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AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER'S IN RELIGION SOCIETY AND
GLOBAL ISSUES**

TOPIC:

Understanding the Causes of Civil Wars in Post-Colonial Sub-Saharan Africa.

Case study: Sierra Leone and the Role of women in the Search for Peace

PRESENTED BY

ADAMA SESAY

SUPERVISOR— Assistant Professor Kjetil Fretheim

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

50/50: Fifty-Fifty group

AFRC: Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

AU: African Union

APC: All People's Congress

CEDAW: Convention On the Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women

CDF: Civil Defence Forces

CMRRD: Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources National Reconstruction and Development

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

ECOMOG: ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group

FAWE: Forum for African Women Educationalists

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

GBV: Gender Based Violence

INGO: International Non Governmental Organization

IRC: International Rescue Mission

MRU: Manor River Union

MSF: Medisance Sans Frontieres

MARWOPNET: Mano River Women's Peace Network

NEWMAP: Network for Women Ministers and Parliamentarians

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

NOW: National Organization For Women

NPRC: National Provisional Ruling Council

OAU: Organization Of African Unity

PAEWC: Partners in Adult Education Women`s Commission

PFHR: Physicians For Human Rights

PRSP: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

RUF: Revolutionary United Front

SLAW: Sierra Leone Association of University Women

SLPP: Sierra Leone Peoples Party

SLWMP: Sierra Leone Women`s Movement For Peace

SLANGO: Sierra Leone Association of Non Governmental Organizations

UNAMSIL: United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations Children Emergency Fund

UNIFEM: United Nations Development Fund For women

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees

USAID: United States Agency For International Development

WAND: Women`s Association For National Development

WOMEN: Women`s Organization For a Morally Enlightened Nation

YWCA: Young Women`s Christian Association

CHAPTER ONE:

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The history of Sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone inclusive, has been a paradox. A paradox because the educated elites during the colonial period clamoured and agitated for self-rule and independence on the premise that a new dawn would be born whereby the continent's endowed natural resources would be utilised in what would be in the best interest of the masses. This position was epitomised in a famous speech by the late Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah who, at his country's independence said "seek ye first thy political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto thee".¹

Indeed, Nkrumah sought the consolidation of the state by adopting an African Socialist agenda but as he consolidated in power, his regime became enmeshed in absolute corruption that mirrored the rest of the continent. The disillusionment and frustration that ushered independence was captured by Ghanaian-born writer, Ayi Kwei- Armah in "The beautiful ones are not yet born" when he stated that:

*...the wood underneath would win and win till the end of time. Of that there was no doubt possible, only the pain of hope perennially doomed to disappointment. It was so clear. Of course it was in the nature of the wood to rot with age. The polish, it was supposed, would catch the rot. But of course in the end it was the rot which imprisoned everything in its effortless embrace...*²

In spite the appealing quest and wave of independence from 1958 throughout the 1960s that saw countries like Angola, Guinea, Nigeria, The Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Ghana, among others raising flags of political sovereignty, Sub-Saharan Africa combines all the major risk factors commonly associated with the onset of civil conflicts in her post-colonial

¹ Biney 2008:128

² Armah 1968:1

history, with 24 out of 48 countries having experienced civil war over the past 50 years.³ Yet at the same time, half of its crisis-ridden states have managed to maintain political stability despite the challenges. Maybe what the emergent leaders at independence did not grapple with was the fact that the granting of sovereignty (political independence) would not automatically mean the continent would be divorced from global economic realities as well as subject to the economic exploitation by the Western powers that have largely become increasingly dependent on the continent's raw materials like coffee, cacao, diamonds etc. The only exception to this sordid reality was Ghana's former President Kwame Nkrumah who at independence lucidly articulated the challenges that came with independence when he somehow realistically contradicted himself that, "political independence in itself does not yet mean complete national liberation".⁴

Another oversight was (is) the fact that governments can use resource revenue for costly policies such as large scale, re-distributional schemes and a huge security apparatus which are used to buy off potential dissidents or effectively suppress rebellion.⁵ As a result, rebellion will not be feasible or potential rebel leaders will find it difficult to recruit the rank and file of the "hoi polloi" (meaning the masses, the underdogs).

It is against this background that this thesis will use Thomas G. Weiss' influential theoretical approach in the civil war literature as the background for understanding the causes of civil wars in post-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, Sierra Leone in particular and the role of women in the search for peace.

Interestingly, even though everybody caught up in armed conflict suffer the consequences of violence, yet gender stereotypes argues that women and children are adversely affected by war. Women are depicted as ultimate victims or as earth mothers promoting peace, whilst men are depicted as agents of destruction and violence.⁶

³ Biney 2008:124

⁴ Gebe 2006:160

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Sweetman 2005:3

Paradoxically, women have potentially played other social roles than those of wives and motherhood. For example in the National Liberation Struggle in Eritrea, women were freedom fighters, and in Sri Lanka they comprised one third of the fighting forces because they perceive the goal of the struggle as their only option to pursue their interests.⁷

In Sierra Leone, women and girls were involved in the conflict both as perpetrators of the war and also as agents of peace. As perpetrators of the war, although McKay and Mazurana stated that girls enter fighting forces through recruitment, joining, abduction, being born of mothers who are in the force, or because they leave home to escape abuse,⁸ but they further stated that in Africa, the predominant pattern is for girls to be abducted, coerced into forces, taken from their homes, communities or being forcibly recruited.⁹

It is noted that over 9000 women and girls were involved in the Sierra Leone civil war.¹⁰ They were predominantly abducted and recruited into the fighting by the RUF, and played multiple roles ranging from sex slaves, forced labour, some were brutally subjected to gang rapes, some forced to be wives of commanders and endured other forms of gender based violence, whilst many, especially the older ones, participated as fighters, looted, committed atrocities and killed. They also served as spies, trained fighters, commanders and acted as messengers.¹¹

Notwithstanding this, women played a tremendous role in the conflict as agents of peace which was only possible by first overcoming the highly patriarchal structures in the country, that suppressed, discriminated and naturally relegated women to the back. The social structures of the country were broken down as an outcome of the war and these women played non traditional roles as household heads, decision makers within their families and

⁷ Bah Memunata:22.Gender roles in African societies. Available at www.Sierraleone.Newbreed.com. Accessed 22.7.11.

⁸ McKay and Mazurana 2004:18

⁹ Ibid: 20

¹⁰ Joint Consortium- UNHCR/Save the children 2002:1.The experience of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Based on initial findings and recommendations from assessment missions. October 22-30 november 2001. Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rwb.nsf/AIIDocsBYUNDP6010>:Accessed 11.11.2011

¹¹ Sweetline 2005:22

agents of peace (positions that were previously meant for men). This they achieved through the formation of various grass root organisations like the Sierra Leone Women For Peace (SLWFP), which champion their course for peace and by mobilising, training, and sensitising women through campaigns, rallies and workshops. This eventually led to the successful outcomes of the Bintumani¹ and 11 Conferences, where their call for peace was adhered to, as an outcome of which the Abidjan Peace Accord was signed but was later overturned by the military coup headed by Captain Valentine Strasser.

Although they were met with a lot of resistance and brutal repression from the military government and the RUF, as peace accords were broken, the women of Sierra Leone fought relentlessly through out the duration of the conflict to bring about peace and tranquillity into the country.

Regionally, self- exiled women who were refugees in Gambia and Guinea, exposed the illegal mining and arm deals of the military junta and called on the international community to intervene. This eventually led to the British intervention that led to the defeat of the RUF and the eventual signing of the Lome Peace Accord between the rebels and the government, which has brought and maintain peace in the country.

Although the war ended more than a decade ago, despite women`s role to the achievement of peace, the women of Sierra Leone still struggle to survive against cultural rules, and formal law still restrain their progress and maintain their subordinate status. This stand in stark contrast to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which, among other things emphasizes that the key to a peaceful and harmonious society depends on the full and equal participation of women and all other marginalized parties in decision making at national and local levels,¹² for only then will there be a chance of ending the economic inequality that is often a source of armed conflict.

So even though Sierra Leone is enjoying relative peace following the cessation of armed hostilities in 2002, largely measured by the successful outcome of the country`s 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections that were conducted without major incidents, the creation of democratic institutions like the office of the Ombudsman, the Anti-Corruption

¹² Sweetline 2005:2

Commission (ACC), the National Commission for Democracy (NCD), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Attitudinal and Behavioural Change Secretariat (ABCS), and the Open Government Initiative (OGI), among others, as well as the passing of the three gender acts that aims at providing space for women to participate in the governance of the state, recent developments that climaxed the open armed confrontation between the ruling All People's Congress Party (APC) and the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) had left political observers like Abdulai Bayraytay, worried about what the post reconstruction challenges of the country hold.

Part of the reasons for the fragility of the state cannot be divorced from the fact that the post-War challenges are still herculean. The country is still grappling with some major challenges that preceded the civil war in 1991; youth unemployment, ethnic based politics, the continued exclusion and marginalisation of women from the political sphere, HIV, poverty and plundering of the country's natural resources by multinational entities. Another huge challenge to the security of the state was the recent election by the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party of one of the antagonists in the war, former military head of state and number two man in the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio as the party's flag bearer and presidential candidate for the presidential elections slated for 2012.

The country has so far generated diverse opinions with frequent references to the Truth and Reconciliation Report and the blanket indictment of the NPRC of which Julius Maada Bio was second in command for the extra judicial killings of 28 Sierra Leoneans including the former Inspector General of Police, James Bambay Kamara.

1.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH.

It is widely understood or assumed among scholars like Thomas Weiss, that civil wars in Africa are mainly wars for natural resources.¹³ This statement needs careful evaluation, and it is for this reason that this study will use Weiss`s theories on the causes of wars in sub-Saharan Africa as a background for understanding the Sierra Leone conflict. In addition, as the title implies, this paper further aims to investigate the war in Sierra Leone and most importantly the predominant role played by women in the search for peace, in sustaining it and in the post conflict reconstruction. It is of vital significance because in the minds of many Africans, women are meant to be seen and not to be heard. It is in the light of this that this thesis will investigate the sudden emancipation of the Sierra Leonean women from victims of their culture to agents of peace like their women counterparts in neighbouring Liberia.

1.2 MOTIVATION

From the introduction, it is clear that pre-colonial sub -Sahara Africa is a menace with brutal wars which ranks prominently among the growing problems of Africa. Nevertheless, my interest in this study grew out of my deep desire that a proper understanding of the issue would be relevant in order to get to a proper understanding of the solution to the problem and the role women played in putting an end to the ten years civil war in Sierra Leone. So what can reduce wars in Africa? Good governance or good characteristics? How did the women of Sierra Leone overcome their religious, social and cultural beliefs that relegated them backwards to become forefront in the politics of the country? These are some questions that have been of interest to me hence the motivation to research on this topic.

¹³ Weiss 2007:58

1.3 PROBLEM

The issues concerning civil wars in Africa are vast, and it is a topic that has been misrepresented by mainly Western writers like Thomas Weiss,¹⁴ as only conflicts for the struggle of natural resources without taking into consideration other factors like the marginalisation of women and youth. The problem I want to discuss however is the fact that prior to the war, women were not sufficiently participating in the politics of the country, thus they were marginalised, and ostracised. What baffles me is that although research has shown that women suffer the worst brutalities during civil conflicts,¹⁵ yet they are still heavily relied upon in the search for peace. Furthermore, although it may seem that women are now forerunners in the politics of Sierra Leone, they are still grossly under represented¹⁶, and this would continue to be a challenging issue to the politics of the country.

The presenting questions that would be examined in this research against the backdrop of the role of women in the search for peace would include among others, what roles women could play to mitigate the outbreaks of wars in sub-Sahara Africa, or better still, what tangible roles could they continue to play in peace-building strategies could be put in place for countries like Sierra Leone that had witnessed conflicts not to relapse? And what roles women of Sierra Leone played in their transformation from being victims to agents or resources of peace and progress?

1.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS

Due to the vastness and complexity of the concept of wars in Africa, it would be time consuming if I have to elaborate on it. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I will therefore not go into depth but I will rather give a brief historical overview of the causes focusing the study within the limits of Sierra Leone as the thrust of this thesis, and particularly the

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Bouta et al,2005:13

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch 2003:12..Available at www.humanrights.org rights watch, Accessed 7.11.2011

contributions of the Sierra Leonean women in the peace process of their country.

1.5 SOURCES OF MATERIALS

I have materialise the goals of this thesis, through written and empirical sources of data. The written materials were mostly used to give an adequate understanding of the causes of conflicts in sub-sahara Africa, Sierra Leone in particular and for understanding the patriarchal system of Sierra Leone and gender theories on women in conflict. These includes:

“Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action”, Written by Thomas G, Weiss.

“A dirty war in Africa West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone”, Written by Gberie Lansana.

“Gender Peace building and Reconstruction”, written by Caroline Sweetline.

“Women waging war and Peace: International perspectives on Women`s roles in Conflict and Post conflict reconstruction”, written by Sandra, Cheldelin and Maneshka Eliatamby.

For the second part of the thesis which is the role of women in the search for peace, in particular, how the women of Sierra Leone were suddenly able to overcome their religious and cultural beliefs which had naturally relegated them as mere “observers”, to become frontrunners in the peace building process and politics of their country, in addition to the written materials mentioned above, i relied mainly on an empirical source of data collected from telephone interviews (where note taking was used), with two male journalists and three female activists who were key players during the conflict and in negotiations that led to the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999, that brought the war to an end.

NGO`s reports, articles and the Sierra Leone government websites were of vital importance in understanding the programmes and reforms that were implemented. In this regard documents from the UN, the International Alert, Amnesty International etc. were therefore useful in the fulfilment of the aims of this thesis.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

I will use a qualitative research method ” which can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than the quantification in the collection and analysis of data”¹⁷ in the form of literature and empirical methods of analysis. For the first part, I will use Weiss` theory as my background for understanding civil wars in Africa and Sierra Leone in particular.

In addition empirical analysis of qualitative telephone interviews with two male journalists and three female peace activists living in Sierra Leone will be used for the second part of the study. I have chosen these people as my informants because I know them personally and I am aware of their activities towards the attainment of peace in the country. My experiences as an African myself, not only born and raised in Sierra Leone, but one who witnessed the conflict itself that eventually sent me into exile into this country, Norway, have all combined in providing me with that advantage of being a long time observing participant which has afforded me a natural integration and knowledge to approach the topic at hand from an insider`s perspective.

1.7. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

In order to adequately explore the main issues this topic may demand, chapter two of this thesis will Project the general overview of Weiss` theoretical arguments for the causes of civil wars in post - colonial sub -Sahara Africa as the background for understanding conflicts in Africa and Sierra Leone in particular. Chapter three will give the historical context and general causes of the rebel war in Sierra Leone (and try to fit Weiss` theories into the Sierra Leone situation). The fourth chapter will discuss the role of women in the national and international efforts in the search for peace. It will discuss the patriarchal structure prior to the war and the women`s motivation for overcoming it, to become agents of peace . It will also discuss the double role women played in the war, both as agents of peace and as perpetrators

¹⁷ Bryman 2008:22

of violence. The fifth chapter will discuss the successes and constraints faced by Sierra Leonean women in their search for peace, and the position of women in present day Sierra Leone. The sixth chapter will make an analysis of the interviews whilst the seventh and concluding chapter will give a summary of the empirical evidence of the research question, which is the causes of civil wars in post colonial sub-Saharan Africa and role played by the women of Sierra Leone in the search for peace.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 BACKGROUND STUDY OF THE THEORITICAL CAUSES OF CIVIL WAR IN POST COLONIAL SUB-SAHARA AFRICA

African scholars and scholars on Africa, who have been following the instability in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa even before the outbreak of what is now the “Arab Spring” seem to have spent most of their research in establishing the link between natural resources and the outbreak of violent conflicts.

Even though it is indisputable that the corruption around the management of natural resources like oil in countries like Sudan, Nigeria and Libya, for instance, have contributed to various forms of internal conflicts, yet in the case of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the generalisations, or rather the emphasis on “blood diamonds” as the main causes of the civil wars in those two countries have potentially undermined other causes like political corruption, marginalisation of the rural youth and women, and the patronage of the state by the elitist class. This does not however, preclude the emphasis already positioned above that Africa’s conflicts are largely as a result of the human competition for scarce natural resources like diamonds.

The origin of modern African conflicts can historically be traced with the outbreak of the First World War in 1918, to the second World War from 1939 to 1945 that drew most of the world’s attention not so because of the number of casualties involved, but largely as a result of the sentimental nationalism provoked by Adolf Hitler of Germany that potentially aimed to extinct about six million Jews from the face of the earth.

Interestingly, at the end of the above calamity that struck the world, ideological warfare between the US and her allies on the one hand defending western capitalism and the Soviet Union and her Eastern allies on the other hand defending the ideals of communism dominated global politics. This period of the Cold War in effect characterized by the two super powers playing the politics of divide and rule by tacitly providing support for one regime in their bid to outweigh the other.

In consequence, human rights abuses and the rising death toll as a result of the exportation of the deadly and devastating conflicts to Third World countries that claimed innocent and unsuspecting civilians were relegated to the background.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union and her Eastern bloc in 1989, however, there has been a proliferation of violent conflicts in which out of the ninety-six armed conflicts recorded since 1989 only five have been conventional between states, the rest been internal, with most reflecting ethnic differences that consolidated on the huge political failures particularly in the new “independent” states of Sub-Saharan Africa. Accordingly, American Sociologist Ted Robert Gurr, authoritatively indicated that out of the thirteen most deadly conflicts that eclipsed the 19th and 20th Centuries, ten were civil wars.¹⁸

Although these types of conflicts have been viewed as an anathema to modern civility and therefore condemned as needless and useless destroyers of life and treasure, yet some have hailed them as a panacea to reawakening mankind from inept, corrupt, and outdated authoritarian regimes like those of Idi Amin in Uganda and Pol Pot of Cambodia in the 1970s.¹⁹

Conflict, according to A. Covie, is “struggling, fight, serious disagreements, arguments and controversy that result in armed struggle, armed clashes and civil wars”.²⁰ This definition, precise as it is, did not however give details as to why men have resorted to conflicts in the course of settling disputes. It is against this backdrop that many political scientist and other conflict analysts have identified various reasons, some contradictory of course, for the outbreak of contemporary conflicts.

The term ‘civil war’ has often been elastically used in classifying many of the most recent conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa. This in itself is problematic not so much because of its lack of empirical evidence, but simply because the description does not take into consideration the general characteristics that are prerequisite for a conflict to be referred to as “civil”. In most cases, belligerents have trumpeted political liberation as reasons for the commencement of

¹⁸ Gurr 1970:56

¹⁹ Papp 1988:27

²⁰ Covie 1973:117

conflicts when in actual fact the wars are not about holding territory to exert political influence, rather it is more on holding on to lucrative areas with huge mineral deposits like diamonds.

Many of the wars in Sub-Saharan Africa since the end of the Cold War have been more regional in nature rather than simplistic intrastate conflicts. This is because combat could fluctuate between high-intensity and low-intensity phases often resulting in horrible atrocities against non-combatant civilian populations, particularly the most vulnerable in these circumstances, women and children. As a region, over the last two decades, sub-Saharan Africa has been the most conflict ridden area of the world, with terrible costs in social and economic development.²¹

In order to scholarly understand the intricacies that have permeated conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, the United Nations had over the years coined the term ‘complex political emergency’ because of the requirements of a multidimensional international response including a combination of military intervention, peacekeeping and peace support operations, humanitarian relief programs, and high-level political intervention and diplomacy,²² because of their “multi-causality in nature and scope.

According to Francis, et al, many of the region’s wars could not fit a single paradigm as a causal factor. This could be seen in wars in the name of national liberations which were struggles against colonial authority for independence during the 1950s through the 1980s. During this period, it should be noted, Africa became a battlefield for Cold War Proxy Wars where the two superpowers and their allies backed different groups and factions to promote their political ideologies through conflict.

The aftermath of these proxy wars was the availability and proliferation of small arms and light weapons which corresponded with an increase in armed groups, and soldiers of fortune throughout the region. The consequence has been huge, as in Nigeria, for instance, the region of Biafra led by the secessionist Ojuku sought to fight for self-determination from the already independent post-colonial state of Nigeria.

²¹ Weiss 2007:63

²² Francis et al 2005:74-75

In addition, Roal Van-der-veen, describes African states during the cold war as lacking democracy, political freedom, pluralism or human rights and consisted of authoritarian leadership, with centralised legislature. Freedom and political pluralism was considered un-African and therefore insignificant for the continent`s development. Consequently, unquestionable and dictatorial regimes emerged but they were too weak to produce any socio-economic progress, regardless of their political ideologies. He refers to poor governance as a “disgraceful disappointment” for the high expectations of independence movements and freedom fighters. He traced the system of government and its failure to colonialism wherein power and control, was in the hands of a small elite of foreigners and argued that this colonial legacy continued after the attainment of independence, as a small elite ruling group was created which controlled state institutions, and revenue was entirely in their hands. Politics was thus personalised with no restraint which consequently led to the rapid systematic deterioration of the institutions of governments in power.²³

Under this system, access to state resources like contracts, development loans, import and export license especially for diamonds and gold were controlled directly by the state and a relationship was established that enabled the ruling government ensure on the loyalty of the police and armed forces and as a necessary condition in order to get to senior positions in the military and police force. This system of governance was described by Christopher Clapham as the politics of political patronage wherein the politician distributes the country`s resources as rewards for personal favour to their followers or supporters, who in turn responds with loyalty to the politician or government rather than to the institution he represents.²⁴

Another theorist Yeats Douglas, describes this system as one in which “public authority has been made an object of appropriation by the formal office holders, functionaries, politicians and military personnel who based their strategies on individual or family ascendancy on a private usage of the res publica”²⁵ He described this as the reason for the underdevelopment of post independent politics of Sub-Sahara Africa and argues that the practise of such a

²³ Van-der-veen 2004:87

²⁴ Clapham 1992:22

²⁵ Douglas 1996:5

system produces immobility, massive corruption, inefficiency, exploitation, and weakened state institutions.

Unfortunately in an attempt to understand conflicts, some Western scholars have often hastily also lumped inter-state conflict in Africa as civil wars. A typical example of this erroneous classification was the Ethiopian- Somalian War of 1977-78 and Uganda-Tanzania of 1978-1979. Part of this “error” could however be attributed to the challenges the West usually face in understanding the gross images of war from say ethnic and tribal wars in Africa, like the genocides in Rwanda and Burundi which brought the horror of these wars to the forefront of the world’s consciousness. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the main cause of the war has been tailored to fit the “blood diamond” paradigm without the least trying to position that the availability of natural resources like diamonds coupled with greed, capitalization, and plundering of natural resources only contributed to the exacerbation of the conflict.²⁶

From the foregoing it is clear that centralisation of power, authoritarianism, poor leadership and the lack of democracy, the use of Africa as a dumping ground for arms during the cold war, the politics of divide and rule, and of political patronage, extreme corruption, economic mismanagement and exploitation, were some of the factors that renders Africa a breeding ground for armed conflicts.

Indeed, understanding the general overview of the theoretical arguments for the causes of civil wars in post-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa is one important step in further exploring the historical context and general causes of the rebel war in Sierra Leone and the role of women in the search for peace.

²⁶ Francis et al 200:76-8

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 WEISS` THEORIES AND THE GENERAL CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone is located on the west coast of Africa. It shares boundary with Guinea on the North East, Liberia on the South East and the Atlantic ocean on its South. The country went through a brutal civil war which lasted from 1991-2002 and resulted in tragic loss of human lives and a large destruction of social and physical infrastructure. A presidential and parliamentary elections was held on may 2002 that commemorated the end of the war .

However, there will not be a better way to fully understand the role of women in the search for peace in the conflict in Sierra Leone without first understanding what led to the outbreak of the war itself. That is why this chapter will examine the general causes of that conflict bringing into focus the main theorist in that analysis, Thomas Weiss who described the war as ‘New War’. The war has fit the paradigm of what Thomas Weiss describes as a new war because of the following characteristics:

The first is that the conflict defy conventional categorization of other civil conflicts the continent witnessed, namely that though states could claim sovereignty, that the war in Sierra Leone defied that political correctness as the country’s borders became useless. The second characteristic being that the country’s military charged with the responsibility of defending the sovereignty of the state became meaningless as non-state actors like private military corporations²⁷ played an increasing role in the course of the conflict.

The third factor Weiss advanced was that the war was primarily financed from illicit activities and aid rather than from government revenues²⁸ and lastly, but not least, civilians, particularly

²⁷ Weiss 2007:67

²⁸ Ibid :72-82.

women and children became the main victims of the conflict rather than the main combatants in the conflict itself²⁹.

This is where understanding Weiss' and Francis, Faal, Kabia, and Ramsbotham's position on the political ramifications and the complexity of the war in Sierra Leone could further help in understanding the main underlying issues that led to the war in the first place. Undoubtedly, the competition for diamonds always connected to the war became a fuelling factor over the years of the conflict, and the conflict was directly linked to the collapse of the state, coupled with the emergence of pervasive criminality among state and non-state actors amidst the proliferation of small arms and light weapons readily available through private military companies like the Executive Outcomes. It is a combination of the above that one can conveniently indicate that the war in Sierra Leone was not a civil war but one with complex regional dimensions.³⁰

The war broke out immediately after Sierra Leone was ranked in 1990 as having the second lowest human development ranking in the world. But the total failure on the part of the government to adequately provide education and generate employment opportunities only succeeded in creating a large pool of disenfranchised youth ready to rise up violently against the system.³¹

The politics of Sierra Leone before the war like most African states consisted of massive corruption, extreme poverty and economic decadence which weakened the institutions of the state and turned it into a `shadow state`. (a concept used to define the relationship between corruption and politics) This simply means that even though a country may have all the democratic institutions in place but in actual fact real power lies in the hands of non- state actors like the wealthy and other private international, firms who wanted their policies passed in the state and they operate behind the scenes. An example was during the hey days of Siaka Stevens and Momoh wherein Jamil Sahid Mohammad a private businessman virtually controlled the state and even attended parliamentary and cabinet meetings.

²⁹ Ibid:63

³⁰ Silberfein 2005:214

³¹ Richards 1996:22

Kandeh Jimmy refers to this system of governance as Parimonialism. He defines it as the misuse of political sovereignty resulting from centralization of power, authoritarianism, and personal rule. He relates this phenomenon to the Sierra Leone situation as follows:

Conversion of state offices and public resources into sources of private wealth has been the primary mode of accumulation among Sierra Leone`s political elites since independence in 1961. Siaka Stevens (prime minister, president of Sierra Leone from 1968-1985) turned over the entire diamond and fishing industry to Jamil Sahid Mohamed, his Afro-Lebanese crony and business partner, who also at the time operated his own bank in addition to marketing, insurance and light manufacturing ventures. Under Siaka Stevens, Mohammed attended Cabinet meeting s(although he was not a minister or official member of government.),Occasionally vetoed ministerial decisions and routinely violated government foreign exchange regulations.³²

From the above indication, the system of governance was based on accumulation of wealth by the ruling elites and its party loyalists. Under this system a lot of false contracts were signed between politicians and their followers. Salaries of non existent workers, were diverted to the private use of the Politicians and their Permanent Secretaries. Corruption was so blatant and unrestrained under the APC regimes that Kandeh asserted that the erstwhile presidents Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh under the one party system administered the state as their private property.³³

Joseph Saidu Momoh was hand picked by Siaka Stevens to replace him in 1985. If Momoh inherited a government that was already steeped in unparalleled corruption, opportunism and sycophancy it would be comfortable to indicate that he exacerbated an already bad situation

³² Kandeh 1999:351

³³ Ibid:352

by creating the ``Ekutay.``³⁴ (Which translated in english means “you see”) and elevated it to control the social, political and economic organisation of the state. Kandeh as such regarded Momoh as a weak and imposed president and a tribalist which made him very unpopular even within his own party. By the 1980`s the country was a very weak and collapsing state, which could either protect the lives of its citizens nor defend its internal and external sovereignty. This consequently led to deterioration in the health, social and educational system, and the decay of a grossly mismanaged economy. In summary the mode of governance under Siaka Stevens and Momoh laid the foundation for the collapse of the state³⁵.

From this perspective, one gets the impression that the exclusive nature of politics and the concentration of all power in the hands of the ruling party, intimidated the populace and reduces effective political participation. This led to a struggle for power by the excluded and marginalised and the regimes application of severe repressive measures led to wide spread political and socio- economic discontent in the country which further provided the breeding ground for armed rebellion. It was for this reason and others cited previously that Kalevi Holsti stated that, ”weak states-not in the military sense but in terms of legitimacy and efficacy, are and will be the locales of wars, to the extent that those issues will be settled once and for all...it will be by armed conflict.”³⁶

From this insight, it was therefore not surprising that the NPRC coup d`etat, which ousted the government of President Momoh in 1992 was widely supported by many Sierra Leoneans in and out of the country. The coupists were hailed as rescuers of the country from the APCs corrupt and manipulative governance. But to the disappointment of their supporters the situation only got worst as they continued the same misrule and abuse of power as their predecessors. In fact they could not even uphold their self-declared mission to end the war, eradicate corruption and mismanagement.³⁷ They unlawfully exploited diamond resources For example the Swedish News paper *The Sunday Express* in their September 1993 edition had a

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Kandeh.1992:42

³⁶ Holsti 1996:40

³⁷ Abdulai 2004:95

headline of “Sierra Leone’s great Redeemer Becomes a millionaire Whilst The People Continue To Starve”. It stated that Strasser and his NPRC colleagues sold diamonds worth 43 million dollars to Sweden. This report was similar to the one reproduced by the local tabloid “*Need Breed*” which discussed the wide spread corruption that was prevalent in the country and how the NPRC regime allegedly exported diamonds worth 435,000,000 united states dollars to Antwerp and that Strasser bought a house in London that very year.³⁸

As indicated above, greed and the grievances perpetuated by the politically elitist class against marginalised youth and women served as catalyst for the rebel outfit, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to mount the decade long campaign against the state. This, to some, did not come as a surprise since a country with large natural resources, many young men, and little education is very much more at risk of conflict than one with the opposite characteristics.³⁹

In situations as described above, one can indicate that the protracted search for peace and the recalcitrance of the rebels for a political settlement of the conflict cannot be divorced from the looting of resources and selling them for wealth and weapons thereby creating a war economy that was more profitable to the rebels than peace.⁴⁰ In such a situation, the war took the dimension of more of an organized crime by the RUF whereby the late and erstwhile leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh established more or less a criminal empire with the rhetoric of “changing things for the better” in the country.⁴¹ According to Ian Smilie et al, the breakdown of law and order presented an economic opportunity and this they believe became a driving force to sustain the violence in what was now evidently a highly criminalised war economy.” They therefore stated that “the point of the war may not actually have been to win it , but to engage in profitable crime under the cover of the war fare.”⁴²

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Francis et al 1998:75

⁴⁰ Ibid:81

⁴¹ Walter 2002:40

⁴² Smilie et al 2000:1

To therefore say that the country's vast diamond resources funded and sustained the RUF's decade-long campaign would be an understatement, with the only exemption that the RUF was not running an organised crime empire being its indiscriminate violence it also unleashed on innocent and unsuspecting civilians during the course of the war. This is where one would agree with Lansana Gberie's assertion that the RUF contained an aspect of "bandatism," that the group also displayed "a simple resentment and the urge to pillage and destroy."⁴³ From the above background, it would therefore be safe for one to conclude that the persistent undermining of peace efforts by the RUF could not be disconnected from provisions that the rebel outfit would have to give up control of diamond mines and instead continued to erode the government's control of the countryside in driving away the rural population away from those areas and into government-controlled in the urban cities of the country. This view was supported by Silberfein who maintained that the RUF only needed to control three elements to obtain weapons, primarily small arms; the resource base, one or more routes to move the diamonds out of the source area, and exchange points in order to obtain weapons, primarily small arms.⁴⁴

Another cause of the war in Sierra Leone was the fact that it was a war whose activities were not confined within the traditional understanding of its sovereign borders as "boundaries have not impeded the flows of resources and weapons or movement of peoples"⁴⁵ This was so because the illegal diamond trade not only provided the RUF with the means to prolong its military campaign, but it had spill-over impacts into Liberia. Charles Taylor used the diamonds from Sierra Leone through Liberia to fund his war efforts. The war itself was "exported" to Sierra Leone in 1991 by erstwhile Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor who set up the RUF.

It has been widely believed that Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters, supported by mercenaries from Burkina-Faso were trained, supplied, and dispatched from Liberia thereby making leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh a proxy in the hands of Charles Taylor and only the formal leader and figure head of the RUF.

⁴³ Ibid:12

⁴⁴ Ibid:31

⁴⁵ Silberfein 2005:215

The motives of Charles Taylor to wage war in neighbouring Sierra Leone have also come into the political debate in analysing sub-regional conflicts. However, it has been generally indicated that Taylor had grievances against the Freetown government for its support to the regional military outfit of the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOMOG), to intervene in Liberia following that country's conflict. Also, Taylor had accused the government of Sierra Leone of allowing the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO), to attack positions of Taylor in Liberia from Sierra Leone.⁴⁶

The argument therefore follows that Charles Taylor started the war in Sierra Leone as a way of diverting ECOMOG's attention and resources from the conflict in Liberia⁴⁷ as he allowed Liberian territory to serve as sanctuary for the RUF from which they could launch offensives and raids into Sierra Leone.

From the above, and coupled with the fact that ruthless RUF fighters like Samuel Bockarie aka "Maskita" also fought alongside Charles Taylor in Liberia and also in Côte d'Ivoire makes it apparent that the war in Sierra Leone was far from being an isolated, intra-state conflict. Moreover, the war was driven by a host of other non-state actors thereby further complicating the search for peace. The first of these factors was that the RUF rebel movement operated outside the control of a state apparatus, and at no point did it enjoy the formal backing of any legitimate government. The illegal diamond trade which motivated and gave the RUF its means to fight was conducted through proxies of non-state actors ranging from arms and diamond smugglers to Lebanese diamond dealers in Liberia and Freetown, to legitimate diamond cartels in major trading hubs like Antwerp and Tel Aviv.

The economic theory for conflict (devil theories) fits well in the case of Sierra Leone from an intra-state perspective since the rebel outfit like the RUF had used populist language and embark on the economic rape of their respective countries' natural resources because of the contention that successive "democratic" governments are incapable of addressing the socio-economic need of majority of the people.

⁴⁶ Gberie 2005:35

⁴⁷ Silberfein 2005:218

This argument was strengthened by Paul Collier who stated that economic agenda was the primary factor for understanding the causes of civil wars and identifies the main exports of the country as the proxy for lootable resources and a source of attraction for unemployed and uneducated youths. War therefore became a source of income and an alternative to poverty and joblessness. For such people, peace and security in conflict situations are detrimental to their livelihood, accumulation of wealth and income generating opportunities. His argument therefore is that economic agenda ignites and sustains these wars, because even though civil wars destroy economic opportunities for a majority of actors they do create them for the minority.⁴⁸

This argument, according to S.J. Stedman, is that rebel groups, especially those in Africa and other Third World countries, are competing for resources in determining what is right, fair and just. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, the former National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Movement Populaire de Casamance in Senegal are typical examples.⁴⁹ The RUF and the NPFL, for instance, were only capable of seizing the diamond-rich areas and the timberlands in Sierra Leone and Liberia; these areas used resource bases that provided the oil to lubricate the war machine.

Added to this complexity was the ineffectiveness of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) in protecting the civilian population against the RUF, especially in the rural areas. The consequence was the formation of local militias like the “Kamajors” (derived from the Mende language meaning local hunters), the “Gbenthis” (derived from the Temne language meaning “the observed”), among others, to fight against RUF atrocities. These local fighters did not only become effective in reversing RUF gains by virtue of their knowledge of the bush terrain, but they also reportedly adopted the policy of not taking RUF prisoners but killed them instantly with absolutely no repercussions.⁵⁰ Their ferocity against the RUF eventually qualified them for recruitment by the Executive Outcomes and later constituted into the Civil Defence Forces (CDF).

⁴⁸ Keen David 2000:24-25

⁴⁹ Toma et al 2007:231

⁵⁰ Hirsh 2001:307

In the ensuing chaos and confusion of the war emerged other rogue rebel groups not associated with the RUF that also added to the already existing chaos and anarchy. Interestingly, these “rogue” groups would swing allegiance depending on their interests and who held power in the government. The most notorious of these groups was the “West Side Boys” composed mostly of street gang of young men who took advantage of Sierra Leone’s anarchy to conduct violent crime, thefts, and extortion at makeshift roadblocks and ambushes. Their notoriety became conspicuous with their frightening presence and tendency to kill and putting on outfits like wigs, flip-flops, and the uniforms of their killed victims.⁵¹ Their notoriety fame in 2000 when they succeeded in capturing eleven British soldiers, thereby prompting London to launch Operation Barras, one of its most successful offensive missions in Sierra Leone. Another factor responsible for the exacerbation of the war was the pervasive, deterioration and corruption in the country’s police and army which resulted in ineffective and rogue elements becoming combatants in the war. Corrupt soldiers in the SLA engaged in illegal mining and fought on both sides of the war. This became so common that a term “sobel” was coined for those engaged in these practices of being “soldiers by day, rebels by night.”⁵²

In addition, what further exacerbated the conflict was the presence of non-state actors like private military corporations (PMCs). Former military leader of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) Captain Valentine Strasser hired the British-based Ghurkha Security Group and charged them with the responsibility to train his rag-tag army in order to secure important highways for the government. The corporate mercenary outfit, made up of demobilized units from the infamous Ghurkhas, experienced moderate success, but were short lived in Sierra Leone, withdrawing after their leader was suspiciously killed in an “ambush”.⁵³

It should however be noted that among the PMCs one that created one of the major impact in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to trapped civilians behind RUF rebel lines was the Executive Outcomes. The professionalism of the outfit was not a surprise, as it comprised ex-members of the disbanded Special Forces 32nd Parachute Battalion of the former South

⁵¹ McGreal 2000:28

⁵² Howie 1999:307

⁵³ Gberie 2005:91

African Defence Forces. In essence, it was a leftover of the Apartheid era, led by a Rhodesian Brigadier, with a white officer corps, and black Angolan and Namibian infantry. These were a group of “crack bush guerrillas, who mostly served fifteen to twenty years in South Africa’s most notorious counter-insurgency units.”⁵⁴

In an attempt to further understand conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, the world media had only succeeded in capturing the images of war and civilian suffering as one and the same thereby buying to the academic temptation by usually Western analysts of the Africa’s conflicts to make one size fit all intervention policies.

During the course of the war, civilians, as noted above, became the main victims both in the hands of the government and the RUF. The lack of distinction between civilian and combatants lend credence to Weiss’ definition of ‘new wars’. This is particularly against the backdrop that even though the RUF reported to have started their campaign on the premise that it was more or less to combat corruption in government, yet much of their violence was directed at local rural populations with no ties to the Freetown government.

In this pursuit, the RUF used terror to control the countryside through mutilations against civilians in order to cow them into submission. Therefore, atrocities like the amputation of the limbs, hands, arms, legs, feet, and ears, of innocent civilians became common practice. In essence, the RUF institutionalized within its ranks indiscriminate violence against civilians. A victim of the grim accounts of the RUF killing machine narrated his ordeal to Human Rights Watch that “...witnesses describe the existence of units for committing particular crimes, like the Burn House Unit, Cut Hands Commando, and Blood Shed Squad. Some squads had trademark way of killing, such as Kill Man No Blood unit, whose method was to beat people to death without shedding blood, or the Born Naked Squad, who stripped all their victims naked, particularly women, before killing them.”⁵⁵

At the commencement of the war, the RUF which initially entered the country from Liberia with barely one hundred rebels did not have much trouble in swelling its ranks as they embarked on massive recruitment. To this end, they recruited gangs of unemployed,

⁵⁴ Ibid:93

⁵⁵ Ibid:130

disillusioned youth or street boys locally referred to as ‘raray boys’ or ‘Savis man’ (Krio words for street boys who dropped out of school) to fight against the government which the impoverished had come to perceive to have turned its back against them. It was within the desperation to swell their ranks that the RUF, with the tacit support of Charles Taylor, also resorted to recruiting children as soldiers.

The recruited soldiers were subjected to rigorous military training and “ideological” indoctrination processes, forced to take narcotics to increase their aggression in combat, and were often forced to kill their relatives and parents as a strategy to kill the fear in them. To the child soldier, therefore, the RUF became his family and the war his reason for existence. It was estimated that at one point almost one half of the RUF’s ranks were comprised of soldiers between the ages of eight and fourteen.”⁵⁶

For those recruited into civil militias, their membership served as a ready-made ticket for meal ticket. In this situation, formal education became to be perceived as “waste of time” since training in the use of small arms and light weapons had quicker and immediate pay offs than school ever. So, the AK47s were used as means to bring food, money, a warm bath and instant adult respect.”⁵⁷

The use of children as combatants was not limited to the RUF, as both the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the Civil Defence Forces also enlisted children into their ranks. Further, the RUF used sex as a weapon against the population. Young girls were made into sex slaves for the insurgents. RUF fighters, including children, used rape as a form of psychological warfare against the population. There were also reports of violence and sexual assault against civilians amongst the ECOMOG forces.

By the time the conflict eventually reached all regions of the country, political instability became the order of the day as Sierra Leone experienced two coups and saw a serious deterioration of discipline within the Sierra Leone Army. According to most reports, elements

⁵⁶ Meredith 2005:563

⁵⁷ Ibid

of the SLA were colluding with the rebels throughout the war hence their new accolade of “sobels”.

There were few battles between the army and RUF, and a faction of the SLA even briefly entered into an unholy collusion with the rebels after the 1997 Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) coup led by Johnny Paul Koroma. As a consequence of this alliance, the main victims of violence became civilians rather than soldiers. At the local level, the RUF rebels generated political and institutional instability by specifically targeting chiefs, and other traditional rulers in rural areas, through arson, with young RUF recruits often deliberately sent to attack their own home villages, leaving deep scars within their families and communities.⁵⁸

Yet the violence also led to the creation of new local institutions, as communities throughout the country organized Civil Defense Forces (CDF) to protect themselves. CDF fighters were civilians, often linked to traditional hunter groups, and they relied primarily on local fund raising for supplies. Though initially admired for their defense of civilians, later in the conflict some CDF units lost discipline and also began to abuse civilians.⁵⁹

As indicated earlier, one of the immediate causes of the conflict was the availability of, and the role diamonds played in fueling it. This is against the backdrop that diamonds became the conduit through which the conflict perpetuated itself as they were not only easy for smuggling, but provided immediate wealth for both militia leaders as well as funding for arms. Because large-scale diamond smuggling was possible only so long as the country maimed in chaos, diamond profits represented an important incentive for all armed groups to continue fighting.⁶⁰

The general cost of the war on civilians was enormous. By the start of the conflict until the cessation of hostilities, it was estimated that 50,000 were killed, over one million were displaced from their homes, and thousands more were victims of brutal amputations, rapes, and assaults. The toll the war had on particularly women and children was so enormous that

⁵⁸ Keen 2005:60

⁵⁹ Ibid 2005:68

⁶⁰ Ibid 2005:50

the search for peace locally, regionally and internationally became so crucial that women became key players through civil society organizations in that venture.

3.2 CONCLUSION:

It is therefore prudent to say that the civil war in Sierra Leone is the consequence of long standing grievances, to which poor economic and political mismanagement since independence, the one party system and its centralization of power which led to massive corruption, the political exclusion of the educated elite, the high rate of unemployment among the rural and urban youths were catalysts for the collapse of the state.

One can therefore argue that even though Weiss` theory does not provide a sufficient interpretation to the causes of the Sierra Leone war and he did not address the role of women in the conflict and he did not therefore examine the effects the war had on women generally, yet his theory has provided the foundations upon which one could better understand the main causes of the war itself. It is in understanding the main causes of the war that one could further grapple with the sordid fact that the RUF used rape as an effective weapon against women, children and girls, the usually vulnerable in any conflict of the magnitude like the one in Sierra Leone, in subjugating them to their whims and caprices.

It is against this complexity that the next chapter will examine the role women played by women in national and international efforts in ending the conflict through first the Lome Peace agreement of 1999 to the holding of elections in 1996 that eventually ushered in a democratically elected civilian government.

CHAPTER FOUR:

4.1 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE.

4.1.2 INTRODUCTION

The twelve years conflict in Sierra Leone was a violent and vicious one that resulted in traumatic and life threatening experiences for the people of the country. It has an estimated loss of 50,000 people, over one million displaced from their homes and thousands are victims of brutal amputations and assaults.⁶¹ It is further estimated that up to 250,000 women and girls were victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and many of these women experienced multiple gang rapes.⁶² This was confirmed by paragraph twelve, verse eight to nine of the TRC report which states that:

“all of the armed factions in conflict particular the RUF and the AFRC embarked on a systematic and deliberate strategy to rape women and girls, especially those between ten and eighteen years of age, with the intention of sowing terror amongst the population violating women and girls and breaking down every norm and custom of traditional society”⁶³

In addition to rape women experienced other violations such as sexual violence, sexual slavery, abduction, forced pregnancy, forced labor, mutilation, and trafficking.⁶⁴ It is against this backdrop that this chapter will focus on gender theories on women in war and argue that

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch 1999:6. Violence against women. Available at www.hrw.org/violence. Accessed 11.9.2011

⁶² Physicians For Human Rights 2002:2. War related Sexual violence in Sierra Leone: Available at <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org>: A population Based Assessment. Accessed 11.9.2011

⁶³ TRC report 2005:163

⁶⁴ Barrister 2003:1. Addressing Gender based violence in Sierra Leone. Available at <http://www.internationalAlert.org>. Accessed.8.10.2011

although women are mainly victims but their role is not just limited to that, for they have largely proved to be champions and agents of peace in Sierra Leone. To achieve this, this part of the thesis will first make a careful discussion of the patriarchal structure of Sierra Leone prior to the war, that naturally relegated women to the back. It will then proceed to discuss the dual role they played in the conflict first as rebels and perpetrators of the war and secondly as agents of peace. The aim of looking at such customs and practices in connection with gender theoretical framework is to enable us understand the status of women before the war, and their sudden transformation which will also include the nature and contributions of women in consolidating peace. This chapter will therefore answer the following research questions.

- A. what were the customs and traditions of Sierra Leone that naturally relegated women to the back.?
- B. What were their motivations for overcoming such customs.
- C. How were they able to overcome them to become forefront in the social, and political structures of the country?
- D. what roles did they play in the national and international efforts for peace?
- E. Why were they involved in the war?

From the methodology of this study, it will mainly include my telephone interviews with five people- two male journalists and three female activists living in the country. The findings will be supported or refuted with the work of authors who have done research on the topic and it will also include my opinions.

4.1.3 GENDER THEORIES ON WOMEN IN CONFLICT

Sandra, Cheldelin and Maneshka Eliatamby`s gender theories on women in conflict essentially and overwhelmingly portrayed women as victims - whether as mothers grieving the loss of their sons missing or dead, raising fatherless children, as widows struggling to survive in male dominated societies, as refugees displaced from their homes, community and country or as those raped, tortured, and left physically impaired, psychologically distressed,

shamed, humiliated or dead⁶⁵. Although this remains a reality and without doubt women and children are adversely affected during war and its aftermath. This victim hood theory however ignores how women`s lives changes as a result of war and traumatic experiences and how they are able to create strategies that enable them survive war situations. It is for this reason that the next part of the thesis will discuss the new roles adopted by the women of Sierra Leone that has helped them transform their society from war to peace as stated in my research question. Before achieving this, it will take a careful look at the highly patriarchal structure of the country that they first had to overcome.

4.2. THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE OF SIERRA LEONE PRIOR TO THE WAR

Sierra Leone is highly patriarchal in orientation. Gender inequalities are prevalent throughout society and are exacerbated through its discriminatory structures with relation to many of the concerns of women such as Marriage, property rights, sexual offences, and divorce laws.⁶⁶

There were high levels of illiteracy and poverty amongst women of the country which prevented them from upholding many of their internationally recognised rights. Economic insecurity was also a major contributor to women`s vulnerability to Gender Based Violence (GBV), which in itself is an epidemic problem through out the country and it prevents women from contributing and participating fully in peace building efforts.

Women were also marginalised from local and national decision making processes which consequently limited their ability to redress the prevalent gender inequalities.⁶⁷ They had little access to resource and opportunities which created a burden that adversely affected the society`s potential for peace building and development because more than half of its population was disempowered.⁶⁸ Many women led very traditional lives, they were mostly

⁶⁵ Cheldelin et al 2011:1

⁶⁶ Amnesty International 2006:12. Sierra Leone: women faced human rights abuses in the informal legal sector. Available at www.Amnestyinternational.org. Accessed 1.10.2011

⁶⁷Barrister 2003:1. Available at www.InternationalAlert, Gender Based Violence, Sierra Leone. Accessed 8.10.11.

⁶⁸ Ibid:2

farmers or petty traders, they married, had children and had little interest in politics as it was believed that politics was for men and women should be subordinate to their father and husbands.

4.2.1 THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND ITS DISCRIMINATORY STRUCTURE

The legal system in Sierra Leone consists of the co-existence of three different legal system which makes it very complex. These are the general law, made up of statutory code and codified law inherited from the British colonial masters, Customary law, made up of unwritten traditional codes and practises and Islamic law, where statutes related to divorce and inheritance are differentiated from within customary law. Customary law is protected in the constitution and is defined as “the rules of law by which customs are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone.”⁶⁹

Most of the country`s population lives outside Freetown, as a result of this, up to 85 per cent of its populace falls under the jurisdiction of customary law. Each system and its differing practises has specific implications for women. Consequently even though “women have certain rights under the general law the majority falls under the practises of the customary system which often exacerbate gender based violence and results in the predominance of discriminatory attitude and behaviour”.⁷⁰ Discriminatory practises and human rights violations against women were more pervasive under customary law,⁷¹ where decisions are made by chiefs and not local legal court.

Amnesty international noted that “ not only do chiefs act outside their jurisdiction, at times they collude with men in the community to forcibly evict women and children from their homes to subject them to arbitrary detention and other forms of gender based violence.”⁷². Despite this, most people uses the informal legal system because it is easily accessible and

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch 2003:15. Available at [www.Human Rights Watch](http://www.HumanRightsWatch.org), Accessed 7.11.11

⁷⁰ Barrister 2003:14.Addressing Gender based violence in sierra Leone. Available at www.international-alert.org Accessed.8.10.2011

⁷¹ Amnesty International 2006:1. Sierra Leone: Women Faced Human rights abuses in the informal legal sector. Available at [www.Amnesty International.org](http://www.AmnestyInternational.org) ,Accessed 7.11.11

⁷² Ibid

cheaper and also because most women are illiterates, ignorant of the law and do not know how they can protect their rights.

Furthermore Sierra Leone's citizenship Law of 1973 is very discriminatory against women, whilst it permits a man to confer citizenship on their foreign wife, and children, it denied women of the right to do so on her foreign husband.⁷³ Whilst this is an indication that women were denied equal status with their male counterparts, it undermines a woman's status as equal to the man and it contradicts many of the international human rights standards ratified by Sierra Leone including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This leads one to question the authenticity of a woman as a citizen of Sierra Leone, if she is deprived of this political right by the very law that governs her.

In addition, Women were culturally socialised to see themselves as inferior to men therefore, physical violence perpetuated against them by their male partners is acceptable and expected. They therefore do not pursue recourse against their perpetrators for fear of stigma, social pressure, expense, lack of awareness and the existence of generally prohibiting legal structures⁷⁴ such as Women's commission. Consequently, crime against them go unacknowledged, as they were mostly unable to challenge the discrimination they face daily. The fact that the entire legal system was administered mainly by men, further worsened women's situation as it made it difficult to protect their rights and overturn discriminatory practises.

4.2.2 MARRIAGE

This is another institution that greatly discriminates against women, for example even though the general law does not permit marriage before the age of 18, there was no minimum age for marriage under customary law. As such forced and arranged marriages were common.

⁷³ Women's law reform workshop. report compiled by the ministry of social welfare, Gender and Children's affairs, the law reform commission in collaboration with UNICEF and UNIFEM,2003 pg 53

⁷⁴ Barrister 2003:18. Addressing Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone. Available at www.international-alert.org. Accessed 8.10.2011

This has led to situations wherein girls health were compromised from early sexual activities and this is where they were more easily violated and exploited.⁷⁵ The dowry payments that girls receive upon marriages, is part of the reason for early marriages as this has proved to be a significant source of income to families, given the endemic poverty. Once married, the girls become economically indebted and dependent on their husbands. This forced women to stay in abusive marriages, since the men can cater for their needs, because if they divorce, the woman`s family may be asked to return the bride price which they may not have.

4.2.3 EDUCATION

With regards education, boys are usually given priority over girls. This can be attributed to Poverty and the cultural belief that girls should get marry and bear children at an early age. Many parents are therefore reluctant to invest in the education of their girl child and are instead kept at home and thought to do domestic activities in preparation for early marriages. This practise is quite common among the muslims especially the fullah tribe who do not send their children to school at all no matter how rich they were. In some cases girls are withdrawn from primary school and married off to wealthy suitors. This problem of early and forced marriages is a major reason for the high level of illiteracy which consequently disadvantaged women in all spheres of society. The 1985 census report for example stated that 91.5 per cent of girls and women from the ages of five onwards were illiterates. The female illiteracy levels in the country exceeded 90 per cent and it was worst in the northern part of the country especially in kambia and koinadugu district with 97.7 per cent.

In addition to the problem of poverty, the report also blamed it to the unavailability of schools in the rural areas where 80 per cent of the country`s population lives. This argument was strengthened by the disparate distribution of schools in the country as Freetown, the capital city had the greater number of schools and the great distances from schools to their homes was another reason they claimed discouraged parents from sending their children to schools.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Kandeh et al 1985:7

The problem of early teenage pregnancy is also another contributing factor. The culture of the country does not encourage victims of teenage pregnancies to go back to school. They can be suspended indefinitely for example and some find it difficult to go back for fear of the stigma, mockery and isolation they risked in the hands of their school mates and friends. This can also be given as the reason for the great disparity in the educational difference between men and women in the country.

4.2.4 PROPERTY

With regards property rights, the customary law in Sierra Leone before the war discriminated against women by depriving them of the right to own and inherit any kinds of properties especially houses and lands. In many cases, women were denied tenancy unless accompanied by a man. Inheritance laws favour the male family members and it was common for widows to be either thrown out of their home or like a property, the husband's brother or other male family member can inherit the widow if she has no sons to take control of the husband's properties. So women were left at the mercy of their male family members. Without land ownership, the women losses an important source of collateral and are therefore denied the social standard and financial security that property gives.⁷⁷ This deprivation deepened poverty among women, it compromises their economic self sufficiency and thereby increases their vulnerability and other forms of insecurity.

4.2.5 SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Customary laws of the country sanctions domestic violence, and exacerbates the culture of tolerance around sexual violence⁷⁸ in many ways. For example it permits a man to beat his wife for flirting with other men, disobedience, and for failing to perform their domestic duties. Disputes around sexual violence including rape are commonly resolved outside the formal legal sector. Settlements are often made within the community between the perpetrator and the victim's family which usually results in financial compensation or marriage to the

⁷⁷ TRC Report 2005:219 .Available at [Http://www.trl.sierra.leone.org/Appendices/submissions.pdf](http://www.trl.sierra.leone.org/Appendices/submissions.pdf). Accessed 1.12.12

⁷⁸ Amnesty international 2006:9. Sierra Leone Women faced Human rights abuses in the informal legal sector. Available at www.Amnestyinternational.org. Accessed 1.10.11

perpetuator. In addition, the TRC report also noted that “the justice system itself militates against victims of sexual violence taking their matters further ...justice officials have little or no understanding of the trauma associated with cases of sexual violence. The courts have too few officials who are trained to deal with these cases. Victims have no access to legal aid.”⁷⁹ This culture of violence against women did not therefore augur well for them at all, because they could not help themselves and the formal legal sector lacked the know how to handle their cases. In situations wherein a woman is forced to marry the man who has raped her, it confines the woman to a man she wouldn't have married under normal circumstances and therefore deprives her of her right to choose her own husband. This practise humiliates and degrades the woman whilst the man comes out as the victor in all sense of the word. Thus the culture of violence against women is hereby exacerbated.

4.2.6 ECONOMIC INSECURITY

The problem of economic insecurity was a major hindrance to women's progress and development in Sierra Leone. Even though Poverty was endemic, well entrenched and affects society as a whole, nevertheless, it is interesting to note that according to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), Poverty was more pronounced amongst women, of whom 74 % lives in less than 50 cents a day, compared to only 54 per cent of men. Women earned only 42 per cent of male earned income⁸⁰ and urban women constituted the lowest paying jobs sector and low income generating activities such as petty trading because they lacked the requisite education to move forward.

There were very little economic opportunities for women prior to the war, despite this, they played and still play a major role in the production of food and also in providing basic goods for the family. 60 to 80 per cent of the agricultural workload for example were undertaken by women, but this did not improve their lives as they were frequently economically insecure.⁸¹ The discriminatory laws, high illiteracy rate, lack of adequate skills and the lack of property

⁷⁹ TRC Report 2005:211. Appendix

2Availableat<http://www.trcsierraleone.org/pdf/Appendices/submissions.pdf>.Accessed.1.12.2012

⁸⁰ Physicians for human rights 2005:8 Available at <http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia.htm>. Accessed 8.11.11

⁸¹ TRC Report 2005:100.Appendix 2.Available at <http://www.trcsierraleone.org/dpf/appendices/submissions> Pdf. Accessed 1.12.2012

and credit facilities compound women`s low economic status and independence. When they are not the head of their families, they have very little or no decision making power within their families, which made them economically dependent and unable to exert any form of control over the resources that they contribute to their household⁸² and this further limits their ability to combat poverty.

As mentioned earlier, this great economic imbalance led them to be over dependent on men for the provision of their basic needs and services and men in many instances used this economic dependency to wield control over women and this further worsened their disadvantaged situation.⁸³ It is therefore not surprising that they are reluctant to report sexual and domestic violence against their male family members since they are responsible for their financial security. Thus economic insecurity was a major obstacle to women`s progress as it increases their overall vulnerability and is the main reason for the persistence GBV in the country.

4.2.7 HEALTH

The Persistent economic deterioration, in the country since independence led to a general deterioration in the public health sector and as a result, a large percentage of Sierra Leone`s population had no access to basic health services. This had a devastating effect for women of the country, as the health care system was privatized, leaving the majority of them with no access to the use of basic health services and opportunities for the protection, promotion and maintenance of their health.⁸⁴

In addition, the issue of early and forced marriages also contributed to women`s poor health, as it led to early sexual activities which exposed them to the risks and complications related to early pregnancies and child birth. These factors in addition to their high illiteracy and

⁸² Ibid:3

⁸³ United Nations: 2003:2.United Nations Human Development Report.2003.Available at.<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/country-fact-sheets-fs.SL.E.html>

⁸⁴ PAEWC report 1998:8

ignorance exposed women to high health risk even before the war and was further exacerbated by the war.

4.2.8. POLITICS

Politically speaking, not only was politics male-dominated, but women were marginalised from the local and national decision making processes despite the fact that their rights to hold public office was enshrined in the constitution. Consequently only a few women were able to play an active role in politics, and only a few succeeded in holding senior positions within the government or as paramount chiefs.⁸⁵

It was mostly illiterate women like wives and relatives of Paramount chiefs and female religious leaders in the churches and mosques, especially the “Hajas”(a title given to Muslim women who have paid pilgrimage to Mecca) that were used in politics. They were only tools of exploitation by the male politicians who often took advantage of their popularity to gather support, because even though these women were illiterates but were very influential in their communities. At the beginning of every election campaign, the male Politicians usually contacted these women, deceived them with few bags of rice and empty promises. The women in return mobilized grass-root women to support and help them win the elections.⁸⁶ Sadly, these male politicians never improved their living conditions or help develop their communities. At the end of the elections, these politicians ignored women, and would only resurface during the next elections campaign, with few bags of rice and new empty promises.

This limited role of women therefore did not improve their conditions, as the few educated ones were usually relegated backwards when the elections were over and the government established, As such women did not benefit from the government.

In addition to this the Sierra Leonean cultural belief that women are meant to be seen and not to be heard stated in the introduction hinders women`s progress because any attempt made by

⁸⁵ TRC Report 2005:4 Available at <http://www.trcsierraleone.org/pdf/appendices/submissions.pdf>. Accessed 1.12.2012.

⁸⁶ Ibid

women to agitate for political power was criticized by their fellow women and their male counterparts as inconsistent with their traditional gender roles. This is because the women of the country were led to believe that politics was a man's domain. The attitude of women themselves is therefore a contributing factor to female political backwardness.

4.2.9 CONCLUSION

One can therefore say that these gross inequalities subjugated women and rendered them politically mute for decades. Cultural stereotypes coupled with the lack of laws in support of Maternal inheritance, educational empowerment, and economic sustenance dented the status of women in Sierra Leone. With these disadvantages, there was no open avenue for women to express their political will and exercise their rights in society. In addition to these factors, the attitude of women themselves and domestic responsibilities marginalised them even more.

An understanding of this patriarchal dominance would therefore enable one understand the next section which investigates the motivations of women to override the customs and traditions that naturally relegates them backward and champion the course for peace in the country.

4.3 MOTIVATION FOR PEACE

This section is partly based on reports collected on my telephone interviews with three female activists and two male journalists living in Sierra Leone. Their assertions would be confirmed or refuted by the work of other researchers. It also includes my views and opinions as stated in the introduction. It answers the following research questions-What motivated the Sierra Leonean Women to fight for Peace and how were they able to achieve it?

Although the patriarchal culture in Sierra Leone as discussed above marginalised women from the decision making process, the status quo changed as a result of the war and the women of the country like their counterparts in Liberia, Somalia, Sri-Lanka Rwanda, became agents for peace both locally and regionally. The women advocated for a cease fire and were actively engaged in peace building initiatives, and responsibilities, they were previously

restricted from taking part in. This therefore prompted me to ask what motivated them to fight for peace rather than leaving everything in the hands of men as they were used to.

Interviewee A, who was a female peace activist responded that a strong motivating factor for them was the specific needs created by the war. The lack of basic goods and services like food, clean drinking water, medicine, and the general breakdown in law and order was what generated a motivation among women to take on a non-traditional role in championing the course for peace. She explained that her daughter died on her back, because of hunger and starvation when she was fleeing rebels in Bo town. She further explained how her nephew died of cholera and malnutrition right beside her as the hospitals were closed and there were no doctors to treat them. According to her this was a strong motivating factor for her and other women who found themselves in similar situations.

Answering the same question, interviewee B, another female activist responded that some women witnessed their family members being raped, tortured, killed and their homes set ablaze by the RUF. According to her it was such disregard for human lives, habitual lawlessness, and ruthlessness of the rebels that was a key motivating factor on women in their fight for peace. Whilst interviewee C, another female activist, answering the same question stated that unlike men “We women understand the value of life, we carry children in our stomachs for nine months, suffer under hard conditions to bring them up, it was hard to see men jumping dead bodies on the streets and it was therefore important for us to stop the killing.” She told of her missing twelve years old daughter, brother and other family members and that it was therefore necessary for them to take action and call for an end to the war.

Interviewee D, a male journalist and activist on the same question, responded that it was the disappearance of his 22 years old brother and 54 years old Father (both military officers) that motivated her mother to join other women in similar situations, asking the Red Cross to help them in their search for their missing sons and husbands. According to him it was in the search for his brother and other missing soldiers that his mum and other women at the Wilberforce Barracks formed The Wilberforce Alliance, which later became a grass root organisation, that sent a delegation to the then military government of Johnny Paul Koroma, appealing to him, to call for peace and stop sending their children to the war front. He stated that the military leader responded that “their children were military officers with the duty to

fight for the country and were being paid by the government to do so.” To him the military leader’s negative response was also an urge for women to continue to mobilize other mothers with children in the military to agitate for peace, with the belief that once the war was over, they would be able to know the fate of their missing children and husbands.

Furthermore, Interviewee E, another male journalist explained that the effects of the war on the people of the country was so devastating that they were left with no choice but to fight for peace. He stated that thousands of people were chased out of their homes and villages and were forced to leave everything behind including their houses, clothes, cattle’s, plantations, and make new beginnings. He stated that as victims of such a situation displaced women who were tired of moving from one place to another cannot help but join other women in the fight for peace. Elaborating on this, he further stated that he thinks people were tired of the long fighting’s, the killings and amputations of civilians and that even the rebels themselves were tired of living in the bushes like animals.

Interviewee A, further answered that her experiences interacting with other women in the MAROPNET was another influence for her to fight for peace in her own country. Seeing women in neighbouring Liberia aggressively agitating and succeeded in bringing peace to their country was a source of inspiration for herself and other educated women in the country, to come together and form an alliance for peace, thereby mobilising and sensitizing the grass root people. She went on to say that, the regional collaboration of women helped strengthen the movement and helped them achieved the goal of a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone.

This role and importance of MAROPNET on the Sierra Leone Women’s motivation for peace was also supported by interviewee D, who stated that MARWOPET was a powerful influence on women who previously might have been silenced by traditional gender assumptions and cultural norms. Interview B in support of the previous respondent asserted that this strong collaboration and regional networking instilled strong commitment into the Sierra Leonean Women’s desire to accomplish peace.

In addition to this, it is my conviction that women of Sierra Leone must have got their inspiration from other women in the Beijing Conference which consisted of women from Chechnya, Sri-Lanka, Rwanda and Eritrea who were in similar situations and had successfully

championed the course for peace in their various countries. I contend that the unparalleled levels of networking and exchange between activists in these conferences in terms of sharing of knowledge and innovations, must also have been a great source of inspiration.

I further contend that a key motivating factor is the fact that war affected the division of labour in the country. As most women became household heads because their husbands were killed or because they were unable to perform their roles as bread winners. This situation created a growing motivating force among women to develop the necessary income and manage everyday life. This empowered them, increases their self esteem as it led them to make decisions within their families for the first time. This new confidence women enjoyed and the obstacles posed by the war to their abilities as providers of their families needs, must have therefore been a strong motivating factor in their desire to overcome the status- quo, in forming and leading peace groups and thereby championing the course for peace in the county.

In addition to this, it is worth noting that the NPRC government had compromised with the rebels by inviting them to come to Freetown since they couldn't win the war. The sight of women carrying guns for the first time, instructing and controlling civilian men, earn them great respect and was a source of inspiration for other women like myself. Seeing our female counterparts stand up against the patriarchal structure, I think, the women of Sierra Leone generally came to believe that they can be equally as tough as men. This must therefore have been another motivating factor for women who now sees themselves as equal with men, to stand up against the status quo and take up non- traditional roles in their fight for peace.

Furthermore, in the book "Women Waging War And Peace", Patricia Maulden argued that women in war achieve a greater sense of equality with men and are granted heroine status with female militants, which is in stark contrast to their previous statuses and inequalities. She stated for example that "in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, the possession of AK-47 or in some cases a machete produced an instant alignment of the traditional power structure."⁸⁷ and that women earn the respect of males in the battle field and civilians than they ever had, prior to taking up arms. In this sense, it is therefore not surprising that women in such a situation

⁸⁷Cheldelin et al 2011:285

could seize the opportunity to challenge the patriarchal structure that had discriminated against them for so long.

So the unanimous motivating factor according to my respondents is that they were tired of living in fear and losing their loved ones. This indicates that it was the conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability encountered by people in the country on a daily basis such as the total lawlessness, brutal killings and amputations of civilians, changes in the status quo that motivated the women for an agentic choice of peace. In summary, they were pushed to the wall and this created the need for women to stand up and restore some human dignity.

In line with this, the next section will therefore investigate the changes in the roles of women during the war that enabled them overcome those cultures that discriminates against them and move from victims to agents of peace as stated in my research aim and is also based on interviews with peace activists.

4.4. WOMEN`S LOCAL AND REGIONAL EFFORTS AT PEACE

Researchers Goldblatt and Meintjes, writing on women`s experiences in South Africa stated that “war also break down the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs and community war also opens up and creates new beginnings.”⁸⁸It was in relation to this quotation that I questioned the women on how they were able to overcome those cultures that naturally relegated them to the back and help bring about peace in the country. In response, they all answered that it was done both locally and regionally. I then proceeded to ask the question:

4.4.1. WHAT WERE YOUR LOCAL EFFORTS AT PEACE?

Interviewee A answered that as the social structures breakdown, women of all calibres, educated and uneducated, from different spheres of life worked together to address the needs of their communities. Peace according to her was achieved through the activities of pre-war existing women`s organizations which includes the Young Women Christian Association,

⁸⁸ Turshen et al 1998:20

(YWCA), Women`s Association for National Development (WAND), the National Organization for Women (NOW) in collaboration with various new organisations that emerged during the war such as the Sierra Leone Women`s Movement for peace. One organization she mentioned that was particularly influential to the attainment of peace in the country was the Sierra Leone Association of University Students (SLAUW). According to her this was a pre –war existing organisation that was at the time networking for the Beijing Fourth World Conference on women, but as the war escalated it became a platform for women to meet regularly and discuss on a peaceful resolution. According to her it was their activities in these organisations that set the stage for the birth of new women led grass root peace movements like the Women For Peace And Progress(WPP). She elaborated that as the war intensifies all the pre-war and newly formed organisations collaborated into an umbrella organisation called The Forum which championed the women`s course for peace and democracy and through which they supported, advocated and participated in the transition from military to civilian rule with one voice.

In addition to this, interviewee B named other organizations which the women of Sierra Leone formed. One of these is The Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN), She stated that through this organization, women manifested their ideas and ideals through Workshops, Conferences and Seminars and they were able to organise demonstrations, peace matches and rallies that enabled them serve as direct mediators between the government and the rebels for an end to the war.

I then asked how they got involved and what were their activities. The same respondent answered that as the war intensified and the rebels advanced closer to Freetown the capital city, the women realised that the NPRC regime was unable to bring the war to a speedy conclusion as they had promised and it became clear they were unable to protect the nation from the RUF. With this in mind they therefore started pressuring for a peaceful solution to the war. They started by praying for divine intervention, they called on the leaders of the Inter Religious Council of Sierra Leone (IRCSL) to join them in praying for divine intervention, which they adhered to by declaring a week of prayer and fasting for the country. She elaborated that the women held meetings, lobbied and advocated with the government and the RUF representatives and pressured them for a peaceful settlement and that they raised consciousness among people.

Furthermore, the same respondent proudly stated that it was the pressures from women's organizations backed with increase pressure from the international community and the government's inability to defeat the rebels that forced the then reluctant military leader to succumb by adhering to the women's call for the National Consultative Conferences.

I then proceeded to ask the reason for the conferences and what took place, Interviewee C responded that, the first Consultative Conference, was held in 1995 and its aim was the preparation for a return to constitutional rule. It consisted of representations from over forty grass root organisations as well as traditional leaders and chiefs. She explained that during this conference, all the female organisations in the country unified under an umbrella organisation called "The Forum" which presented a unified position, stood vehemently for elections, peace and an end to military rule. She stated that the women's position won and elections date was set up for August, 1996 but added that the persistent RUF attacks on civilians disrupted the agreement to return to a civilian rule. She then boasted that in spite of all the setbacks the women remain undeterred by the RUF violence and continue to champion their desire for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

In addition to this, interviewee B like the previous interviewees, made mention of Sierra Leone's notorious Palace Coup in which Valentine Strasser's military government was ousted and replaced by that of his deputy, Julius Maada Bio. She elaborated on how the new NPRC government was reluctant to give up power by arguing that a return to a democratically elected government before the attainment of peace would hurt the RUF and escalate the war. She was of the opinion that Maada Bio reversed progress towards the multi party elections by campaigning for peace before elections. This she claimed, angered the women and brought them in direct confrontation with the military as they once again held demonstrations and took to the streets arguing for elections and the peace process to occur simultaneously as agreed in the first Consultative Conference.

My next question was what was the necessity for the second Consultative Conference? The respondent explained that it was because of the disagreement as to whether elections should come before peace or whether they should wait until peace was achieved that the second Consultative Conference was held, with the aim of resolving the political crises. She

elaborated that the chaos and massive displacement of people in the country made it difficult for many to understand the essence of holding elections under such circumstance but went on to say that:

as many would rather have the worst civilian regime to the best military government, many disgruntle Sierra Leoneans who had opted for peace before elections earlier, joined us in fighting for elections and the peace process to go in parallel, because they also came to understand that the NPRC was using the war as an excuse to cling unto power.

She stated that it was the women again who organised press conferences and meetings educating the masses and lobbied delegates in support of their stance, which was that elections and the peace process should be done simultaneously as agreed in the first consultative conference. She stated that the women`s position won again, elections were held and president kabba was reinstated. She boasted that it was because of their determination and vigilance that the democratisation process was not thwarted by Maada Bio and further stated that: "We encouraged women to use their votes to make a statement against the military government`s inefficiency, brutality and injustice."

Interviewee A stated that their campaigns were so effective that all attempts made by the military to discourage the women from participating in the conferences like firing threatening shots and beating people, on the day of the conference yet thousands of women turn out and participated.

Their unity, oneness and determination as explained by my interviewees was buttressed by Jusu-Sheriff who puts it this way –

When some one noticed that the young teacher slated to speak on behalf of the women of the eastern province was being prevailed upon by the kailahun district elders to break ranks. An immediate decision was taken by the other women in the conference hall to substitute another speaker. Marie Turay`s loud and unequivocal declaration in favour of Elections took courage and was considered by many to be the

*turning point in the favour of the decision to proceed with elections.*⁸⁹

Talking about activism, I then asked who were the leading female activists and what were their roles. Interviewee B named Mrs Shirley Gbujama who she said chaired both consultative conferences and was later appointed Minister of Social Welfare, Gender, And Children`s Affairs, Dr Khadi Sesay who she said was the Chairwoman of the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, Zainab Bangura, a Politician and Chairwoman in Campaign for good governance, Dr Memunatu Gazalley and Amy Smyth both former members of parliament. She stated that these women were highly educated and were the key members of The Forum. They represented women, served as their mouthpiece in both Conferences and were responsible for mobilizing the populace in support of a return to democracy and peace. She commended Dr Khadi Sesay and Mrs Zainab Bangura for educating people on their democratic rights and duties on radio and television, as a result of which there was a great turn out during the conferences and on the elections day.

I then asked if the international community was represented in these conferences. The respondent answered yes and that it was represented in both conferences by the British high commissioner and the American Ambassador to Sierra Leone, and representatives from the United Nations.

My next question was what was the essence of fighting for a civilian government since she had stated earlier that the women`s only concern was an end to the war. she answered that, it was because the women realised that the NPRC was unwilling to end the war and relinquish power as they promised the nation a day after they ousted the APC government of Joseph Saidu Momoh. She then explained that the leading members of The Forum held a small meeting and unilaterally agreed, that it was in the best interest of the country that they advocate for a return to civilian rule which they believed provided the best opportunity for a negotiated peace settlement, because it is only in a democratic government that the grievances that had ignited the war would be addressed and eradicated with out resorting to frustrations and increased violence.

⁸⁹ Sheriff 2000:6

She elaborated that because of the reluctance of the military to relinquish power, women's organization called for civil disobedience and were able to persuade the populace not to go to work. As a result of which all sectors of the government and businesses came to a complete halt. This civil disobedience according to her went on for over a week. A demonstration march was held all over the country including major cities like Bo, Kenema, Makeni, kabala and in the capital Freetown simultaneously and that its participants included Youths, Christian and Muslim religious groups, NGOs, Students and people from all works of life. She believes it was the biggest demonstration in the country since independence.

My next question was why did they believed the NPRC was reluctant to hand over power. Interviewee B answered that they came to that conclusion because the NPRC regime was using the war as an excuse to stay in power, since they were enriching themselves through illegal diamond mining and smuggling. Interviewee C on the other hand answered that it was because Maada Bio tried to impede the conduction of the election which was in progress before his palace coup, by touring the country and tried to persuade the rural population against holding of an election until peace was attained, when he was very much aware that his military was no match to the well sophisticated RUF machinery, and that after the tour the NPRC leader announced in the media that the urban population do not favour elections until peace was achieved.

I proceeded to ask whether the elections, took place as was agreed during the second consultative Conference and what were the women's contributions. Interviewee A answered that the elections took place and that women served as voluntary workers. She stated that leading female activists took it upon themselves to educate the people on their voting rights and responsibilities, and sensitizing them to register and vote. Some volunteered as electoral officers, polling agents, etc and that despite the military governments intimidating tactics like beating of women the turnout was again very great. she stated that for most women it was the first time they ever exercised their right to vote. According to her it was such voluntary activities of women that led those who were critical of them to believe that the women's desire for a peaceful resolution was genuine and would be beneficial to the entire nation.

My next question was on what were their tools for activism- Interviewee A answered that the media was a very important tool which they used to raise social awareness. she answered that

they greatly relied on the media to help them mobilise the people, educate them and it was also used to validate and affirm their stance, to oppose the military government brutality oppression, publicise their movement`s agenda and it was used to voice their concerns about particular issues to the government especially during President Kabba`s era.

Answering the same question interviewee B stated that in addition to television, they used pamphlets and various newspapers in the country for the dissemination of information. Interviewee D, stated that as a journalist they used the newspaper particularly the “Daily Mail and We Yone” to publicize women`s harassment in the hands of the military, pressured the NPRC government to observe the rule of law and was also used to galvanised support for their campaign. She asserted that” through the media, educated women were able to transform their fellow citizens from mere observers to supporters and advocates in the struggle for peace.”

My next question was; why was it necessary to mobilise and sensitize the women on the importance of peace? In response, interviewee A stated that they trained the people as to the importance of having peace and elections going on simultaneously because they wanted them to be in unity, as to their desire, they wanted the women of the country to speak with one voice. Whilst interviewee B, stated that it was necessary because of the mass illiteracy in the country. According to her, some women were looking at the issue of war tribally, whilst others were sympathising with the RUF because they were dissatisfied with the state of affairs in the country, prior to the war. In her opinion many people believed that, there would only be improvement in the country once people fight and kill themselves. Another reason she gave is that the war was taking a tribal dimension. She explained that some believed that the rebel leader was a `temne man` (a member of the temne tribe) and was not killing the people of the north but he rather took his war to the south which consisted of the mendes and this she said was in fact the main reason for the formation of the “Kamajors” whose intention she said was to revenge on the northerners.

Interviewee B on the other hand answered that some wanted the war to carry on because of the stealing and looting that was profitable to them. For all of these interviewees therefore sensitizing and educating the illiterates on the ills of the war was important, because

according to interviewee B: “some just take sides because of tribal reasons, they really do not understand what was best for themselves and the nation at large”.

On the Question of whether they think their mobilisation and sensitisation program was effective, Interviewee A, B, and C answered yes, because through such campaigns they were time and time again able to get thousands of women and girls to the streets, participating and supporting protests, in support of peace and that for this same reason the turnout in both consultative conferences and on the elections were great.

The effectiveness of the women`s sensitization campaign was also confirmed by Filomina Steady when she stated that thousands of women –students, workers peasants abandoned their roles as wives, daughters, mothers and took to the streets demanding an end to the hostilities. She further stated that Women who had suffered repression in the hands of these patriarchal structures in Sierra Leone established themselves as capable actors in what she said, was previously a man`s world.⁹⁰

My next question was what was their most memorable activity in the search for peace. Interviewee B answered that a memorable activity for her was when they wrote an open letter to Corporal Foday Sankoh pleading with him to stop killing innocent civilians and negotiate with the government. It was a memorable event for her because it was as if the letter instigated the RUF leader to commit more atrocities as that month was recorded to be the deadliest in the history of the war.

In response to the same question, interviewee A, who was forefront in the process of managing the crises, explained that a very memorable event for her took place when The Forum members together with members of the Inter-religious Council, marched to Sankoh`s house demanding that he stop violating the Lome Peace Accord to which he was a signatory and let peace reign. She explained that this violation was caused by Sankoh`s dissatisfaction over United Nations Assistance Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) control of the diamond rich areas of Kono and other eastern parts of the country. The women did not want Sankoh to use this as an excuse to restart the war. They therefore criticized Sankoh`s appointment as Vice president. She explained that instead of listening to their plea they were beaten up, and

⁹⁰ Steady 2006:42

disgraced by Foday Sankoh and his body guards. In return the women cursed him by stripping themselves naked, and bending their bared buttocks towards him. She narrated that this incident shocked people all over the country and in retaliation and defence of the women, disgruntled youths mobilised and, marched to Sankoh`s residence but his body guards opened fire on the demonstrators killing and injuring many. This incident she stated hardened the youths who stormed Sankoh`s residence and captured him in the evening of the same day. He was charged by the UN special court with the murder of unarmed civilians, but he died in Prison before the court proceedings even resumed.

This answer by my interviewee was affirmed by researchers Mazuna and Carlson who stated that this incidence was the zenith of the role of women and that it marked the turning point in the conflict. They Put it this way: “The women collectively hitched up their skirts, bent over, and bared themselves to Sankoh and his coterie...in Sierra Leone ,such an action by women is the worst curse that can be brought upon anyone”⁹¹

My next question was about the fate of the RUF after Sankoh`s death. To this the same respondent answered that the vacuum was filled by his deputy Issa Sesay who she said was more serious about making peace. She added that the International Community encouraged and help Issa Sesay turned the RUF into a political party. Operation Barrister was then implemented by the British among the remaining RUF fighters who were still reluctant to surrender, there was a ceasation of hostilities within the CDF and the war was declared over in January 2002.

All my interviewees agreed that it was the activities of these grass root organisations headed by educated women of the country that was used to champion the course for peace. Their assertions were also buttressed by Chris Coulter who stated that:

*the authoritarian nature of formal political authority in Sierra Leone
had generally a negative impact on women, as a result women
formed associations to advance their political participation and
strengthen their opposition to the war...conflict prevention and*

⁹¹ Mazuna et al 2004::22

*peace building activities and developmental goals were combined to improve their material goals, and welfare opportunities which was necessary in view of the rapid economic decline and underdevelopment exacerbated by the war.*⁹²

The same researcher further supported my respondents statements when he stated that the role of women`s associations specially the women`s Forum in the National Commission for Democracy, the national conferences for democracy and feminism in the 1996 elections were four major landmark events spearheaded by women that contributed to the return of constitutional rule and democracy.⁹³ He further supported their answers by stating that the women used the media to widely publicize their activities at home and abroad, peace matches were major events held in the major towns and cities all over the country in which women of all works of all life joined hands and sang songs in the spirit of solidarity, shouting “try peace to end this senseless war”.⁹⁴

Concluding the interview, interviewee D stated that “women`s intervention in the Sierra Leone political climate, changed the nature and discourse of the peace process and the politics of the country in general, period!”.

To further buttress my respondents assertions, Jusu Sheriff stated that The Forum worked on various issues not only related to peace and democracy, but that the women were also forefront in the Beijing Conference wherein they brought to the world the devastating effects of the war on the people of Sierra Leone, that they advocated forgiveness for perpetrators of heinous crimes and reconciliation with ex-combatants, they encouraged all parties to participate in the reconciliation processes to seek forgiveness through the TRC process. He stated that prioritising reintegration of child soldiers, impacting of based knowledge, lobbying for comprehensive free education and primary health care support for all, were also part of

⁹² Coulter 2009:153

⁹³ Ibid :42

⁹⁴ Ibid:43

women`s activities and that they advocated programmes for the co-existence of various groups of society.⁹⁵ He further summarised their impact as follows:

“peace groups hitherto viewed with suspicion as fifth columnists and rebel sympathisers acquire legitimacy through association with women who had mobilised a mass movement and enjoyed the support of the international community. As a result of the women`s associations, a negotiated peace settlement became a respectable option that offered both the government and the rebels the opportunity to climb down from entrenched positions without loss of face”.⁹⁶

4.4.2. WOMEN`S REGIONAL EFFORTS AT PEACE

In response to the question on what their international efforts in bringing peace were, all my interviewees responded that their involvement was more on the regional level.

Interviewee A, stated that the Mano River Region (MRR) that is the region consisting of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone was very volatile as a result of the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. She explained that for them to get a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone, it was necessary for them to involve other neighbouring countries in the MRR and that it was for this reason that they came together with other women in the MRU and formed The Mano River Peace Network (MARWOPNET) as a regional network comprising of women from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Its aim was to maintain both peace and stability in the region she describes it thus: “ the MARWOPNET was a kind of watch dog for all its member countries.

They report to one another any sign of instability in each other`s country that needs to be paid attention to.” Its significance was buttressed by Swell when she stated that MARWOPNET was built in 2000 out of a joint effort of women peace builders in Sierra Leone, Guinea and

⁹⁵ Sheriff 2002:2

⁹⁶ Ibid:3

Liberia and its “mobilization of women seem to strengthen as the women gained recognition and support for their work in 2003, with the award of a UN prize in the field of human rights which ... was a major step forward that proved the women were essential actors in the peace building process.”⁹⁷

Responding to the same Question Interviewee B and C responded that it was more than a regional effort, for when Valentine Strasser overthrew the democratically elected government of president Kabba, many female activists were self exiled in Guinea, Liberia and Gambia because of the brutal and repressive nature of the military regime. From these countries they were able to mobilise other women and took an active part in Peace and pro- democracy campaigns through meetings held in the Sierra Leone Embassies in these countries. Interviewee A further responded that from Guinea, they engaged in exposing the illegal activities like diamonds, timber, iron ore smuggling and arm deals of the military and RUF. As a result of this they were able to get the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions on Charles Taylor of Liberia in 2001 which curtailed the arm smuggling from Liberia to the RUF.

Interviewee B further commended individual efforts of Dr kadi Sesay and especially that of Mrs Zainab Bangura, presently Minister of Foreign Affairs, who she said bought a house in Conakry Guinea, and offered it to the self exiled Forum members. This house became a meeting place for exiled Forum women living in Guinea. The Forum meetings, mechanisms to sabotage the military regime in Freetown and the return of the ousted democratically elected government of president kabba were discussed here. Women collaborated here by giving information and sharing their experiences and it was from this place that their views were aired to the military junta in Sierra Leone and the international community with a unified voice for the restoration of the ousted president and ultimately peace.

Furthermore, all my respondents agreed that in the midst of this political crises a radio station which came to be known as Radio Democracy, was created as a result of women`s efforts and its main goal was exposing the evil deeds and crimes of the military regime and countering their propaganda. They stated that through this radio station, they were able to

⁹⁷ Swell 2004:1

send hostile messages to the military Junta in Freetown, organised demonstrations against the regime and call on the International Community to intervene in the crises. This according to them led to the UN and British intervention which eventually led to the defeat of the rebels and the achievement of peace.

Interviewee D concluded by saying that it was as a result of women`s efforts, both within and outside the country that a peace plan on Sierra Leone was established for the first time by member countries of ECOWAS and also as a result of women`s increased pressure for peace that the ECOMOG`s military intervened in the crises and reinstatement the ousted president kabba and the SLPP Party in 1999.

My next question was what did the women do after the reinstatement of president Kabba. Interviewee A answered that exiled women returned into Sierra Leone again, and concentrated on bringing peace. They held meetings with ECOWAS and the International Community to discuss strategies on how to get the RUF and the kabba government to the peace table. She further explained that it was the founding members of the Inter-religious council of Sierra Leone, the YWCA and the Council of Muslim Women who were mainly engaged in discussing the issues that were negotiated for a lasting peace. She explained that they wrote an open letter to the president demanding a fifty per cent female representation in every peace delegation, but to their disappointment the government ignored their request and sent a delegation that consisted of sixteen men for the first peace talks in Ivory coast with no female representation. She further explained that even though this was a big blow to the female activism, the women did not relent but continue to advocate for peace.

Their next effort at peace according to interviewee C, was by organising a press conference consisting of all female groups and the International Community present in Sierra Leone to discuss peace issues and that during this conference they called on the government and RUF to bring a speedy and lasting conclusion to the war.

The women`s regional activities was affirmed by Chris Coulter who noted that

“the majority of Sierra Leone refugees were in neighbouring Guinea, Liberia, and Gambia lobbying for peaceful solutions to the conflict and for a return to constitutional rule.”⁹⁸.

On the question of whether the women were the only contributors to the peace process. All the respondents agreed that there were other regional and international organizations that helped them immensely. Interviewee A stated that members of The Forum asked the International Community to support the objectives of the Women with the belief that this would help the RUF and the reluctant NPRC government listen to their call for a negotiated settlement. This she claim was one of their smartest moves in resolving the conflict, because as a result of their involvement, the military government for the first time made peace a priority, and the RUF agreed to a cease fire. This she said enabled them to restart their campaign for a return to democracy, held the Bintumani 1and 11 Conferences and the eventual conduction of the elections that returned president Kabba and multi party politics into the country again. According to her they wouldn't have succeeded without the support of the International Community.

In addition, they all agreed that the United Nations played a major role in returning the country to a democratic civilian rule and in the attainment of peace. Interviewee B explained that the NPRC government in collaboration with the paramount chiefs, asked the United Nations to help negotiate between the government and the RUF. As a result of which a UN special envoy was sent to Sierra Leone to facilitate peace negotiations, act as mediators and support a return to a democratic civilian rule. She asserted that the UN Secretary General paid a visit to Sierra Leone a few months later and mandated Valentine Strasser and his government to facilitate the return to democracy and to strictly adhere to the election dates set up on the National Consultative Conferences.

She added that the UN sent observers during the elections and they were the most important mediators in the peace conference between the government and the RUF and that the UN continued helping in sustaining a peaceful Sierra Leone even after the peace deal, by sending a neutral peace monitoring group that ensured the disarmament and demobilization of the

⁹⁸ Coulter 2009:116

warring factions and both armed peace keepers and unarmed observers were later sent in the country.

The UN contribution to the peace process was affirmed by Abu Bakarr kargbo who stated that the UN contributed to the attainment of peace through its various branches one of which was the UNDP which he said funded the two consultative conferences, provided logistics and financial support to the electoral Commission and also provided the same service to the government and the RUF, during all the peace negotiations.⁹⁹

Other organisations they agreed were very instrumental in the attainment of a peaceful Sierra Leone was the AU and ECOWAS. These regional organisations they said worked together with the UN and other international organisations like the Common Wealth Secretariat. They sent observers during the elections and they were represented in every stage of the peace negotiations. They facilitated dialogue between the NPRC government and the RUF and also between the kabba government and the RUF until peace was achieved. Interviewee D, credited the ECOWAS particularly as the first external organisation that attempted to restore peace in the country and rated the height of its success to the restoration of the ousted president Kabba through force of arms and military intervention.

From the foregoing, it is evident that within the existing norms and structures of power, discussed in the country's patriarchal system, women led organisations with help from sub regional organisations and the International Community, were able to take on non traditional roles and responsibilities, which enabled them to challenge the stereotype, and largely contributed in overcoming various obstacles to peace, democracy and national unity as stated in the research aim. It was these activities that transformed them from victims of patriarchy and war to over comers and champions of their situation.

In spite of these positive role, it is worthy to note that women's activities were not only limited to that of peacemakers. As stated in the introduction, they were also perpetrators and collaborators of the war and therefore integral in committing atrocities that would be discussed in the next section.

⁹⁹ Kargbo 2000:38

4.4.3. SIERRA LEONEAN WOMEN IN WAR

Many experts in conflict management and resolution like Bouta, et al, have the tendency to view women as peace makers whilst men are genetically predisposed to violence.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding this, women in Sierra Leone have defied such stereotypes and assumed active roles during their civil war. Estimates states that there were over 9000 girl soldiers involved in the war¹⁰¹. These girls stated that armed groups exploited them sexually and they were also used as domestic servants, porters, and laborers. Some were trained to use the gun in order to defend themselves if attacked, whilst those who became wives of commanders where actively involved in planning and instituting attacks¹⁰². Although this reveals that women were not innocent bystanders in the conflict but whereas most reports on child soldiers interviewed after demobilization like in Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Eritrea stated that they had voluntarily joined their fighting faction¹⁰³. In the case of sierra Leone, a unique picture is presented by virtue of all my interviewees response to the question -why did women or girls of the country got involved in the conflict. They unanimously agreed that they should not be blamed because the majority of them hadn't a choice, they were kidnapped or forced to join the fighting factions.

Interviewee B for example stated that according to those he got in touch with when working for UNICEF, they were under duress and drugged so it was easy for them to commit atrocities like the cutting of limbs and hands of villagers, which they later regretted. He stated that they were commanded to do so and disobedience would have cost them their own lives. Their assertions were confirmed by Mazurana and Carlson's study which noted that majority of girl

¹⁰⁰ Bouta et al 2005:11

¹⁰¹ Joint Consortium 2005:24. UNHCR/Save the Children 2002:14. The Experience of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone based on initial findings and recommendations from assessment missions. October 22 -30 November 2001. Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AIIDocsBYUNDP6010>:Accessed 11.11.2011

¹⁰² Sweetman 2000:22

¹⁰³ Mazurana et al 2004:13-14

soldiers across Sierra Leone were abducted, taken by force while working in fields, walking down roads or sitting in classrooms¹⁰⁴.

Interviewee B further stated that in some cases girls saw their parents being killed, raped and their houses set ablaze. Although this was earlier given by one of my respondents as a source of inspiration to end the war but this respondent argued that it was in fact a reason for some to join, because in such a situation a girl who is the only surviving member of a family with no hope or where to turn to, can join the rebels in order to survive.

In addition, even though my respondents generally believed abduction was the only source of recruitment, Save the Children 2005 confirms interviewee B's supposition that in addition to the predominantly force recruitment method, some girls did choose to join and that during the disarmament process such girls declare that they did so to defend their country, to avenge family members, to escape conflict or abuse at home or because their families were too poor to provide for them. They further noted that in conditions of uncertainty, such as existed in Sierra Leone and Liberia during their civil wars, alignment with an armed group often seemed the best chance for any access to resources.¹⁰⁵

From the interviewees and the report from NGOs, it is prudent to say that unlike The Black Widows of Chechnya and The Black Tigresses of Death of Sri Lanka, wherein women were forced to prove their worth in the battlefield the case of Sierra Leone women's involvement in violence stand in stark contrast, for they were overwhelmingly captives and defendants. I therefore view their agency as null and void, for not only were they helpless victims of overwhelming circumstances but it is clear that it was the extreme forms of human insecurity and vulnerability that made them perpetrators of the war.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Joint Consortium(2005):24UNHDP/Save the children (2002). The experience of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone based on initial findings and recommendations from assessment mission.27october -30 November 2001.Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb/AllDocs/6010>.Accessed 11.11.2011

Despite their double role, the next chapter will however investigate the milestone achieved by these women and the constraints they encountered.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE THE WOMEN'S EFFORTS IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE?

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The activities of the Sierra Leonean women in the fight for peace could largely be rated a success. This does not however mean that there were no constraints to their activities especially when they had to defy chronic cultural norms that limit women's progress. This chapter will therefore investigate the successes of the women and the constraints they faced in their struggle for peace. Like the previous chapter, it is based mainly on interviews with peace activists. It will answer the following research question- how successful do you think your efforts were in bringing peace and consolidating it and what were the problems encountered?

In response to the question on how successful they were, all the interviewees unanimously answered that they were very successful because their paramount goal was the attainment of peace and they are happy that they achieved it. According to them, the ability to go about one's daily businesses without fear of being killed or kidnapped is of immense importance. They also agreed that the prevalence of peace twelve years after the war is an attestation to their success. Interviewee A puts it this way: "all we ever wanted was peace, as long as there is peace in the country even if we do not have food to eat, we will still be satisfied. Because it is only peace that will enable us to go from one place to another to fend for our living."

She further stated that as an outcome of the war there is now a proliferation of NGOs that work with rehabilitation and reintegration. This she said has given women the opportunity to get involved in the country's reconstruction and rehabilitation process. She added that not only is the majority of these NGOs headed by women but that they have a number of economic, and social initiatives that target them. This she said has given women the opportunity to advocate for issues that directly affect them and promote social justice.

One of such projects she named that women were successfully involved in was the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (NCDDR). She explained that women in post conflict Sierra Leone were engaged in reintegrating child soldiers, youths and women ex-combatants. They provided crucial services for abandoned youths, ex-child combatants and children orphaned by the war. She stated that a lot of women

in various parts of the country like Bo, Kambia, Makeni, Kenema and Kailasa district took upon themselves the burden of caring for these children and taking them out of the streets after the demobilisation process. This move she said was one of their numerous contributions to the sustenance of peace.

Another success according to interviewee C, is that women were able to raise funds and built training and reintegration centres all over the country. Members of The Forum voluntarily runs these training centres and offer basic illiteracy programmes and training skills in tailoring, carpentry, tie dying, masonry with the aim of increasing literacy and education. This she said has helped ex- child soldiers and rape victims obtain an independent living. She also stated that this move was part of a greater mechanism to help sustain a peaceful Sierra Leone because if these children are not reintegrated, cared for by society there is the tendency for them to return to the bush.

The women were also successful in their post war efforts to address the problems of sexual violence effected by the war. The same respondent stated that SLAUW with support from INGOs were engaged in sensitization campaigns, educating the masses against the negative attitudes meted out to victims of sexual violence. They offered free medical services to such victims and over 5000 of them were assisted with micro credit finances and educational opportunities. She later stated that they however encountered financial problems due to the lack of sponsors and they therefore had to stop the programme, after operating for a period of about nine months. She elaborated that its initiative was however undertaken by Medicin Sans Frontieres (MSF) and The International Rescue Committee (IRC), and that both INGOs collaborated and provided counselling, free medical services, and legal assistances for victims of rape and other sexual violence.

Interviewee C stated that women`s engagement in peace activism was an eye opener for them. It enabled them realised that the high illiteracy among women was the main reason for their marginalization in society. Improving women`s literacy rate was therefore one of the main problems they successfully tackled in their post conflict activities. They did so by establishing Adult Literacy Schools especially in Freetown wherein SLAU employees and trainees serve as voluntary tutors. A department for peace studies was also established in Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone as a training Centre for women.

Interviewee B further answered that she was a skill training teacher and that skill training is one of the priorities of NGOs working in post war Sierra Leone. New skills like gara dyeing, Soap making are taught to young and illiterate girls who were unable to go to school and that this has enabled most girls support them selves. She further mentioned of the existence of many vocational schools which provide basic illiteracy programmes because: “many girls missed out of school during the war and are now reluctant to return to primary school as they are much older than the other classmates.”

She added that as poverty was identified as the main reason most parents don’t send their girls to school. FAWE therefore lobbied the government and INGOs to create programmes that would help eliminate this entrenched poverty. This she said led the government with funding from the African Development Bank to create the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP) which addresses the economic and social development of the country. This programme consists of a micro credit scheme that offers small term loans to poor Women individually or in groups and in most cases the traditional “Osusu” (which is a local alternative to micro credit loans) is still very common. The PRSP programmes she said, also train women petty traders in management skills that can be used to earn money in order to sustain themselves and their families. She concluded by saying that: ”this scheme elevated women as it has helped many develop an independent income and take on financial responsibilities within their families”.

In addition, Interviewee E stated that numerous cooperation’s like Action Aid has helped rural uneducated women who were formally, culturally relegated backward to evolve into viable business women. He stated that the granting of micro-credit finances was an important part of women`s group activities in post conflict Sierra Leone and that this has helped women improve and construct their own properties. According to her:

Such finances has enabled many families rebuild their houses and huts, cultivate plantations, established poultry farming’s, and handy crafts like gara cloths, country cloths, mats, black soaps, baskets from which these women in rural areas get small income at the markets and some

travel to Freetown and sell for higher prices. As a result Some women now have money and properties of their own for the first time.

Interview E in agreement with the previous respondents answered that micro- credit facilities were given to women who were traders and those in the rural areas that were largely farmers received farming skills and supplies of modern farming equipment, fertilizers and seeds, which enable them invest in small businesses, such strategies according to him helps integrate and rebuild the whole society towards peace.

when I asked interviewee A what working and having one's own economy meant for women she explained that it kept them busy, and enabled them contribute to their household income as a result of which they feel respected by their husbands. She explained that the woman's ability to contribute financially to the family brings stability to the marriage because in situations wherein the man is the sole provider, it has in most cases led to tensions and fightings between the husband and wife. So the money the woman contributes is a vital source of peace and harmony as it eases the husband's frustrations.

According to interviewee E, women's efforts were a success because policy makers in the country now speak regularly about the need to involve women in the daily affairs of the country. She also stated that the ministry of Gender, Social welfare and children's Affairs was established in the country for the first time in 1996, and that it ensures gender equity at all levels of government and institutions and that many women can now vote and be voted for. This I think makes them active competitors with their male counterparts for senior governmental positions and is a great step in improving their situations in post-war Sierra Leone.

In relation to the previous respondent an important success they all agreed upon is the slight increase in female political participation after the war. The 2002 elections had a woman presidential running mate for the first time and the women gained 18 parliamentary seats of which three became cabinet ministers and three serve as deputies and for the first time a women became deputy speaker of parliament. They generally agreed it was an improvement when compared to the 1996 elections which sent only eight women to parliament.

Interviewee B credited the increase in female political participation to the relentless lobbying of female groups which she said aims at increasing female participation in politics. For interviewee A, the credit goes to the British Council of Sierra Leone and UNIFEM which she said provides funding for training and coaching women to be politically active. Interviewee C, credited the Fifty - Fifty group which she said train women from all over the country on gender and political issues and lobby government and political parties to encourage women participate in politics.

Interviewee C, further asserted that various movements have included women`s rights and equality for men and women in their programmes for political change. She cited “Masianday” as a post war project whose primary agenda is to eliminate all sorts of discrimination and oppression against women, and tries to address the inequalities between men and women in both rural and urban areas. Her hopes for the future is that their support for the continuation of democracy and multi party politics in the country would eliminate patriarchal dominance and hence remove bias against women.

To Interviewee E, they were successful because women with the support of NGOs like Human Rights Watch and Women Human Rights Defenders were determined to empower the women of the country. He stated that he saw women carrying their babies on their backs, encouraging other women to vote and for the first time in his life he saw women talking and leading, whilst men listened and followed and that through their campaigns they were even able to get men into the streets in support of their stance. For him “this was really a kind of improvement and empowerment for women”

These findings on their successes were supported by Chris Coulter who stated that hundreds of NGO`s emerged to work with rehabilitation and reintegration. The majority of their projects targeted women with the intention of ameliorating their general situation, improve their economic and emotional status and their knowledge of health and productive issues.¹⁰⁶ He credited the government for the establishment of the Human Rights Commission Act, the TRC and special courts which he said addressed gross violations and impunity. He stated that with the support of some UN agencies, like UNIFEM, the TRC addressed crimes against

¹⁰⁶ Coulter 2009:186

women, whilst UNICEF supports education and skills training programmes for ex - female combatants.¹⁰⁷

Interviewee B added that, reforms were achieved mainly as a result of women`s groups and grass root organisations that were formed during the war, whilst interviewee D stated that reforms were achieved with the collaborative efforts of the UNDP in accordance with the objectives of CEDAW. She mentioned the Popular pre-war practise of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has become very uncommon as it is now practised only in some rural areas, and that the law has now given property rights to women, who can now own and inherit properties as their male counterparts. She made reference to the reformation in the feudal system of production, which she says now makes it possible for women to get access to loans. This she said has “led to an improvement in their standard of living because through the support and training they acquired, they are now able to develop and the NGO`s support has thus helped changed Women`s situation tremendously.” The respondent further answered that due to social disruption caused by the conflict, many women have taken on an unaccustomed role as head and provider of the family. This according to her has led women to gain authority, and confidence, both within their families and in their communities.

In addition, to this the same interviewee further responded that many women are now instrumental in pioneering women`s rights through speeches and writings that are inspirational to both men and women and stated that “I helped women and girls during trauma workshops in which they learn how to cope with abuses sustained from their husbands, fathers, brothers and other male family members.”

Interview C responded that as a distinguished journalist and speaker at radio FM 99.9, She now broadcast programmes that provides a forum for women to talk and debate gender and women`s issues so that the women become aware that they have rights and need to positively participate in the affairs of their country, by ensuring that their voices be heard. She told of women who she said:

were agents of their own healing processes, who testified in courts against

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

perpetuators of heinous crimes, have worked with health and news organizations to bring their issues to the public and have engaged the international community in a call for change and the promotion of gender equality.

she asserted that women have brought changes in Sierra Leone's traditional patriarchal society and boasted that "we were able to show that women cannot just do domestic work but that we can also effectively participate in all aspects of society ...we can even do better"

All the women I interviewed expressed great achievements for themselves and their communities. Interview A stated that with the support of an NGO she was able to create "Sorbeh" (meaning Seriousness) a grass root organisation that assisted widows. She further stated that she was responsible for rebuilding the roads and wells and renovate schools in Kambia town, something that was unheard of in pre-war Sierra Leone.

A great achievement for Interviewee B was her experiences in working with UNHCR, after the war, she got involved in helping women restart their lives by providing their basic needs which included cooking utensils like pots, spoons, plates and farming equipment like hoes, cutlasses, seeds etc. She stated that "in the past society has not viewed women as capable but recent years has proved that they can do better than some men". She concluded up by saying: "children raised in post conflict Sierra Leone are now more likely to carry attitudes of equality."

Interviewee C said she worked for The United States Agency For International Development (USAID). According to her this NGO implement programmes that enable women participate in the Construction and Reconstruction of the country thereby enabling them overcome some of their daily challenges. It sensitises women on health rights, through the television, posters and radio and that it also gives trauma counselling in Madingo, Limba, Temne and Mende local languages thereby helping people understand the political and social issues of the day. It educate young girls on early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and other health issues.

In support of the previous respondent, she stated that there is now an increased in perception of what women can do. She said that as a result of the crises and women's experiences, they

take on roles and responsibilities they may not have taken before. According to her, there is now an increase in courage which she said, enables women to take chances which they couldn't do earlier. Similarly, Interviewee C, stated that they have a better life now than before as they now have awareness of their situations, they received trainings on how to save money and resolve loans, this has made them more confident in taking responsibilities within their family's development.

In response to the question: what more should be done for the maintenance of peace? Interview A stated that women need to be educated and be employed so that they would be able to take responsibilities within their families in case their husband dies. She also stated that most women found freedom in the conflict

.Concluding on the same question, Interviewee B answered that: "I think many things have changed the benefits outweigh the challenges, ... there are now shelters for women who cut off from abusive relationships, men are increasingly respecting and giving value to women."

A notable achievement according to The International Alert is the new protection laws for women and sensitization campaigns which they claim enable women to fight for their rights. Abused women now sue their husbands and ask for divorce which result in the sharing of the family's properties. The women get custody of the children and forces the father to pay child support.¹⁰⁸ This NGO further confirmed my respondents answers by mentioning that as a post conflict reconstruction programme, the women of Sierra Leone are targeted through micro finance programmes lauded by development agencies as an effective anti poverty intervention. Agricultural tools were allocated to women in rural areas which consequently led to an improvement in their farming techniques. Women are now integral to the political, and economic life of the society and there is an increased number of women recruit in the police and army. It also confirms reformation in the estate law which now permits women to inherit property from deceased husbands or parents even in cases where no will was written and made mention of a registration of customary marriage and divorce act passed in 2007, which states the minimum age for marriage as 18 and dowries do not have to be returned following divorce. It further made mention of a new rape law which states that a convicted

¹⁰⁸ Barrister 2003:23..Addressing Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone. Available at www.InternationalAlert.org. Accessed 8.11.2011

rapist may be jailed for life and that there are now counselling and other support systems for rape victims which train them to become self-sufficient.¹⁰⁹ Unlike my female respondents who credited themselves entirely for these reforms, this NGO stated that these reforms were achieved with the collaborative efforts of the UNDP in accordance with the objectives of CEDAW.

Furthermore, a research conducted by the Physicians For Human Rights in Sierra Leone (PHRSL), documenting the effects of the war on internal displaced persons (IDPs), stated that an overwhelming majority of 90 percent believed that women and girls should have the same access to education as men and boys and should have the right to express themselves with legal protection¹¹⁰. This I think confirms my respondents answers about a dramatic attitudinal change from pre- war days.

Another success interviewee D mentioned came as a result of their peace and democracy activism campaign. She stated that during their campaign they advocated for respect and protection of women`s rights and law reform which became a success as a lot of women groups have emerged advocating for equality and women`s rights. There is now a family support unit in the police force that address issues of sexual and domestic violence and there is an increased in reporting`s and prosecution of sexual and domestic violence.

I then proceeded to ask who could be credited for the women`s successes and the prevalent peace and stability in the country. The respondents again commended the role of the UN and its agencies, the AU, ECOWAS and ECOMOG and internally they commended the efforts of SLANGO and professional organisations like Students Union, the labour congress, the Inter religious council, and the Council of chiefs.

However these successes had not emerged without problems and shortcomings which will be investigated in the next section.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Physicians For Human Rights 2002:3.War related Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone: A population Based Assessment. Available at WWW.bostonpfh.org. Accessed.11.9.2012

5.2. PROBLEMS THEY FACED IN BRINGING ABOUT PEACE AND IN SUSTAINING IT.

This part of the thesis will investigate the multitude of challenges women faced in their fight for peace and in sustaining it.

In response to the question as to what their obstacles were to the attainment and sustenance of peace, Interviewee A responded that “some traditions hardly die” According to her they faced and still face a lot of resistance from men in both rural and urban areas. She explained that in some communities they are having problems with uneducated males, who refuse to recognise women`s participation in decision making and still believe they should be steps behind. This she said makes it difficult for women to run for office along side men who are still hostile to women`s empowerment and equality.

Interviewee B also stated that some men or local leaders resist changes, by resorting to old ideas and traditional demands such as advising women to stay in abusive relationships for “their children`s sake” instead of advising them to seek professional help. She further stated that it was difficult for them in the early stages of their peace activism, because most men reacted with surprise because they believed women were fragile and unsuited for the job, they were dismissed as unimportant and were ignored by many even when they were speaking on matters of national importance. They were instead urged to return to “the kitchen” for they were seen as breaking the traditional patriarchal structure.

In line with the above, Interviewee C added that in many instances they were accused of being too outspoken and their call for fifty per cent female representation in the Lome Peace Accord was referred to as “asking for too much”. She referred to instances in which their male opponents accused them as being brain washed by the western ideals of female empowerment, thus traitors of their own cultures and traditions. She made references to instances wherein a member of the SLAUW was locked out of her house by her husband because he was not in support of her attending The Forum meetings, which he believes instil some negative attitudes of equality into her, instead of teaching her to be submissive to him. In another instance she explained that another woman was beaten by the husband because she was becoming too challenging and powerful in his eyes which the husband believes is linked to her association with the women organisations.

In addition, interviewees A, B and C, expressed disappointment over the fact that despite their contributions to the attainment of peace, the women of the country were persistently marginalised in all the previous peace accords, in the formal peace process and even in the post-conflict politics. They all made reference to the Abidjan peace conference and stated that although the women`s voices were heard and elections were held in 1996 which brought the SLPP to power and return multi-party politics to the country but, there was only two female representation during the signing of the Peace Accord (one from both sides of the conflict). Their demand for a fifty per cent female participation was therefore not heeded. Their hope for a greater female participation was crushed as out of eighty Parliamentary seats, only five was granted to women and they received only four seats out of forty five cabinet and deputy ministerial seats.

What angered them most was the fact that their efforts as peace activists was further, crushed at the Lome Peace Agreement in which there was no female representation from Sierra Leone. To them therefore the accord did not respect or give due recognition to women`s participation as peace activists, made very little recognition of their role in bringing about peace in the country, but instead sees them as victims who should be protected. Their disappointment is confirmed by this phrase in the TRC report which states that:

“Given that women have been particularly victimised during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes, to enable them play a special role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of sierra Leone”¹¹¹

In addition to my interviewees responses, an area that still needs progress is the entrenched violence against women and children which is still in existence twelve years after the war. Even the International Alert claim that achieving justice for sexual crimes remain elusive as it is hard for rapists to be identified and tried and many women are afraid to prosecute rapists

¹¹¹ TRC Report 2005:4 Available at <http://www.trcsierraleone.org>. Accessed 1.12.2012

for the social stigma it brings them.¹¹² This point was also echoed in the words Caroline Sweetman who stated that in Sierra Leone it is easier for a boy who had amputated arms and limbs of villagers to be accepted back into his village than for a girl who has been raped¹¹³. It is the degradation, isolation, scorn and shame that rape brings to the Sierra Leonean women that forces most of them to keep the issue a secret.

The International Alert also noted that although the ministry responsible for gender affairs was established, it is one of the weakest and least funded in the government and this has constrained the recommendations of the TRC in relation to Women`s rights. In addition, they noted that Polygamy and compulsory marriage which degrades women still exists among many tribes and although Sierra Leone is a signatory to CEDAW the practise of FGM still exists especially in the rural areas.¹¹⁴

In addition, although my respondents seemed very positive about the activities of vocational schools, Chris Coutler stated that they are too few and their courses very brief. As a result of this many women only learnt to write their names. He also stated that adult education centres are absent in the bigger towns like kabala, Makeni, Bo and argues that there is still a general limitation of the basic literacy training which makes it difficult to rehabilitate girls and get them the necessary help they needed.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, even though the UN and associated organisations emphasised the importance of educating girls in post war Sierra Leone, my interviewees stated that most girls are only interested in skills training than in formal education. This may have to do with the country`s culture, because in Sierra Leone it is quite uncommon for young girls to continue school after having children, they become more interested in fending for their kids and therefore prefer the fastest method of generating income. It may also has to do with the laughter, and scorn

¹¹² Barrister 2003:34.Addressing Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone. Available at www.international-alert.org. Accessed 8.10.2011

¹¹³ Sweetman:22

¹¹⁴ Barrister 2003:39.Addressing Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone. Available at www.international-alert.org. Accessed 8.10.12

¹¹⁵ Coutler 2009:157

mothers who had to return to school faced. For they are seen as a disgrace to their families as mentioned earlier in the patriarchal system in Sierra Leone.

Another big problem that they all revealed is that the DDR programme excluded women from its package that was intended for ex-combatants. They stated that where as a lot of money was given to ex-male combatants, such services were not provided for females. They made reference to situations wherein guns were withdrawn from these former male-combatants in exchange for money, but most women did not benefit from this as most of them were not in possession of guns but were rather used for other services such domestic servants, sex slaves, porters and looters. So these women were marginalised in a lot of ways and the extent of their sufferings were not recognised.

Rehabilitating some female abductees who were in the bush with the rebels was another big challenge they encountered. They claim some girls are ashamed of their past and do not want to expose themselves in public, so they refuse to take advantage of the post conflict opportunities designed to help them. This may have to do with the wider problem of hostility and marginalisation that ex-female combatants were meted with by both their families and their communities at large. Interviewee C also added that a lot of them came back with children from their rape and abduction experiences with rebels in the bush, they are insecure as they cannot support themselves or their children through work or other activities. In such situations she explained that it is the women who had the responsibilities of intervening and educating families and their communities to accept and encourage these girls in order to prevent them from returning to the bush. She mentioned instances in which they had to go in search of these girls, encourage them not to be hard on themselves and educate them, on the importance of mixing with the wider community rather than living in isolation.

Although training skills projects were an opportunity for many ex-female combatants and young girls to improve their situations and standards of living, according to Chris Coulter, women were offered training activities for a limited set of skills and as such it was only something of a quick impact efforts to solve a problem he thinks is much more complex. He stated that women were only offered skills in gara dyeing, soap making, hairdressing, weaving, tailoring, different types of food processing and on how to improve their agricultural skills. Although my interviewees, claim these skills were appropriate for women as it enabled

them become self reliant and independent, Chris Coulter stated that these skills could actually offer little economic gains if practised and that the Sierra Leone local economy can not absorb the enormous increase in similar skills trained programmes. To him such skills and products exceeded the demands. He stated for example that “from the beginning it was clear that the country`s ability to support newly minted welders, mechanics and gara dyers are no where near the 77000 who passed through the programme”.¹¹⁶ He therefore argue that only a few who graduated from these training programmes could really make a living from them.

Like my interviewees, he also stated that many NGOs had difficulties in finding funds for more extensive projects and for this reason, they had to shorten the length of their programmes. This he said caused resentments and ill feelings among many women.¹¹⁷ For those who were fortunate to graduate from these centres he stated that most of them could not afford to invest and buy the materials needed to perform the work and had to sell the tools they were given in order to survive. He stated thus: “in some tailoring projects for example, the women could be given a sewing machine on graduation but since they could not afford to buy materials to start their businesses, many end up hawking the machines for a few thousand Leones just to get by.”¹¹⁸ He added that many who finished their training programmes

thinks it was only a waste of time and ended up doing petty trade, collect and sell fire woods etc. For these reasons he argues that for most girls, success is only a dream as they have only a few opportunities to realise it. To buttress his point is also reasonable to argue that even if these trainings provide employment for women but with limited skills and no formal education, it is impossible for these girls to occupy any mid management positions or even close the gender gap.

In addition, interviewee D identified prostitution as a common survival strategy in post war Sierra Leone. He explained that in the absence of fighting peace also poses problems for women and young girls who are sexually violated by peace keeping forces. According to him there are lots of single mothers with children from UN peace Keeping Forces and these girls

¹¹⁶ Coutler 2009:190

¹¹⁷ Ibid 189

¹¹⁸ Ibid 191

are mocked by their communities. He explained that Lumbly beach is no longer the recreational sight, it used to be but rather the base for prostitutes moving aimlessly around in search of men and money. He mentioned HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases which he said is rampant as a consequence of prostitution and that this has become a problem for particularly those who had lost their parents during the war. He stated that even in cases wherein the parents or guardian exists, they are usually reluctant to take care of an HIV infected child and in such cases the burden is upon female organisations members who device mechanisms of caring for them. Some with the support of NGOs were able to take into their homes and cared for abandoned youths and former child combatants as they work to normalise and bring stability to their communities.

The lack of proper health care for women as in the pre-war days, is one of the problems raised by interviewee B. she said inadequacy and high cost of health facilities, makes it difficult or even impossible for women to meet their health care needs. She stated that the maternal mortality rate is still high and blame it to malnutrition and complications associated with early pregnancies.

The negative impact of sexual violations on girls was another problem she cited in post war Sierra Leone. She asserted that many rape victims are ashamed to talk about their experiences or even accept help. For this reason many women suffer in silence as they carry on the shame and stigma of their rape and abduction experiences. Whilst interviewee D, elaborating on this issue, stated that even those who were brave enough to come out of their shells and seek help, still claim they have not received any or benefited from the NGO programmes and that during the TRC hearings and up to date most victims of rape complain they still have not receive any medical help and continue to experience sexual related health problems encountered during their period of abduction.

Furthermore, although my interviewees are very positive about the micro credit schemes, which they claim serves as the main source of income for many women headed house holds and has helped many improve their lives and emerged out of poverty, Regn and Sirleaf stated that these small loans do not lead women into greater economic growth, but rather limits them into small purchases which can only generate immediate income. such loans do not help women become entrepreneurs but it rather strengthen the idea that women are supplementary

wage earners, and marginalises them out of the larger financial markets into the domestic sector.¹¹⁹ She argues therefore that women needs larger loans to put them into the broader economy.

Interviewee B stated that men still dominate politics, and that there are still cultural practises in some areas especially in the northern province of the country particularly among the Limbas and Temnes tribes that do not allow women become paramount chiefs. This is major hinderance to women`s growth and participation in politics.

My last question was to the possibility of war erupting again and the future of the country.

To this they sadly agreed that poverty is still a major problem and that poverty and violence are inseparable They generally agreed that war is not something they pray for nor is it something they think any Sierra Leonean would choose as an alternative anymore.

As to the future of women`s advancement interviewee A explained that it is difficult to assess because many women still depend on men for survival and that such women may not get out an abusive relationship due to fear of an uncertain future. She also stated that despite the reformation in marital laws, some girls still marry at a younger age out of necessity and in such a situation men abuse women because they know they are their source of livelihood.

She further stated that there is some kind of inferiority complex on the side of some men as educated women especially those who have attained high positions of leadership are sometimes abused and harassed by their husbands who feel threatened by the wife`s success.

This was however refuted by interviewee E who argues that although he cannot deny this completely but that there has been some attitudinal changes on the side of men whom he said support their wife attending meetings, join associations and becoming leaders and that it should also be noted that some women also misunderstand the feminist message of women empowerment, by interpreting it as simply overturning the status quo and having women control men. This he argues creates unhealthy competition within families.

¹¹⁹ Regn et al:132

Interviewee D further argued that women still lack the required training and expertise to favourably compete with their male counterparts and that many women in rural areas are unfamiliar with the new laws and lack the knowledge to utilise them to their advantage. Such women she added complain about the changing roles of women claiming that it erodes the culture of the country. Ignorance and poverty are therefore setbacks to women`s advancement as some ignore the advancement for fear of losing their male relations who are their source of survival.

Although there are differences in perception of things between my male and female interviewees, this chapter has demonstrated that despite the multitude of challenges faced by women especially from contending with the patriarchal structure, the women of Sierra Leone have been very successful actors not only in bringing peace and sustaining it but also as post conflict reconstruction actors which has made them integral to the political, and social arenas of the country as stated in the introduction.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

An analysis of the interviews reveals that women played multiple roles in the conflict both as victims wherein they were subjected to abuses and as perpetrators of violence wherein they aided in killings and other sorts of atrocities. Their role in managing the crises was successful with the formation of grass root organisations through which they mobilised the society in support of democracy, the cessation of hostilities, and peace. In this regard the role of prominent female activists like Zainab Bangura, Dr Kadi Sesay and Patricia Kabba to name a few, is worth noting. Their activities such as the national demonstration was very admirable not only because it resulted in the reluctant NPRC government making peace a priority, but also because it led to the first ceasefire agreement that was ever reached during the course of the war.

These single individuals through their organisations proved to be an effective force that exerted pressure on the reluctant warring parties especially the RUF. They were a force to reckon with, as they defied the Military junta that wanted to derail the peace process. Even after the collapse of the peace talks, the interviews reveals that these woman remain steadfast in their course to encourage a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Their efforts thus attracted publicity both internally and internationally as it brought to the world's attention, the seriousness of the Sierra Leone situation. It was their activities that led to the Bintumani one and two Conferences, which further led to the demise of the military government and ultimately ushered in a democratic civilian rule and the signing of the Lome Peace treaty. These incidents indicates that the Sierra Leone women were primary actors in resolving the country's civil war. In fact, when one considers the immense sacrifice these women made in bringing about a peaceful negotiation, one can only contend that those who voluntarily joined the fighting factions did so only as a survival tactics. For despite the setbacks and oppression they encountered, especially with the marginalisation of ex-female combatant after the peace process, these same women did not relent but continue to play significant roles in peace building and reconstruction.

Just as President Kabba, my male respondents like many other Sierra Leoneans have ultimately acknowledged that women played a significant role in the peace process. This is a

great achievement when one considers the fact that these women had occupied relatively low statuses in the Sierra Leone society. While I am grateful for this acknowledgement, I remain convinced that had it not been for the immense and relentless efforts of women as a pressure group, the country would probably still be at war.

In addition, the interviews exposed weaknesses in the DDR programme and the TRC, as they both failed to acknowledge women and girls' experiences. As a result of this, ex-female combatants benefited very little from the DDR package meant for combatants. This means that matters related to crimes against women are still being ignored in the country. It is also in this area that one would further commend and appreciate women's individual and collective assistance in the reintegration of former combatants especially in the area of taking in, these ex-female combatants who did not benefit much from the DDR programme like their male counterparts. Women's efforts were therefore an effective means of preventing the conflict from relapsing, because if these ex-child and female combatants were completely abandoned, they would have returned to the bush as a last resort which would have been detrimental to the existing fragile peace.

Although the impact of the war on women is devastatingly negative, I can proudly contend that many women were able to take advantage of the opportunities they had and provide a better future for themselves and their families. The interviews reveal that women's social and economic responsibilities increased as a result of the war, as they had to take over as family heads. They therefore learnt new income generating skills which made them better prepared to support themselves and their families. In as much as these skills enabled them to perform their new roles as providers, it also helped them achieve greater financial independence which enabled them to support themselves without having to rely on men. This has increased their worth and makes them feel valuable.

The research further reveals that women who were discriminated against in Sierra Leone's highly patriarchal society, were able to empower themselves and now participate in all arenas of society. The inclusion of women in the reconstruction of the country and the attempt to eliminate some bias societal norms and traditions, is not only essential to the establishment of peace but is a very positive step towards reintegrating the country. It complements the principles of CEDAW and UN article 1325, which advocates for the

inclusion of women in peace building and reconstruction processes, and the elimination of all forms of discriminatory practises against women. This means that their crucial role through out the mediation has changed traditional way of thinking about gender role in the society and is an indication that excluding women would have been a serious violation of their rights which would have further weakened the fragile peace in the country. As a result of this success, one can also hope that the massive employment of women in the police forces of the country as revealed in the research may improve the understanding and response of the law enforcement agencies as to the issues of women and may enable society acknowledge their human and legal rights.

Furthermore, the research revealed that despite the massive strides of women, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children`s Affairs which has the responsibility of improving women`s statuses in the country, is in fact the least funded within the government. Whilst this indicates that the government is still not committed to women`s advancement, it also makes it difficult for this ministry to achieve its goals and purposes. It is therefore not surprising that the research still reveals a large gender gap between men and women of Sierra Leone, despite the reported progress. In this regard combating the high rate of illiteracy which has been sited as the main reason for women`s marginalisation in the society, would therefore necessitate a full financial commitment of the government and this remain an urgent need for woman`s reintegration and advancement.

Apart from mass illiteracy, economic insecurity also emerged as a major hindrance to women`s political participation. This is so because even in situations wherein a woman may have the necessary education but she still needs financial support to engage in election campaigns and considering the massive corruption in Sierra Leone, a woman should at least be economically strong for people to trust her political ambitions. In addition to this, the attitude of the Sierra Leonean woman reveals itself as the greatest obstacle to female political participation. Because of the highly patriarchal nature of the country, the women have been socialised to believe that politics is for men. This attitude does not only prevent women from participating in politics but it also makes them hostile to, and prevent them from supporting and voting for their fellow women desiring political office. But the research of the Physicians for human rights as stated earlier reveals a drastic attitudinal change in this

area after the war, this gives me hope because this is exactly what is needed if the goal of the Sierra Leone women's political empowerment is to be enhanced.

The research has further demonstrated that many women suffer a double victimization. This means that even though they were abducted and forced to join the armed forces, society finds it difficult to forgive them as they are now victimized for their role in the conflict. Their refusal to come out and seek help or talk about their experiences during their period of abduction, implies that they prefer suffering in silence to facing the social stigma and isolation they risk in their communities. It is therefore salient for the society to encourage and help them reintegrate, for only then can one be sure of a lasting peace in the country.

In addition, the interviews further brought to light the emergence of increased domestic violence in the country as husbands feel threatened by the financial and social empowerment of their wives. This is because patriarchy subordinates women and it is not uncommon for a man to use aggressive behaviour as a means of regaining control over the women who intimidates him. The men of this country are used to women being content whilst they provide and lead. Attempts to reverse this pattern is therefore met with aggression as the Sierra Leonean man feels his ego is at stake. In this regard, they should be thought to see women as complimentary to them and not a competition.

It also reveals that women continue to suffer conflict related health issues, injuries and the scars of sexual abuse. While this is an indication that their sufferings did not stop with the end of the war, it also reveals that it is the women who suffer harmful long term effects of the Sierra Leone war which makes them the ultimate victims.

The RUF ultimately refused to stop fighting even after the peace deal was signed. This does not only reveal Sankoh's uncommitment and the fragility of the peace agreement but it further enables one appreciate the crucial efforts of women in encouraging the reintegration of ex-child soldiers in order to prevent a relapse.

There is no question that the women of Sierra Leone have been very pivotal in bringing the war to an end. The efforts of the dedicated women and their organisations did make a difference as they offered their lives to make peace and democracy a priority amidst the brutal military repression. Therefore being subjected to the ordeals women suffered in the

country, it is my opinion that the extreme suffering and abuse is underrated by the government, the TRC and the DDR. It appears as if there was no understanding of the large extent of female suffering as no adequate provision was made in support of women and their groups. As a result of this many local NGOs were unable to give the necessary help to ex-female combatants and many had to close down due to the lack of funding.

I therefore contend that this negligence could make it difficult for these ex-female combatants to make vital contributions to the healing process. To buttress my statement, this research has shown that there are still elements among female ex-combatants who are still disgruntled about the neglect they suffered, as no adequate measures were made to help them combat the sicknesses they incurred during their stay in the bush. In the same token, the rampant prostitution as revealed by my respondents could partly be a consequence of this problem, because in a situation of neglect and hardship, it is not uncommon for ex-female combatants with no other means to support themselves and the children, to use prostitution as a last resort. Such a problem would have been avoided if many women were involved in designing and implementing of the DDR programme or if those involved had incorporated the concerns of ex-female combatants.

Furthermore, it is glaringly clear that even though the government has made some provision of equality of rights between men and women but in reality these provisions are not implemented. This may have to do with the cultural aspect of the country which is always an issue when it comes to women's rights. One can therefore say that culture is hereby used as a scapegoat to discriminate and devalue the women of this country. But as this principle of respect for human rights is not a matter of culture but a universal value that should be upheld, I therefore propose the need to promote community awareness of the need to protect the rights of women of the country. In order to achieve this, there is the need to reflect on the values and beliefs in the Sierra Leone communities. Those cultural practises that discriminates and violate the rights and dignity of women, like FGM, wife inheritance, son preference, property rights, early marriages etc, should be totally abolished not only in theory but also in practice, because even though there has been some reforms but the research has further demonstrated that there is still a lot to be done. In addition to this, outdated legislation like the article in the country's 1973 constitution which unlike men, deprives women of their

rights to confer citizenship on their foreign husbands, should be abolished as it contravenes their human rights and undermines their equal status to men.

Another problem that came out glaringly is that in spite of the tremendous efforts of female activists to improve the situation of women in the country, traditional women are still reluctant to see themselves as equal to men. While this may be attributed to the problem of mass illiteracy among the female population, one should also acknowledge that a large percentage of these women do not even know their rights as revealed in the research. This may also be attributed to the fact that these customs are deeply rooted in patriarchal systems that control the Sierra Leone Society and were created to subjugate women to the wills of men. In addition to abolishing these cultures, I further propose that women's rights and the feminist message of female empowerment be conveyed to women in their local languages because most of these women are illiterates and therefore do not understand creole which is the general and widely spoken language of the country. My point here is that it is only when women understand their rights and its importance that they would be able to claim them.

These interviews has therefore revealed that the women of sierra Leone were not only victims but used their strong will to overcome all odds which makes them powerful actors in returning peace and democracy into the country. Their achievements are remarkable and not only should they get the recognition, acknowledgement and support they deserve but the government should help them sustain their victories.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 FINAL CONCLUSION

As the case study has illustrated, this thesis has used the causes of civil wars in post colonial Sub- Sahara Africa as the background for understanding the civil war in Sierra Leone and the role played by women of this country in the search for peace. While a multiplicity of factors are responsible for these conflicts, it highlighted centralisation of power, the lack of democracy and the rule of law, absolute corruption enmeshed in the continent after the attainment of independence, as some the causes of conflict in post colonial sub –sahara Africa, Sierra Leone in particular. These factors has further enable me understand the root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone, in addition to which factors like mass illiteracy, bad governance, the politics of exclusion of the youths and elites, Siaka Stevens conversion of the state into a one party system of government, authoritarian rule, entrenched poverty, mass unemployment were identified as some of the causes that ignited the sierra Leone civil war, and was further worsened by the desire for the control of natural resources.

By researching these causes, this thesis has partly dismissed Thomas Weiss` argument that civil wars in Africa are only struggles for the control of natural resources. For even though one could subscribe to the view that diamonds and other natural resources are and continue to contribute to the outbreak of conflicts in Africa and particularly contributed in aggravating the war in Sierra Leone, but it would be scholarly foolhardy for one to simplify the Country`s war based on greed. This is because the struggle for natural resources is only a short term stimulus for war and a strategy for financing and managing it, in order to attain political power which is the ultimate goal. The argument here is that economic motivations is not an end in itself, but a means to en end, the end being the achievement of political power. This explain the self –aggrandized motives of African leaders like Jonas Savimbi of Angola, and the convicted Charles Taylor of Liberia, whose brutal war led him to become president of Liberia and that of the mass murderer Corporal Foday Sankoh who despite the millions of dollars he accumulated by criminally exploiting the diamond resources, still tried to overthrow president kabba in June 2000 through force of arms.

In the case of Sierra Leone, it is important to note that though diamonds were discovered as early as 1932, the country only degenerated into a brutal civil war in the 1990s. This therefore

makes it wrong to simplify the country's war as a struggle for the control of diamond resources. One Sierra Leonean Journalist for example, explains it this way" Ours is not just a history of few crack –heads taking guns ... shooting and amputating... ours embodies a history of long years of injustice in a highly impoverished society...still groping in the dark."¹²⁰ It is therefore prudent to say that the Sierra Leone civil war is the result of long standing and deep seated grievances listed above. The fact that peace reigned for over sixty years since diamonds were first discovered in the country, makes it wrong to simplify the country's war as a struggle for the control of natural resources and partly renders Weiss' theory a fallacy.

Nevertheless, one can contend that even though Weiss' theory and single interpretation does not provide a sufficient interpretation as to the causes of the war in Sierra Leone, neither did he specifically address the role of women in the conflict and therefore did not examine the impact of the war on women generally, yet his theory laid the foundations upon which one could better understand the main causes of the war itself. Indeed, it is in understanding the main causes of the war itself, that one has further grapple the sordid fact that all parties in the conflict used rape as an effective weapon against women.

It is against this complexity that the second part of the thesis examined the role played by the women of Sierra Leone in the national and international efforts in the search for peace as proposed in my introduction. It achieved this by highlighting Cheldelin and Eliatamby's gender theories on women in conflict, which traditionally view women as victims and proceeded to discuss the patriarchal structure of the country through which it reveals how the women of the country were victims of societal oppression as a result of the economic, social, political and cultural framework of the society, that naturally relegated women backwards. Through interviews, it investigated the contributions of women to the achievement of peace and democracy. It further highlighted the milestone they achieved and the difficulties they encountered as peace activists.

Essentially, this victimisation theory has enabled me understand the inconsistencies of the Sierra Leonean women's behaviour, first as victims who were captured by rebels and forced

¹²⁰ Fifthen et al 2005:121

to defend themselves and secondly as victims who were further forced to take non- traditional roles and responsibilities in ending the same war they helped perpetuate. Although many women fought along side men during the war, they also toiled tirelessly to mediate between the government and the armed groups and were successful in bringing peace and construct a better future in the aftermath of the war. It is therefore important to note that though they were involved in the war but it was through peaceful means that they were able to prove their worth, and achieve some relative degrees of emancipation and semblance of equality.

Furthermore, through my conversation with these woman, I learnt that the hardest obstacle they faced was/is the problem of overcoming their cultural barriers. The persistent exclusion of women from all the peace making processes, the fact that despite their activism and clear potential value in the peace process they were not consulted, the absence of women at the negotiation table during the Lome Peace Accord, (the only woman present was representing the regional body OAU), strengthened by the fact that the accord made very little reference to women who it refers to as “victims” that should be protected, is an indication that negative traditional attitudes towards women still pervade the culture of the country.

In addition to this, the limitations of women`s roles to that of merely gathering support for male politicians and collecting of party funds, explains why, the women of Sierra Leone still lags farther behind in terms of gender equality as stated in the introduction. While women make up only 30 per cent of Sierra Leone`s legislature, Rwanda and Liberia are success stories of where women have been included in negotiation for peace and post conflict governance. Liberia boasts of Africa`s first female president while Rwanda parliament is made up of over 51 per cent women, which makes them the largest female parliamentary representation in the world.¹²¹ Perhaps it was in this regard that the government and international supporters of Sierra Leone`s post conflict stabilization process, emphasized the need for women`s involvement in the reconstruction process as a development strategy which has involved many women today in the country`s on going reconstruction process.

By talking to these women activists and organizers, I also became aware of their great efforts to reconstruct their homes and societies after the war. I realised that they took advantage of

¹²¹ Sweetman 2000:71

new opportunities, and the support from NGOs and INGOs had a strong influence on their activities and played an important role in making women aware of their potential for development. It is this approach that has helped empowered women who now increasingly view themselves as active participants in the affairs of the country and continue to be active agents of political change. Therefore although the conflict in Sierra Leone was not used to enhance women's liberation or gender equality. It is safe to say that in war ridden Sierra Leone, there is now a kind of flexibility that accept women's engagements in arenas traditionally reserved for men. The new roles, responsibilities and experiences of women during the war as both victims and agents of peace has led to a change in the status quo.

Therefore despite my interviewees dissatisfaction with the low female representation and the fact that they were not signatories to the Lome Peace Agreement, Women's collective role was pivotal and historic in the return of Sierra Leone to democracy and peace. It provided an opportunity for women to be heard and to be active participants in the politics and social arenas of the country. Their present 30 per cent composition in the legislature following the 2007 general elections, indicates they are slowly progressing towards better parliamentary and cabinet representation, which is a significant achievement compared to their positions in pre-war era and it gives one hope that they will achieve more with time.

It is therefore prudent to say that even though their contributions has been undervalued and taken for granted, as it did not significantly change the reality of politics as a male preserve neither did it give women significant gains in terms of being elected and appointed to political office, the story of the Sierra Leone women in war however solidifies an alternative narrative to the notion that women in conflict are but victims. For although the research has revealed that women and children were adversely affected during the war, this thesis discounts the notion that women's roles are limited to that of victims, it rather supports the theory that they are best suited for peacekeeping. The efforts of the Sierra Leonean women has thus reposition the traditional gender narrative from solely victims of tragedy to women as over comers, champions and leaders of positive societal change as stated in my introduction.

The question now is how can women be used to mitigate the causes of conflicts in Africa

/Sierra Leone? To this one can contend that, as women are culturally stereotyped to be

natural peace makers symbolised by excellence qualities such as sweet moral, sacred, good, gentle, non violent, and tolerant to difference. Even though some women today have lost that myth by virtue of their involvement in conflicts, they still possess these positive values to mitigate conflicts based on an ethic of care embedded in their motherhood nature. Thus in addition to the ubuntu (oneness) system of resolving conflicts, an African feminist mode of peace keeping should be developed wherein the feminist ethic of care that was used by women to wage peace and maintain social harmony in pre-colonial era could still be effective in resolving contemporary conflicts in Africa.

7.2 RECOMMENDATION

As the problem of civil wars poses a major obstacle to the overall development of the African continent, the need for a conflict free Africa could not be underestimated. This could be achieved by a peaceful resolution of the on going conflicts and the application of true democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. With regards Sierra Leone in particular, the elimination of corruption, greed, poverty, tribalism, nepotism and favouritism, inclusion of women, youths and the educated elites in politics and the availability of equal opportunities for all, can go a long way in mitigating the causes of conflicts in the country.

In addition, much work needs to be done to strengthen the women of this country to continue making meaningful changes towards the status quo because the peace they achieved is deep rooted in social justice that still inhibits women`s development potential.

In this regard, women should be given an equal participation with their male counterparts in parliament and in other areas of decision making processes for without this they would never be able to address the issues that affect them and they would continue to be ignored and marginalised. They therefore need the support of the government and the media as previously mentioned, could continue to be an effective network in highlighting good practises in gender equality.

In addition, the women of Sierra Leone, should continue to work both individually and as an effective force to sustain the peace they had fought for and in the rebuilding of their communities because this research has shown that the consequence of the Sierra Leone war

weighs heavily on women and their children. Most importantly, men should be thought the importance of incorporating women as counterparts rather than feel confronted with disempowerment. In this regard it is important that both boys and girls be given equal access to education, which is a critical intervention in mitigating the causes of violence as is often said that “Education broadens the mind and liberates society from the clutches of unfair and inhumane cultural traditions”¹²². Therefore one could only hope that long term benefits of universal education can help prevent the outbreak of conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa and help address the gap of uneven development in Sierra Leone.

¹²² Bouta et al 2005:9

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9.1 APPENDIX

Semi-structured, individual telephone interviews, carried out in the period of December 22nd 2011 to May 18th 2012.

Individuals` questions:

- a. what motivated you to fight for peace?
- b. How did women get involved in the war ?
- c. what were their /your activities as peace activists?
- d. What took place during the first consultative conference?
- e. What was the need for a second consultative conference?
- f. Who were the leading female activists and what were their roles?
- g. Was the international community represented?
- h. What was the importance of fighting for a civilian government?
- i. Why did you believe the NPRC was reluctant to hand over power?
- j. What were women`s activities during elections campaign?
- k. Did the elections take place as agreed and what were women`s activities on election day?
- l. Why was it important to sensitize people on the importance of peace?
- m. Do you think your sensitisation campaign was effective?
- n. What were your tools for activism?
- o. What was your most memorable activity as a peace activist?
- p. What were your activities after the reinstatement of president Kabba?
- q. What was the fate of the RUF after the death of corporal Foday Sankoh?
- r. Were women the only contributors to the attainment of peace ?

- s. Who were the other peace activists?
- t. What does working and having one`s own economy means for women?
- u. What should be done for the sustenance of peace?
- v. What are the possibilities of war erupting again?
- w. What else should be done for the maintenance of peace
- x. Do you think your peace activism was a success?
- y. What were your failures ?