



**Women in arms:
Feminist Narrations on Sierra Leonean and Liberian Female
Combatants**

A Research Paper presented by:

Nicole Ann Hosein
(Trinidad and Tobago)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:
Conflict, Reconstruction and Human Security
(CRS)

Members of the examining committee:

Dr. Dubravka Zarkov
Dr. Silke Heumann

The Hague, The Netherlands
November, 2011

Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Inquiries:

Postal address:

Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ix</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 The Research Problem	1
1.2 Research Question	2
1.3 Approach and Methodology	3
1.4 Structure of the Research Paper	5
Chapter 2 Reviewing Feminist Literature on Women Combatants	7
2.1 Women, Peace and War: Beyond Essentialism	7
2.2 Women's Active Participation in Conflict	9
2.3 Women's Motivation for Participating in War	11
2.4 Conclusion	12
Chapter 3 Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone: Academic and Personal narratives	14
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Background to the Sierra Leonean conflict	14
3.3 Women in Sierra Leone Society Pre and Post-Conflict	15
3.4 Feminist Narrations of Sierra Leonean Female Ex-Combatants	16
3.4.1 Sexual Violence	16
3.4.2 Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy	18
3.4.3 The Cross-Cutting Issue of Agency	20
3.5 Face_WSLOT: The Sierra Leonean Ex-Combatant's Own Voice	22
3.6 Conclusion	24
Chapter 4 Female ex-combatants in Liberia	26
4.1 Introduction	26
4.2 Background to the Liberian conflict	26
4.3 Women in Liberian Society Pre and Post-conflict	27
4.3 Feminist Narrations of Liberian Female Ex-combatants	28
4.3.1 Representing and Self-representing as Victim	28
4.3.2 Perpetrators of Violence: The Liberian 'Lara Crofts'	29
4.4 Face_WSLOT: The Liberian Ex-Combatant's own voice	30
4.5 Conclusion	32
Chapter 5 Analysis, Reflections and Conclusions	34

List of Tables

Table 1: Conventional Female/Male Roles in Rebel Groups in Conflict	10
---	----

List of Maps

Map 1: Sierra Leone	6
Map 2: Liberia	6

List of Acronyms

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
AI	Amnesty International
APC	All People's Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Force
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HDI	Human Development Index
IDDRS	The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
ILO	International Labour Office
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LTTE	Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party
TESI-WSL	Tertiary Education Support Initiative for Women in Sierra Leone
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia
UNLIMO-J	United Liberation Movement of Liberia - a Krahn (Liberian ethnic group) dominated group
UNLIMO-K	United Liberation Movement of Liberia - a Mandingo (Liberian ethnic group) dominated group
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
WSLOT	Women See Lot of Things
WAC	Women's Auxiliary Corps

Abstract

This study examines the way feminist academic literature discusses experiences of women combatants in non-state armed groups in Sierra Leone and Liberia. These views are contrasted with the combatants' own narratives of their experiences with the intention of illustrating how feminist academic researchers bring their own agendas and interests into the research process, and do not always depart from the priorities and experiential knowledge of women combatants. This desk-based study reviewed a broad range of feminist literature on women combatants and selected literature written from a feminist perspective that claimed to include the 'voice' of female combatants. This literature was contrasted with a key text written by three former women combatants covering experiences from Sierra Leone and Liberia to contrast the priorities and concerns of the texts. The main focuses of the feminist literature were sexual violence, victimhood versus perpetrator identities, and questions of agency, while the key priorities and concerns for the female ex-combatants were obtaining an education as a way to retain, and then return to a 'normal life'; the importance of both professional work (e.g. nursing); and of negotiating security through relationships, including intimate relationships. The former women in arms made less emphasis on sexual violence and victimhood, and more focus on career, education and vital interpersonal relationships which are themes not often reflected in feminist literature, that uses the 'voices' of women combatants mainly to legitimise their own concerns. This research thus hopes to contribute to enriching our understanding of the task that feminists still face in giving a voice to former women combatants more generally - can they indeed represent the priorities and concerns of former women combatants?

Relevance to Development Studies

This research is related to the field of development studies because it challenges the essentialist thinking and Western constructed idea that positions women as peacemakers and/or a victim in conflict. In doing so, this paper highlights the lack of literature on women combatants as a category, which challenges the gendered stereotype of "women as victims" and "men as perpetrators" in conflict. This gap in literature on the experiences of women combatants during and post-conflict has concealed the knowledge of that experience, thereby stripping them of any new roles or position of authority they may have held during the conflict and prevents the recognition and understanding of female perpetration of violence. This is useful for overcoming 'victim-perpetrator' dichotomies, which seems inherent in transitional justice. Additionally, it contributes to the body of knowledge on reconstruction efforts in war-torn countries post-conflict that calls for the participation of former women combatants in the design and execution of reintegration processes.

Keywords

Sierra Leone – Liberia – Female Combatants – Victimhood – Perpetrator – Agency – Feminism – Education

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my Mom, Camilla Coolman-Hosein and my Dad, Franklin Hosein, whose own struggles taught me that I could only be happy taking the road less travelled.

Thank you to my mentor, Gabrielle Hosein who always believed in me and never doubted my abilities.

Thank you to my Supervisor, Dubravka Zarkov for making this not only a process of academic growth but personal growth as well.

Thank you to my second reader, Silke for your words of encouragement, continuous support and guidance.

Thank you to my Convenor, Helen for being proud of me.

Thank you to my dear friend Lauren for holding my hand through this process. Always your kind words warmed my heart.

Thank you to my ISS family, Sibora, Juan, Charmaine, Fabio and Hannah for your time, support, encouragement, kindness, humour and never letting me forget that I am only human.

Thank you to my 'Trini' family, Mary Jane, Michelle, Krishanta and Aisha for keeping me grounded during my up and down moments.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Research Problem

Women have always been part of violent conflict whether willing or unwilling; however the way they experience it and are affected by it is different to men. For more than a decade, they have occupied a variety of roles in fighting forces in Algeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Zimbabwe. They have been involved in armed conflict in Angola, Colombia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Uganda. They have fought as freedom fighters in Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Sudan and Vietnam. They have fought in guerrilla armies in Eritrea, South Africa and across Latin America and have acted as spies and couriers. Some have incited violence and encouraged revenge for the dead as in Rwanda.

Whilst the female combatant has been described as integral to the efficient running of armed forces (D'Amico 1996), at the same time the growing body of research on the topic and the fact that we need to specify FEMALE indicates how highly contested is her role, function and presence in armed groups. Many questions around the topic clearly illustrate how much people grapple with the idea of the female combatant. How do we view her? Who is she? What motivates her to join an armed group? There must be some way to explain her.

The Women, Gender and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) module of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)¹ defines the female combatant as “women and girls who participated in armed conflicts as active combatants using arms” (2006: 8). This is a limiting definition, which does not take into account the varied roles and circumstances that female combatants experience during conflict. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers² describes a child soldier as “any person under 18 years of age who is a member of or attached to the armed political forces or an armed political group, whether or not there is an armed conflict” (Fox, 2004: 468). This definition focuses on minors in state and non-state armies as well as those armed and operating in a support capacity. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) decided on this broad definition to make certain that as many minors as possible would have access to treatment and protection developed especially for child soldiers.

Subsequently, the fact that the female combatant needs to be defined and there is more than one definition speaks to the broader issue regarding the numerous gaps in academic literature about women as combatants, a category, which challenges the gendered stereotype of ‘woman as victim’ and ‘man as perpetrator’. Most research on women and war is grounded in essentialist

¹ A set of policies, guidelines and procedures covering 24 areas of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process developed by the United Nations (UN) DDR Resource Centre.

² An NGO that works exclusively with child soldiers. <http://www.child-soldiers.org/home> [accessed on: 15 October 2011]

thinking and Western³ constructed which focuses on women either as inherently peaceful or a victim. This poses a challenge when reflecting on women's agency in conflict vs. their victimization. But as I mentioned above, women have always been part of conflict, willing or unwilling. This is particularly the experience of non-western women who live in conflict zones and do not have the choice of staying home during conflict times.

Non-western women challenge essentialist and western constructs of women and war. In addition, there are many authors who stress that the category of 'woman' is not a homogenous group and whilst the idea that 'women as peacemakers' seems to have been established across countries and cultures, it is an assumption to say that women are by nature more peaceful and nonviolent and will work towards peace more so than men. Therefore, in this research paper, I argue that to NOT recognize the role these women engage in as combatants: silences their accounts as combatants during the conflict, conceals the knowledge of that experience, thereby stripping them of any new roles or position of authority they may have held during the conflict as well as it prevents the recognition and understanding of female perpetration of violence.

1.2 Research Question

This research is interested in examining academic debates about female combatants in armed political groups in the South⁴. Whilst it could have been interesting to study a wide range of well-documented examples, from Latin America, and Asia, the specific focus was on West Africa, and the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone were selected. Narratives of women and girls' participation in non-state, armed groups in the Sierra Leone war from 1991 to 2002 and the Liberian conflict during 1989 to 1996 and from 1999 to 2001 were selected. This provides the backdrop for examining feminist literature about women combatants who had fought in those movements in addition to narratives of former women combatants themselves.

On the basis of these two case studies, an analysis of both global and local discourses around the situations, problems and capacities of female combatants is carried out. Using the work of both local and international authors, the aim is to expose, analyse and better understand the various ways in which female combatant's priorities and concerns are discussed in the literature. The intention is to highlight and analyze the similarities and differences between the two narratives in an attempt to highlight the need for former combatants to be able to represent themselves in post-conflict reconstruction situations. The research question guiding this paper is as follows:

³ For the purposes of this research paper, Western refers to the countries of Western Europe and North America (United States of America and Canada) who share similar traditions, values, and political ideologies based on liberal democracy, personal liberty and human rights.

⁴ For the purposes of this research paper, the South refers to developing, underdeveloped, emerging and non-industrialised countries.

What are the similarities and differences between international feminist literature on female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and locally grounded narratives of ex-combatants themselves?

1.3 Approach and Methodology

This study takes a critical examination of local and global feminist literature⁵ on the lives, position and status of female combatants in post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia. In doing so this study adopts the view of literature to be an, “ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena. Discourses frame certain problems; that is to say, they distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others” (Hajer 1993 as cited by Gasper & Apthorpe 1996: 2). Therefore this paper examines feminist literature on female combatants of Sierra Leone and Liberia as a framework, in order to understand what can and cannot be said about female combatants in feminist writing, and in personal narratives of ex-combatants.

In addition, I also utilize the contribution of Michel Foucault with respect to the relationship between truth, knowledge and power in terms of producing and distributing information. Mills (2003: 67) in her discussion of Foucault notes that for him, part of understanding this relationship involves understanding the “process of exclusion which leads to the production of certain discourses rather than others”. She adds that he also understood the historical processes, which support the creation of knowledge, as being able to assist the reader to see beyond universal truths. For the purposes of this paper the feminist writing is seen as a specific collective that produces a specific kind of knowledge. In addition, Foucault argues that it is necessary to detach “the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (Foucault 1980b: 133 as cited by Mills 2003: 75). Mumford (2010: 12) cites Mills (2003: 70) who notes,

“Differences in power between groups and institutions is most evident in discourses that are produced by particular institutions or individual experts about the other, whereby the ‘knower’ produces a representation of the other which plays a role in maintaining both the author and the other in their positions.”

In this regard, this research does not only examine the priorities and concerns of international feminists in their discussions on women and conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia but it is juxtaposed against the priorities and concerns of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian female ex-combatant in their own discussions about their experiences of being a combatant during conflict.

A key source in examining this comparison, in addition to the many feminist writings was the remarkable narrative account edited by Meira Asher (2004) *Face_WSLOT Women See Lot of Things* referred to in this study as *Face_WSLOT*, for short. It is the first part of an interdisciplinary societal art project by *bodylab art foundation*, which dissects “the experience of contemporary

⁵ Literature that considers the lives, position and status of women and girls ex-combatants.

social conflict in the lives of children and/or youths in three separate locations worldwide" (Asher 2004: 7). Participants use various art forms to communicate aspects of reality as experienced by three former female child combatants in post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia. The first phase of the project consists of a book and a CD, which has recorded sound compositions of words both spoken and sung by the three women who participated in the project.

The book contains life trajectories of each of the women together with their views regarding social issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and unequal relations between men and women in Sierra Leone. There is also an art installation using photographs, interactive machines and chemically modified fabrics, which portray the lives of these women as they are now and what they have gone through in order to reconcile with their experiences. Finally there is a documentary film, and a Tertiary Education Support Initiative for Women in Sierra Leone (TESI-WSL).

'Women See Lot of Things' is a translation of the Bassa⁶ word, 'Maady-edei' which is incidentally the name of the Liberian former combatant in the project, Mahade Pako. She spells her name differently to the prescribed Bassa spelling but it means the same thing. The name is symbolic in its reflection of the nature of the project, which is focused on conveying the reality of the lives of these three women as they have constructed it whilst maintaining freedom of speech of each of the participants without the distractions of a questionnaire and an outsider imposing their views on the dialogue.

Asher (2004) felt that the use of researchers outside Sierra Leone or Liberia played a part in creating a space where participants were more at ease to freely share their experiences without the fear of stigmatisation. But she notes given that some of what the women shared is still taboo in both countries and therefore could not be included in the book for fear of the consequences the women may face if some of their experiences were known to their families and communities. Whilst Asher does not explicitly say who decides what stays and what goes, participants were involved in every aspect of the project, therefore one gets the feeling that the participants were also involved in deciding what parts of their stories needed to be cut out to protect their identity.

This is also what makes this a unique project, which stands out from many research projects that deals with women and conflict. These are the stories of three women, Anita Jackson, a Liberian who moved to Sierra Leone (and presents herself as a Sierra Leonean), Chris Conteh of Sierra Leone and Mahade Pako of Liberia. Asher is the editor of the book who translates and puts in chronological order the words, feelings, thoughts and ideas of these women as they have told her. However, some allowance must be made for what gets 'lost in translation'. That is to say, there is no neutrality in translating; it is subject to interpretation by the translator if even in a minimal way which alters the story. But Asher made every effort to ensure that the original story as told to her by the participants remained intact. This was important to her in her effort to relate a different kind of reality that would allow the reader to feel closer to the participants lives without imposing her own opinions on their stories.

⁶ One of six ethnic groups in Liberia

Therefore, language was an important consideration in the project in terms of translating the different languages and media used by the participants to tell their stories. It was also an important component in relaying the ‘truth’, which is something Asher asks the reader to question – “What is the truth? There is no ultimate Truth. Truth serves a certain goal and interest at a particular moment. It can change its nature from one day to the other” (Asher 2004: 16). The stories of each participant represents multiple ‘truths’ by choosing three very different women with diverse experiences and backgrounds, who each held different roles in the conflicts, have different views and are now in very different situations post-conflict. This forces the reader to review the material with an open mind and take a deeper look at what they are presented with. Asher (*Ibid.*) notes “there is more here than meets the eye at first glance. A variety of messages are hidden beneath the surface.” Her intention is for the reader to develop a personal connection with each participant, which she does with the first section ‘Life Trajectories’. In this section, Asher presents narrations of each of participant, which relates a different reality for each, as each woman places emphasis on different details and experiences in different periods of their life.

Narration of experience can rarely be direct. Even a book written by former combatant women will be edited, selective and cannot be ‘raw voice’. However, when academic researchers express the wish to convey ‘voices’ of those in direct contact with conflict, for example, they make claims that need to be questioned. In this study, the methods of research I have used enable me to identify and then to interrogate the priorities of feminist conflict researchers. This is done by contrasting the themes dominant in feminist studies on female combatants in Sierra Leone and Liberia with those that emerge as dominant in narratives of former women combatants. By combining these approaches I hope to be able to examine in more detail whether feminist researchers can ‘represent’ the voices of women whose experiences may be very different from what the researcher expects, or chooses to focus on.

1.4 Structure of the Research Paper

This paper is organised as follows: after this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 introduces feminist theories of women’s participation in armed conflict, in a broad sense, going into the debates of former combatants as both victims and perpetrators. The issue of agency is also discussed in this chapter, which reviews briefly current debates in feminist academic literature about the female combatant in non-state, armed, political groups in the south. Chapter 3 discusses feminist academic texts and articles that claim to use the voice of the combatant, contrasting this with the narratives of two former women combatants from Sierra Leone. Chapter 4 then similarly contrasts feminist literature on Liberian women combatants with one in-depth local narrative. Finally, in Chapter 5, I return to the central research question incorporating the key findings of Chapters 3 and 4 with the intent of showing how the analysis of the key findings answers the research question. This chapter reflects on the broader issue of the implications of the two case studies selected, and also serves as a conclusion.

Map 1: Sierra Leone



Source: US State Department
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5475.htm>

Map 2: Liberia



Source: US State Department
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

Chapter 2 Reviewing Feminist Literature on Female Combatants

In examining women's participation in conflict, there are many contrasting perspectives. This chapter mainly discusses the feminist literature on the topic with a concentration on broad, theoretical approaches, rather than on case-specific feminist literature. Much of this literature will also be drawn on in the case-based chapters 3 and 4, to analyse the comparison of feminist and female ex-combatants accounts and narratives.

2.1 Women, Peace and War: Beyond Essentialism

Some approaches to women and war are either grounded in essentialist thinking or can be Western-constructed worldviews. 'Essentialist' perspectives tend to make generalising and decontextualised claims, that, for instance: 'all women are peaceful and non-violent' whilst 'all men are aggressive and war-like' (Jacoby, 2008: 67-84). These kinds of assumptions and stereotypes also tend to relegate women to domestic spheres, responsible for attending to household and family in terms of basic needs, including food, health and care. Whilst men occupy public spaces, with a 'natural' inclination and aptitude for political and military positions. This justifies the assumption in essentialist thinking, that men tend to act as women and children's protectors.

This kind of gendered binary involves both a social construction of femininity and of masculinity, with men portrayed as guardians and defenders of 'their' women. Essentialist thinking has also been critiqued by feminists such as Elshtain (1995: xiii) in her work on *Women and War*, where she criticizes the views of women as peacemakers with "beautiful souls [embodying] values and virtues at odds with war's destructiveness." She postulates that this thinking serves to recreate and secure women's position as non-combatants and men as warriors. The starting point of this study is that neither of these kinds of gendered representations of male and female identity is helpful when it comes to understanding women combatants.

Forcey (2009) a feminist author who has written extensively on the topic of women, mothering and peace has observed, it may indeed be that the connection between women and peace is an ancient one; peace is often symbolized as the mother, preserver of life, as an angel in the house. However, when Forcey (2009: 332) rhetorically asks, "Is it not women who possess the special peacemaking skills for a new, more peaceful, and more just world order?" the implication is that women who do not possess such skills may not be regarded as 'real women'. Cock (1989) takes a much more critical perspective, and views the automatic associations sometimes made between women and peace as shrouded in sexism, casting women as not only 'physically inferior' and unsuited for fighting, but also as responsible for peace. This essentialist thinking categorises women as unqualified to fight, and implies that those who do are going against their 'true nature' and should instead be focusing on life-giving activities such as childbirth and rearing a family, rather than destroying life or taking up arms. Hooks (1985) as cited by Forcey (2009) agrees that feminists

sometimes romanticize motherhood, and can even employ similar terminology to that used by overtly sexist and essentialist approaches to gender differences.

However, the suggestion that women are life affirming, not only serves to reinforce central tenants of male supremacist ideology; it may also be a view held by women themselves, including former combatants. From the feminist, non-essentialist perspective however, there are researchers who stress the importance of socially constructed gender differences in times of violent conflict. For instance, Alison (2004) adds that it is more familiar to society to represent women as peaceful and men as warlike which is difficult to argue with, as it is a widespread tendency across many societies. In line with this, Brocklehurst (2006) argues that the dichotomy of men as life-takers and women as life-givers remains central to how gender roles are constructed by the state, and also by other social actors, and perhaps especially during warfare.

Because of the complexity of the issue of gender roles, anti-war feminists are torn in the way they view the issue. D'Amico (1996) in her work on *Feminist Perspectives on Women Warriors* note that some avoid the issue altogether, suggesting it can potentially obscure the underlying causes of male violence. She adds, that others discuss gender roles cautiously within a broader framework that analyses the socio-economic and structural causes of violence, something they however continue to see as primarily – though not exclusively - a male domain. Furthermore, Decew (1995), points out that many still find it 'bizarre' or 'sick' that women would want to engage in armed combat, along with men. She suggests that most feminists still believe that women would generally achieve more meaningful equality by not bearing arms, but by working towards building peace and making conflict obsolete. This position is echoed by Peach (1994: 201) who adds that anti-war feminists believe "women have a different moral voice, one based on caring, compassion...and responsibility for others." Therefore women should be more concerned with their caretaker/provider role than with seeking opportunities to use weapons to kill others in the name of a cause. An alternative view is offered by Porter (2007), who emphasises in her research on women in combat, not ALL [emphasis added] women are peacemakers; some women make the choice to participate in conflict.

Whilst a common feminist position may be that women have no place in war, and should not be involved in direct combat, this is giving way to some serious analysis of women combatants as social actors (as will be discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 in more detail). But whilst there are those who may choose to overlook women and their role in conflict, it does not detract from the reality that women have always been involved in conflict. Whether it is in battle on the frontline or in the background providing medical care to the injured, women have always been actively involved in conflict. This is particularly the experience of non-western women who live in conflict zones and do not have the choice of staying home during conflict times. Giving discursive space to these women to tell their stories can assist in dispelling essentialist and 'universal' definitions of women in conflict such as peacemaker, victim and perpetrator of violence.

2.2 Women's Active Participation in Conflict

Vickers (1993) describes the case of the Lebanon conflict where women were involved in whatever aspect they could help – they donated blood, gave food to the fighting forces, administered first aid and sewed hospital sheets. Brett and Specht (2004) confirm, women are certainly no strangers to conflict, they have been involved in liberation struggles in Sri Lanka, Colombia, Sierra Leone, the Philippines, East Timor and South Africa to name a few. In addition, combatant groups in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had female-only units.

Applying a gendered analysis to discourses about conflicts can be useful in revealing among other things, which women get involved, what motivates their involvement and the various roles they occupy. In reviewing literature on women's participation in conflict, we see it is very telling about their lives in different cultures and societies and even the characteristics of the different conflicts. Schroven (2006: 40) in her analysis of women as combatants and victims in the Sierra Leone conflict, explains when there are changes in a society in the intensity and/or prevalence of indicators such as acceptability and/or sanctioning of aggressive behaviours, availability and access to guns and ammunition as well as sexual and gender based violence, this is indicative of gender relations in the wider societal structure and informs how a society deals with violence of any kind at any level. She elaborates that what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour for women during conflict is constructed along gendered lines and part of their gendered roles. In other words, women's participation in conflict is mediated by a set of interrelated and assimilated masculine and feminine ideals that systematically prepare society for conflict and work in conjunction with established power relations within the society that in turn dictate who can participate in conflict and how (Ibid.).

Based on this understanding, some authors support the idea that women's roles in conflict have been reflective of their gendered roles in non-conflict times (Green 1999, Enloe 1983 and 2000). They argue that it is expected and acceptable for women to participate in supportive roles as long as it is in alignment with ideas of traditional femininity (Enloe 2000). In addition, they describe the organizational structure of most liberation movements as having been fashioned against the sexual division of labour where women occupy mostly supportive roles so men are free to fight (Enloe 1983). However, these ideas are problematic in that they contradict research done on women in various conflicts who have participated as active fighting combatants, which I have mentioned at the start of this section and in the previous chapter.

In *Table 1* below, I have listed the various roles an individual could hold in an armed group as divided into the conventional roles held by women and those held by men. You will notice there is an overlapping of roles in the case of women where in addition to the role of combatant, women have also held roles in a supportive capacity. Mazurana et al. (2002) add, women's roles can and often do overlap between operating in a supportive capacity and actively fighting.

Table 1: Conventional Female/Male Roles in Rebel Groups in Conflict

Roles	Conventional Female roles	Conventional male roles
Combat soldiers	✓	✓
Trainers for combat	✓	✓
Slave labour	✓	
Sexual slave	✓	
Gather, prepare, cook	✓	
Porters	✓	
Looting	✓	✓
Suicide/Bombing missions	✓	✓
Mine sweeps	✓	✓
Child care and rearing	✓	
Spies	✓	✓
Informants	✓	✓
Messengers	✓	✓
Intelligence officers	✓	✓
Communications	✓	✓

Source: Table constructed by author (Hosein 2011) based on roles from, *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*, Mazurana and McKay (2004)

In addition, many feminist authors argue that women's most important supportive role has been that of 'mothers of the revolution', the women reproducing the male soldiers necessary to continue the fight. A number of authors (Enloe 1983, Alison 2009, Lyons 2004) have discussed at length the value of women's reproductive capabilities to revolutionary movements. Lyons (2004: 31) cites Tétreault (1994) who notes "unless a revolution can topple an old regime within a very short period of time, its ultimate triumph depends upon successful appeals to women and families to supply resources to nourish it." Women are the primary reproducers who are essential to continued efforts to challenge and overthrow the state. Enloe (1983) in her account of the 'mothers of the revolution' draws reference to the popular image used by many liberation armies of the woman holding the baby in one hand and the rifle in another. She notes that this brings to mind "images of the can-do-everything 'super-woman'" (Enloe 1983: 166). The point she attempts to make in her analysis of this image is that it implies that revolutions have the power to both transform a woman and her self-esteem and maintain the "social order that in the past has ensured the reproduction and nurturing of the next generation" (Ibid.). She theorises that whilst this image on the surface may give the impression that liberation armies are concerned with women's liberation; on a deeper level, she believes it reinforces the patriarchal ideology that a woman's place is in the home, nurturing the children. Enloe concludes that the image may ap-

pear to support women who may take up arms to defend their home front, but it also expects them to return to taking care of their families once the threat retreats. Yuval-Davis (1997) agrees that images of women who participate in conflict have been constructed in such a way as to reinforce general notions of masculinity and femininity as prevalent in the wider society of these ‘female warriors’.

Whilst there are authors who have argued that conflict often reinforces gender differences, where women are used more in a supportive capacity as dutiful wives and mothers. Their lives are treated as an accommodating arrangement because once the conflict is over, they are expected to return to their homes and communities and help with the transition of back-to-normal. I argue that this is a problematic argument in that it gives little acknowledgement to the roles women hold as combatants in its focus on women operating in a supportive capacity. This serves to illustrate that even in the literature on women’s participation in conflict there still remains a lack with respect to research on the female combatant. What do we know of those women who choose to remain as part of the revolution wanting to achieve equality with men or having political aspirations? Enloe (1983: 168) reports that for these women, “Their behaviour and their desire for equality were considered a sign of loose morals.” While Kelly (2000: 46) notes often times they are only seen on par with men when they adopted traditional male behaviour, which contradicts with the empowerment they sought by joining the revolution. She adds that it also questions whether women in the army are really breaking down gender stereotypes or indeed legitimising violence as anti-war feminists see it.

2.3 Women’s Motivation for Participating in War

Part of understanding women’s participation in conflict involves understanding what motivates their participation, which from the research, we can see is as diverse as the conflict itself. They can vary across continents, cultures and individual situations. Depending on what kind of war it is, Graham (2008) notes women are just as likely as men to participate if it is a struggle for justice or liberation, involving the majority of the masses or in defence of their community, country or family.

In her work on female terrorists in the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia FARC) Graham adds that many women also choose to take part in revolutions expecting that gender relations would be restructured as part of the restructuring of society. She notes that different authors theorise motivation along different lines. She cites the example of Whittaker (2001: 19) who categorises motivation in terms of rational, psychological and cultural. She also cites Dmitry (2001) and Cunningham (2003) who discussed seven general themes found in academic literature that accounts for female participation in conflict:

- For some their motivation is grounded in the belief in a political cause, they may be attracted to the ideology of the group, which they believe could result in change in every area of society including for women. Left-wing groups in particular often seek to break completely from tra-

ditions and women may see this as an opportunity to step into non-traditional roles

- Others are socially motivated and therefore seek entry into specific groups with the intention of achieving a high-ranking position on the social hierachal ladder, which they see as improving their status, something that they may not be able to achieve in any other space.
- Many are economically motivated by the opportunity to be employed and earn a salary which can offer financial stability to those living in poverty
- Religion is also a motivational factor that is particularly the case with religious extremist groups who promote rewards such as glory, pride and respect for those who participate in the group's activities.
- Some may be personally motivated in terms of wanting to take revenge for the death of a loved one. Graham (2008) notes personal motivation includes women who are sometimes forced to join a group or do so because of victimisation they face at home or in the community. Women may also decide to join because they are following their lover or a family member such as their brother.
- Women can also be motivated by the need to protect their family. Graham (2008) refers to this as the 'mother motivation' where women who want to provide a better life for their children may see joining a group as the only alternative available.
- For many women their choice was not their own as they were kidnapped and forced to become combatants.

This is not an exclusive list nor does each motivation operate in isolation. These are very broad categories, which I found to be more useful than others such as Whittaker's (2001) much broader three categories. It gives the reader an idea of possible motivational factors that can account for female participation in conflict. But of course women's motivation is context specific and why they choose to pick up arms could be based on any number of the factors listed above or just one or none of the above. In discussing the cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia, many researchers who interviewed women former combatants noted the most popular reason given for joining rebel groups was forced recruitment, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter took a broad look at the theoretical perspectives on women and war which are dominated by the essentialist perspective that makes general assumptions about women, positioning them as inherently peaceful, fit for the private sphere responsible for the care of the family and home. These representations of women, while giving space to the roles that women can play in conflict, help to reinforce the gendered binary of women, vulnerable, and men protectors. Other perspectives discussed included the anti-war feminists who are torn between whether or not women's participation in conflict should in fact be discussed for fear of taking attention away from men's violence.

I also discussed possible motivations for why women join rebel groups but focused on seven broadly defined motivations that could account for women and girls joining rebel groups. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it showed diversity in women's motivation for joining armed groups, which highlighted that women's experiences of conflict, cannot be homogenised and must be contextualised. However, the female combatant is discussed, it is clear that she challenges conventional, long-standing ideas about women's roles in conflict. She has also been a source of much contestation by authors. Some argue that women's roles in conflict reinforce their gendered roles in non-conflict times. Others question what she expects to gain, how she is viewed and whether she is breaking down gendered stereotypes or promoting violence. In the following chapters I use the case studies of Sierra Leone and Liberia to examine further the above feminist discussions on women's participation in conflict.

Chapter 3 Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone: Academic and Personal narratives

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the case of Sierra Leone is explored drawing on the general theoretical background already provided in Chapters 1 and 2. First the background to the conflict is given, followed by a list of dominant themes observed as recurring in feminist academic literature that is wholly or partly about Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants. I show how this feminist literature is centrally preoccupied with some of the key concerns of the international community in relation to: sexual violence and victimhood of female ex-combatants, versus their role as perpetrators.

This is contrasted this with narrations of two female ex-child combatants from *Face_WSLot* (2004) who were seventeen and eleven at the time they joined the armed groups making them child soldiers in the legal sense. In their narratives, however, this is less apparent, since seventeen and eleven year olds often assumed similar roles to adults in the Sierra Leone conflict.

3.2 Background to the Sierra Leonean conflict

Sierra Leone is located on the Western African seaboard with a population of 4.9 million. Youth make up a great percentage of the population; statistics from 2005 note 42% are below 15 years whilst 34% are between 15 and 35 years. Only about 49% of males and 29% of females are literate with males only attending school for four years whilst females attend for 2 years. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Sierra Leone last out of 179 countries in terms of the percentage of the population (70%) living under the poverty line.

Before the outbreak of civil war, there existed an oligarchic ‘shadow state’ in Sierra Leone, which was frail and suffered the consequences of corruption, which also sustained it. Sierra Leone also had to contend with issues of poor governance and mismanagement, which lead to continuous economic decline, raising unemployment rates and the erosion of civil society (Denov 2010:49). This coupled with the bleak situation of poverty, health and social welfare, which was not only complex and multi-faceted but connected to larger issues of colonization, a frail and corrupt state, collapse of institutions and structural violence were factors that contributed to the hotbed that made Sierra Leone ripe for conflict (*Ibid.*). In addition the mounting disenchantment among the youth in particular and ongoing conflicts and support of armed groups in neighbouring countries such as Liberia, Guinea and Cote d’Ivoire also had a significant impact on the growing tensions in Sierra Leone which all contributed to the outbreak of civil war in late March 1991⁷.

At this time, the All People’s Congress (APC) was in power and many had grown frustrated with their authoritarian rule and corruption. This prompted

⁷ See *Map 1* for a geographic visual of Sierra Leone and its neighbouring countries.

the emergence of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) backed by Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor. Operating under the objective of ‘freedom, justice and democracy for all Sierra Leoneans’, RUF’s recruitment pool consisted of the disillusioned youth who were recruited either voluntarily or by force. The RUF were the first to attack by crossing the Liberian border into Sierra Leone declaring that they were there to liberate the people from the rule of APC.

As the conflict progressed, it became more and more complex. In May 1997, the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) joined forces with the RUF and formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC); they then overthrew the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). However, the AFRC’s stay in power was not for very long. In February 1998, this military rule government was forced out by the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), who were supported by a few loyal SLA officers in addition to the Civil Defense Force (CDF), which was a pro-government militia.

In early January 1999, the conflict intensified when the AFRC and RUF forces invaded Sierra Leone’s capital, Freetown, where they successfully burnt down part of the city, as well as killed and wounded hundreds of thousands of civilians in less than one month. Eventually, the international community was successful in intervening and negotiating a temporary ceasefire, which led to the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord. The 11-year conflict came to an end on 18 January 2002.

3.3 Women in Sierra Leone Society Pre and Post-Conflict

Coulter (2009) in her ethnographic study of women ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, discusses the gendered lives of women and men in rural Sierra Leone and notes it difficult to talk of one unified system of gender in Sierra Leone because there are various expectations of men and women, there are also many assumptions on how women and men should behave and what roles they should occupy. Coulter discovered their roles to be mostly complementary and interdependent of each other, “men and women are assigned separate but complementary roles and duties, but men are superior to women, particularly in the legal and political domains...women in northern Sierra Leone are thus considered to be subordinate to men...” (Coulter 2009: 59). Male stereotypes label women as “dangerous and needing to be controlled...it was understood that a woman cannot *be* for herself; she is always *of* or *for* someone else” (Ibid.). In addition, customary law⁸ treated women as legal minors. This situation was made worse by the outbreak of conflict in 1991.

The Sierra Leone conflict had a particularly adverse effect on the girls and women who were already “historically relegated to positions of dependency within traditional systems of patriarchy...” (Denov and Grevais, 2007: 888) this coupled with the political and economic decline, in addition to the erosion of civic structures in the 1980s aggravated the vulnerability of women and girls

⁸ In Sierra Leone, there existed both the Formal law, which consisted of the Constitution, parliamentary laws and Common law, which the Customary law was part of – it is applicable to certain communities in Sierra Leone.

from their already subordinated position in Sierra Leone society. One of the reasons the Sierra Leone conflict gained international notoriety was because of “the widespread use of child soldiers, and the sexual abuse and ‘forced’ marriage of girl soldiers” (Park 2006: 315). Much of the literature reviewed notes that many women and girls were forcibly recruited through abduction, while some volunteered for protection purposes (Coulter 2008). Rebel groups used women and girls as fighters, sex slaves and labourers. Images such as these dichotomise women/girls and men/boys by presenting women/girls as ‘victims’ of crimes perpetrated by ‘brute’ men/boys. But is this the only story we are meant to know about girls and women’s participation in the Sierra Leone conflict? As agentless victims? What about their experience of combat? Or the different roles they held in the conflict? Or how they negotiated their security? These questions will be explored below in the review of feminist literature and Sierra Leonean women’s narratives of the conflict.

3.4 Feminist Narrations of Sierra Leonean Female Ex-Combatants

The remaining sections of this chapter discuss recurrent themes found in feminist literature on the topic of women and girls participation in the Sierra Leone conflict.

3.4.1 Sexual Violence

In chapter 1, I noted that women and girls in particular are susceptible to sexual violence in times of armed conflict both as members of armed groups or as civilians. Coulter (2009: 125) adds, “it is just not possible to write about abducted women’s experiences of war without going into the issue of rape and sexual abuse, as this was part of daily life for many women.” Indeed, a preliminary overview of the feminist literature on the experiences of female ex-combatants in the Sierra Leone conflict, revealed sexual violence to be a much discussed issue by many authors, van Gog (2008), Denov and MacLure (2006 and 2009), Coulter (2008 and 2009), Park (2006), Brett and Specht (2004), Coormaraswamy (2005), Leatherman (2011) to name a few. As well as international organisations such as Amnesty International (AI) (2007, 2005 and 2000), UNDP (2010) and other non-profit, humanitarian groups such as Human Rights Watch (2003), Physicians for Human Rights (2002) and International Alert (2007).

Park (2006: 324) notes, “In Sierra Leone, all parties to the conflict raped civilian women and girls often sadistically or in gangs”. Coulter (2009: 125) concurs “rape and sexual abuse were extremely common during the war in Sierra Leone.” Based on interviews she did with female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone she noted, “almost all girls and women...told of multiple rapes, gang rapes, and continued sexual abuse...” (*Ibid.*). In a report on sexual violence⁹ in

⁹ AI refers to sexual violence as ‘acts of torture’ and notes it was not only about rape but also included sexual slavery and forced ‘marriages’. Forced ‘marriages’ or ‘bush marriages’ (named for the location of the ‘marriage’) is defined as abducted girls who

Sierra Leone by Amnesty International (AI) (2000: 1), they introduced the report by stating, “Abduction, rape and sexual slavery of girls and women have been among the most abhorrent and distressing features of the nine-year internal armed conflict in Sierra Leone...it was systemic and widespread.” They quote statistics from research done by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) who stated, “75 percent of abducted girls and young women have been sexually abused” (AI 2000: 2). In addition, much of the report contains explicit details of females’ experiences of rape, AI (2000: 3) adds, “Girls and women abducted by rebel forces have been raped as a matter of course”, they were threatened with death if they refused or resisted.

It is common to read reports or articles similar to the one produced by AI, containing explicit and graphic details of females’ experiences of sexual violence in conflict. It has become a common trend that some argue re-victimises the individual in having them re-live very personal, private and painful experiences in a public way. In the case of Sierra Leone, Coulter (2009) reports, many females that experienced sexual violence reportedly were shocked by the nature of the sexual acts they experienced, it bordered on pornographic, as it was not the common sexual practice. In addition, the public aspect of the rape violated social taboos in Sierra Leone where “women had a ‘duty to serve’ their husbands...” (Coulter 2009: 59) which meant females who were known to be raped were stigmatised by their families and communities and even held responsible for what happened to them. Those who were virgins before being raped were now considered ‘damaged goods’ which their families considered a social disaster and the females were often ostracised in some areas. Given the low status of Sierra Leonean women and girls pre-conflict, it is understandable that many women would not want to speak about their experiences with sexual violence let alone discuss painful details for fear of being stigmatised or ostracised from their community.

However, other authors argue that to “shy away from explicit descriptions of sexual violence is also a way of silencing and censoring women’s experiences” (Coulter 2009: 128). Chris Coulter an anthropologist is one of the few authors that discusses at length in her book *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*, the dilemma she faced in whether or not to report in explicit detail Sierra Leonean females’ experiences of sexual violence. She notes that sexual violence was so common in the conflict that not to talk about individual experiences meant it would be inevitably lumped under the collective ‘war rape’ umbrella. She argues that war rapes need to be contextualised because then important aspects that are unique to each context will most likely be overlooked.

Whilst this is a viable argument, I wonder why is the combatant not the one telling her own story then? Most of these explicit and graphic details may be provided by female ex-combatants but are told through the voice of the researcher who is an outsider. Many authors argue that including the ‘voice’ of the combatant gives the research legitimacy. However, I argue that the re-

were either given as rewards to men or boys, or high-ranking men such as commanders would claim an abducted female for himself as his ‘wife’.

searcher can also be viewed as a ‘gatekeeper of knowledge’ deciding what the reader can know and not know about the combatant. Furthermore, whilst there was and still is a significant amount of international attention on sexual violence in post-war Sierra Leone; this is the emphasis of the international community not necessarily the ex-combatant. Later in this chapter I present narrations of the ex-combatant as told in their own words and it is interesting to note that sexual violence does not take centre stage when the discussion is not guided by a questionnaire and a specific agenda.

3.4.2 Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy

The dichotomy of victim-perpetrator has been a persistent theme when it comes to discussions of women’s participation in violent conflict even though post-conflict research has time and again challenged this dichotomy. As I discussed in chapter 2, women are often lumped together with children and categorised as the ‘passive’ victims in need of protection versus the ‘active’ male perpetrators. This continues to be problematic for the reader when it becomes the only perception of reality that they are made to know especially given that either labels are limiting and obscures the various roles participants may have held. In the case of Sierra Leone, women and girls who participated in the violent conflict blurred the lines between the ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ dichotomy. Whilst many were victimised through some form of violence, this did not mean that these same women and girls did not take part in perpetrating violence themselves through looting, killing and cutting of the hands of civilians.

As I discussed in the previous section, women and girls during the Sierra Leone conflict were susceptible to various forms of sexual violence, it was a part of daily life for those who were part of rebel groups and has been the focus of much international attention. Many ex-combatants report being “abducted by the RUF under circumstances of extreme coercion, violence, and fear” (Denov and MacLure 2006: 77). For them, the brutal nature of the sexual violence they experienced was debilitating. In addition to gang/individual rapes, they were subjected to rapes with objects and forced into sexual slavery as well as ‘marriage’ (*Ibid.*). As I previously mentioned, I do not deny that women and girls were victimized by violence, particularly sexual violence, however, I argue that to not solely focus on it does not take away from the part it played in women and girls experience of violent conflict. However, it may be more useful to also focus on the strategies these women and girls may have employed to negotiate their security rather than focusing solely on their victimization which also obscures the complexity of their experiences with the rebel groups.

In addition to experiences of sexual violence, women and girls had other experiences of conflict, which included roles they held such as spies, messengers, informants, porters, cooks and combatants. Coulter (2009) reports that all females who were with the rebel groups for more than one year were trained to fight but not all fought. Mazurana and Carlson (2004) add, ‘wives’ of commanders and younger girls had a lot of power within the rebel groups and were not required to fight, instead, they were in charge of the camp while the rebels were away and were the ones to select who would fight or loot that day. Of the women and girls who fought, Coulter (2009) reports, many found females to

be more brutal than the males. She quotes one male combatant who noted “female fighters were more wicked” (Coulter 2009: 137). McKay and Mazurana (2004: 44) from observations based on interviews with ex-combatants in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique adds, “Girls in fighting forces have been forced to violate taboos more fully than boys.” In the Sierra Leone conflict, the “female fighters had to prove themselves by becoming more violent than their male counterparts” (Coulter 2009: 137).

As I discussed in chapter 1, dominant feminist discussions on female fighters who are part of armed forces are judged against standards of the institution of the military, a masculine institution, in which they challenge essentialist thinking that categorises women as relatively peaceful compared to aggressive men (Enloe 1983). This thinking however does not explain the women and girls of Sierra Leone, where traditionally the women were not considered innately peaceful but “wild and dangerous and...need[ing] to be controlled” (Coulter, 2009: 142). Coulter further argues that women’s time as combatants only sought to “unleash their wild and unpredictable behaviour” (*Ibid.*) which she believes could explain why female combatants were thought to be more cold-blooded than the male combatants. With this argument, Coulter seems to be reinforcing the gendered construction of Sierra Leonean women as ‘wild and dangerous’. Additionally, whilst the context is necessary to consider, women combatants being considered as more vicious than men combatants in conflict is not an argument unique to Sierra Leone. In discussions about female combatants of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE), the FARC and the Shining Path of Peru authors have suggested that women combatants want to be considered as equal to men or need to prove themselves among other things.

To fully appreciate these experiences of women and girls who participated in the Sierra Leone conflict, it therefore becomes necessary to do a contextual analysis. Context is central to understanding the complexity of each role held by women and girls. Herein lies the problem with using EITHER victim OR perpetrator labels. It does not take into consideration the context and thus does not adequately explain women and girls who were not only victims of violence but also participants in the onslaught of violence and terror that played out across Sierra Leone. The experiences of these women and girls blurred the line that separates the two roles. They were victimised through kidnapping and being raped by mainly rebel forces but were also forced into perpetrator roles such as combatants, commanders, wives or a combination of these roles. How then do we discuss these simultaneous experiences of women and girls as both victim and perpetrator?

Given the complexities of women and girls participation in violent conflict that exists not only in the Sierra Leone conflict, a number of feminist authors (Coulter 2008, 2009, Denov and Maclure 2006, van Gog 2008, Schroven 2006) have been calling for an alternative way of conceptualising women and girls participation in violent conflict. van Gog (2008) during her field work time in Sierra Leone is one who presents an alternative consideration. She felt it was more about a distinction between “voluntary and forced participation in con-

flict¹⁰” (van Gog 2008: 62). Whilst the author acknowledges that these can also be problematic labels in the way the two are perceived, it does move away from the restricting labels of victim-perpetrator and open up discussions about motivations, agency and empowerment.

MaKay and Mazurana (2004) elaborate that the longer a female stayed in the bush, the more likely it appeared to be voluntary and she would no longer be viewed as a captive but as an active participant in the atrocities committed by the rebel groups. Coulter (2008: 55) adds, “Some girls and women managed to escape within days or months after their capture, while others stayed with their captors for up to 10 years.” Of those who stayed, Coulter (2008: 55) notes from interviews with Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants that “some took the opportunity to loot and fight in the destructive trail of the various fighting forces...most also fell in love, some married, others divorced and most had children.” Shepler (2002) from her *Post-War Trajectories for Girls Associated with Fighting Forces in Sierra Leone* notes that these women in particular found it difficult to reintegrate once the war was over because their families and communities blamed them for the circumstances they found themselves in during the conflict.

3.4.3 The Cross-Cutting Issue of Agency

Dominant discourses on agency are influenced by western feminist thinking, which promotes the belief that it is a universal desire to want to be free from relations of subordination and for women to want to be free of male domination (Heumann 2011). Western feminists argue that agency is the “capacity to realise one’s own interest against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether collective or individual)” (Mahmood 2001: 206). Therefore, agency is equated with resistance, whilst female agency is equated with resistance against relations of subordination. But there is ‘no pure place for resistance’ as a number of non-western feminists such as Mahmood (2001)¹¹, Aretxaga (1997)¹² and Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) have critiqued at length.

¹⁰ Many women denied voluntary participation but reported they were forced to participate in the conflict. Whether this is true or not is not known but many authors such as van Gog (2008) speculate that women and girls may have done this to protect themselves from the consequences associated with voluntary participation. However, Coulter (2009) reports that some of the ex-combatants she interviewed admitted to voluntary participation in the second part of the conflict. Whilst, Schroven (2006: 98) adds that “a lot of women identif[ied] as ‘bush wives’” because it provided a certain degree of protection from being accused of voluntary participation as well as access to programs and benefits.

¹¹ Mahmood (2001) argues that agency can be present in conformity and compliance where an individual may choose to reproduce and inhabit norms rather than resist them. For Mahmood, agency is associated with the ability to choose – whatever that choice may be.

¹² Aretxaga (1997) discusses the idea of ‘choiceless decisions’ which challenges liberals belief in agents having free choice and at the same time questions women’s passivity and victimization.

For the purposes of this research paper, I found Sjoberg and Gentry's theory of 'relational autonomy' to be useful in understanding how individuals are shaped and restricted by structures in their society. Their theory recognises the interdependence of choices, which are not independent but dependent on the social context in which they exist. This is useful for understanding discussions around the topic of agency as it relates to female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone which have mostly been from a western feminist point of view that questions their supposed LACK of agency in being solely 'victims' of violence, particularly sexual violence, in addition to whether their 'motivation' for joining the rebel groups was forced or voluntary.

As I discussed in a previous section, the label of 'victim' is problematic for several reasons. In addition to those I have discussed already, western feminist discourse argues that victimhood is also synonymous with lacking in agency and part of the passive-agency dichotomy that seems unavoidable in humanitarian and conflict discourses. Given the international attention to the pervasive and widespread nature of the sexual violence that occurred during the Sierra Leone conflict, it is almost impossible to avoid discussions of the topic, however I argue what needs to change is the terms of the discussion. Denov and MacLure (2006: 79) note, "many girls responded to the culture of violence with individual autonomy, resilience and resistance." They were resourceful and creative in the ways they protected themselves and avoided forms of victimization. When it came to resisting sexual violence, "one would pretend that she was menstruating...[another] reported using violent forms of resistance...[another way] was through the establishment of close relationships and a sense of solidarity¹³ among other girls and women" (Denov and MacLure 2006: 80). When it came to resisting participation in violence, many girls were not comfortable with the idea of killing others and therefore refused to kill. Denov and MacLure (Ibid.) reported that they "fired their weapons in such a way that human targets were able to escape without being hurt." Others resisted the culture of violence by "socializing covertly and engaging in forbidden or surreptitious discussions about their former lives as civilians" (Denov and MacLure 2006: 81). Girls also resisted by mobilizing themselves and others to escape. Although many efforts were not successful, these examples illustrate how girls were able to assert themselves and their individual agency and the very fact that they tried shows "remarkable courage and ingenuity" (Ibid.).

In addition, discussions around the 'motivation' for women and girls joining rebel groups and/or picking up arms is another contentious point linked to discussions of agency. In Chapter 2, I discussed Graham's (2008) seven general motivational factors found in academic literature that can account for why females participate in conflict. Whilst I noted that this could vary across continents, cultures and individual situations, in the case of Sierra Leone, Graham's seventh reason of women and girls being kidnapped and forced to join rebel groups was the dominant reason given for participation by former female

¹³ Creating a sense of solidarity was essential and helpful to "younger and inexperienced girls relied on the older women for knowledge and mentorship, as well as for the unique sense of female community" (Denov and MacLure 2006: 80).

combatants¹⁴. Brett and Specht (2004: 62) doubt that this was the case for every female but it was the reason given by most ex-combatants they interviewed. They postulate a possible reason for this was to “dissociate themselves from the real or feared accusation of voluntary participation in the conflict.” Coulter (2008: 66) adds that it served the “aid discourse and conflict analysis on women and war, [in which] women are ‘located’ primarily as refugees, displaced persons, or victims¹⁵.” I argue whilst the act itself of joining the rebel groups may have been forced making it appear as a lack of agency, what the reader misses with this restricting label is the relational autonomy as defined by Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) these women and girls employed in choosing between joining an armed rebel group versus being killed on the spot if they refused. Their choice was dependent on their context, whilst some may not have wanted to join the rebel groups, when faced with the possibility of death; this impacted the choice they made.

3.5 Face_WSLOT: The Sierra Leonean Ex-Combatant’s Own Voice

Anita Jackson was born in Liberia but the ongoing conflict, which started with the Liberian civil war forced her to move to a refugee camp in Sierra Leone when she was 17 years old. The following year, she joined the SLA as a volunteer and spent 3 months training for battle. She mentions one battle she took part in but she does not discuss her role or refer to herself as a combatant while telling her story. Her account of her involvement with armed conflict focuses mostly on her experiences as training to be a nursing assistant, caring for children she adopted along the way or helped at various duty stations with different rebel and government groups¹⁶. Anita does not provide any reasons for why she joined any of the armed groups she belonged to; she discusses her involvement with these groups in terms of facts relating to time and historical accounts. She also does not discuss her feelings at any point in her story in terms of whether she was affected by what she saw going on around her or how she felt at any point in time not even when she mentions being raped as a civilian in Liberia by four policemen or an incidence of harassment (the type she does not qualify) while she was with ECOMOG.

The next story is that of Chris Conteh which presents a different view. She was born in Sierra Leone and captured and raped by the RUF rebels when she was 11 years old. She was then selected to be a ‘wife’ of one of the rebel commanders and forced to participate in ‘Operation Stomping Stomach’,

¹⁴ I acknowledge that authors such as Park (2006), Brett and Specht (2004) and Peters and Richards (1998) discuss economic reasons for women and girls joining the rebel forces such as seeing it as a source of regular meals and access to medical supplies whilst some joined for the purpose of taking revenge. However, for the purposes of this paper, I am only examining voluntary versus forced participation.

¹⁵ Coulter (2009) notes there were several aid agencies that flooded Sierra Leone post-conflict. Their presence was tied to both material and social survival.

¹⁶ For different periods of time, she is involved with the SLA, then a junta group created by Johnny Paul Koroma, then the RUF, then the ECOMOG, then back to the RUF and finally with the SLA and ECOMOG.

where she along with the other two ‘wives’ of the commander were made to kidnap a pregnant woman, guess the sex of the unborn child, then cut the foetus out of the woman’s stomach and announce the sex. Chris’s story focuses on the hardship she endured during her time as a member of the RUF and how she survived throughout and post conflict. ECOMOG forces killed her ‘husband’, she gave birth to their child, she searched for her family only to find her sister and learn their parents had died. She prostituted herself in order to provide for her and her child and contribute to the household she shared with her sister who eventually kicked her out. She then moved from village to village in search of work and food. She does not refer to herself as being a combatant while recounting the details of her experience or any experience of fighting with the armed rebels but does mention taking part in the government’s DDR program. She eventually moves back in with her sister and gets two women to take care of her child while she returns to school.

Unlike the feminist literature I reviewed previously, the ex-combatants themselves in their own voice constructed these narrations albeit they were translated and edited. It was important for the editor to remain true to ex-combatants stories as much as possible in terms of having the ex-combatant talk about aspects of their experience that were important to each of them and what they were each comfortable with sharing. Whilst these stories are in no way representative of all former female combatants, what is revealing about them is diversity in experiences that is shared even just between two former combatants. Each combatant focused on a different aspect of their time as a combatant because they each had very different experiences of the conflict.

This is a stark contrast to feminist literature that homogenises the experiences of women in war under thematic groups such as those I discussed in this chapter. When compared to the narrations of Anita and Chris, we see how limiting and concealing feminist literature on the Sierra Leonean female combatant can be. I argue that much of what women former combatants have experienced is made invisible in order to adhere to the researcher’s agenda as evidenced by the focus on issues such as sexual violence, victim-perpetrator identities that may not necessarily be the focus of the ex-combatant. Additionally, whilst Chris’s narration contains aspects of sexual abuse, it is not the focus of her narration. She mentions in the last four lines of the first paragraph, “Two rebels raped me...three of us were selected to ‘wives’ of the rebel commanders” (Asher 2004: 48). Her narration focuses more on survival as evidenced by her many attempts to secure and income, food and shelter for her and her child.

Feminist discussions about the Sierra Leonean female ex-combatant focus and portraying women who have been sexually abused and exploited as helpless ‘victims’, which runs in line with the dominant feminist discourse I discussed in previous chapters on women in war that positions women as victims in need of protection. However, a common thread in both stories was the theme of education. Although, both former combatants discussed it in different ways, Anita mentions getting access to training as a nursing assistant with one of the rebel groups she belonged to and how this became her main source of income; Chris received no training and talks about returning to school post conflict so she can support herself and her children and contribute to the home she shares with her sister.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the case study of Sierra Leone was used to examine the priorities and concerns of international feminist literature on the topic of women in war as compared to priorities and concerns revealed in narrations by two former Sierra Leonean female child combatants. After reviewing a considerable amount of feminist academic literature written entirely on or in part about the Sierra Leonean female combatant, themes such as women combatants as victims of sexual violence; women combatants as perpetrators of war crimes in addition to the question of women ex-combatants' agency in terms of negotiating their own security and joining an armed groups were all found to be recurrent. Coincidentally, some of these themes were also found to be the concern of the international community, as evident by the number of reports by international NGOs and UN agencies.

When these literatures are juxtaposed against the individual narrations constructed by the two Sierra Leonean ex-combatants, we immediately notice a difference between the two in terms of what is the focus of the discussion. The feminist literature discussed above homogenises female ex-combatants experiences of conflict placing it all under the umbrella of collective war experience, which hides aspects that may be unique to each situation. However, whilst I acknowledged in my methodology that individual narration of experience can rarely be direct as one has to account for the editing, the individual narrations discussed above illustrated that ex-combatants have a different idea about what is important to them in terms of their experience of conflict and this contrasts with that of the researcher's own priorities and concerns.

In addition, what also stood out was that much of this reviewed literature had been written from an 'outsider' perspective using the 'voice' of the ex-combatant to legitimise the researcher's own priorities and concerns. While reporting on the experiences of the Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants, the authors have imposing their own perspectives and agendas. I argue that while the researcher may have had the interest of the ex-combatant in mind in wanting to include her 'voice' through the use of direct quotes, the conversation and topics discussed revolved around the interest of the researcher rather than what the ex-combatant chose to focus on. The researcher therefore acts like a 'gatekeeper' regarding what can and cannot be known about the ex-combatants experiences of conflict.

For example, in the case of sexual violence, many authors argue that the graphic nature of the details of sexual violence re-victimises the individual whilst others claim that providing these details is necessary in order to not silence or censor women's experiences of conflict. Whilst I agree that it is important for women's experiences of conflict to be known, I argue that the women who have had these experiences should be the ones constructing the story and sharing what they consider relevant about their experience. Painful details about wartime rape may not be an aspect of her experience that she wants to remember or one that is important for her to tell. Similarly, with the victim-perpetrator dichotomy theme, we are once again presented with a limited view of the ex-combatant experience of the conflict. I argue that this dichotomy is problematic if it is the only perception of reality that we are made

to know about the ex-combatant as either-or labels are not only limiting but also conceals the various roles and experiences of combatants.

Chapter 4 Female ex-combatants in Liberia

4.1 Introduction

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter explores the case of Liberia further against the general theoretical background already provided in Chapter 1 and 2. Firstly the background to the conflict is mapped. This is then followed by a list of dominant themes observed as recurring in feminist academic literature that is wholly or partially about Liberian female ex-combatants¹⁷. Once again I show how feminist literature on Liberian female ex-combatants is centrally preoccupied with some of the key concerns of the international community in relation to: victimhood of female ex-combatants, versus their role as perpetrators.

This is once again contrasted with a narration of a Liberian female ex-child combatant from the key resource in challenging international feminist literature on women's participation in conflict, *Face_WSLOT* (2004). The woman was fifteen at time when she became a combatant and was therefore a child soldier in the legal sense. In her narrative, however this is not immediately obvious, since fifteen year olds often assumed similar roles to adults in the Liberian conflict.

4.2 Background to the Liberian conflict

Liberia is located on the Western African seaboard bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. In 2010, the population was listed at 4.1 million with English being the main language in addition to 29 indigenous languages. The UNDP HDI report (2010) ranked Liberia 182 out of 186 countries. Whilst it is one of Africa's oldest republics, Liberia is better known for the civil war, which occurred in two parts spanning a total of 12 years. The conflict was responsible for the deaths of more than 250,000 people leaving over 2,000,000 displaced persons (Specht, 2006).

Since it was founded in 1821, Liberia has had few periods of peace with constant tension between the Americo-Liberians¹⁸ and indigenous Liberians. The first president who came into power in 1944, attempted to unify the different ethnic groups, by improving the infrastructure, and providing educational and employment opportunities for everyone. However the following President had a different agenda, which resulted in increased conflicts between the government and opposition groups. It was also this government that was overthrown in early 1980 in a military coup led by Samuel Doe who then became the first native Liberian to be President. Whilst he promised the Liberian people to return Liberia to a multi-party democracy, this went out the door when he started bullying, jailing and/or killing his opponents using the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL).

¹⁷ Literature on the experiences of the Liberian female ex-combatant however was not as easy to locate as that of Sierra Leone. Therefore, the quantity of literature discussed in this chapter is significantly less than that of the previous chapter.

¹⁸ The name given to the freed slaves from America, who founded Liberia in 1821.

This climate of oppression and dictatorship contributed to the outbreak of civil war in late 1989 when Charles Taylor's¹⁹ rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire thus starting the first part of a two-part civil war²⁰. However, differences between Taylor and another of his commanders, Prince Johnson ended in a split in the NPFL with Johnson forming the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Now with three armed groups involved in the conflict, it became more complex not to mention difficult to resolve. After several years of fighting, the Abuja Peace Accord was signed in the Nigerian capital in 1995 and Taylor was elected President of Liberia.

Taylor however was unsuccessful in keeping the rebel forces from rising up and in mid 2000, fighting began again along with a host of opposition groups entering the mix. These included the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the Sierra Leonean supported United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO) who eventually split along two ethnic lines and became UNLIMO-K (a Mandingo dominated group) and UNLIMO-J (a Krahn dominated group) and the Liberian Peace Council (LPC). With such an increase in rebel forces, it became even more difficult to resolve the conflict and Taylor ultimately sought asylum in Nigeria on September 2003.

In 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was also established and deployed with the mandate to support the peace negotiations and signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). An interim government made up of rebels, government and civil society groups were formed in October 2003 in an effort to fill the leadership void left by Taylor. Relative peace was established in 2004 and supported by 15,000 UNMIL troops and a considerably large international aid presence. The following year formal elections were held and for the first time in any African state, a female President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected to office.

4.3 Women in Liberian Society Pre and Post-conflict

As with Sierra Leone, it is difficult to generalize Liberian culture, as it is such a diverse country in terms of counties, languages and ethnic groups each of which have their own social and cultural practices. However, there are certain aspects that can be seen throughout most of Liberia. Some of which include, the gendered roles and positions of women before the Liberian civil war; editors Bennett, Bexley and Warnock of the text, *Arms to Fight Arms to Protect: Women Speak out about Conflict* (1995), note from interviews with Liberian women that before the civil war, women had an insignificant presence in political, administrative and business roles. Specht (2006) in a report done for the International Labour Office (ILO) based on interviews with former Liberian female combatants confirms this and adds that men were the breadwinners and decision makers, who exercised power over the women and girls. Women took care of the home and the children; sometimes they worked in the market. But

¹⁹ Taylor is an Americo-Liberian who had been part of Doe's administration but then escaped to the United States of America when he was accused of embezzlement.

²⁰ See *Map 2* for a geographic visual of Liberia and its neighbouring countries.

whilst Liberian women were also seen as strong, independent women, Specht (2006) reports that there existed no equality between women and men with women occupying a lower status than men. In addition, Specht (2006) adds, that amongst all the women she talked with, there were none that reported experiences of domestic and gender-based violence. She acknowledges that that does not mean it did not happen but finds is questionable that in a war where sexual violence was rampant, that she did not hear at least one experience of domestic gender based violence pre-conflict.

But the war changed all this with some women becoming participants in the conflict and a vast number becoming the breadwinners in their families. Existing traditions and cultural practices were replaced with one of extreme violence that involved “rape, cannibalism and burning people alive” (Specht 2006: 42). For girls, they were forced to ‘grow up’ over night almost with many being separated from their parents and families and having their first sexual experiences at very early ages. Also, the conflict brought about a new determination on the part of women to be more independent and active in the political and business aspects of their country.

But there was also a change in women’s attitude towards Liberian men. The conflict put women in a position where they were now responsible for supporting the household and with very little economic opportunities in a war-torn society, many women entered into a sex-in-exchange-for-money relationship with men who could provide them with a much needed source of income. This in turn was not well received by Liberian men who in spite of understanding the economic rationale felt “ignored...jealous and humiliated” (Bennett, Bexley and Warnock 1995: 9). Liberian women looked upon this as the men being ungrateful for the sacrifice they had to make in order to support the family, which incited feelings of hostility and resentment towards the men by the women who also lost respect for the men as well. Bennett, Bexley and Warnock (1995) add it is one of the unfortunate consequences of conflict that women who have been sexually abused and exploited have to deal with rejection and devaluation by the family and community. They further state, even if there is acknowledgement from the family and community that they were indeed victims of the conflict and even if they may feel sympathetic to their plight, often times strict gender roles and relations label these women as ‘damaged’ and disallows families from intervening to provide support for these women, instead they are made to ostracize and stigmatize them.

4.3 Feminist Narrations of Liberian Female Ex-combatants

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss recurrent themes found in feminist literature on the topic of women and girls participation in the Liberian conflict.

4.3.1 Representing and Self-representing as Victim

Coulter (2008: 66, 2009: 148) notes that aid discourses locate women “primarily as refugees, displaced persons, or ‘victims’.” It is a limiting framework that dictates how women who have experienced conflict in whatever capacity can and should talk about their experiences. In previous chapters, I have noted

that I do not dispute that women are indeed victims of conflict, but as I argued in chapter 3, to only see them in this light conceals other experiences of conflict they may have had. Coulter (*Ibid.*) notes this is how development agencies exercise their dominance - through the power of naming who can be a 'victim' and who can be a 'perpetrator' and in post-conflict Liberia (as was also the case in Sierra Leone) aid agencies had an enormous presence that was tied to the material and social survival of those in an impoverished, war-torn society.

Utas²¹ (2005) in his article, *Victimy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's social navigation of the Liberian Zone* which is based on interviews with former Liberian female ex-combatants calls for another way of looking at the label of victim. He argues that the label of victim does not necessarily have to be equated with lack of agency but it can actually be seen as a strategic form of agency employed by the ex-combatant in presenting herself as a victim. He concurs with Coulter (2008, 2009) and adds that the aid-discourse label of victim is often presented as part of the mutually exclusive dichotomy of victim-perpetrator, which is applied to women and only serves to trap them in a disempowering state. This limiting framework allows the reader to only know the violence that was done to women as opposed to how they might have coped, struggled or sought to empower themselves in a conflict ridden environment.

But he notes that if we looked at victimy as one tactic (among others) used by Liberian female ex-combatants it opens up a whole other dialogue that reveals how these women socially navigated their environment. Utas (2005: 407) like Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) see agency as "highly dependent on specific social situations." His article presents experiences of a former female combatant, Bintu, which he uses as examples of how former female combatants employed social navigation tactics to protect themselves during battle and in post-conflict Liberia. They include, "establishing and carefully managing relations with boyfriends, commanders, co-wives, peacekeepers [and] NGO staff..." (Utas 2005: 408). He adds that social navigation tactics can also involve women accepting humanitarian aid in some circumstances or taking up arms in other circumstances. Female ex-combatants negotiation of their security operated along a continuum between tactics of victimy and others mentioned above. Utas (2005: 409) argues that in self-representing as a victim, women not only "established themselves as 'legitimate recipients' of humanitarian aid" but it also served to create "compassionate bonds with important social actors in both war zone and post-war settings" (*Ibid.*).

4.3.2 Perpetrators of Violence: The Liberian 'Lara Crofts'

Liberian disarmament statistics revealed, "between two to four percent of the fighters...were female" (Utas 2005: 405). For groups such as the NPFL, every 10 combatants, one was female. In conflict torn Liberia as similar to Sierra Leone, both men and women were perpetrators of violent acts, and women were known to be as fierce as their male counterparts. Utas (2005) notes a male

²¹ Whilst I am not aware if Utas is a self-declared feminist, and he does not use gender as an analytical tool, but his work is concerned with lives, position and status of women and girls ex-combatants.

combatant saying how feared they were when they had a woman fighting amongst their group. Civilians reported being more afraid of them than men. This is not an unfamiliar image of female combatants who are often described as more heinous and brutal than men. As I mentioned in chapter 2, women are often presented as helpless victims lacking in agency and autonomy, unable to defend themselves during conflict and therefore when they step outside of these representations, anything outside of this ‘norm’ is perceived as abnormal and even worse than male combatants.

One of the popular images of the Liberian conflict that made its way into western news and impacted the dominant gender discourse of women’s role in war as primarily victims was the image of Colonel Black Diamond who headed the Women’s Auxiliary Corps (WAC) of the LURD. Utas (2005) cites Itano (2003) as describing her as an African ‘Lara Croft’ with her muscular look, form-fitting clothes, AK-47 and red beret. The western media was mesmerised with her feminine image of fancy hair-dos and make-up, which contrasted with the image they constructed of her and her battalion which “directly challenged the dominant gender discourse” (Utas 2005: 404) on women in conflict. They portrayed her and the group of women she commanded as killers who were equally vicious as the men they fought along side, only the women’s images were ‘sexified’. It was as if they could not reconcile the essentialist constructed image of ‘women as peaceful’ with that of Black Diamond and her battalion’s roles as “brutal field commanders and soldiers” (Utas 2005: 405), they needed to find some way to ‘feminise’ their images by placing emphasis on the fancy hair-dos and make-up.

Utas (2005: 404) adds that not only did the image of Black Diamond challenge the way women in war are discussed but she also established Liberia as the “‘African Other’ to the rest of the world and even within the continent itself.” Utas (2005) adds, until then, female combatants in other rebel movements in countries such as Uganda and Congo have acted mostly in supportive roles, however the female combatants of Liberia were on the frontline as part of a special unit who were feared by not only civilians but male combatants as well²². Specht (2006) adds women of the WAC were indeed well respected by the senior officials of WAC and LURD for being able to fight ‘more fiercely’ than men in the other units. One commander was noted as saying, “the girls were very, very strong” (Specht 2006: 62). Senior officials added that even though the women fighters were small in numbers, their presence on the frontline fighting along side their male counterparts was necessary for encouraging the men to fight during times when they were tired or scared to fight.

4.4 Face_WSLOT: The Liberian Ex-Combatant’s own voice

Mahade Pako was born in Liberia. She had been attending school before war broke out but her education was interrupted when Charles Taylor’s rebels

²² This is not entirely correct for the entire African continent, as research done on female combatants in Mozambique (West 2000) and Zimbabwe (Lyons 2004) reveal similarities with the way the Liberian ‘Lara Crofts’ are discussed in terms of being more feared than their male counterparts.

started the Liberian civil war. When she was 15 years old, the INPFL burnt her father to death in front of her. She reported, “I could not cry because they would realise he was my father and kill me” (Asher 2004: 58). It was in that same year that she was captured by the ULIMO and trained for six months to be a combatant. The beginning of Mahade’s narrative provides much insight into her time as a combatant, the combat training she received and how she rose in ranks within the ULIMO from a Squad Commander, to Lieutenant and finally Captain. This is also the focus of her narrative – her experience as a combatant. However, whilst she explains her initial entry into the armed group was forced, she does not explain why she stays or continues to go back every time war breaks out.

The theme of the narrative changes when she discusses giving birth and wanting to find her family. Her family knew she had been with the rebels. She reports that her mother was afraid of her because of what she had heard about the way the rebels killed people. She does not discuss how this made her feel but says that she left and “went back to the jungle” (Asher 2004: 59). During her second disarmament, she did a hairdressing course but then war broke out again and she rejoined the rebels. After the ceasefire, a friend tried to convince her not to continue as a combatant anymore, which she agreed to but she had no way of supporting herself and at her friend’s suggestion, becomes a prostitute. After some time, she along with others decide to follow Lucifer Johnson²³ who escaped Charles Taylor’s soldiers to Sierra Leone, which is where she decided to settle. She brings along one of her sons but gives him to a lady to take care of, as she cannot. The reader learns at this point that she also has two other children that she left in Liberia with their father’s parents. She continues to work as a prostitute in Sierra Leone.

With each detail Mahade provides, she also shares with the reader some of the complexities of the Liberian conflict in terms of the movement of the conflict from ceasefire, to disarmament, to the split of the ULIMO, re-joining the rebels, a peace agreement, to being disarmed again, then another outbreak of war, and another ceasefire, to elections, to another outbreak of war and finally the end of the war. This is different from the usual historical details such as timelines and actors we are given by researchers in that it is from the perspective of an actual participant providing more in depth details about the same historical events.

As with the two Sierra Leonean narratives discussed in chapter 3, the Liberian narrative was constructed by the ex-combatant in her own voice and is not representative of all Liberian female ex-combatants. Her focus is more on being a combatant and all that entailed, including training and moving up in rank which provides useful insight into life as a female combatant, she also provides details on the movement of the conflict that is not necessarily found in the background literature researchers may provide on the conflict. She discusses topics of pregnancy and challenges with child rearing but these are

²³ Also known as Prince Johnson, he led the breakaway party INFPL from Charles Taylor’s NFPL. He was noted for capturing and executing the former Liberian President Samuel Doe.

secondary to the main focus, which is her experience as a combatant, which makes her narration quite the rarity in the details it provides on a female being trained and advancing within the hierachal ranks of an armed group. The themes observed in Mahade's narration, as was also the case with Anita and Chris's narrations, are very different from those observed in literature done by researchers about Liberian female ex-combatants. Additionally, Mahade's narration introduces to the discussion on women in war themes such as women's experiences of being a combatant, including training and moving up in rank. These are experiences that NEED to be part of discussions on women as perpetrators of violence within the context of war.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the case of Liberia is examined to discuss the priorities and concerns of international feminist literature on the subject of women's participation in violent conflict, comparisons were made with the Sierra Leone case study presented in chapter 3. In addition, the case of Liberia was juxtaposed against the priorities and concerns observed in a narration by a Liberian combatant. As I mentioned in a footnote earlier in this chapter, information on Liberian female ex-combatants experiences of the conflict has been hard to come across, therefore in the literature that was reviewed, the following recurrent themes were observed: women ex-combatants self-representing as victims and women ex-combatants as perpetrators of violence. There is also the additional theme of agency that underscores both previously mentioned themes.

When compared to Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants, Liberian female ex-combatants are discussed in a similar manner. For instance, some texts are similarly written from an 'outsider' perspective using the 'voice' of the ex-combatant to legitimise the researcher's own priorities and concerns and at the same time imposing their own perspectives while reporting on the experiences of the Liberian female ex-combatant. I argue as is similarly the case with Sierra Leone that while the researcher may have had the interest of the ex-combatant in mind in wanting to include her 'voice' through the use of direct quotes, the conversation and topics discussed revolved around the interest of the researcher rather than what the ex-combatant chose to focus on. Furthermore, the researcher acts like a gatekeeper regarding what can and cannot be known about the ex-combatants experiences of conflict.

This was illustrated in feminists' narrations of self-representing as victim. Here, we were made aware of how very embedded is the victim-perpetrator dichotomy in aid discourses, so much so that women ex-combatants are encouraged to present themselves as victims in order to 'legitimately' qualify for aid. And this is where we also see the difference in Utas (2005) and his approach to the victim-perpetrator dichotomy as compared to most authors who also discuss this topic. Utas (2005) attempts to deconstruct the stereotype of women as victims in conflict in an effort to present the reader with a different view of seeing the agency in women's actions and choices that may otherwise be seen as them lacking in agency. He argues and I agree: can the female ex-combatant's choice be seen as one of exercising agency through relational autonomy whereby her choice is interdependent on societal structures? Or as Utas (2005) himself puts it, can we see it as a strategic form of agency that al-

lows the ex-combatant to socially navigating her environment? Here as with Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants, the topic of victimhood also features in feminist literature but with Liberia, we are presented with women who self-present as victims as it serves a purpose that could be profitable for them as opposed to Sierra Leone, where women's victimhood is defined in terms of being victims of sexual violence. Whilst the two examples discuss former female combatants as victims, their victimhood is discussed in two very different ways. In one instance, we are asked to look at victimcy as agency while in the other we are made to see victimacy as a lack of agency.

In addition, on the perpetrator side of the dichotomy, emphasis is placed on Liberian women ex-combatants being more violent than their male counterpart. This is similar to the way Sierra Leonean women are discussed. However, this is not an image that is exclusive to these two conflicts but women in rebel groups in Colombia and Peru as well as Sri Lanka and Nepal have also been labelled in a similar manner. I argue that the label of perpetrator is just as limiting and obscures other experiences of conflict that women ex-combatants may have. In the case of Liberia, western media in addition to the local population grappled with the image of Black Diamond – how do we view this 'feminine beauty' that is also a vicious killer? In chapter 2, I noted for women who participate in violent conflict or those who decide to take up arms they challenge essentialist thinking that positions women as peaceful. Alison (2009: 120) notes that they are seen as a 'hyper agent', who must be a mad or evil woman, a deviant from the norm. She adds, the trouble with this categorisation is that in defining violent women it also sets parameters for the kind of person women should be and should not be.

Lastly, these themes were then juxtaposed against narrations constructed by the Liberian ex-combatant herself. Similar to the case of the two Sierra Leonean women ex-combatants, who also constructed their own story, this comparison also revealed a difference in the focus of the experience of being a combatant when the ex-combatant constructs her own narrative as compared to the focus of the researcher. Additionally, this narrative as with the two Sierra Leonean narratives provided yet another kind of experience of women in conflict, which highlights how very diverse women's experience of conflict, can be.

Chapter 5 Analysis, Reflections and Conclusions

In answering the research question of ‘what are the similarities and differences between international feminist literature on female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and locally grounded narratives of ex-combatants themselves?’ This research paper did so by examining feminist academic literature that discussed the experiences of women combatants in non-state armed groups in Sierra Leone and Liberia. These views were then contrasted with the female ex-combatants’ own narrations of their experiences, with the intention of illustrating how feminist academic researchers impact the research process with their own agendas and interests, which often departs from the priorities and experiential knowledge of women ex-combatants. The study was desk-based and conducted on the basis of a broad review of feminist literature on women ex-combatants, which claimed to include the ‘voice’ of female combatants themselves. The main themes focused on and as observed from recurring trends in feminist academic literature on Sierra Leone and Liberia were: sexual violence, victimhood versus perpetrator identities, and often with a cross-cutting interest in questions of agency.

The concern of sexual violence was not only a major concern of the international community but it was also a dominant feature in feminist literature on Sierra Leone. It examined women as victims of sexual violence in conflict; a conceptualization that I illustrated in chapter 2 was part of the gendered dichotomy in conflict that positioned women as vulnerable victims of sexual violence and the men as the perpetrators of violence. Whilst I do not dispute that women and girls did indeed experience sexual violence, I argue that in preserving this view, it limits the way in which women who have experienced violence can talk about that experience. Furthermore, their ‘victimhood’ now becomes their identity – they are “a victim as a person” (Coulter 2009: 149). In addition, the preservation of this victim-perpetrator dichotomy makes it easier for aid agencies to exercise their dominance through the power of naming; they attach criteria for who can qualify as a victim and it is only these people who can get access to aid. A consequence of all this is that other experiences of conflict that women may have are made invisible or silenced.

In addition the concern of women as perpetrators of violence was dominant in both the Sierra Leone and Liberia case study. Reports from community members as well as members of the rebel groups reported how much they feared the female combatants, they were seen as more brutal and vicious than the men. I argue in chapter 2 that gendered constructions of masculinity and femininity and the sexual division of labour have framed how feminist writings have discussed women’s involvement in rebel movements. Violence is seen as part of the construction of masculinity, which relegates men to combat positions while women occupy support roles which service men. Feminist literature argues that when women cross these boundaries to take up arms and become perpetrators of violence, their family and community see them as embodying masculine qualities; or they are feminized, as was the case with Black Diamond, ‘the Liberian Lara Croft’ who was portrayed as a feminized brutal killer.

Similarly, the cross cutting issue of agency was discussed in one way or another with all themes found in feminist literature on female combatants in Sierra Leone and Liberia and discussed in chapters 3 and 4. As I discussed in chapter 3, feminist discussions on the topic of agency are dominated by a western perspective, which calls for resistance to male subordination through conscious political action. This view denies women in non-state, armed groups much, if any agency, as western feminists argue they are not part of the decision-making process nor are their views considered in post-conflict reconstruction processes. Foucault as discussed by Mills (2003) notes this is one of the issues when Western feminists attempted to discuss the 'truth' with respect to women's experiences and conditions. Mills (2003) further adds that Foucault noted their intention was to oppose sexist stereotypes. However, what ended up happening was non-western feminists began challenging these ideas and their representations, claiming them to be homogenous and denying women their individuality. This research has sought to underscore how very limiting this western-constructed idea of agency is in equating agency with resistance. Not recognising that agency can exist in other forms, such as those argued by non-western feminists and discussed in chapter 3, particularly denies Sierra Leonean and Liberian female combatants the relational autonomy they employed to negotiate their security during and post-conflict. However, I argue it is not enough to understand that ex-combatants can derive agency from relational autonomy. The discussion on agency needs to extend to understanding the different levels of agency associated with different levels of power.

The above concerns and priorities of global feminists were then contrasted with local experiences as told by women ex-combatants themselves in a key text with narrations constructed by three former women combatants, covering experiences from Sierra Leone and Liberia²⁴. The priorities and concerns observed in these three narratives were different from those of the global feminist literature. The key issues for these former 'women in arms' were: the story of their recent lives; with less emphasis on sexual violence and victimhood; and with different priorities for each women. What was distinctive was the importance of both professional work (e.g. nursing) and of negotiating security through relationships, including intimate relationships. For all three former women combatants, an absolutely central priority had been obtaining an education as a way to retain and then return to a 'normal life', as they each defined it. This focus on career, education and vital interpersonal relationships, is not reflected in the feminist literature reviewed in this research paper, which often seems to use the 'voices' of women combatants mainly to legitimise their own concerns. Whilst these stories are in no way representative of all former Sierra Leonean and Liberian female ex-combatants, what is revealing about them is the diversity in experiences that is shared. Each combatant focused on a different aspect of their time as a combatant, which reflected the different experiences of conflict they had.

²⁴ I recognise that I am contrasting a sizeable body of research done by feminists with three single narratives and in so doing, acknowledge that these single narratives do not speak for all Sierra Leonean and Liberian female ex-combatants.

These contrasts to feminist literature that homogenises the experiences of women in war under thematic priorities and concerns such as those I discussed above and in Chapters 3 and 4 of this paper. I argue in chapter 3 and 4 that researchers act like a gatekeeper regarding what can and cannot be known about women ex-combatants experiences of conflict. But not only a gatekeeper; also they are now 'experts' on the topic. Researchers then present their research as 'fact', as 'truth' legitimised by the 'voice' of the combatant, or it has undergone the 'ratification' process of being tested and found to be reliable and valid, as Foucault would argue. Mills (2003) notes that Foucault cautions us to beware of accepting 'fact'. He elaborates that we need to consider the complex and lengthy process of editing and exclusion which information goes through before it is 'known'. This point is reflected in Asher (2004) discussion of her role as editor of *Face_WSLOT*. She noted translators are not neutral in their role and what they make 'known' through their translations is subject to interpretation. She also questions the concept of 'truth' in recognising that there is not no, one Truth but multiple truths which is what she attempted to show with the individual narrations.

In addition, the focus and priorities of the former women combatants does not match those discussed by the researcher. Mills (2003: 69) notes of Foucault's discussion on the production of knowledge that it can also happen when there is an "imbalance of power relations between groups of people or between institutions/states." Thus she adds, Foucault would argue that due to the imbalance of power relations between female ex-combatants and international researchers, knowledge is produced ABOUT female ex-combatants NOT by the female ex-combatant BUT by international researchers. This is not to say that knowledge produced about the ex-combatant by the ex-combatant is necessarily 'right' or 'better' than that produced by the researcher because again Foucault would argue that all knowledge is local and situated.

Therefore we must remember the knowledge produced by the ex-combatants is dependent on and impacted by their own context, which would speak to the diversity of the knowledge produced and as I illustrated with the different experiences shared by each of the former women combatants in *Face_WSLOT*. Additionally, the ex-combatant is not completely powerless in her relationship with the researcher, because whilst the researcher may have his/her own agenda; the combatant has power speaking through her in what and how she chooses to share her knowledge. Finally, Foucault's discussion on the imbalance of power between groups of people or between institutions/states has been useful in highlighting the lack in literature from the point-of-view and as constructed by former women combatants about their experience.

References

Alison, M., 2004. Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security. *Security Dialogue* [e-journal] 35 (4) Available through: Sage Journals Online [accessed 10 February 2011]

Alison, M.H., 2009. *Women and Political Violence: Female combatants in ethno-national conflict*. London and New York: Routledge.

Amnesty International, 2007. *Sierra Leone: Getting Reparations Right for Survivors of Sexual Violence*. [online] London: Amnesty International. Available at: <http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/ai-reparations_for_survivors_2007.pdf> [accessed on: 30 October 2011]

Amnesty International, 2005. *Sierra Leone: No One to Turn to: Women's Lack of Access to Justice in Sierra Leone*. [online] London: Amnesty International. Available at: <http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/ai-no_one_to_turn_to_2005.pdf> [accessed on: 30 October 2011]

Amnesty International, 2000. *Sierra Leone: Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence Against Girls and Women*. [online] London: Amnesty International. Available at: <http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/ai-rape_and_other_sexual_violence_2000.pdf> [accessed on 30 October 2011]

Asher, M. ed., 2004. *FACE_WSLot Women See Lot of Things*. The Hague: Bodylab Foundation.

Aretxaga B., 1997. *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Bennett, O., Bexley, J. and Warnock K. eds., 1995. Arms to Fight – Arms to Protect: Women Speak Out About conflict. London: Panos.

Brett, R., and Specht, I., 2004. *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*. Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. Geneva: International Labour Office.

Brocklehurst, H., 2006. *Who's Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations*. Ashgate: Hampshire

Cock, J., 1989. Keeping the Fires Burning: Militarization and Politics of Gender in South Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, 16 (45-46), pp. 50-64

Coormaraswamy, R., 2005. Sexual Violence during Wartime. In: Durham, H. and Gurd, T., eds. 2005. *Listening to the Silences: Women and War*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV. Ch. 7.

Coulter, C., 2009. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Coulter, C., 2008. Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?, *Feminist Review* 88(1): 54-73.

D'Amico, F., 1996. Feminist perspectives on women warriors. *Peace Review*, 8(3), pp. 379-384.

Decew, J. W., 1995. The Combat Exclusion and the Role of in the Military. *Hypatia*, 10(3), Winter, pp. 56-73.

Denov, M., 2010. *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Denov, M., and Gervais, C., 2007. Negotiating (in)Security: Agency, Resistance, and Resourcefulness among Girls Formerly Associated with Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front, *SIGNS* 32(4): 885-910.

Denov, M., and Maclure, R., 2009. Girls and small arms in Sierra Leone: Victimization, participation and resistance. In: Farr, V., Myrttinen, H. and Schnabel, A., eds. 2009. *Sexed Pistols: The Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press. Ch. 3.

Elshtain, J., 1995. *Women and War*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Enloe, C., 1983. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives*. London: Pluto Press Limited.

Enloe, C., 2000. *Maneuvers – The International Politics of Militarising Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Forcey, L., 2009. Women as Peacemakers: Contested Terrain for Feminist Peace Studies. *Peace & Change* [e-journal] 16 (4) Available through: *Wiley Online Library* [accessed 1 February 2011]

Fox, M., 2004. Girl Soldiers: Human Security and Gendered Insecurity. *Security Dialogue*, 35(4), pp.465-479.

Gasper, D., and Apthorpe, R., 1996. Introduction: Analysis and Policy Discourse. In: R. Apthorpe and D. Gasper, eds. *Arguing Development Policy: Frames and Discourses*, pp. 1-15

Graham, S., 2008. Mother and Slaughter: A Comparative Analysis of the Female Terrorist in the LRA and the FARC. In: J. Pretorius, ed. *African Politics: Beyond the Third Wave of Democratisation*. Cape Town: Juta and Co. Ltd. pp. 198-219.

Green, D., 1999. *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses*. London: Macmillan.

Huemann, S., 2011. Session 10 Theorizing Agency and Power III (SH): Power, agency and resistance, 4226 Feminist Theorising on Institutions and Agency. [online via internal VLE] Institute of Social Studies. Available at: <<http://moodle.iss.nl/mod/resource/view.php?id=13057>>

Human Rights Watch, 2003. *"We'll Kill You If You Cry": Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict*. [online] New York: Human Rights Watch. Available at: <<http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/hrw-we'll%20kill%20you%20if%20you%20cry%202003.pdf>> [accessed on: 30 October 2011]

International Alert, 2007. *Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone: Mapping Challenges, Responses and Future Entry Points*. [online] London: International Alert. Available at: <<http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/ia-gbv%20in%20sierra%20leone%202007.pdf>> [Accessed on: 30 October 2011]

Jacoby, T., 2008. *Understanding Conflict and Violence. Theoretical and Interdisciplinary Approaches*. London: Routledge. pp. 67-84.

Kelly, L., 2000. Wars Against Women: Sexual Violence, Sexual Politics and the Militarised State. In: S. Jacobs, R. Jacobson and J. Marchbank, eds. *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*. London: Zed Books.

Leatherman, J. L., 2011. *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict*. Cambridge: United Kingdom.

Lyons, T., 2004. *Guns and Guerilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwe Liberation Struggle*. Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press Inc.

Mahmood, S., 2001. *Feminist Theory, Embodiment and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(2): 202-236.

Mazurana, D., and Carlson, K., 2004. *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. Washington, DC: Women Waging Peace Policy Commission.

Mazurana, D., and Mckay, S., 2004. *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*. Montréal: Rights and Democracy.

Mazurana, D., McKay, S., Carlson, K. and Kasper, J., 2002. Girls in Fighting Forces and Groups: Their Recruitment, Participation, Demobilisation and Reintegration. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 8(2), pp.97-123.

Mills, S., 2003. *Michel Foucault*. Oxon and New York: Routledge. pp. 67-79.

Mumford, L. 2010. *Representations as Interventions: Framing HIV and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Conflict*. MA. Institute for Social Studies.

Park, A.S.J. 2006. 'Other Inhumane Acts': Forced Marriage, Girl Soldiers and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, *Social & Legal Studies* 15(3): 315-337.

Peach, L.J., 1994. Women at War: the Ethics of Women in Combat. *Hamline Journal of Public Law and Policy* [e-journal] 15 (2) Available through: Heinonline [accessed 10 February 2011]

Peters, I and Richards P., 1998b. Fighting with Open Eyes: Youth Combatants Talking about War in Sierra Leone. In: Bracken, P.J. and Petty, C. eds. 1998. *Rethinking the Trauma of War*. London: Free Association Press.

Physicians for Human Rights, 2002. *War-Related Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone: A Population-Based Assessment*. [online] USA: Physicians for Human Rights. Available at: <<http://www.universaljurisdiction.org/images/reports/sierra%20leone/phr-war-related sexual violence in sierra leone 2002.pdf>> [accessed on: 30 October 2011]

Porter, E., 2007. *Peacebuilding: Women in International Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Schroven, A., 2006. *Women After War: Gender Mainstreaming and the Social Construction of Identity in Contemporary Sierra Leone*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Shepler, S., 2002. Post-War Trajectories for Girls Associated with the Fighting Forces in Sierra Leone. *Politique Africaine*, 88, pp.49-62.

Sjoberg, L. and Gentry, C. E., 2007. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books.

Specht, I., 2006. Red shoes: Experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia. [online] Switzerland: International Labour Office. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS_116435/lang--en/index.htm> [Accessed: 26 May 2011].

UN DDR Resource Centre, 2006. *Women, Gender and the DDR*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available at: <http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/05/download/IDDRS_510.pdf> [accessed: 10 September 2011].

UNDP, 2010. *Sierra Leone: sexual violence remains unpunished*. Press Release, 10 February 2010.

Utas, M., 2005. Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone 1. *Anthropological Quarterly* [online]] 78(2) pp. 403-430. Available through: Project Muse database [accessed: June 29, 2011)

Van Gog, J., 2008. *Coming back from the bush: Gender, youth and reintegration in northern Sierra Leone*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.

Vickers, J., 1993. *Women and War*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books.

Yuval-Davis, N., 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage

