built this, saying that there would be peace. At the time nobody wanted to buy (the homes). This housing complex wasn't just built for the Southeast Moluccans, but for people from everywhere. So whoever wanted to buy could buy. The price at the time was 2.5 million. The original plan called for two rooms, but the Social Works department paid more money to subsidize the land, so, together with 2 million from the residents, the price was 3 million for the land used in the housing complex.

Our social lives at the time were ruined. We couldn't earn money anymore. From 2000 to 2002, the economic situation was terrible. And the social situation was difficult. [Everything was] destroyed, really. *We didn't think that we could find peace like we have now*.

There is pessimism regarding peace evident in the discourse of M.T. In his **linguistic practices**, he uses re-wording, namely the repetition of words and sentences which contain the same message. This can be seen, for instance, in the sentence "people didn't think that Maluku could be peaceful again", which M.T. repeated through the sentence "a lot of things happened, and so people thought that Maluku would never again have peace." This same message is repeated in the sentence "We didn't think that we could find peace like we have now." At the **discursive practice** level, M.T. refers to the government as a subject in the sentence "the government built this, saying that there would be peace". This pessimism has had an effect on M.T.'s **social practices**, as evidenced by his expressed opinion that nobody believes in many aspects of life in Ambon, including the economy and housing. The widespread destruction of homes in Ambon has made the island's residents hesitant to buy houses or other property.

This apparent dichotomy in men's and women's use of language needs to be examined in greater detail and in relation to issues of ethnicity, religion, etc. M.S. is a woman, but from the majority group, and she has had a higher level of education and as such had access to develop her agency as a woman activist in Ambon during the conflict. Meanwhile, M.T., he was a leader and considered himself as pure Ambonese. The fact that the outsiders, men from other places called BBM (Buton Bugis and Makasar) were considered more successful in economic than the Ambonese create his pessimistic view.

Selfing and Othering in Discourses of Peace

The informants' use of language also refers to a constructed understanding of the self and the other. N.S., one woman from Batu Merah, gave a dissenting view of the rise of the conflict and the peacemaking process. She explained her experiences as followed:

At the time, see, it was Eid. Tuesday afternoon, at 3 o'clock, the conflict started. *We held out in the complex. The Christians, in the upper areas, were also panicking, so we often stood guard at night. We looked at each other, ensuring that nobody would attack, because they didn't know what would happen either.* Only on the third day of the conflict did we evacuate the kampung. *The one who told us to leave was the priest, (T).* That's because *they were worried that*

somebody would come from elsewhere, and that they wouldn't be able to handle them. If it was them themselves (the local Christians), they could perhaps still deal with it, but if they were outsiders then there were no guarantees.³

From N.S. expressions above, strong acts of selfing and othering are clearly evident. At the level of **linguistic practices**, several sentences are used, including: "We held out in the complex. The Christians, in the upper areas, were also panicking, so we often stood guard at night. We looked at each other, ensuring that nobody would attack". N.S. lived in an environment in which Christians and Muslims co-mingled. These groups watched over each other to ensure that neither was attacked. At the **discursive practice** level, the reference used is an interdiscursive one in which the priest, (T), was considered a person to be heeded. Before, the residents stayed where they were; only after the priest, (T), asked them to leave did they do so. At the **social practice** level, the question of self and other was recognized by N.S., because she felt certain that her Christian friends could guarantee her safety, as they were still "insiders" rather than "outsiders". The language used here again illustrates questions of optimism and trust answered by these women. M.S., above, strongly trusted in women as peacekeepers. N.S., meanwhile, had trust for another group which she considered capable of ensuring her own safety: in this case, the local Christians.

In terms of optimism and trust for others, slightly different perspectives are apparent in the language used by men. Referring to the same issue as N.S., A.A., an ordinary man in Batu Merah, explained.

I was in the center (Central Maluku). My village is there. My village doesn't border any of the Christian villages. All of us are Muslims, so that means it was safe. But the ones who were near (Christian villages), they were on guard. They could be attacked or attack, the two groups.⁴

They actually weren't that influenced. See, at the time we reminded each other that we had to be wary, because at the time the situation in our village was safe. But, yes, there was a sense of caution. That's it. So, we didn't get too provoked by others. Especially at the beginning. That was when they were still targeting those people I mentioned earlier, the BBM. So, if we thought about it, it was "Yeah, maybe they are the ones with the problems. Let the government handle it."

A different process of selfing and othering can be found in the utterances of A.A. At the level of **linguistic practice**, he uses the sentence "My village doesn't border any of the Christian villages. All of us are Muslims, so that means it was safe." A contrasting sentence, referring to neighboring majority Muslim and majority Christian villages, follows soon after: "They could be attacked or attack, the two groups". At the **discursive practice** level, the reference is again to the government as a subject, as seen in the sentence "Let

³ Interview with N.S., a housewife in Batu Merah.

⁴ Interview with A.A., an ordinary man from Batu Merah

the government handle it". In terms of **social practice**, there is repetition of the need to be on guard, to remind and warn each other, because "they were still targeting ... the BBM".

In A.A.'s perspective, it is apparent that there is still a process of exclusion of the Other. There is a perceived gap between the Christians and the Muslims. Both groups are considered to be mutually suspicious, and the need to look after oneself remains a strong influence on this utterance. This, however, is understandable. As a minority, they feel vulnerable as they are frequently the targets of violence at the hands of other groups, and as such they feel the need to strengthen their protection of their community and their internal affairs.

The Past and the Present

Different ways were used to express the effects of the conflict on interviewees' lives and on the changes between the past and present. This can be seen in the utterances of N.S., a woman informant, as follows:

- (S) : If we compare our lives now and then, our lives then were better before than they are now. Even though we comingled with people of other faiths, we understood each other. If they had difficulties, or we had problems, we could share without conflict. Now things are alright, but they were better before.⁵
- (S) : Yes, Alhamdulillah we had enough. You see, we didn't have to buy water. We didn't have to buy vegetables or coconuts because we'd planted some. Now, we have to pay for water. There's no more firewood, everything uses gas. It used to be that we'd use firewood. But, Alhamdulillah, the important thing is that we still have enough to eat and wear. I can send my children to school, and the house belongs to us now. It used to be that I didn't work, and the children didn't need all that much. Now I have to work to help out.

In terms of **linguistic practices**, there is a repeated utterance that life was better before than conflict than it has been since the conflict. N.S. used the phrasing "If we compare our lives now and then, our lives then were better before than they are now" and "Now things are alright, but they were better before". These sentences are reiterated through another series of utterances, "Yes, Alhamdulillah we had enough. You see, we didn't have to buy water. We didn't have to buy vegetables or coconuts because we'd planted some" etc., which again emphasizes how much better life was before the conflict. This chain of sentences includes one rather positive word, "Alhamdulillah", or "Praise be to God". The word "enough", however, is then used to explain the benchmark being used, as in the sentence "The important thing is that we still have enough to eat and wear." The interdiscursive reference here is a religious one, using the term "Alhamdulillah", which hints at an argument as to why N.S. should feel fortunate despite her life not being as comfortable as it was before the conflict.

In regards to social practices, there is a new reality which N.S. must face: she must work harder than before the conflict: "It used to be that I didn't work," and "Now I have to work to help out." In the facing life's difficulties, she demonstrates elements of sharing with other groups, as indicated by the sentences "Even though we comingled with people of other faiths, we

⁵ Interview with N.S., a housewife in Batu Merah.

understood each other. If they had difficulties, or we had problems, we could share without conflict."

Meanwhile, in their language the men have their own way of explaining the past and present.

In my opinion, things were better before. After the conflict, the economy has been so complicated. Used to be that whoever was active and flexible could get money. Before the conflict the economy was stable. The merchants, there were only a few. There weren't as many merchants as now. Now people come from Bau-Bau to sell things. I often tell some people that they may come to Ambon to look for money, but if the conflict breaks out they'll end up running away and not taking responsibility for Maluku. Yes, I am Butonese, but I've lived in Ambon for a long time and I have a house in Ambon. Them, they come temporarily. They come with their families, then they leave.⁶

Although L.N. holds similar views, he uses different utterances to express them. In his **linguistic practices**, there are direct sentences such as, "Things were better before. After the conflict, the economy has been so complicated. Used to be that whoever was active and flexible could get money. Before the conflict the economy was stable." There is also a clear development of intertextuality through **discursive practices** which strongly show a sense of otherness, as in the sentence, "Yes, I am Butonese, but I've lived in Ambon for a long time and I have a house in Ambon". The development of this intertextuality indicates that L.N. is the Other in an Ambonese context, as he is Butonese but he considers himself to be part of Ambon.

Interestingly, the rationale through which L.N. includes himself, a Butonese man, as part of Ambon is not applied to others. Unlike the women's language, which tends to emphasize the difficulties and joys of working with other groups, in the language of L.N. there is an otherness which applies to groups which are considered threats. This can be seen, for instance, in the sentence " Now people come from Bau-Bau to sell things. I often tell some people that they may come to Ambon to look for money, but if the conflict breaks out they'll end up running away and not taking responsibility for Maluku," and the sentence "Them, they come temporarily. They come with their families, then they leave."

These processes of creating otherness offer fertile soil for conflict development. Economic competition and ideological issues over differences frequently emerge as part of the production and reproduction of discourse.

CONCLUSION

Language, as related to issues of peace, has strong ties to gender issues. Men and women have different approaches to explaining their own views of peace. However, this gendering also needs to be understood within a wider scope, specifically the backgrounds of the men and women expressing their views. One woman quoted above appeared optimistic when it came to women's issues. This is closely related to her background as an educated woman who

⁶ Interview with L.N., a businessman in Batu Merah

originates from Ambon and thus has greater freedom of movement, including in peace-related affairs. Furthermore, her own experiences, having observed the markets and noting how women established their own networks in their own lives, gave her the perspective that peace was not something that was difficult to apply in everyday living. Meanwhile, one of the men quoted above tended to be more pessimistic in his view of peace. The fact that he originates from Ambon and as a father of the family who have to earn money but challenged by the outsiders (Buton, Bugis and Makasar people) who were successful in their economic business in Ambon makes him feel constantly marginalized economically in his own land.

In regards to their views of the past, present, and the mindset of peace, it is apparent that women use different language to explain the past and present. It is not difficult for them to linguistically express a positive view of the present, whereas men are more straightforward in describing the present as a challenging time. This can be attributed to a high degree of solidarity with others, in which different persons become a single group which attempts to unite in a single group to struggle for the future. Regarding peace, there are several significant aspects developed by men and women. Women, as seen in the above example, offer greater space for the inclusion of others. Men, meanwhile, tend to have a more exclusionary perspective, even when they themselves are not from the dominant group. These patterns of exclusion and inclusion are important for peace, as they are factors in conflict escalation and de-escalation.

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