

## **Explaining Women's Roles in the West African Tragic Triplet: Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire in Comparative Perspective**

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**Abstract:** *This paper is a critical examination of women's roles in the West African civil conflicts of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. Our epistemological point of departure is that women perform significant combat roles in war situations. Scholars/analysts have focused on women as solely victims of wars, but this study presents a framework that distances itself from this view and presents information on the wide variety of women's involvement in conflicts. Thus, whilst the public life of politics that comprises war-making decision is being dictated by men, women are involved in many other roles in the field. Consequently, this study addresses the following research conundrums: What factors explain the increased 'feminization of the militarization process' associated with conflicts in West Africa? Are women voluntary partners in war or are they reluctant actors being manipulated by ruthless army officers/warlords? What are the implications of women's active involvement in conflicts for the future development of women in these countries under focus, and society at large? What are the current and prospective roles of women in mediation and post-conflict peacebuilding?*

### **1. Introduction: The Questions of Analysis**

This paper is a critical examination of women's roles in the West African civil conflicts with emphasis on 'the West African Tragic Triplet'—Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. My epistemological point of departure is that women perform significant combat roles in war situations. Scholars and analysts have focused on women solely as victims of wars (African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004; George-Williams, 2002), but this study presents a framework that distances itself from this view and presents information on the wide variety of the nature of women's involvement in conflicts. Thus, this paper sets, therefore, to challenge some of the essentialist theses that present women as hapless

victims of armed conflicts. The essentialist theses are based on the belief that men are dictating the public life of politics that comprises war-making decisions. Doubtless, this is imperative in the sense that in Africa, and especially in the three countries under focus, we are dealing with very conservative and patriarchal societies where women have been traditionally represented in second position to men (Badmus, 2006: 60-65). While concurring with the above assertion, this is not to say that women are 100% peace promoters in war situations. While women are, oftentimes, exploited in war situations, they also act as agents of destabilisation and destruction. This is so because the harrowing experiences in the West African sub-region in the past two decades, especially in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire, confirm the atrocities committed by women and their active roles as agents of destruction in these conflicts.

Consequently, this paper, therefore, addresses the following research conundrums: What are the backgrounds to the wars in the countries under review? What factors explain the increased 'feminization of the militarization process' associated with conflicts in West Africa? Are women voluntary partners in war or are they reluctant actors being manipulated by ruthless army officers/warlords? What are the implications of women's active involvement in conflict for the future of women in these countries, and society at large? and What are the current and prospective roles of women in mediation and post-conflict peacebuilding? These questions will be fully addressed in the subsequent sections of this paper by, first of all, engaging in the theoretical discourses on gender difference and their relevance in fathoming our subject of inquiry. Furthermore, most of the analysis in this paper will focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone while references will be made to Cote d'Ivoire where the conflict is still ongoing.

## **2. Theoretical Considerations**

As already adumbrated in the preceding section, my primary task in this paper is to analyse the multiple roles played by women in conflict situations within the broad

context of empirical and theoretical conjectures. Here, the focus is, therefore, to explore the contending perspectives on gender difference as advanced by the two opposing schools of thought in gender research, viz, essentialism and constructionism. Before going further, it should be realised from the outset that the two schools of thought focus on gender difference but differ in their explanations and justifications. Despite these differences, the schools unanimously agree that women, as a gender category, have made positive contributions in the post-conflict peacebuilding. In addition, the two approaches agree on the need for, and imperative of, sound analysis and explanation, which can be acted upon so as to create positive changes. Scholars in the opposing camps have strong convictions that the gender dimension plays a very fundamental role in shaping the parameters and conduct of warfare, and that efforts towards creating more peaceful solutions to conflicts must, of necessity, take the gender dimension into account. The basic argument of the essentialist scholars<sup>1</sup> is best captured by Skjelsbaek (1997: 24) when she contends that: “[e]ssentialism is based on the notion that some objects, no matter how they are described or defined, may have certain qualities which are timeless and immutable.” In the essentialist worldview, gender identity is construed as natural, permanent, and unchangeable. Thus, gender, according to essentialism, is regarded as something which has its root from one principal origin and not from numerous aspects of our social worlds. Since essentialism deals with the natural thesis of gender identity, scholars honouring this theoretical tradition preoccupy themselves with the task of finding answers to such questions as ‘who am I’ and ‘where do I come from?’ (Smith, 1996: 8). This is because gender, according to essentialism, is determined by the fundamental characteristics of an individual’s biology, then, it (biology) becomes: “...the primary source for explaining differences in male and female behaviour, attitudes, and thinking. What it means to be a man or a woman is seen as having the same implications across time and space.” (Skjelsbaek, 1997: 24).

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the proponents of this school of thought are Caprioli, 2000; Caprioli and Boyer, 2001, El-Jack, 2003; Byrne, 1996; Segal, 1987.

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Furthermore, essentialist scholars contend that for men in power and position of authority means that there is, apparently, something about men's power status that is rooted in their gender identity—i.e. the 'true' nature of men. The fact that women are always at home looking after their husbands and children is best explained in terms of women's 'true' nature. This implies that from time immemorial, men and women have tended to do what they are naturally good at. From the essentialists' point of view, gender difference becomes a matter of nature rather than nurture.

It is worth bearing in mind that despite the contributions of the essentialist scholars to gender research, essentialism has been rejected on several grounds. First, the essentialist natural thesis is regarded as an anachronism since it recognizes gender identity as being static irrespective of time and space. Essentialism upholds the assertion that *all* men are masculine and *all* women are feminine. The essentialist postulation becomes more confusing and even problematic when the phenomenon of attraction, for example, is subjected to serious scrutiny. According to the essentialist scholars, a vital part of femininity should be attracted to males; hence all women should be attracted to men. When women feel attracted to other women, it then becomes absurd and seen as abnormal. The meaning of this, according to the essentialist scholars, is that their biological constitution is deficient, since this is where their gender identity is supposed to originate. Second, essentialism does not believe in change since it contends that human being remain the same throughout his/her lifetime; implying that a prostitute, for example, will always be a prostitute irrespective of her desire to change. Finally, the essentialist assumption that men possess certain unchangeable features that distinguish them from women has equally been rejected.

Constructionism, on the other hand, is based on the belief that gender difference is itself a cultural construct subject to constant changes. Constructionists agree that the world (especially our social worlds) rather than being static is dynamic and metamorphosing (Burr, 1995: 1-5; Gergen, 1994). Constructionists argue that an object is defined through our combined perceptions of the object and its qualities. It is along this line of reasoning that Skjelsbaek surmises that gender difference, thus, becomes a question of

*perception of gender* rather than innate qualities of men and of women. The social constructionism school of thought holds the view that:

Our identities are not given by nature: We *become* who we are through interactions with our social surroundings. The implications and meanings of our gender identity are not fixed, but constantly changing. This does not mean, however, that male and female identities change arbitrarily. Changes follow other patterns of the structures of a given society. Socio-economic changes as well as religion, ethnicity, and class will act to determine the meaning and implications of gender identity, just as gender influences the meaning of religion, ethnicity, and class (Skjelsbaek, 1997: 27).

From the foregoing analysis, constructionism offers a more convincing argument and is more beneficial in our search for a better understanding of the gender analysis of armed conflict. Its (constructionism) rejection of the essentialist's static and natural way of thinking enables us to be deeply convinced that changes are possible. Doubtless, this is why Skjelsbaek (*ibidem*) concurs that: "if we want to believe that conflicts can be avoided and that peaceful outcomes of violent struggles are possible, we will have to believe that people can change."

### **3. The Tragic Triplet: Descent into Ignominy**

It is important, right from the outset, to discuss the historical backgrounds to the conflicts in the three countries under focus in order to have a proper understanding of the factors that plunged the triplet into political cataclysms and eventual civil wars. While there is a growing volume of interesting literature on the origins and dynamics of these civil conflicts, a review of the antecedents to these conflicts is not an exercise in futility.

#### **3.1. Liberia**

Liberia was established in 1822 by the freed slaves from the United States of America.<sup>1</sup> These immigrants were first settled in Christopolis (now known as Monrovia)<sup>2</sup> on 6 February 1822 and formed the core of the settler populations of what later to become the Republic of Liberia<sup>3</sup>. Immediately after state formation, Liberian society was divided along ethno-linguistic line between the settlers and the indigenous African Liberians that the settlers met on their arrival to the coast of Liberia (Dennis, 2006). Although, political independence came in 1847, Liberian society was deeply polarized between the two groups with the Americo-Liberians dominating the political and socio-economic spectrum of the state. Reinforcing the settlers' hegemony and lopsided state policy was the dual legal systems for the country. Also, the indigenous populations were marginalized and played virtually no role in national political life, as this section of the population had no representation in the National Assembly until 1946.

This is the background to the political disorder and socio-economic decay of the Liberian state and society. The unequal relations among the various ethno-linguistic groups as well as the lopsided state policy in the distribution of the fruits of growth (i.e. political power and economic resources) fanned the fire of hatred, suspicions, and lack of understanding among the populations that eventually fractured the glue that *partially* cemented the society together and set the state disintegration process in motion. Thus, conflict-generating structures enlarged as the True Whig Party (TWP) government of President William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman became repressive. Under his rule, fundamental freedoms were curtailed while ethnicity took the centre stage as the new parameter for negotiating political space and government's favours, which eventually saw the institutions of government under the tight control of the regime's associates. Tubman's years in office epitomized

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<sup>1</sup> These freed slaves are known as the Americo-Liberians or American-Liberians

<sup>2</sup> The Liberian capital, Monrovia, was named after the American President, James Moroe.

<sup>3</sup> For background studies on Liberia, read generally: Buell, 1947; Marinelli, 1964; Liebenow, 1947; Best, 1974; Lowenkoff, 1976.

the cult of the presidency as the President had a larger than life status. Sesay (1978: 117) describes how under Tubman: "the ship of the state had lost its initial momentum...it was simply kept afloat by the presence of the Chief Executive but the engines had actually slowed down considerably."

Tubman's death in office on 23 July 1971 saw the ascendancy to the presidency of William Tolbert, another Americo-Liberian. Copying Tubman, Tolbert elevated favouritism and corruption to the level of official state policy. Sesay (1978, 287, cited George, undated), in his analysis of the political situation in the country under Tolbert, asserts that:

Apart from the accident of history that led to it (Liberia) being patterned upon the American political and economic system, there are hardly any other similarities. *A few families seem to dominate almost every aspect of political and economic life in the country, and Americo-Liberians have ruled the country since 1847. ...The system is essentially a patriarchal dynasty with the President at the top. ...As a result, there is virtually no opposition against such wide powers of the President (italics added).*

The privatization of state under the Americo-Liberians' domination became unbearable to the indigenous Liberians. This situation eventually led to a mass protest in Monrovia on 14 April 1979 that was followed by a riot due to the increase in the price of rice. The intervention of the Guinean troops on the side of the government to crush the riot became counterproductive as this put the government and the Liberian Armed Forces at loggerheads a situation that saw military intervention in politics. Thus, on 12 April 1980, Samuel Doe, an indigenous Liberian, was nominated to head the military government after the junior army officers staged a successful coup that sacked the government of William R. Tolbert.

No sooner had Doe become the president than his regime too became authoritarian, thus short-lived was the ecstasy that greeted his emergence as the new ruler of Liberia. Bad governance, exploitative economic policies and corruption represented the zenith of people's disenchantment with Doe's administration that became more

repressive even than the regime he had toppled in April 1980<sup>1</sup>. President Doe reduced the political space by promulgating several decrees that curtailed fundamental freedoms, while ethnic politics was still in top gear. Besides, the regime embarked on systematic killings of prominent members of the Americo-Liberian political class, thereby forcing the majority of them into exile from where they supported Charles Taylor's rebellion.

Furthermore, the differences among members of Doe's military government became the Achilles heel of the regime as they saw the elimination of the key members of the People's Redemption Council (PRC). A major political error committed by Doe was the killing of Brigadier Thomas Quiwonkpa, the regime's number two man, who was accused of masterminding a failed coup.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Doe embarked on an 'endless transition' to civil rule that was shifted thrice while political murders were institutionalized as a mode of silencing political opponents (Ohanwe, 2000, 64-65; Badmus, 2009a). All these events set the stage for the civil war, that was started on 24 December 1989 by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), that eventually ravaged and rocked the country to its foundation. Taylor's insurgency marked the beginning of Liberia's journey to self-destruction (Sesay, 1995).

### **3.2. Sierra Leone**

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<sup>1</sup> The coup d'état of 12 April 1980 was highly welcomed by the indigenous Liberians as it was regarded as the opportunity to liberate them from more than a century subjugation by the American-Liberians. This coup was, according to George Klay Kieh: "another juncture critical in Liberia's political history: it provided an excellent opportunity to transform the country's age-old neo-colonial political economy and its vagaries." (See Kieh, 1989). The joyous mood of the indigenous Liberians by declaring openly that: "this is our first year of independence", was short-lived as Doe's administration became tyrannical. For details, see Liebenow, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of Doe wickedness abound: He executed 13 members of President Tolbert's cabinet including, of course, Tolbert himself and also eliminated all the original coupists that brought him to power including Brigadier Quiwonkpa. Additionally, ethnic politics became upswellings with the killings of Gio and Mano ethnic groups because Doe believed that they were against his government, while his own Krahn ethnic group occupied key positions in government and the military.



The war in Sierra Leone is widely regarded as an offshoot of the state collapse and war that ravaged its neighbour, Liberia. Established as a settlement for the freed slaves by the British, the coastal areas and its adjoining lands became a British colony in 1808, which made its inhabitants British subjects. In 1896, after the British influence had spread to the hinterland, the area that was later to be known as Sierra Leone became a British Protectorate with consequences that set the polarization of the society in motion. The bifurcation of the society manifested in the sense that those living in the colony (i.e. the coastal areas) were classified as British subjects while people living in the interior were regarded as British protected persons (Alie, 1990: 4).

Decolonisation started in earnest with the revision of the Stevenson constitution by the Governor, Sir George Beresford-Stooke, in 1951. Not too long afterwards, Sierra Leone became an independent state within the British Commonwealth on 27 April 1961, while the mantle of leadership fell on Sir Milton Margai, a Mende, who became the Premier. Three years later, Margai's death heated up the polity as the country was widely envenomed with a serious succession crisis due to his inability to name a successor before his death. The leadership vacuum created by the demise of Margai and the ensuing political crisis compelled the Governor General of Sierra Leone to appoint the late Premier's half-brother, Albert Margai, as the new Prime Minister<sup>1</sup>. Apart from the fact that the appointment of the new Prime Minister brought ethnicity to the fore as oppositions to Margai's ethnic group, the Mende, skyrocketed, Albert Margai's misrule attracted bitter oppositions to his administration. Examples of his maladministration include the dismissal from the party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), of key supporters considered as threats to his authority, and his attempt to restructure the SLPP and make Sierra Leone a one party state. Consequently, SLPP became fissured along ethnic lines and weakened, a sorry state that made the party lose the 1967 general elections to the All Peoples Congress (APC)

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<sup>1</sup> [Online]: Retrieved from: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5475.htm/> (Date accessed: 20 September 2009).

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under the leadership of Siaka Stevens. Siaka Stevens' leadership was cut short by a military coup led by Brigadier David Lasana. In the aftermath of a counter coup that ousted Brigadier Lasana, the deposed Prime Minister, Siaka Stevens, was reinstated by the National Interim Government (NIG) formed by the Anti-Corruption Revolutionary Movement with the grand objective of speeding up the return to civil rule.

For the next twenty-five years, Sierra Leone was under one party rule characterised by the overcentralization of state machinery, rural isolation and neglect, ethnic politics and politics of systematic exclusion, corruption and abuse of power, neglect and misuse of youth. All these conjoined to plunge the country into civil war in 1991, led by Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with the strong backing of Taylor's NPFL.

### **3.3. Cote d'Ivoire**

Cote d'Ivoire<sup>1</sup>, a Francophone country of about 16 million inhabitants, became an independence state on 7 August 1960 with the late Felix Houphouet-Boigny as its first president. Long regarded as the beacon of political stability and an oasis of peace within the unstable West African sub-region, the country joined the unenviable league of war-torn African countries consequent on the 19 September 2002 failed coup d'etat and the rebellion that followed. Under Houphouet-Boigny's presidency, the Ivorian state witnessed rapid socio-economic development, while the President's political acumen helped to manage diverse ethnic and religious groups that formed the sociological configuration of the country. Houphouet-Boigny's death in late 1993 signaled the beginning of the Ivoirians' tortuous road to disintegration as the mechanism of succession was interpreted according to the parochial interests of the

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<sup>1</sup> Literature on Cote d'Ivoire's history and the current civil war is rich. Read generally, Akindes, 1996, 2001, 2003a&b, 2004; Badmus, 2009b; Ogunmola and Badmus, 2004a&b, 2005, 2009; Banegas and Losch, 2002; Chappel, 1989; Contamin and Memel-Fote (eds), 1997; Curdiphe, 2000; Dozon, 1996; Vidal, 2002.

political actors. The ensuing competition for the presidency saw the triumph of the President of the Ivorian National Assembly, Mr. Henri Konan Bedie, at the expense of the incumbent Prime Minister, Alassane Dramane Ouattara in an atmosphere of political instability. Elections were held in late 1995 in which Bedie got a mandate to rule the country but this was cut short by a coup d'état by General Robert Guei in December 1999. In a bid to become a civilian President during the general elections of December 2000: "Robert Guei contested elections and lost to Laurent Gbagbo, despite fixing the rules to prevent the candidacy of Alassane Ouattara...who hails from the north." (Ogunsanya, 2007: 6). Despite his attempt to manipulate the electoral process to his advantage, a peoples' revolution flushed General Guei out of office and Gbagbo was announced by the country's Supreme Court as the victorious candidate and was sworn in as President. While the exclusion of Ouattara from contesting the general elections split the country along ethno-religious line, the people of the north of Cote d'Ivoire see themselves as being marginalized and vow to contest exclusion. Under Laurent Gbagbo, ethnicity becomes an instrument of political exclusion. In an attempted coup d'état on 19 September 2002, the deposed General, Robert Guei, lost his life. The failure of the coup leaders to overthrow Gbagbo saw the rebels, *Mouvement Patriotique de Cote d'Ivoire* retreating to the north of the country while the government forces occupied the southern half. Two other rebel movements sprang up to engage the government forces.<sup>1</sup> The rebels, now collectively known as the *Forces Nouvelles* are now in control of the North with Bouake as their headquarters. Despite the efforts of the international community to return the country to the *status quo ante*, a lack of trust and ill feelings among political elite and the need to achieve parochial interests rather than national ones, deny Cote d'Ivoire the much-needed peace to move the country forward.

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<sup>1</sup> The two other rebel movements are: *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest*—MPIGO (meaning: The Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West) and *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix*—MJP (meaning: The Movement for Justice and Peace).

#### **4. The Tragic Triplet: War and Women as Agents of Destruction**

Contrary to popular perceptions of women as being peaceful and victims of atrocities of war that are generally regarded as male folly, the West African civil wars provide evidence of women as agents of destruction. In Liberia, women were in the forefront of Taylor's rebellion. During the early stages of Taylor's NPFL, women joined and played various roles in the process and they also provided what Aning (1998a; see also Aning, 1998b: 47), termed as the 'primary infrastructure of resistance.' The contributions of women to Taylor's campaign during this period can be seen in term of political support through facilitating his contacts with influential individuals in the West African sub-region who had the capability to support his ambition. It is reported that women provided sanctuary for the NPFL members that were in need of such help, especially in neighbouring Ghana, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. Furthermore, the NPFL's campaign of terror was boosted financially through the active support of a group of influential women that believed in Taylor's cause. Dissatisfied with Doe's autocratic rule, some women, both Liberians and foreigners, played significant roles in seeing an end to autocratic rule in the country. Prominent among these women was the then Burkinabe ambassador to Ghana, Madam Moumouna Quattara, a close associate of Burkinabe President, Blaise Campaore<sup>1</sup>, who is believed to have introduced Taylor's to her boss. Campaore then facilitated contact between Taylor and the Libyan leader, Muammar Ghadafi, who bankrolled the NPFL and offered Taylor's men sanctuary.

Even before this period, Aning (1998a: 8) contends that, "earlier fund-raising activities in the US had been supported by renowned Americo-Liberian women who were actively engaged in planning his speaking appointments and travel schedules, which netted an estimated US\$1 million."

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<sup>1</sup> It should be recalled that during this period Blaise Campaore was the Vice President of Burkina Faso.

Most of these women abandoned the NPFL when they realised, especially after Doe was killed in September 1990, that the leadership of the organisation was harbouring a hidden/ personal agenda that was at variance with the original purpose of the struggle. Foremost among these women was Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson, the current President of Liberia. Mrs. Sirleaf-Johnson left the NPFL when she realised that Taylor had completely deviated from the original plan and objective of the struggle which was to liberate the country from the stranglehold of dictatorship and started pursuing his own interests of economic gains and seeking political power at all costs. Apart from Sirleaf-Johnson, other women, by dint of hard work, were elevated to positions of authority in the hierarchy of the NPFL during the war. A case in point was that of Mrs. Grace Minor. Minor will be best remembered as the proponent of selective elimination of the indigenous Liberian leaders in the NPFL. She was accused of championing the Americo-Liberians division within the organisation. By 1992, such systematic eliminations (either general or selective) were so rampant that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was compelled to accuse the NPFL of war crimes and crimes against humanity (ECOWAS Report, 1992: 29). The defection of Grace Minor came not only as a surprise, but also it was a big blow to the organisation and served as precedent for many women to leave the NPFL. Minor's defection inspired several of her male colleagues to leave and form the NPFL—Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC).

The appointment of another woman of repute, Reffel Victoria, to the NPFL leadership confirms the active involvement of women in war decision-making in Liberia; thereby discarding the essentialist argument that women are solely hapless victims of war. At the close of 1993, the "increasing series of defections among top ranking members, field commanders and ordinary citizens, had convinced Reffel of the need for a change in the NPFL, of seeing the Nigerian-led ECOMOG intervention as an impediment to the NPFL's battlefield success..." (Aning, 1998a: 9). In addition, Reffel was instrumental in the efforts to stem the popular perception that the NPFL was an Americo-Liberian organisation formed purposely to revenge the 1980 indigenes' coup that led to the death of influential Americo-

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Liberians. Reffel's diplomatic skill came to bear when she, as the NPFL chief representative during the 1995 Extraordinary Summit of ECOWAS on Liberia, successfully convinced Accra and Abuja of her boss' new willingness to negotiate peace. The NPFL's volte-face and rapprochement with ECOWAS (and Nigeria in particular) consequent on Reffel's diplomatic accomplishments was highly valued even by Taylor when he declared that:

...coming here is an indication of our recognition...and the importance in breaking this particular impasse... [T] here is no longer an intransigent party...all those lies and deceptions to keep this atmosphere of hostility is over. I want to appeal to the people of this nation, let us forgive and forget. For our own part, the NPFL, if we have done anything to the people of this nation, directly to individual families or individuals, we want us to let us put it aside, let us forgive (Nigerian Tribune, 6 June 1995, cited in Aning, 1998a: 10).

Based on these accomplishments, Reffel was subsequently promoted to become the NPFL representative to the Second Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) in addition to being the Minister of Information. During these periods, she led the NPFL delegations to many peace conferences.

In neighbouring Sierra Leone, women helped the RUF immensely, especially in mobilizing the war assets and also in diplomatic negotiations. Women's roles in supporting the war efforts became more noticeable through the establishment of the women's wing of the RUF. Prominent among these women was Isatu Kallon who was reported to have used her vast knowledge of the Liberian countryside to procure arms for the rebels. Through small arms and light weapons (SALW) smuggled into the country, the militarization of the society was assured with the diffusion of weapons that constituted a social menace. Mrs. Kallon was later arrested and jailed by the government of Sierra Leone. Another example of woman of repute in the RUF was Agnes Jalloh who was the leader of the organisation's women's wing. Young women and girls served as combatants in the RUF while some were even promoted to prestigious positions of field commanders, generals, and senior intelligent officers.

Before going further, it is important to examine the methods of recruitment of women and girls into different armed factions in West Africa. Certainly the modes of conscription vary as is the case for boys and men (Brett, 2002; MacMullin and Loughry, 2004; Mazurana et al, 2002). While many women were forcibly conscripted to bear weapons and act as sexual partners and nurses for wounded soldiers, others voluntarily took part. Evidently this distinction is very complex and sometime blurred (MacMullin and Loughry, 2004). In Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, warlords and militias recruited most of their soldiers male and female through coercion and, as a result, many women and girls were trapped and thus become female combatants and wives to male soldiers (Wolte, 2004: 15-16; see also Human Rights Watch, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. In the case of Sierra Leone, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women,<sup>2</sup> and international non governmental organisations (INGOs) such as Human Rights Watch,<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International,<sup>4</sup> and Physicians for Human Rights,<sup>5</sup> documented in their various reports the abduction of thousands of women and girls after they had been sexually abused during the country's civil war (1991-2001). According to the Physicians for Human Rights' Report, close to a third of women who reported sexual violence during the conflict were abducted and most of these abductions occurred in the rebel-held areas. It is sad that abducted women were forced to become sex slaves of assigned rebel 'husbands' in rebel camps and to perform slave labour, carrying ammunition, and looted items. More often than not, rebels chose "very young women or girls because they assumed them to be virgins, healthy and resilient. Many women and girls were

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<sup>1</sup> These female combatants who are married to male soldiers are often referred to as 'bush wives'.

<sup>2</sup> Coomaraswamy Radhika, 2002. Coomaraswamy Radhika at this time was the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

<sup>3</sup> See Human Rights Watch, 2003b.

<sup>4</sup> See Amnesty International, 2002

<sup>5</sup> See Physicians for Human Rights, 2002.

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kept with rebel forces for many years and they gave birth to children fathered by rebels.” Wolte<sup>1</sup> gives a disturbing account of the mode of recruitment and exploitation of women and girls during the civil war thusly:

Some women and girls were forced to become combatants for the rebels. Forced women combatants were repeatedly raped by the rebels. Before they were sent to fight, some women and girls were given drugs. The rebels carved with razor blades the names of their faction onto the chest of the abducted women and girls. If these marked women and girls were caught by pro-government or other rebels they would often be killed. Yet, depending on the situation, some women tried to flee with the first opportunity.

In Cote d’Ivoire, the experience is not so different from the Liberian and Sierra Leonean cases as multitudes of women and girls are victims of sexual violence and abduction as combatants. While it is undeniable that women and girls are found on both sides of the fighting factions, the majority of these women were abducted at gunpoint and sexually abused and later forced to be fighters. What makes the Ivorian case highly disturbing is that most of the atrocities committed against women are ethnically motivated as government forces shot Burkinabe men and raped Burkinabe women and girls and people from the north of the country (Amnesty International, *undated*)<sup>2</sup>. These victims were assaulted and threatened with death if they attempted escape (Human Rights watch, 2003). Thus, in the Ivorian case which follows the general pattern of the war situations in West Africa, rape and sexual violence are widely used as weapons of war, to dehumanize women and the communities they belong to. Aside from being forcibly conscripted, other group of women voluntarily joined the armed factions and fight to protect themselves and other women from rape and murder, and as a survival strategy. To this group of women, becoming a soldier was a matter of kill or to be killed. Also in this category, others voluntarily chose to go into battlefield

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<sup>1</sup> Wolte, 2004, *Op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> This is based on the belief that Mr. Ouattara is of Burkinabe parentage and thus, Burkinabe are sympathetic to his cause.



for ideological reason and to prove their equality with males. Though the proportion of this category is minute when compare to those abducted and forced to fight (Ekiyor, *undated*; Amnesty International, *undated*).

## **5. The Tragic Triplet: Women's Roles in Peace Processes and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding**

As earlier discussed, women played destructive roles in the civil wars that ravaged some states in West Africa and facilitated the war efforts of the belligerents (both governments and rebels). Despite these roles, it is heartening that women were also in the forefront in the peace processes that eventually ended these wars, especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone<sup>1</sup>. Such women's roles can be located within the context of war fatigue since they became tired of losing their loved ones to war and wanted to put an end to living in perpetual fear. In Sierra Leone, women's roles in peacemaking became more noticeable with the formation of women's civil society groups through which they mobilised and galvanised the society (women in particular) to call for peace, democracy, and an end to hostilities. Of note in this regard, were the highly significant roles played by prominent Sierra Leone women such as Zainab Bangura, Amy Smythe, Elizabeth Lavalie (the most prominent female parliamentarian) and Kadi Sesay through organising workshops and conferences with the sole objective of promoting democratic ideas and ideals. Through these efforts, women hoped that the entrenched state institutions that encourage 'structural violence'<sup>2</sup> against them would be

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<sup>1</sup> The war in Cote d'Ivoire is still ongoing.

<sup>2</sup> According to Johan Galtung, structural violence is a "social and personal violence arising from unjust, repressive, and oppressive, national or international, political and social structures. According to this view, a system that generates repression, abject poverty, malnutrition, and starvation for some members of a society while other members enjoy opulence and unbridled power inflicts covert violence, except that it does it in more subtle ways. In other words, it is not only that gun that kills. Lack of access to basic means of life and dignity does the same thing." See Galtung 1975.

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identified and reformed. Also, Kadi Sesay used her office as the Chairman for the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights (NCDHR) to promote civil education, democracy, and human rights. Her democracy programme “contributed to preparing the electorate for nationwide participatory electoral democracy, which bore fruit in the massive turnout for the 1996 democratic elections.” (Mansaray, 2000: 150). Mrs. Sesay tirelessly committed herself to the institution of democracy and encouraged women to join in the political processes of the country.

The period between 1994 and 1995 witnessed a great momentum in women’s agitation for peace in Sierra Leone. Through the untiring efforts of women like Bangura, Lavalie, and others, the Women’s Movement for Peace organised a march for peace in the country’s two biggest cities of Freetown and Bo in February 1995. A month earlier, Mrs. Lavalie led a peaceful demonstration organised by the Eastern Region Women’s Movement for Peace. Women’s agitation for peace climaxed in March 1995 when the organisation, Women’s Movement for Peace, organised a press conference in which a letter sent to the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, was read calling for the end to the senseless war. At the conference, the Public Relations Officer of the organisation, Mrs. Isha Dyfan said: “women have a specific role in conflict resolution and our concern here is to bring the war to a speedy end with independence and neutrality being our main focus.” Supporting Dyfan, Fatmata Kamara added: “since the public is in full support of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, we are going to keep harping on this until the warring factions come to the negotiating table.” Women’s quest for peace climaxed in the aftermath of the January 1996 coup d’état that ousted Valentine Strasser’s National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government. Julius Maada Bio who succeeded Strasser lobbied for, the shifting of the date of the general elections<sup>1</sup>. The junta’s efforts to circumvent the process became fruitless as women vehemently opposed the move and voted against such postponement in the second National Consultative

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<sup>1</sup> The National Consultative Conference (known as the Bintumani I) of 17 August 1995 has earlier scheduled the elections for 26 February 1996.

Conference convened by the Junta (Bintumani II).<sup>1</sup> At Bintumani II, women delegates reached a consensus that was made public:

We support that peace negotiations and elections must go hand in hand as previously agreed. We therefore demand that the elections...go ahead on 26 February 1996 as agreed at the National Consultative Conference and approved by the NPRC Government the political parties, civil society and the Interim National Electoral Commission.

It is interesting to note that women's active participation did not end with the advent of democracy as the post-military Sierra Leone witnessed the rise of the multiplicity of women's organisation such as Women in Action, Women in Need, Women Accord 97, etc. These organisations gave a high profile to women leaders of civil society and more women were chosen to head such civil society organisations. When the military sacked the democratically elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, women did not relent in their efforts to challenge this illegality and confronted the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). During these tense periods, women organised mass rallies, and civil disobedience that virtually paralysed the country and made life difficult for the junta. The deposed first lady, Mrs. Patricia Kabbah, appealed strongly to the Sierra Leone women not to give up their struggle for democracy. As part of their commitment to democracy, the coup d'état of 25 May 1997 saw the exodus of women into exile from where they coordinated opposition to the military regime. For example, Zainab Bangura mobilised civil society from neighbouring Guinea while her Campaign for Good Governance office in Conakry became the meeting place for all civil society groups to discuss their strategies and coordinate their activities. Through Radio Democracy (F.M 98.1) regular contacts were made with those activists at home. Women, through the Women's National Salvation Front, confronted the Junta and their numerous atrocities were exposed on Radio Democracy. Anti-Junta discussions

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<sup>1</sup> Women leaders launched a sensitization campaign raising the awareness of the danger of such postponement. Through these activities, the plan was defeated.

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were aired on Radio Democracy which, undoubtedly, keep the civil society united and increased the tempo of their opposition to military rule. All these efforts by women bore fruits as they encouraged ECOWAS to intervene; an intervention that happily resulted in the return of democracy in March 1998. These determinant roles played by women in bringing peace back to the country confirm the women's expected roles in conflict resolution as contained in the Kigali Declaration that: "recognis(es) women's traditional peacemaking roles and their rights to equal involvement in all peace initiatives, including early warning mechanisms and swift responses at national, regional, and international levels."<sup>1</sup>

In Liberia, the roles of women in bringing about the return of peace cannot be underestimated.<sup>2</sup> During the country's first civil war (1989-1997), Liberian women organised to demand for peace. This quest resulted in the formation of the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) under the headship of Mrs. Etweda Cooper. Most of the street protests, rallies, and demonstrations during these periods to persuade the combatants to stop the bloodshed and surrender their guns in return for gainful employments were organised and coordinated by LWI. Annie Saydee (cited in African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004: 13) asserts that: "we talked to them (leaders of the warring factions). They are children to us, and we wanted this fighting to stop. We, the women, bear that pain. So we begged them—Kromah, Boley, Taylor—at different times."

The Women Peace Initiative was remarkable in its activities. The organisation stood solidly behind the West African intervention force (ECOMOG) during the demobilisation of the various armed factions that commenced in late 1995. It should be recalled that Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme was central to the Abuja Treaty II that paved the way for the election of 19 July 1997. During the conflict, a women's organisation, the Women in Liberian Liberty (WILL),

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<sup>1</sup> See Kigali Declaration—Final Document of the Pan-African Conference on Peace, Gender and Development, Kigali, Rwanda, 11-13 July 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these roles have been earlier discussed in the preceding section of this paper.

led by Mrs. Myrtle Gibson and Mona Wureh initiated food aid and sensitization programmes that helped tremendously in alleviating the sufferings of war victims. Additionally, the organisation carried out its activities beyond the shores of Liberia by visiting Liberian refugee camps in the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. Even during the Liberian second war (1997-2003), women were still active. The combined oppositions to Taylor's National Patriotic Party Government by the Liberian United for Reconstruction and Development (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) resulted in creating strong solidarity among women of all faiths in the country. Consequently, a women group, the Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET), mobilised and organised marches and sit-ins in Monrovia in front of the Government House, House of Parliament, etc. Women also organised prayers and fasting for the return of peace. These religious activities in negotiating for peace were even recognized by the New York Times, which asserts that:

In an empty field, in a heavy down pour in the middle of the rainy season in one of the world's wettest countries, was a small group of women, nearly all dressed in white, throwing their arms to the sky and dancing and singing drenched from head to toe, calling to God to bring an end to war. They are Liberia's peaceniks, a radical, some would say delusional breed, who for three months have been bent on praying on the side of the road, in the sun and rain, every single day, to bring an end to the war (New York Time, 1 July 2003).

The Ivorian women's roles in peace process are not different from the experiences in the two countries earlier discussed. Women have been highly instrumental in ensuring that peace returns to their country right from the beginning of the war. As part of the efforts to diffuse tension following the Linas-Marcoussis Accord,<sup>1</sup> multitudes of Ivorian women

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<sup>1</sup> The Linas-Marcoussis Accord, under the auspices of France, gave two key ministries (Security and Defense) to the rebels and many Ivorians, especially supporters of President Gbagbo, objected to this concession. Sadly, only one woman participated in the Linas-Marcoussis peace negotiations

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staged a peaceful protest in Abidjan urging the President to pull out of the Paris Peace meeting. In spite of the fact that most of the protesters were in support of Gbagbo, going by the situation in Cote d'Ivoire at the time, this was a clear departure from the previous demonstrations that always resulted in violence, looting and death. The February 2003 peaceful demonstration took the women to the French and American embassies in Abidjan to convey their objection to the Linas-Marcoussis Accord that was believed to have conceded too much to the rebels<sup>1</sup>. With the assistance of the international community, especially UNICEF, Ivorian women civil society groups performed creditably in ensuring that girls and children voices are heard. A classical example is UNICEF's sponsored radio and television statement of a twelve-year old displaced girl, Awa, telling the parties that: "We, the children of Cote d'Ivoire, want the war to stop now so that all children in Cote d'Ivoire can go back to school. It's our right!"<sup>2</sup> Also, a women's civil society group, the Ivorian Movement of Democratic Women (MIFED) founded in 1990, has been effective in mobilizing women to protect their rights, addresses the socio-economic consequences of the war, and advocates for peace by organising conferences and workshops. Interestingly, this group has raised women's awareness of the need for their involvement in the peace process. The organisation gives voice to women through numerous press releases on women's perspectives on the situation in the country and also to denounce violations of human rights and women's rights. Also, a women's civil society group, the Federation of Women's Organisation in Cote d'Ivoire (FOFCI) organised numerous peaceful protests against police brutality in Abidjan and condemned rapes of women by the police. Finally, it is important to stress the fact that all these efforts in peace processes have been recognised by the international community when the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Cote d'Ivoire,

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<sup>1</sup> See Africa Online. "Ivory Coast: Women Out in Force Against Deal", 4 February 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.africaonline.com/site/Articles/1,3,52004.jsp> (Date accessed: 12 September 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See Women, War, and Peace. Gender Profile of the Conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. [Online]: Retrieved from [http://www.womenwarpeace.org/cote/docs/cote\\_pfv.pdf](http://www.womenwarpeace.org/cote/docs/cote_pfv.pdf) (Date accessed: 12 April 2009).

Pierre Schori, emphasized: “the commitment of the United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI) to ensure women involved in all the mechanisms to bring peace in the country in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security 1325 of 2000.” (Cited in Ogunsanya, 2007: 23-24).<sup>1</sup>

Women’s peaceful roles in conflict situations did not stop with the end of wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia as they are key actors in creating an enabling environment for post-conflict peacebuilding (i.e. socio-economic development and physical reconstruction). Although the war in Sierra Leone is over the society is yet to overcome the negative consequences of the war. Giant strides have been made by the government in Freetown in the areas of DDR, re-establishment of public and social institutions; rehabilitation and provision of some basic services, but the challenges ahead far outweigh these achievements. The population of Sierra Leone is young with over 60% under the age of 35 years, while majority of these young people are unemployed. Thus, anti-social activities among the youth have become a great challenge to post-civil war Sierra Leone society which the government in Freetown seeks to address by embarking on “long-term capacity development efforts and sustainable international partnerships that would produce concrete results in helping to reinforce the country’s peace” (Ogunsanya, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. As part of the healing process, women have been advocating forgiveness for the perpetrators of war atrocities and reconciliation of ex-combatants while also they are in the forefront in encouraging the ex-combatants to participate in the reconciliation processes and seek forgiveness through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Women are, according to Ogunsanya (2007: 34-35), “now focusing on the future, prioritizing reintegration of child soldiers, imparting

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<sup>1</sup> See also UNOCI. Yamoussoukro: Let’s give tradition a try, the women say. [Online]: Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unoci/year\\_peace\\_f/forum\\_yamoussokro\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unoci/year_peace_f/forum_yamoussokro_en.pdf) (Date accessed: 25 August 2009)

<sup>2</sup> See Peacebuilding Commission, Great Strides Made in Sierra Leone’s Emergence from Conflict. Second Session, 12 October 2006. [Online]: Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/doc/2006/psc6.doc.htm> (Date accessed 17 June 2009)

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of skill-based knowledge, lobbying for comprehensive education, particularly free education for all, and primary health care support. Through civil society organisations, they have initiated programmes for the co-existence of various sectors of the society.”<sup>1</sup> Another important area in which women’s civil society organisations are contributing to post-conflict peacebuilding is by creating awareness through sensitization programme especially on health related matters. Through print and electronic media, women’s awareness of their health rights is seriously being raised. The classical example of these efforts is the USAID sponsored radio soap opera called “Atunda Ayenda” or “lost and found” aired in the Mandigo language. Apart from the fact that the programme informs people on the current socio-political state of the nation, it also aims at disseminating information as well as educating the public (women in particular) on the dangers of early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and other issues. Women are actively involved in all government sponsored health programmes and most especially those relating to trauma counseling. It is of note that in Sierra Leone, survivors of sexual violations are employed as educators and assistants in health institutions across the country. The successes of women’s roles in post-conflict peacebuilding in Sierra Leone will be better appreciated by quoting Ogunsanya in *extenso*:

The TRC has mandated the establishment of an impartial record of the abuses committed during the war, as a step towards achieving national reconciliation. The Commission also urged reforms in Sierra Leone’s legal, judicial and police systems to make it easier for women to report cases of sexual and domestic violence. It called for the repeal of all statutory and customary laws that discriminate against women in marriage, ownership of property. The Commission further recommended that the government should campaign against the customary practice whereby a rape victim is obliged to marry the rapist. The country now recognizes rape and other

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<sup>1</sup> See Women’s Commissions for Refugee Women and Children’s website on [http://www.womencomission.org/take\\_action/sl/abibatu.shtml](http://www.womencomission.org/take_action/sl/abibatu.shtml) (Date accessed 12 August 2009).



sexual violent acts as gender crimes and is now working towards achieving gender based laws, which will protect women from gender violence and other forms of discrimination. A Rape Bill has been introduced by the Sierra Leone legislature, dramatically changing the culture of impunity. Under the new laws, a convicted rapist may be jailed for life. To further sensitize society about the rights of women and young girls, women civil society networks have organised and provided support systems for rape victims including counseling and training to make them self-sufficient.

In Liberia, women's roles in post-conflict peacebuilding, especially during the first civil war, become apparent when one examines into the activities of the Women's Peace Initiative (WPI) especially its partnership with ECOMOG. During the demobilisation phase of the post-conflict peacebuilding process, WPI members were actively involved in helping ECOMOG through the provision of basic services such as water supply, etc in all the 10 demobilisation centers established across the country. Furthermore, WPI members were visible throughout the tour of these centers by Mrs. Ruth Perry's, the transitional President at the time. Of particular note in this endeavour "were the lines of communication opened between WPI members and ECOMOG officials in Liberia. Through WPI's lobbying activity, ECOMOG agreed to extend the deadline for the demobilisation process for fighters in the rural areas to hand in their weapons." In Cote d'Ivoire, despite the fact that the conflict is still ongoing, women's peacebuilding efforts are visible. Ivorian women's civil society groups have vigorously embarked on a countrywide public awareness campaign to combat sexual violence with the objective of changing the activities and perceptions towards sexual violence and exploitation. A study undertaken by the Ivorian Movement Association for the Defense of Women (AIDF) on domestic violence revealed that 95% of interviewees had experienced violence at home. Responding to this shocking revelation, AIDF collected 18,000 signatures on a petition to compel the Ivorian government to enact stronger domestic violence

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laws<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the organisation has been deeply involved in raising awareness on the danger of female genital mutilation and underage marriage. Also MIFED runs the Centre for Legal, Economic and Social Assistance for Women where women can learn about their rights, receive medical assistance and train as artisans.

## **6. Summing Up: Challenges and Limitations**

From the discussion so far, it is clear that while women suffer atrocities during armed conflicts in West Africa, they also perform destructive roles in war situations through their supports of the various armed factions. Women's roles as combatants during wars apparently made nonsense of the essentialist argument that women stay at home as nurturers, homemakers, and life givers. The determinant roles played by women in the West African civil conflicts relegates the essentialist theses to the background and upholds the constructionists' perspectives on the gender analysis of armed conflicts. In spite of women's visible roles in bringing peace back to the West African sub-region and post-conflict peacebuilding processes; certain obstacles have to be overcome to realising women's full potentials in this endeavour and avoid being exploited. First, the socio-cultural practices of patriarchy determines the masculine super-ordination/feminine subordination dichotomy which creates hurdles for female advancement in decision making and politics that surround women in all spheres of life in West Africa. Patriarchy is based on the socio-cultural beliefs and myths that decide the perceptions of men and women's rights from childhood. It disempowers women through various discriminatory cultural practices. In the patriarchal society in West Africa: "male dominance is evident in all echelons of power and spheres of life. Men define cultures and religions. Women are rarely visible in most areas of decision-making. Women's opinions are generally not sought

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<sup>1</sup> See US Department of State. "Country Report on Human Rights Practices—Cote d'Ivoire." 23 February 2000. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/242.htm> (Date accessed 16 august 2009)

at home, and by extension in communities.” (Ekiyor, *undated*). Thus, despite the fact some women, by dint of hard work, have attained positions of authority; patriarchy is inhibiting women's active involvement in politics and full participation in peace processes and political decision-making. In the case of Cote d'Ivoire, it is disheartening to note that only one woman participated in the Linas-Marcoussis peace process, while in Sierra Leone, the official peace processes did not include women, as they were absent at the Head of State's Summit and not invited as Expert Consultants to the peace negotiations. Subsequently, Sierra Leone women forced themselves through lobbying to participate in the peace processes.

That education is a basic human rights that provides opportunities for socio-economic advancement is unarguable. Indeed, women continue to endure inadequate representation in political and decision-making because of formidable socio-cultural discrimination against women's participation in higher education. The girl child is deliberately denied education and opportunity for meaningful political participation while male children are socialized/educated to become kings, family heads, aggressive, competitive, professional and independent minded. In the three countries reviewed, women need to acquire a certain amount of formal education before their peacemaking roles can be more recognised. In the particular case of Liberia, a country report at the Beijing plus five meeting unmask the shocking revelation that only 1/5 (or 20%) of the country's girl children have the opportunity for formal education as against 54% of their male counterparts (Liberia Report, 1999). The situation becomes more pathetic judging by the UNICEF Liberia Representative, Angela Kearney's comments that: “we continue to face a situation in which girls remain at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to enjoying their right to quality basic education. Consider these facts: the present ratio of girls to boys at the primary school level in Liberia is 40% to 59%”, according to the Liberian Millennium Development Goals Report by the Ministry of Planning,” said Kearney. “In West and Central Africa, almost one out of every two children (45%) is out of school and most of these are girls in rural areas. 81% of children out of school have mothers with no formal

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education. Only 55% of children of school-going age are in school...”<sup>1</sup> The same is true for other West African states including Cote d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone where lack of formal education has been continuously limiting women in attaining political equality with men. Furthermore, despite the proliferation of women’s civil society organisations, cooperation among them is weak and this, more often than not, make them vulnerable to domination. Lack of coordination and rivalry among diverse women groups with different agendas have led to weak networking of these groups and sadly, jeopardized the goal of influencing the public sphere.

From the foregoing analysis, it is apparent that women perform combat roles during armed conflicts. They also play useful roles in peace processes and post conflict peacebuilding. Despite women’s positive roles in nation building, there are multiple challenges and constraints that inhibit the effectiveness of women category in this endeavour. Since women’s roles are fundamental in conflict transformation, there is the an urgent need to encourage women’s participation in peace processes and peacebuilding by incorporating their views in peace negotiation. Also, women need to be empowered. Women’s empowerment through the provision of quality education will go a long way to see more women attaining positions of authority which will definitely translate into more engagements by women in peacebuilding process

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_33392.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_33392.html) (Date accessed 26 August 2009)

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