

militarism, conflict and women's activism in the global era: challenges and prospects for women in three West African contexts

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101 | militarism, conflict and women's activism in the global era: challenges and prospects for women in three West African contexts

Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey

abstract

This article develops a feminist perspective on militarism in Africa, drawing examples from the Nigerian, Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars spanning several decades to examine women's participation in the conflict, their survival and livelihood strategies, and their activism. We argue that postcolonial conflicts epitomise some of the worst excesses of militarism in the era of neoliberal globalisation, and that the economic, organisational and ideological features of militarism undermine the prospects for democratisation, social justice and genuine security, especially for women, in post-war societies. Theorisations of 'new wars' and the war economy are taken as entry points to a discussion of the conceptual and policy challenges posed by the enduring and systemic cultural and material aspects of militarism. These include the contradictory ways in which women are affected by the complex relationship between gendered capitalist processes and militarism, and the manner in which women negotiate their lives through both. Finally, we highlight the potential of transnational feminist theorising and activism for strengthening intellectual and political solidarities and argue that the globalised military security system can be our 'common context for struggle'¹ as contemporary feminist activist scholars.

1 Mohanty, 2003.

keywords

militarism; gender; armed conflict; West Africa; feminism; security

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historical context: how militarism has underdeveloped Africa²

² Walter Rodney's 1972 classic text was entitled 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa'.

The real security need for Africans is not military security but social security, security against poverty, ignorance, anxiety and fear, disease and famine, against arbitrary power and exploitation; security against those things which render democracy improbable in Africa. (Ake, 2000: 147)

Africa's modern history is deeply marked by the history of colonisation, a project that relied directly and indirectly on the military superiority of the colonisers. The military might of imperial and colonial armies was buttressed by a far-reaching array of technologies of governance, from brutal forced labour and taxation systems to sophisticated psychological and cultural strategies. These strategies worked together to create complex tapestries of consent and coercion, terrorising local populations and orchestrating complicity (see, e.g., Lazreg (2009) on Algeria during French colonialism; Elkins (2005) on British colonialism in Kenya; Hochschild (1999) on the Belgian occupation of the Congo; and Mamdani (2001) on Rwanda). These examples illustrate how colonial regimes relied on military force, deployed along with a formidable array of political, economic and cultural technologies of violence, thus militarising the societies they conquered and governed in ways that extended far beyond the barracks, into the very fabric of peoples' lives.

The creation of colonial armies based on Western military forms was only one aspect of the militarisation of the continent. Moreover, the historical evidence shows that the colonial armies established in the African colonies differed profoundly from the conventional national armies of Western nations because their major role was not so much the protection of the nation from invasion as the suppression of anti-colonial dissent and rebellions arising among the subjugated peoples inhabiting the colonial territories (e.g. Gutteridge, 1975; Decalo, 1990; Echenberg, 1991). Colonial soldiers were also used to fight their colonisers' battles, not only on European soil, but all over the empire during the First and Second World Wars, with some being sent as far afield as Burma. Finally, at root, imperial and colonial armies were deployed to secure the natural and human resources necessary for Western capital accumulation.

During the first decades of independence (1950s–1990s), which overlap with the Cold War era, Africa was caught up in the politics of East versus West. Both sides provided massive military assistance driven by their strategic interests (Schroeder and Lamb, 2006). Throughout the 1990s, in one estimate, the US sold over \$1.5 billion worth of weaponry to Africa, with many of the top buyers—Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—holding the dubious distinction of violence, instability and economic collapse (Hartung and Moix, 2000). It is ironic that some of the Western governments

expressing support for development and democratisation, such as Britain, France and particularly the US, have been implicated in providing military support to some of the region's most dictatorial regimes. As Hartung and Moix note:

From 1991–1995, the U.S. provided military assistance to 50 countries in Africa, 94% of the nations on the continent. Between 1991–1998, U.S. weapons and training deliveries to Africa totaled more than \$227 million. Because many of the recipient countries remain some of the world's poorest, the U.S. government provided around \$87 million in foreign military financing loans to cover the costs, increasing the debt burden that is already suffocating the continent. These loans, accrued while corrupt dictators were serving as U.S. clients, have further contributed to the economic hardships of these nations by saddling them with unproductive military debt. (Hartung and Moix, 2000)

This kind of evidence strongly suggests that external powers have played an important role in funding and sustaining militarism in Africa. The arguments presented by leading African analysts highlight the way in which militarism has in fact posed a formidable obstacle to development and democratisation (Hutchful and Bathily, 1998; Ake, 2000). In the case of the DRC, for example, the US government has supplied arms and provided training to both sides of the conflict, thereby prolonging it (Hartung and Moix, 2000).

Although the amount of money spent on arming the continent is relatively small compared with other regions, the consequences and devastation caused are incalculable. The political consequence has been that much of the continent emerged from colonial rule to remain imbued with a patriarchal militarist logic that is authoritarian and anti-democratic. The plethora of conflicts that have taken place in postcolonial Africa and the high political, economic and cultural costs of military rule provide good grounds for arguing that African militarism has generated more insecurity than security, often terrorising rather than protecting local populations, dominating the political sphere, blurring the boundaries between civilian and military, and thereby undermining all non-military forms of political and institutional authority and accountability. More broadly, militarism is conceptualised as an extreme variant of patriarchy, a gendered regime characterised by discourses and practices that subordinate and oppress women, as well as non-dominant men, reinforcing hierarchies of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and in some contexts caste, religion and location. Lutz describes the ways in which militarism becomes embedded and normalised in a society and highlights its broader, socially divisive effects:

[T]he contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence This process involves an intensification of the labour and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. Militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher

taxes or tribute used to pay for them. Militarization is intimately connected to the less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action. (Lutz, 2002: 5)

Feminist conceptualisations of militarism are broader than those prevailing within the field of conflict and security studies. In seeking to address militarism as a gendered and gendering phenomenon, feminist scholars have critically engaged with its more enduring cultural, ideological, political and economic aspects, as well as the gendered nature of military institutions. A key argument pursued in this article is that these more enduring and gendered features precede the explicit emergence of military regimes and conflicts, and persist long after 'peace' has been officially declared. Detailed studies of the post-conflict, post-military-rule nations suggest that these nations continue to exhibit the political, cultural and economic features of militarism, alongside the detrimental effects that these have had on both the economic options and the political prospects for women (Meintjes *et al.*, 2001). An aspect of post-conflict reconstruction that merits further examination is the re-marginalisation of women within contemporary security-based policy discourses and practices focusing on demobilisation, disarmament and reconstruction (DDR), and security sector reform (SSR). The fact is that male-dominated security institutions and military forces dominate the post-conflict policy landscape, with clear implications for women's prospects. In addition to national armies and various rebel forces, the West African region has seen the involvement of the Economic Community of West Africa's Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces, the United Nation's peacekeeping forces and a plethora of foreign military advisors. The question is whether conventional security-centred strategies can actually lead to demilitarisation or to genuine security. There is now evidence that, for all the good that they may do in vanquishing local military forces involved in conflicts, the very forces deployed to quell unrest and secure conflict areas become participants in the war economy. They are also implicated in abusing and exploiting women in ways that resemble the actions of the forces they are mandated to control (Higate and Henry, 2004; Valji, 2007; Defeis, 2008). In the short term, there is some evidence that DDR and SSR are not in fact yielding the anticipated post-conflict 'peace dividends' for women (MARWOPNET, 2009). Despite such concerns, peace-building operations have continued to focus on replacing foreign forces with rapidly re-established and trained local army and police forces, rather than demilitarising. At best, these operations have sought to include more women, with limited success.

conceptualising postcolonial militarism in Africa

In this section, we review some key contributions to the theorisation of postcolonial militarism in Africa—as manifest in many undemocratic regimes

and armed conflicts. Mkandawire (2009) examines the rebel movements that have been the major actors in Africa's postcolonial conflicts, identifying failures of the political system to manage social pluralism, and failed decolonisation processes as key sources of conflict, along with the effects of two decades of economic crisis worsened by globalised neoliberal economic policies, particularly externally imposed structural adjustment programmes. He argues that these have put extreme pressure on the body politic by exacerbating the gaps between the *nouveau riche* political class and the impoverished majorities, creating a strong sense of relative deprivation and giving rise to intense contestations over the spoils of the nation state, most of which differ profoundly from the anti-colonial liberation wars that preceded independence. According to Mkandawire, the armed forces are often made up of horizontally dispersed, roving bands that operate at great cost to the communities they pass through, acting more as predators than as the liberators they sometimes claim to be. The modes of violence used to pursue their objectives include attacking and terrorising civilian populations who are considered part of the problem. To this we would add the horrific sexual violence—the widespread and systematic rape and assault of women and girls—along with mutilation and massacre of civilians. The pervasive and diffuse character of the 'theatre of war' in postcolonial conflicts is confirmed by a civilian-to-soldier casualty ratio that has escalated dramatically from 1:9 at the end of the First World War to 10:1 by the end of the twentieth century, with massive shifts from the 1950s onwards (International Committee of the Red Cross cited in Tavernise and Lehren, 2010).

3 Kaldor, M. (2001) 'Beyond militarism, arms races and arms control', Prepared for Nobel Peace Prize Centennial, available on SSRC website, <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/kaldor.htm>, last accessed June 2011.

Although international relations theorist Mary Kaldor's (1999) work does not focus on Africa, her depiction identifies several features of the kinds of wars we explore in this article.³ Kaldor suggests that the end of the Cold War marked, in essence, the end of the old state-centred warfare, which we argue includes imperialist, colonial and national liberation wars. She proposes that 'new wars' differ from their state-centred precursors with respect to the manner of military organisation, as well as in the economic and cultural features of wars. Kaldor emphasises the profound changes in how armed forces are organised and conflicts are fought, attributing these to the technological developments in information, communication and transportation that have led to 'increasing interconnectedness, the shrinking of distance and time'.³ She observes that the protagonists in 'new wars' are not conventional armies, but rather decentralised networks of state and non-state actors such as paramilitaries that include charismatic leaders, multinational corporations, warlords, terrorist cells, zealous volunteers, organised criminal groups, units of regular forces, mercenaries, private military contractors or other security service providers. These include the various transnational actors who appear in

places where the authority of the state has weakened and the financing of war has become dispersed:

Because these networks flourish in states where systems of taxation have collapsed and where little new wealth is being created, and where the wars destroy physical infrastructure, cut off trade and create a climate of insecurity that prohibits investment, they have to seek alternative, exploitative forms of financing. They raise money through loot and plunder, through illegal trading in drugs, illegal immigrants, cigarettes and alcohol, through 'taxing' humanitarian assistance, through support from sympathetic states and through remittances from members of the networks. All of these types of economic activity are predatory and depend on an atmosphere of insecurity. Indeed, the new wars can be described as a central source of the globalised informal economy—the transnational criminal and semi-legal economy that represents the underside of globalisation.⁴

We note that imperial militarism also involved transnational networks and actors who engaged in loot and plunder, including the early corporations and trading companies, as highlighted by early theorists of capitalism and underdevelopment in Africa (e.g. Rodney, 1972).

Militarism and war, in Africa and other regions, are also essential features of the globalised political economy. As many have convincingly argued, militarism and capitalism are inextricably linked (e.g. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2000; Staples, 2000; Enloe, 2007). Federici observes that 'war is on the global agenda precisely because the new phase of capitalist expansionism requires the destruction of any economic activity not subordinated to the logic of accumulation, and this is necessarily a violent process' (quoted in Mohanty, 2011: 77). Extraction of oil in Nigeria, diamonds in Sierra Leone and rubber in Liberia has fuelled armed conflicts of unspeakable dimensions (Okonta and Douglas, 2001; Leavitt, 2005; Smillie, 2010). Others have asserted that wars and armed conflicts, as well as other disasters, have indeed created new opportunities for capital investment and have been extremely profitable (e.g. Klein, 2007).

Peterson (2008) cogently delineates three main economic modes that specifically characterise war economies: coping, combat and criminal. We explore how each of these may be differently gendered through our consideration of women's livelihoods. Peterson identifies a 'coping economy' as the first to emerge in situations of conflict, as it is here that individual survival and social reproduction of families and households are attended to. In relation to Africa, the coping economy may well be considered as a basic feature of long-term economic crises. Economic crises have preceded conflicts and are seen to increase the likelihood of violent outbreaks. It is the most obviously feminised aspect of the economy, as the work of finding and providing food, care and nurture of children and elders, as well as the men who fight, falls even more heavily to the women in crisis situations. In other words, the gender divisions of

⁴ Kaldor, M. (2001) 'Beyond militarism, arms races and arms control', Prepared for Nobel Peace Prize Centennial, available on SSRC website, <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/kaldor.htm>, last accessed June 2011.

labour that place the care and subsistence burdens disproportionately on women are deepened by economic crisis and further exacerbated in the context of war. As we show in the next section, things become a great deal worse for women when their peacetime pursuit of farming, trading food and service provisioning are disrupted and made perilous, and when they are dislocated en masse, and thus forced to find new ways of sustaining their families and communities. In militarised and war-torn zones, women's livelihoods are altered, sometimes drastically and with enduring effects on their lives, yet they remain defined by gender.

Peterson's 'combat economy' coexists with the coping economy, but is somewhat more specific to preparation and execution of war, being run by combatants who directly supply and fund fighters and insurgent activities. This male-dominated fraternity is locally and transnationally networked. Moreover, she defines the 'criminal economy' as opportunistic, run by profit-seeking entrepreneurs who take full advantage of economic deregulation and the collapse of the state to pursue their profitable businesses, in ruthless, free-market bliss. They include gunrunners, conflict entrepreneurs, traffickers of people and goods including sex traffickers, and money launderers—in short, all those who supply the combatants and other actors to make profit from conflict.

The feature of the new wars thesis that we find least compelling is the assertion that new wars are more identity based than their predecessors, on the basis that they are more about 'identity-based claims to power' than the territorially based, geopolitical objectives of old. Depicting this as something new seems to neglect the central role of identity politics in conventional wars. Feminist theories have drawn much attention to the importance of gender identities, emphasising the role of gender and sexuality in nationalism (McClintock, 1993; Riley and Inayatullah, 2006). They have also attended to ethnically based claims to power that are also always gendered, being imbued with militarised notions of masculinity and femininity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). We would argue that imperial wars clearly relied on racial identities and are exemplified in the work of historian Claudia Koonz (2003) on the Nazi era. Koonz demonstrates how 'Aryan identity' was integral to German militarism, as well as being heavily rooted in misogynistic, pro-natalist constructions of gender and sexuality. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the European imperialism and the wars of the early twentieth century happening without 'identity-based claims to power'. The more recent work of Handrahan (2004) takes this beyond war situations, in an intersectional analysis that pursues the interrelated dynamics of ethnicity and gender. From a feminist perspective, it is clear that identities—typically heteronormative and ethnicised masculinities—have always been key to militarisation, the creation of security apparatuses, war preparedness and war-making, something that Kaldor overlooks in her claim for the distinctiveness of 'new wars'.

Given the colonial experience referred to above and despite the fact they exhibit aspects of Kaldor's characterisation of 'new wars', we assert that the various manifestations of conflict in postcolonial Africa cannot really be considered new. The fact is that many of Africa's conflicts have roots in the history of colonialism and manifest colonial-era dynamics of class, race, ethnicity and other social pluralities, all of which are gendered and augmented by militarism. Hence, we agree with other writers on the region's conflicts who refer to them as postcolonial conflicts, thus emphasising the political and economic continuities with colonialism (Nhema and Zeleza, 2009). As feminists, we add a serious consideration of women's gender and positionality to this in our discussion of the three cases we consider below. In the remainder of this article, we develop these ideas through a discussion of the various ways in which women were involved in the secessionist civil war in Nigeria (1966–1970) and compare this to the more recent conflicts in Sierra Leone (1991–2002) and Liberia (1989–2003). We explore women's economic and military involvement, and how the manner in which they have organised across ethnic, religious and national borders in the pursuit of peace and security has changed between the time of the Nigerian war and the present.

Nigeria

The Nigerian civil war was one of the earliest of Africa's postcolonial conflicts. What began as a military coup soon turned into a bloody secessionist struggle that cost over a million lives and resulted in massive destruction and disruptions felt across the entire nation. Peace was declared in 1969, long before the existence of transitional justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court and truth and reconciliation commissions. Peace was not built so much as declared under the victorious Federal Government's slogan 'No Victors, No Vanquished'. However, the war was followed by over three decades of military rule, with only a brief interregnum when the Second Republic was declared, only to be overthrown in another military coup.

Feminist scholars who have explored the era of military rule highlight its persistent negative effects on the status of Nigerian women (Mba, 1982, 1989; Abdullah, 1996; Mama, 1998, 1999). The gendered economic, cultural and ideological effects that also concern us here have not been seriously studied, although they have inspired literary works such as those by Flora Nwapa (1966, 1970) and more recently Chimamanda Adichie (2007). Uchendu (2007) offers the first substantive gendered research of the civil war era. Her investigation focuses on the Anioma region, located in today's Delta State, in the oil-rich Niger Delta. Although the Anioma area was not included in the secessionist demarcation of the Biafra Republic, the Biafran forces occupied it as they headed for the capital Lagos. It then became the site of bitter battles

between the Biafran secessionist forces and the Federal forces until it was re-captured and occupied by the government forces for twenty months of the thirty-month conflict, with profound consequences for women's lives. It was the site of the notorious Asaba Massacre, on 7 October 1997, when Federal forces shot and killed over 500 Asaba men, after they had taken control of the area (Oputa Commission, 2002). Interviews with survivors conducted four decades later confirm that women were subjected to widespread killing, rape and harassment. Thousands fled and lived in the bush for weeks or even months. Those who did not flee into the forests found themselves living with fear of the Federal troops throughout the military occupation (Uchendu, 2007).

combat

The Nigerian military has remained an exclusively masculine domain since its establishment in colonial times. The exclusion of women meant that there were no women fighters on the Federal side during the war. With regard to the Biafran army, there is no information on the number of women who joined, and those who did were mostly in the civil defence forces. In any case, very few would have been from the Delta region, given its location outside of Biafra. Uchendu's interviews indicate that the few who fought on the Biafran side did so out of commitment to the cause, often after witnessing the killing of close kin or the destruction of their communities. Others followed family members. They were expected to perform support and servicing roles for the male soldiers, and very few received military training. As a result, there are only isolated examples of individual women becoming platoon leaders and being allowed to carry guns. Mostly, they simply were not recognised:

Biafran army officers did not recognize [women's] zeal for service and did not treat them in the same manner as they did the regular soldiers. [U]nlike the soldiers the female militia members were not on the Biafran payroll and if found taking part in combat could be disarmed and sent back to the camp. (Uchendu, 2007: 122)

Women serving as self-appointed spies and volunteers were often able to elude capture and enjoy greater mobility than men, so both armies began to use them for high-risk intelligence work. Faustina Oko, for example, was captured and executed by the Federal army in 1968 for spying on behalf of the Biafrans (Uchendu, 2007: 119).

livelihoods

The war situation severely disrupted the farming and trading activities that constituted the major forms of livelihood, discussed here in relation to the concept of a coping economy, introduced above. Many thousands were dislocated and, as men either fled or were killed, women assumed many of the responsibilities previously held by men and adapted them as needed. Those who remained in their home areas survived by farming and trading across the lines at

great risk, and by finding ways of coexisting with occupying forces. For women farmers, journeying to and from farms became extremely hazardous, leading them to adopt a strategy of travelling with caution and always in groups, covering their bodies and disguising themselves as old or disabled to avoid unwanted attention. Women learnt to grow faster-yielding crops and to hide their produce from the soldiers. Those who lived by hiding in the bush learnt to forage, to scavenge from abandoned villages and to beg from those they encountered in their wandering. Women who had never farmed learnt to catch fish and small animals, or learnt how to farm from others. They devised ways of preparing unfamiliar foods found in the bush or on abandoned farms, while women on the coasts learned to boil sea water to extract salt, or to use ash to purify what became a scarce and valuable commodity.

Trading was profoundly affected by the economic blockade the Federal forces imposed to sever supply lines to the East. Some local trading was able to continue, as this supplied the occupying forces with food and commodities. Many women also engaged in the dangerous business of illicit trading with communities on the other side of the lines, regularly changing the multiple land routes they used to avoid military skirmishes and evade detection by Federal forces. Long distances were covered, both on foot and by canoe, and young girls were often relied on to carry the loads to and from trading points. Referred to as the 'attack trade' by the Biafran forces, locals called it the 'bush market' or the 'night market'. However, as the period of occupation lengthened, the wives of soldiers, who were better placed to acquire and supply commodities and food to the soldiers, competed with local women and expanded their dominance into the impoverished local community.

Women who stayed in the towns also survived in various ways. Some managed eating-houses and bars, brewed and distilled local gin, or provided indigenous medicinal and herbal remedies to the soldiers. As the war dragged on, a growing number of local women entered into liaisons with Federal soldiers, with some casting their lot as 'companions' to soldiers until the end of the war, despite the social stigma. According to Uchendu (2007), many of these offered advantages to the women involved, such as enabling them to access basic necessities, and provided a degree of protection from other soldiers, enabling greater freedom of movement. In a few cases, women procured other women for sexual services for Federal soldiers. An uncounted number of women and girls were raped by Federal soldiers during the conquest. Women's continued vulnerability to sexual aggression during occupation led mothers to keep their adolescent daughters hidden indoors, but even mature women were not safe.

This limited available evidence confirms the emergence of a heavily feminised coping economy in which women traded across the frontlines and provided supplies and services to military forces on either side of the lines, often at great risk to themselves. Although stories abound of women becoming big contractors,

locally referred to as *cash madams*, and making fortunes as a result of the war economy, there is little evidence to support this, although analyses of the post-war-era military rule confirm the emergence of militarised elite who continued to amass wealth and power (Diamond *et al.*, 1997; Mama, 1998, 1999; Adekanye, 1999). From the 1970s onwards, the oil economy was to prove extremely lucrative for this ruling minority, while the majority communities, especially those in the Niger Delta, have remained impoverished and have become increasingly militarised (Okonta and Douglas, 2001).

women's activism

There is little evidence that women engaged in organised peace activism during the Nigerian civil war. It is hard to ascertain whether this reflects the actuality, or merely the lack of gender studies during this period. The post-war period saw women mobilising independently, and later joining forces with other pro-democracy movements to protest against military rule (Mba, 1982). By the 1990s, the movement for women in politics had grown, as women's political summits were held across the nation, calling for politics to be rid of violence and corruption, and launching a nationwide political agenda for Nigerian women (Gender and Action Development, 1996).

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's trajectory over a decade (1991–2002) of bloody conflict provides a second example of a postcolonial war. Here the conflict ensued after an extended period of military rule and economic instability, but it was started by an externally supported rebel movement, instigated and supported by the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, and backed by Libyan government. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, led by former Sierra Leone Army Corporal Foday Sankoh, entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in March 1991 in an attempted coup (Fanthorpe, 2003; Abdullah, 2004; Gberie, 2005). Initially made up of a combination of Libyan-trained fighters and seasoned soldiers from Charles Taylor's army, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, the RUF swelled its ranks by attracting large numbers of illiterate, unemployed and alienated men with few prospects for a better future in the poverty-stricken Sierra Leonean economy. Whatever ideological rhetoric Sankoh might have articulated in the beginning, it very rapidly degenerated into a bloody quest marked by unprecedented brutality. A general reign of terror followed as different parties battled to secure the lucrative diamond reserves that would sustain both the RUF and the Charles Taylor government through their connections to the international markets. This focus also led the poorly trained and underpaid soldiers of the national army to defect in increasing numbers as the situation deteriorated, complicated by other major militia formations that emerged later during the civil

war (Abdullah, 2004). These included the Kamajors (composed of traditional hunters from the Mende ethnic group) and the Civil Defence Forces (made up of local people), who aligned themselves with the state military as 'pro-democracy forces'.⁵ These were joined by 9,000 ECOMOG troops (drawn from Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana), British peacekeepers, and finally in 2002 a 17,000-plus contingent of UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone), the largest-ever UN peacekeeping force at the time (Chege, 2002).

combat

The conflict was massively destructive and notorious for the terror tactics—amputations, hangings, burnings and extraordinary levels of sexual violence—used to intimidate rural communities. Rebel bands preyed heavily upon local communities, and by 1999 approximately 2 million people, nearly half the 4.5 million population, were displaced, either internally or as refugees in Guinea and Liberia. Overall, an estimated 50,000–75,000 people were killed and as many as 250,000 girls and women had been raped. The war involved Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire in addition to Liberia and Sierra Leone, as roving bands roamed across borders, and civilians fled from one camp to another trying to escape the violence. The entire country, largely made up of peaceful agrarian communities, became militarised, as militias formed and roved across the land killing, looting and pillaging as they contested for influence and resources.

The RUF rebels engaged in widespread conscription of children and women. Estimates suggest that 25–50 per cent of the fighters were women and girls (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; MacKenzie, 2009), dramatically more than in the Nigerian war. Government forces negatively affected by the deteriorating situation and falling salaries also became a source of the violence against civilians, using and abusing women.

To what extent did women elect to become fighters? Researchers found that the vast majority of women and girls in all the fighting forces reported 'abduction' or 'forced recruitment' following raids and destruction of their communities.⁶ Some women were involved in ceremonies and rituals, serving spiritual leaders, medics, herbalists, spies and cooks, as well as frontline fighters and commanders. According to Mazurana and Carlson, among the girls 44 per cent received military and weapons training from their commanders or captor 'husbands', while many served as cooks (70 per cent), porters (68 per cent), carers for the sick and wounded (62 per cent), 'wives' (60 per cent), food-producers (44 per cent), messengers between camps (40 per cent), spies (22 per cent), communication technicians (18 per cent) and workers in diamond mines (14 per cent).⁷ Although many of these roles were fluid and situational, some women preferred the status of fighters, because it allowed them to protect themselves, to have access to food and other benefits, and to gain greater opportunities to escape than the captives. Within the RUF,

⁵ Ali-Dinar, A.B. (1999) 'Sierra Leone: the main players 5/12/99', IRIN UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin_51299b.html, last accessed June 2011.

⁶ See Coulter, 2009 and Mazurana, D. and Carlson, K. (2004) 'From combat to community: women and girls of Sierra Leone', Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Sierra_Leone/sierraleoneindex.html, last accessed June 2009.

⁷ Mazurana, D. and Carlson, K. (2004) 'From combat to

community: women and girls of Sierra Leone', Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 12, http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Sierra_Leone/sierraleoneindex.html, last accessed June 2009.

child-wives were often left in command of the compounds, where they could exercise substantial authority, deciding who would fight, carrying out reconnaissance and raids for food and loot, selecting and sending troops and spies and generally supporting and advising their commander-husbands. They had their own weapons, and were often provided with personal bodyguards, usually groups of other girls and boys charged with their security. They commanded the Small Boys Units and Small Girls Units carrying out scouting and food-raiding, but some were also involved in brutal killings and mutilations. Surrogate 'families' were formed in many of the camps, and it was through these that food and favour were distributed. Girls seeking protection from gang rape are reported to have tried to establish liaisons with commanders and boys. However, the vulnerability of even the most powerful of these girls and women persisted, as those who fell from favour were easily disposed of (Denov and Maclure, 2006; Coulter, 2009).

When ECOMOG peacekeepers arrived and attacked Freetown in March 1997 to retrieve it from the RUF/AFRC regime and restore President Kabbah, they too carried out widespread violations of desperate women and girls, at times coercing them into spying on enemy camps, a practice that led the RUF to target them for torture and murder during their attacks (Coulter, 2009).³

livelihoods

It is clear from the above discussion that participation in the various military and rebel forces became a significant livelihood option for women in Sierra Leone. Women who did not become fighters faced challenges very similar to those described above in relation to the Nigerian civil war, complicated by the multiplicity of military forces. As in the Nigerian civil war, women came to rely on farming and trading within and across borders under hazardous and unstable conditions. Sierra Leone also included mining areas that utilised forced labour in the arduous extraction of diamonds. Women traders played an important economic role, and organised to defend their interests, as illustrated by the fact that in 1996, right in the middle of the war, one group officially formed the Sierra Leone Market Women Association, to resist the discrimination they faced from their male colleagues (Solomon, 2005). During this time, some market women were filling the economic vacuum left by severely devastated infrastructure by engaging in high-risk trading. They smuggled goods across the Guinea–Sierra Leone border by collaborating with and bribing border police and customs officials, and they traded with various armed forces. Their entrepreneurship was based on complicated relationships with sets of cross-border and ethnic business partners that demanded extraordinary strategising:

Market women profiteers were also engaged in a thriving trade with rebels. Foodstuffs and petrol were smuggled from 'safe' stores in Freetown to rebel-held areas in the provinces, on

board trailers or big trucks, and sold to rebel commanders. In turn, they were either paid in cash (Leones or Dollars) or in kind, including jewelry, gold or diamonds. Back in Freetown, market women either sold their diamonds to Lebanese diamond dealers or smuggled the gems across the border to Guinea where they fetched higher prices enabling them to buy more foodstuffs. (Solomon, 2005: 10)

However, many women met their deaths in road accidents or ambushes, and sometimes their own customers would organise for them to be pursued after their business was ostensibly completed. The economic impact of the war worsened as the country faced UN sanctions placed in 1997.

In short, Sierra Leonean women and girls were drawn into all aspects of the war, in ways that exploited pre-war gender inequalities, worsening them sharply in ways that typify the coping economy. There is not much evidence that they were afforded any significant role in a criminal economy that was dominated by warlords engaged in diamond trafficking and weapons and drug trafficking. The poor social and material situation of thousands of girls, now women, many of whom bore children, remains a pressing problem to date. The information available suggests that women were being re-marginalised in the heavily gendered and narrowly prescribed DDR process, despite the courageous roles they have played surviving, enabling the survival of others and brokering the eventual cessation of fighting (MARWOPNET/Isis-WICCE, 2009).

women's activism

Despite the appalling situation they endured, women from all classes and ethnic groups, and across borders, mobilised extensively to facilitate the ending of the war and build peace. Among the best-known examples are the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Women's Movement for Peace, the Sierra Leone Women's Forum, the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians, and the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace. The various strategies they used included behind-the-scenes lobbying of warlords and political leaders, as well as organising public rallies, demonstrations, and the provision of peace-making-related services such as civilian electoral education and training. As early as 1996, a delegation of women's groups led by Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation pressured the military government to hold democratic elections. However, when the elections that brought President Kabbah to power were held, only five women were on the victorious party's list of sixty-eight candidates. In 1999, women played a leading role in the negotiations that led to the signing of the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord. Their insistence on inclusion of the RUF in a power-sharing arrangement was probably crucial to the deal, even though it was to be another three years before the end of the war was finally declared. The involvement of women in the Lomé process is reflected in several

⁸ Lomé Peace Accord (1999), <http://www.sierra-leone.org/lomeaccord.html>, last accessed August 2011.

articles that called for attention to the victimisation of women in the plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction.⁸

Liberia

Liberia has the dubious distinction of being the only nation in Africa founded by the USA. Like the British colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone, Monrovia was settled in 1816 by mixed-race free offspring of White slave-owners and former African slaves with the support of the American Colonization Society. After gaining independence from the Society in 1847, the Americo-Liberians constituted themselves as the elite, formed The True Whig Party, and monopolised power from independence until 1980. Liberian scholar Abayomi Karnga noted early in the twentieth century that:

[T]he status divisions among the Liberians eventually evolved into a hierarchical caste system with four distinct orders. At the top were the Americo-Liberian officials, consisting largely of light-complexioned people of mixed Black and White ancestry [also known as 'Mulattos']. They were followed by darker skinned Americo-Liberians, consisting mostly of laborers and small farmers. Then came the recaptives [also known as 'Congos'], the Africans who had been rescued by the US Navy while aboard US-bound slave ships and brought to Liberia. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the indigenous African Liberians. (Cited in Dennis, 2006: 1)

The subordinated indigenous African majority were not granted citizenship until 1904 and otherwise disenfranchised, and most have remained poor and marginalised.

The 1980 military coup led by Samuel Doe effectively destroyed the century-and-a-half-long oligarchic regime, as he was able to capitalise on the hostilities generated by the political, economic and social inequalities between the Americo-Liberians and the African Liberians. Doe's installation as the country's leader, first through the coup and later fraudulent national elections, did not effect the kinds of changes promised. Rather, he carried out his own reign of terror by introducing a form of ethnocide against indigenous ethnic groups other than his own, the Khran, and effectively created ethnic divisions, upon which Charles Taylor would rely in his ascent to power (Pugel, 2007).

The civil war began when Charles Taylor with his forces entered Liberia from neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire in 1989 and continued until 1996, only for fighting to resume from 1997 to 2003. As many as 250,000 Liberians lost their lives, and approximately one-third (800,000) of the 2.5 million population were displaced internally, became refugees in neighbouring countries such as Ghana, or both.⁹ Central government effectively ceased to function, and by 1995 seven major armed factions controlled the people and resources in the various regions (Dennis, 2006).

⁹ UNHCR (2006) 'Refugees by the Numbers,' 2006 Edition, <http://www.unhcr.org/>

The Liberian conflict was also prolonged and catastrophic. The level of carnage and its spillover in the form of refugee camps in the neighbouring countries, combined with the refusal of Liberia's traditional patron the USA to intervene, prompted ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States) to take action in 1990. ECOMOG troops became part of the conflict by allying themselves to various factions and joining in the looting and pillaging. Nonetheless, Nigerian government intervention eventually succeeded in bringing about peace and led to the Abuja II Peace Agreement being implemented in 1997.

ECOWAS and the international community hastily 'resolved' matters. As a result of this haste, disarmament was not carried out, and Charles Taylor, the leading warlord in the conflict, was elected to power after running as the sole candidate in an election that could hardly be regarded as credible. He soon reneged on the agreement, taking absolute control, and ignoring the commitment to restructuring to bring about better ethnic representation, with the result that a second phase of war took place between 1997 and 2003. A new rebel formation, Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD), launched a military offensive against the Taylor regime from military outposts in neighbouring Guinea. LURD gained control of large swathes of the North Liberia and, after being joined by the rebel Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) that had started from the southeast of the country, Taylor lost control of all but the capital Monrovia. The final onslaught took place in summer 2003, during which thousands of Liberians were killed on the streets and injured, and the population was further threatened by the collapse of food supplies and all services.

The conflict ravaged communities and led to widespread destruction and pervasive militarisation including proliferation of small arms in the hands of the population. Post-conflict Liberia had the largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world (until the devastation of Haiti required a larger number), with approximately 10,000 uniformed personnel and another 2,000 non-uniformed ones making up United Nations Mission in Liberia.¹⁰ On the basis of various reports gathered by the International Rescue Committee, an estimated three-quarters of Liberian women between ages of 15–49 living in refugee camps in Sierra Leone were subjected to various forms of violence including random acts of sexual assault, mass rape, sexual slavery and exploitation that took place regardless of whether women remained in their communities or became displaced (cited in Omanyondo, 2005).

combat

Estimates put the number of women fighters in Liberia at somewhere between 20 and 40 per cent, with MODEL showing the highest proportion of women (Pugel, 2007). Here too there is evidence that most of the women in the armed groups were coerced into joining after experiences of trauma and gang rape

basics/BASICS/
3b028097c
.html#Refugees, last
accessed June 2011.

10 United Nations Security Council (2011) *Twenty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/497, last accessed September 2011.

11 Amnesty International (2008) 'Liberia: A Flawed Process that Discriminates Against Women and Girls', <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR34/004/2008/en>, last accessed June 2009.

12 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3181529.stm> and <http://www.girlswithguns.org/news/news0008.htm>.

(Isis-WICCE, 2008).¹¹ According to findings from a United Nations Development Programme-sponsored study of ex-combatants participating in the DDR process, women combatants 'served more in logistical roles than their male counterparts and were less likely to be injured while participating as an active member' (Pugel, 2007: 7). Occasional, sensationalised media reports portray women fighters as 'worse than men' and 'even crueller than men'. However, it may well be that perceptions are exaggerated because women's violent behaviour transgresses gender norms. The most well-known example is LURD's woman commander referred to as 'Black Diamond' who gained notoriety in the world media in 2003.¹² A victim of vicious gang rape in her teenage years, Colonel Black Diamond's unflinching aggressiveness clearly challenged Western stereotypes of women as victims. In fact, she headed the Women's Auxiliary Corps and commanded a group of young girls who played a major role in LURD's merciless final advance on Monrovia.

Both Utas (2005) and Fuest (2008) emphasise that women engage in multiple liaisons with men in their efforts to seek protection and survive. Most of those who acquired the status of fighters appear to have done so through their liaisons with male fighters. Their situation can be contrasted with that of girls and women who did not have the protection of guns or men, and therefore remained far more vulnerable. At the bottom of the war hierarchy were women prisoners, kept under horrendous conditions of confinement and multiply raped at the will of their captors, a great many of whom did not survive to tell of their experience.

livelihoods

Traditionally, Liberian ruling society has been highly patriarchal, with the clear male domination of political, public and economic life complicated by ethnic and class factors. For example, Americo-Liberian women have been privileged socially, often being favoured over African Liberian men, although remaining subordinate to Americo-Liberian men.

The few available sources on women's experience of the conflict years indicate a fluidity of roles similar to that described for Sierra Leone. Utas (2005) carried out an informative biographical study of a woman referred to as 'Binta'. He uses her example to challenge the assumptions of women as victims that have tended to prevail, observing that she displays a degree of 'tactic agency', a term borrowed from Alcinda Honwana's (2007) groundbreaking study of child soldiers in Mozambique. Tactic agency is defined as a limited-level agency, somewhere between agency and victimhood. To illustrate, he details the complex social navigation that Binta engages in as she moves through the various locations and situations in which she finds herself during the course of the war: mistress, girlfriend, prisoner, multiple-rape victim, refugee, fighter and trader (Utas, 2005). He describes her actions—'girlfriending' and participating in the 'loving business' as motivated by multiple considerations that go beyond mere survival (Utas, 2005: 408). It seems that many of the women who survived the conflict in

Liberia, not unlike those in Sierra Leone and in Nigeria four decades earlier, did so by navigating extremely hazardous environments and playing multiple roles that include engaging in transactional sexual relations with boyfriends and being co-wives, commanders, peacekeepers and humanitarian agency staff. The fact that some of these livelihood strategies are about more than mere survival blurs the boundary between the coping economy and the combat economy as women clearly move between the two, in ways that display limited agency rather than passivity or victimhood.

Prior to the war, structural inequalities kept all but a small elite of Liberian women at the base of the formal economy, heavily reliant on farming, informal trading and other entrepreneurial activities that drew on extensive socio-economic networks. Also prior to the war, a growing proportion of urban women were acquiring land and property, and choosing to remain as heads of their own households, to take fuller advantage of economic opportunities (Fuest, 2008). The war years saw women take on many of the roles previously carried out by men, with reports of women making bricks, building and roofing houses, clearing farms, and trading. However, this was largely due to the high casualty rates and departure of men from the communities, rather than to a fundamental shift in gender relations and values. Indeed, the diminished options facing women in a war economy increased the involvement of women in sex work, and were thus likely to have worked against the emergence of a more equitable relation between the genders.

There may have been some ethnic redistribution within the urban labour market, as traders and business entrepreneurs including market women continued to conduct their business, at times expanding into gaps left by fleeing men and Mandingo traders. Women's trading included territories where men dared not go, as they exchanged goods with women from other areas and extended the female networks upon which they depended. However, the lack of more adequate information about women's trading and other economic activities throughout the war years makes them hard to assess. Women's organisations are now demanding that reconstruction efforts should be informed by new research on women's economic activities instead of merely reinscribing women's subordinate roles.

women's activism

The Liberian conflict wrought devastation on the lives of many thousands of women, but it also provoked women to organise. Indeed, many of the women's groups that now exist were formed expressly to agitate for an end to the war, prevailing upon warlords and political leaders, in concerted actions all over Liberia, as well as in Nigeria and Ghana where the peace processes were hosted. Women's activism during the civil war was marked by two phases, reflecting the two phases of the war. During the early years of the war (1989–1996), a

Monrovia-based group, Concerned Women of Liberia, made contact with women in territories held by warring factions and encouraged mediation, prayer and conflict-resolution techniques that drew on old traditions and new methods. The Christian Health Association of Liberia, comprising women health workers, provided support to refugee women, while the Abused Women and Girls programme alongside lawyers from the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia worked to provide support for women who had been raped. Numerous other women's groups, such as Women in Action for Liberia, and mixed groups with women in leadership, such as Special Emergency Life Food Program, maintained communication across community lines, distributed food and cared for the elderly and refugees in short, supporting affected communities in multiple ways.

The formation of the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) during the latter part of this period has been described as the 'turning point' because it was 'a movement not simply an organisation or a coalition of organisations' that brought together a broader cross-section of women of Liberia, and hence becoming a more inclusive and stronger peace movement. The LWI went door to door, took to the streets and mobilised diverse groups of Liberian women, and, although not invited to the table, their work influenced the 1997 Abuja Peace Accord (AWPSG, 2004: 17). At workshops during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a contingent of Liberian women exposed their stories of living through the war and struggling as peace activists, listened to the similar plight of other women, and became emboldened to continue their struggles knowing they had garnered international support (AWPSG, 2004).

The later years of the war (2000–2003) saw a second round of mobilisation in which the Women's Peace Network (WIPNET), sometimes described as the 'second generation' (AWPSG, 2004), steered the movement. They along with Women in Peace and Security Network-Africa and other partners responded to the prolonged crisis of 2003 by organising more aggressively, setting off mass protests by thousands of women who wore white t-shirts and held sit-ins on the streets for many weeks. They were eventually able to present a petition for peace to President Taylor. Once the peace talks were in progress, WIPNET mobilised protests and advocacy to ensure the success of the talks. When the talks continued for weeks with no sign of a settlement, a large group blockaded the protagonists in their hotel to prevail upon the Nigerian and Ghanaian hosts to insist on progress. The women's sustained activism and its escalation during the peace talks, Charles Taylor's indictment for war crimes by the International Criminal Court during the talks, and the final major assault on Monrovia launched by LURD and MODEL together appear to have persuaded Taylor to accept asylum in Nigeria. The warring factions signed the peace agreement, and the war officially ended.

discussion and implications

Compelling theorisations regarding the dramatic changes that conflict has wrought on women's lives and livelihoods in all three contexts combine attention to material and to cultural features of conflict. Thus, Peterson's conceptualisation of the 'coping economy' is helpful because it invokes women's culturally ascribed roles in the care economy, transposing these onto the idea of the war economy. We have shown that women in all three countries have also been involved in the combat economy as fighters, commanders, heads of Small Girls Units, as well as the more conventional subordinate roles as porters, intelligence gatherers, food providers, spies and 'wives'. To the extent that individual women moved beyond the survivalism characteristic of the coping economy, it was as beneficiaries of the combat economy, although through their highly precarious relations with powerful male combatants and whatever protection this could afford them. There is little evidence of women being significantly involved in the more lucrative and often illicit criminal economy. The profits of war, accrued through international networks trafficking in weapons, drugs and other commodities key to the war, remained dominated by male warlords and commanders. The fluidity of women's livelihood strategies and the role of sexuality and gender dynamics that are both economic and cultural are worth further study. The accumulated evidence of women's involvement in acts of violence against civilians does of course disrupt outdated but often-reiterated notions of women as inherently more peaceful than men. However, women's involvement in fighting and killing, as well as in the combat economy, has costly and long-term social and economic consequences that are yet to be adequately addressed in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts.

The concept of a gendered war economy is thus analytically productive, but does not adequately attend to aspects that we have identified as key features of women's lives in militarised contexts. More specifically, our analysis points to the need for more serious consideration of women's agency and the mediation of this by sexuality and other aspects of identity. The particular subjugation of women as sexual commodities is evident in both the war economy and the militarised culture of misogyny in which rape, trafficking, imprisonment and torture reach new extremes, affecting countless women and girls. Even these become normalised everyday occurrences that persist long after the cessation of hostilities. Yet there is evidence of immense courage, as women pursue limited options in a daily struggle to support their dependants, even where this requires them to rely on using their own bodies to negotiate their survival.

Women are far from passive, but it is helpful to distinguish different kinds of agency in this respect. The material discussed here points to women's capacity for both tactical and strategic agency, where tactical agency refers to the individual negotiations of survival that occur even in the context of

extreme disempowerment or overwhelmingly negative options. It sits in contrast to the more strategic forms of agency that are evident in the collective mobilisation of Liberian and Sierra Leonean women into peace activism.

Overall, it is apparent that all the war situations discussed here bequeath immense political and social development challenges, many of which marginalise and subordinate women, and many of which have so far eluded policymakers. It highlights the need to consider the gendered economic and cultural distortions that precede and accompany violent conflict, as it is clear that these do not simply wither away once the fighting has stopped. If the global rise of economic neoliberal policies that diminish regulation and constrain government services has facilitated the informal and illegal networks and systems of the criminal economy to gain ground, then dismantling them while the same global policies continue to hold sway will not be easy. Today—in the context of continuing neoliberal globalisation—it remains easier for illicit networks to proliferate and harder for states to control them. The power of the state is significantly diminished with regard to reconstruction and rehabilitation, as illustrated by the role of security corporations in post-conflict SSR. In addition, although it cannot provide a panacea, the state—even in its neoliberal configuration—can act as something of a brake and also as a target of mobilisation and claim-making. The growing role of private corporations in the security sector poses new challenges to feminist movements seeking demilitarisation. In all three countries, women's movements are more accustomed to lobbying publicly accountable state institutions than to taking action against corporations, yet it is clear that the state, even if it builds a new national army and police force that are under its command, no longer exercises the political or economic sovereignty that might once have been assumed. This suggests the need for women's movements to develop new strategies and methodologies. So far, these have included greater degrees of transnational networking, and taking international governance arenas much more seriously than before, but a great more needs to be done to strengthen women's capacities for new modes of activism in the West African sub-region.

peace and post-conflict prospects: when and what are 'peace' and 'post'?

We agree with those who argue that 'war' and 'peace' are not two discrete, opposite conditions and circumstances (Cockburn and Zarkov, 2002; Coulter, 2009). Rather, there are continuities that endure and become more or less visible, more or less salient, during different times and in various ways. Especially for women, the boundary between conflict and post-conflict is not so clearly demarcated. 'Peace and war are not so much two opposed states of being as they are multifaceted, ambiguous, mutually imbricated arenas of struggle. Peace does not necessarily entail the end of violent conflict' (Aretxaga quoted in

Coulter, 2009: 8). Our argument is substantiated through a discussion of militarism as being characterised by political, economic and cultural features that are as enduring as they are gendered, and become augmented as militarisation deepens, before, during and after it becomes recognised as a conflict situation.

In the West African countries discussed, there are several important continuities between colonial and contemporary militarism, and these inform our preference for conceptualising contemporary conflicts as postcolonial, rather than as 'new' wars. These continuities include the following:

1. High civilian casualties, and extensive destruction and seizure of property, both reminiscent of the colonial punitive expeditions.
2. Misogynistic, militarised sexualities enacted through sexual violence, coercion and abuse with enduring effects on social and cultural fabric.
3. Local cultures and value systems replaced with a culture of violence that relies on gendered and ethnicised violence against dehumanised 'others'. Captives are often subject to torture and mutilation, and coerced into joining the perpetuation of violence and humiliation against others. The orchestration of collaboration was also a feature in the colonial contexts cited above.
4. The colonial capitalist economy of loot and plunder has evolved into today's late capitalist extraction of mineral wealth and other natural resources. Conflicts in former colonies discussed here have been facilitated and fuelled by equally ruthless quests for oil (Nigeria), diamonds (Sierra Leone), rubber (Liberia) and other natural resources for sale on international markets. In colonial and contemporary contexts, transnational capitalist interests rely on tacit or overt state support, including legitimising the use of modern-day private security contractors alongside elite military and civilian collaborators. The externalised nature of corporate interests is given visual form in the brightly lit high-security compounds complete with exclusive facilities for largely foreign staff, bearing a strong resemblance to state military bases.
5. Establishment of a parallel criminal economy, with transactions between male-dominated international networks and cabals that connect across private and corporate interests.

By establishing these features as continuities and applying a feminist analysis, it is possible to recognise, as Coulter (2009: 8) suggests, the 'significance of structural violence, long term oppression, and impoverishment' in the production of conflict and militarism. Thus, in essence, the prevailing notion of 'peace' and 'post-conflict' does not take adequate account of the multiple dimensions of insecurity characterising women's lives.

feminist redefinition of security: whose security?

13 Also see Clarke, Y. (2009) 'Security sector reform in Africa: a lost opportunity to deconstruct militarised masculinities?' *Feminist Africa* 10, <http://www.feministafrica.org>, accessed June 2011.

14 Gender and Human Security Network Manifesto (1999), http://www.gwynkirk.net/pdf/gender_and_human_sec.pdf.

Finally, our analysis underlines the importance of redefining security (Peterson, 1992; Tickner, 1992; Steans, 1998; Enloe, 2000; Olonisakin, 2007; Sjoberg, 2009).¹³ Although feminist perspectives could provide the basis for potentially more transformative approaches to gender and security, their uptake in policy has been somewhat limited. At present, the key UN resolutions remain focused on adding women to security reform (UNSCR 1325), or on limited constructions of women as victims of male violence (UNSCR 1820, UNSCR 1888). We agree with Cockburn (2004) that attempts at creating meaningful DDR and SSR reform must critically examine the foundational assumptions of transitional justice mechanisms from a materialist feminist perspective, thereby enabling a reassessment of these assumptions and the policies and practices they inform. This will create an opening to move beyond reform to the possibility of identifying and addressing the systemic roots of the problems women face in militarised contexts. Militarised notions of security promise protection yet rely on institutionalising fear and violence at all levels of society, thus creating and sustaining profound insecurity, especially among women.¹⁴ Militarised security is profoundly gendered and relies on asymmetrical power relations that shape 'how power is used and abused, and citizenship made and remade' (Mohanty, 2011: 83).

As numerous activists and scholars have long observed, insecurity characterises the lives of women in Africa in many ways, key among which are women's exclusion from political arenas, denial of the exercise of full citizenship and the exploitation and invisibilisation of their economic roles. All of these are significantly worsened by outbreaks of conflict. Restoring women to the unequal pre-conflict situation will not be a sufficient strategy, given the realities of gender inequality and injustice before. The evidence reviewed here makes the case for taking feminist activism beyond the demands for the mere inclusion of women in existing institutions and processes. Calls to include women in the security sector can only be as transformative as the definition of security itself, and for feminists this must extend beyond security institutions into much deeper economic and political democratisation processes.

We take genuine security as being based on a respect for human life as a foundational principle of politics and economics. As such, it requires a comprehensive process of demilitarisation, rather than mere reform of the security sector. The gender dynamics of militarism discussed here indicate that demilitarisation will require no less than the transformation of the patriarchal gender relations. One effective way of achieving this is to strengthen women's movements in militarised zones. Feminist critical analysis applied to consideration of diverse examples offers valuable insights that can contribute to

strengthening solidarities against global militarism. As Mohanty (2011) states, 'an alternative vision of connectivity and solidarity requires building ethical, cross-border feminist solidarities that confront neoliberal militarisation globally' (*ibid.*: 83). We remain compelled by the exciting possibilities for transnational feminist praxis in the global struggle for demilitarisation and democratisation.

authors' biographies

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