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# Feminist Africa 10 Militarism, Conflict and Women's Activism

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# Editorial: Militarism, Conflict and Women's Activism

Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey

*Feminist Africa 10* is dedicated to critical gender analysis of postcolonial Africa's most destructive scourge - militarism and violent conflict. The idea for this issue was generated in the context of a research workshop that brought scholars and activists from East, West and Southern Africa together to discuss the prevailing situation and develop an agenda for feminist action research on gender and militarism in Africa<sup>1</sup>. During our discussions we realised the pervasiveness of conflict in our collective experience, as well as how little work has been done to address the centrality of gender in Africa's history of violent conflict and military rule. We agreed on the importance of generating a strong feminist analysis of this collective history and experience, formulated a collaborative research agenda that would support strategising for transformation of the current conditions, and made plans to implement this. FA 10 marks our identification of militarism and anti-militarist activism as a key area for feminist strategy and study in the coming years.

The African continent pursued political independence more than half a century ago, seeking freedom to overcome colonial legacies of military pacification and iron-fisted colonial governments characterised by administrative tyranny, economic exploitation, socio-cultural repression, and all the dynamics that perpetrated underdevelopment and the extreme marginalisation of African women from mainstream public and economic life. When victory came, and political transitions to African rule came, the institutions of state bore the marks of a patriarchal and militaristic history. Independent states promoted an ethos of restorative masculinity, and political culture in the new nations expressed authoritarian and militarist legacies, ritualised in the national parades of the Head of State and 'his' armed forces, echoed in the national symbols - flags and anthems that invariably have military origins.

The global context into which Africa's new nations emerged did not do much to overcome these legacies. On the contrary, individual nations found

themselves variously enmeshed in Cold-War politics and the arms race, and embroiled in a series of deadly proxy wars. Sudan and Nigeria led the way in the ensuing three decades of *coup d'états*, civil conflicts and military government, often fuelled by global power struggles. Even the worst dictators and most brutal non-state militias attracted external military assistance and spent vast fortunes on armaments that were largely used on their own people. African armies made a habit of bursting out of the barracks to perpetrate atrocities, and seize control of the state and all its assets. By the mid-1970s more than half of Africa was under military rule, and between 1990 and 2005, no fewer than 23 nations were involved in conflict, with an average cost per year of US \$18 billion to African economies. Violent conflicts are currently estimated to cost the region somewhere in excess of US \$3 billion per annum and military spending has surged in the run-up to the various civil wars, conflicts and genocides that have taken place since the end of colonial rule. The vast majority of these conflicts were carried out within nations, with increasingly devastating impact on civilian populations and rising casualties among women and children.

Recent years have seen the heavily militarised US regime declare a new borderless war without end, under the paranoid spectre of the 'Global War on Terror'. This is having world-wide ramifications and escalating militarization. The effects include the proliferation of weapons and military bases, some direct military action, a number of well-orchestrated proxy-actions in Africa and other parts of the formerly colonized world, and a growing acceptance of violence as the way to resolve conflicts. As of 2007, this escalating militarization is costing a staggering US \$1339 billion worldwide – nearly US \$4 billion *per day* – with the US being the biggest spender, accounting for nearly half of that amount. African countries are spending nearly US \$17 billion a year, of which US \$10 billion are spent in sub-Saharan Africa (SIPRI, 2008).

Yet, we find surprisingly little feminist scholarship on militarism in Africa. Jacky Cock's (1991) book *Colonels and Cadres* was the first, followed by conference collections such as *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (Turshen, Meintjes and Pillay, 2002). The mainstream of African scholarship on militarism has almost completely neglected to address gender, as typified by Hutchful and Bathily's weighty collection *The Military and Militarism in Africa* (CODESRIA, 1997), which does not contain a single contribution that attends to gender. In this issue, Cheryl Hendricks's exacting



review of the recent two-volume work edited by Nhema and Zeleza (2008) indicates that as far as mainstream African work goes, very little has changed in the ensuing decade, despite the growing public awareness of women's extensive activism and their involvement in all aspects of conflict, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction work. It is thus a field that demands scholarly attention.

To approach this intensely challenging terrain, we frame our engagement in terms of the concept of militarism. This concept is based on our realisation that war and conflict are merely the explicit expressions of deeply gendered, as well as ethnicized and classed, long-term dynamics that precede the outbreak of conflict, escalate dramatically, and persist long after 'peace' has been officially declared and the transition from overt warfare is taking place. This approach echoes feminist theorisations of gender-based violence as the expression of unequal gender relations and dynamics that are far more pervasive than the specific instances of actual violence.

Theorising conflict from a gender perspective very quickly leads us to the realisation that for women living in patriarchal societies, all of which are characterised by a general proclivity for violence, peace and security are elusive, limited and precarious. Even in times of supposed peace, many women do not enjoy peace and security in their homes, workplaces or on the streets. Furthermore, there is much evidence that the more general, everyday violence that women are specifically subject to is especially commonplace in pre- and post-war situations. The experiences of women in Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and many other post-conflict locations in and beyond Africa demonstrate that gender-based violence precedes wartimes and does not end when peace is declared. Indeed, the fact is that militarism in the broadest sense reifies polarised gender relations and gender identities, and particular notions of masculinity and masculine prowess seem to be bound up with gender-based violence, which threatens women's security.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by this, as the capacity to maintain a standing army, *in peace-time*, has been a defining feature of the state since its inception. Societies that did not (as was the case in many parts of Africa) were defined as 'stateless' or 'acephalous'. The establishment of an all-male army was an essential aspect of the 'civilizing' mission of colonisation to the production of masculinity among the natives. The colonial forces were then widely deployed in the service of imperial interests, but more

pertinently for this issue of FA, they were also used to pacify rebellions and insurrections, often across ethnic boundaries that were thus intensified. Recruitment and conscription, carried out in accord with the 'divide and rule' principle, targeted local men, removed them from their communities and social responsibilities and transformed them before those who survived Europe's bloodletting returned home. They returned to rebel, and sometimes to rule, in all the ways that have marked Africa's postcolonial experience with the culture of militarism.

This issue focuses on militarism because we identify militarisation, violent conflict, civil wars, military rule – and all the invidious and pervasive political, social, cultural and economic effects of military institutions, discourses and practices – as significant obstacles to Africa's progress towards democratisation, development, and gender justice. We regard militarism as the antithesis of revolutionary pan-African visions of Africa as a region freed from the destructive legacies of its patriarchal and colonial history. Violent conflicts, the crudest and most obvious manifestations of militarism, have wrought devastation and destruction across great swathes of the African continent, killing, maiming and scarring children, women and men, scoring communities with traumatising and debilitating effects that persist for generations: the shattering of lives, the scattering of families, the destruction of the physical environment, the disruption of political and cultural systems and the already fragile support systems that have enabled much of Africa to survive as long as it has. The contributions to this issue of *Feminist Africa* suggest that building just peace and genuine security demands that we join hands and collectively strategise to demilitarise the region, and that we set about working to develop cultures that transform the destructive legacies of militarism which still permeate our societies at so many levels.

Bringing a feminist lens to bear on the meaning of militarisation, conflict, peace and reconstruction, takes our analysis beyond 'toys for the boys' considerations of arms, arms expenditure, and the mobilisation and demobilisation of national armies. It enables us to tackle the broader historical and socio-cultural conditions that underpin the normalisation of institutionalised violence in our lives. Feminist analyses define militarism in terms that include values, norms and ideas, institutional cultures, and values that emanate from the military and military institutions to permeate society, and come into play in all aspects of culture and identity.

The contents of this issue of *Feminist Africa* set out to stimulate study

and analysis of the manifestations of militarism in Africa in this light. The contributors address a number of conflict, pre- and post-conflict contexts, paying attention to women's experiences, and highlighting the way that women have mobilised to survive, resist and challenge militarism in just a few of Africa's conflict-ridden zones.

Rangira Béa Gallimore provides us with a cultural-historical analysis of Rwandan militarism, focusing on the interconnectedness of class, ethnicity and gender in the gradual militarisation of the postcolonial Rwandan state. She offers an unsettling consideration of why rape, in this case, specifically the rape of women designated as Tutsi, was so widespread during the 1994 genocide.

Muthoni Wanyeki's standpoint considers the recent post-election violence in Kenya, thus providing a different iteration of the interconnection of ethnicity, class and gender in the genesis of collective violence – this time precipitated by the imperative of democratic elections in a purportedly peaceful nation, albeit one marked by a history of injustice and corruption.

Yaliwe Clarke's feature draws on various African examples to examine whether security sector reform offers an opportunity to challenge the pervasiveness of aggressive modes of masculinity that characterise the military institutions responsible for defining and maintaining security. She notes that even the peacekeeping forces sent to protect communities sometimes perpetrate sexual violence. Her analysis points towards a broader re-conceptualization of 'security' as no longer merely a matter of state, but inclusive of commitment to the real interests and wellbeing of the people, such that women and men can live as equals in a less violent world.

Helen Scanlon's contribution critically examines the transitional justice institutions that have emerged in selected countries, looking at the increasing attention to sexual violence, and the gender implications of this. Her analysis leads her to problematise the simplistic polarisation of perpetrators (assumed to be male) and victims (assumed to be women), and looks at how this plays out in demobilisation efforts which continue to exclude women, and still largely fail to prosecute rapists.

The inextricable links between militarism and economic globalisation – both deeply gendered processes – are brought to light in Sokari Ekine's discussion of women's responses to the conditions facing the people of the Niger Delta, where relationships between the militarised ruling elites and transnational corporations sustain extreme human rights abuses. Here the destruction of the physical environment is paramount, yet it is often a neglected consequence of

conflict and wars that can last for several generations.

In our standpoint section, we include the reflections of former Deputy Minister of Defence in South Africa, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, who looks back on her experience within that most male-dominated sector of government. Appointed during a time of transformation and tasked with bringing about change, her reflections allude to some of the lost opportunities that South Africa has come to signify for feminists and anti-militarism activists. A decade later and now out of the Parliament, for allegedly not “toeing the line” during her subsequent appointment as Deputy Minister of Health, Madlala-Routledge’s contribution calls for an international mobilisation against militarism.

From the distressing realities of conflict, the documented limitations of peace-brokering and institutions of transitional justice and security sector reform with regard to women, in the context of a US-led global escalation of militarization, we turn to highlight women’s responses and the emergence of feminist activism against militarism. Women all over the African region have not only participated in, survived and resisted violent conflict, but played key roles in facilitating negotiations and peace-brokering efforts, as is so beautifully documented in Abigail Disney and Gini Ritecker’s film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* reviewed here by Yaba Badoe. Women’s ongoing practical work towards healing the deep harms wrought on women’s bodies and minds by sexual torture and abuse is typified by the work of Isis-WICCE in Uganda, discussed by Ruth Ochieng in conversation with FA. Our conversation with Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff shares experiences of the civil war in Sierra Leone, and the peace-building work of the Mano-River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in facilitating reconciliation and justice across borders. In the spirit of international solidarity, we have included Gwyn Kirk’s profile of the US and Asia-Pacific based International Network of Women Against Militarism which reminds us of the need for feminist transnational strategies and alliances that can respond to the global character of militarism, and a review of *“If I Were Given the Choice”: Palestinian Women’s Stories of Daily Life during the Years 2000-2003 of the Second Intifada*, which chronicles the harrowing experiences of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation.

The recent US attempt to establishing a US African High Command on the continent has alerted us to the reality of ongoing manoeuvres, and the continued building of six new bases in asset-rich and politically precarious African nations. While no African government has currently agreed to host AFRICOM, we remain concerned that while the appointed African-American

Commander General Kip Ward waits it out in Germany, some of our leaders are definitely still interested in attracting the perceived financial and strategic benefits that would accrue from hosting such a force. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is most clearly expressed by the new government of Liberia, which not only has the closest of ties with the US, but has also seen one of the most gruesome conflicts in the region. So while we welcome having the first African woman President in modern history, we need to also note that we have a responsibility to see that she – and all Africa’s other Presidents for that matter – are kept fully aware of the popular and continent-wide resistance to this extension of the US military presence in Africa.

This issue of *Feminist Africa* in many ways presents a grim picture of the conditions facing people, particularly women, of Africa, and the challenges that face women’s activism. However true this may be, the varied and creative forms of women’s growing engagement in protesting militarism and violence evidenced by the peace networks and movements that have emerged in recent times must also inspire us. It is in keeping with this that the features presented here exemplify a combination of emerging scholarship, rather than a profile of established expertise in the field. As such, they do well in highlighting the possibilities for further research and critical analysis of militarism and war from African-located feminist perspectives. The activism appears to be much more advanced than the research literature at this stage. We hope FA 10 will inspire our readers to take up the challenge of bringing feminist scholarship and activism together in new efforts to resist and redress the local and global dynamics of militarism and make the 21<sup>st</sup> century less violent than the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved to be.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Held 2-4<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in Cape Town. We are indebted to all those who participated in the discussions that took place at that meeting (AGI 2007 unpublished 'Gender, Militarism, Conflict, Resistance and Peace Building' Report of the Gender and Militarism Working Meeting, Cape Town 2-4<sup>th</sup> October 2007).

# Militarism, Ethnicity, and Sexual Violence in the Rwandan Genocide

Rangira Béa Gallimore

This historical and socio-cultural study explores the connection between militarism, gender, ethnicity and sexual violence in Rwanda. It analyzes the evolving connection between masculinity and militarism in Rwanda from pre-colonial times, and the escalation of militarism that preceded 1994 and discusses how the construction of gender as an ethnic boundary marker led to widespread and brutal sexual violence against Tutsi women in the 1994 genocide.

In her article, *Women and Militarism*, Colleen Burke states that “military values contribute to the construction of narrow definitions of masculine and feminine characteristics.”<sup>1</sup> She bases her argument on the definition of militarism offered by the World Council of Churches, which defines militarism as a result of the process of militarization to “achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of the state ...[and] as a consequence the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are ‘militarized.’”<sup>2</sup> Thus, war and violence are seen as a direct consequence of militarism. To understand the relationship between sexual violence and militarism, one needs to understand the link between gender and the military. In his book, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War and Vice Versa*, Joshua Goldstein (2001) examines why, in the majority of cultures and at different times in their histories, war was an activity exclusively reserved for men. He considers different disciplines such as biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science and history, and comes to the conclusion that “war is gendered across virtually all human societies”:

Males occupy the ongoing role of potential fighters, even in relatively peaceful societies. Amazon myths aside, in only one documented case (Dahomey) did women make up a substantial fraction of combat forces in a regular standing army over many years. This regularity in gender roles in war contrasts with the much greater diversity found both in war itself and in gender roles outside war (Goldstein, 2001: 10).

The exclusion of women from the army, a common denominator in most traditional societies, originates from an assumption that males and females are biologically different, and because of the difference, women cannot perform military activities as well as men. Despite the evidence showing that women perform as well as men in the military, Goldstein illustrates how cultural norms of masculinity have pushed men to combat in order to prove their virility and masculinity in numerous societies, excluding females from this high-status space.

### **Masculinity and the Military in Traditional Rwanda**

In *The Military and Masculinity in Israeli Society*, Uta Klein (2003) explains the relationship between the military and constructions of masculinity through the social perception of the soldier. The latter is positioned as “an embodiment of traditional male sex role attitudes and behavior. Army service can thus be described as a rite of passage to male adulthood, where the socializing process aims to teach toughness and masculinity and to eliminate what is regarded effeminate” (Klein, 2003: 195).

In Rwandan traditional society, masculine monopoly of the military can be illustrated by the famous Rwandan folktale, Ndabaga.<sup>3</sup> The story centres on a young woman named Ndabaga who disguised herself as a young man in order to replace her father who had been forced to grow old in the military because he and his wife had been unable to produce a son. The young woman decided to disguise herself as a man so that she could be admitted in the military camp. She amputated her breasts and dressed in men’s clothing to conceal her feminine figure and appearance. In the camp, she acquired the skills of archery and became an accomplished archer, capable of securing first place in the high jump that is so prized in Rwandan military culture. As the days went by, Ndabaga’s peers became suspicious of her stubborn search for privacy. They followed her to the little shed she used as a toilet and discovered that the formidable military man was in fact a woman, because she was unable to urinate in a standing position.

Ndabaga’s gender was then revealed to the king. Impressed by Ndabaga’s exploits, he congratulated her, but at the same time, was compelled to strip her of her military position and cast her out of the military camp. Ndabaga feared that she would not be able to marry because she had been left as a woman without breasts. She was nevertheless saved from ostracism when the king decided to marry her. However, when she became pregnant, she could



no longer jump or shoot, thereby confirming the perception that women cannot go to war!

At the end of the folktale, the king revoked the law requiring soldiers to be replaced by their sons and disbanded the military camp. His action is understood to have been a necessary way of preserving traditional gender boundaries. As he dismissed his army, the king is reputed to have said, “when a woman goes to war that means things have reached Ndabaga’s stage.”

The king’s utterance has become a part of the collective memory in Rwanda. When repeated in Rwandan modern daily life, it is usually uttered with a tone of regret and fear – a fear that something dreadful has happened or is about to happen, and is used to draw attention to a situation of crisis requiring immediate attention and a solution. The English equivalent of the saying is, “things have gone to the dogs,” meaning they have reached the worst state possible.<sup>4</sup>

The exclusion of women from the military is also linguistically reflected in Kinyarwanda, the principal language of Rwanda. The word for “male” in Kinyarwanda is “*umugabo*” where the radical “*gab(o)*” denotes masculinity. It is therefore not surprising that the Kinyarwanda word for the army is “*ingabo*.” This same word also signifies “shield.” Here, the emphasis is on the protective role played by the male soldier in the society.

Writing about social values in Rwandan proverbs, Pierre Crépeau (1985) describes the pillars of Rwandan ethics. Among the pillars he cites is “*ubugabo*,” which means courage, constancy, patience, firmness. This concept “means first physical virility, that without which a man would not be a man” (Crépeau, 1985: 176). These ethical qualities are mainly attributed to men in the Rwandan tradition and are deeply embedded in Rwandan culture. Rwandans use the saying “*uli umugabo*” to acknowledge and praise notable performances. The expression means literally “you are a man” and is used to congratulate both men and women for their performances.

The Rwandan language consistently reinforces the culture of inequalities embedded in gender roles. By using “*umugabo*” to compliment a woman, the powerful subliminal message is that some acts and accomplishments can only be performed by a man, and women who do perform these are referred to as “men”.

In a similar vein Rwandan women are not allowed to perform oral epic or praise poetry, or “*ibyvugo*.” The Kinyarwanda word “*ibyvugo*” comes from the verb “*kwivuga*” which literally means “to speak of oneself,” in other

words, to “speak about one’s exploits.” The interdiction is encoded in the following Rwandan saying, “*Nta mugore wivuga*” which means “No woman is allowed to speak about her exploits.”<sup>5</sup>

The fighting regiment in Rwanda was called “*intore*”. The same word refers to the warriors’ dance that is still performed today in Rwanda. This dance which mimics the high jumps of war by dancers holding arrows, spears, arcs and shields, cannot be performed by women even in modern Rwandan society. As mentioned in the tale of Ndabaga, women were not allowed in the military camp, called “*itorero*” in Kinyarwanda. This camp was a space of initiation to manhood. During their stay in the camp, young men learned not only martial arts but also the “*intore* dance”, as well as the art of eloquence through epic and praise poetry. In some wars against neighboring kingdoms which shared the same culture as Rwanda,<sup>6</sup> the combat took the form of a “ritualized ballet.” This traditional sanctuary of masculinity was closed to women.

In the pre-colonial Rwandan society, there was a construction of masculinity in the military from which women were excluded. A July 2001 report by the Rwandan women’s association Haguruka titled *La Femme rwandaise face à la justice* stated that “in the military structure of the Rwandan Kingdom, all Rwandan men belonged to the army.... At the beginning of each reign, a new army was formed. At the end, the king required all his clients to bring their sons (never daughters) who were not members of the army.”<sup>7</sup>

## Ethnicity and Gender in Rwanda

Scholars of pre-colonial Rwandan history disagree on the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi.

[----] the most widely accepted interpretation is the cattle rearing Tutsi arrived in Burundi and Rwanda and neighboring regions in successive waves from the North during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, fleeing famine and drought. The agriculturist Hutu they met in Rwanda had immigrated to this fertile region centuries earlier from central Africa. The longest-standing inhabitants of the region are the Twa, a small marginal group (only 1 percent of the population) engaged in pottery making and hunting (Uvin, 1998: 14).

Many scholars<sup>8</sup> have shown that the region was divided into numerous small Hutu kingdoms in which the three groups coexisted. Some of these kingdoms did not have much power because the Nyiginya Kingdom, a Tutsi

kingdom, conquered the surrounding kingdoms and unified Rwanda into what became the present country. There is general consensus on the mobility amongst and between the Hutu and Tutsi. It has been argued that originally, Tutsi and Hutu were social class divisions rather than ethnic groups. Tutsis were said to have much more economic power because a cattle-based economy was richer than one dominated by agriculture alone. With economic power came the political power. When the cow was introduced in Rwanda, it became a symbol of wealth and prestige. However, all Tutsis did not possess cattle and some Hutus and Tutsis who did not own livestock were able to acquire these animals through the system of “*Ubugake*”, a form of unequal clientship based on a contract between two men: the patron and the client. At the beginning, *Ubugake* was practised between two Tutsi lineages and later it was changed to also allow a contract between Tutsi and Hutu. A Hutu could acquire cattle through his service to a Tutsi patron and also through bravery exhibited on the battleground. The system, in spite its imperfections, enabled social mobility. The class mobility from Hutu to Tutsi, or rather this change of social class/caste, was achieved through the phenomenon of “*Kwihutura*”, which means literally to lose “Hutuness”, and to become a Tutsi. The history of Rwanda shows that the terms Hutu and Tutsi referred to social relations “which were not fixed categories but fluid ones, varying through time and location depending on such factors as wealth, military prowess, family control over a precious commodity, or occupation of prestigious social position” (Jones, 2001: 18). Although scholars of Rwandan history agree on the pre-colonial existence of ascendant mobility between Hutu and Tutsi, they disagree on when this upward mobility started.<sup>9</sup>

Social mobility in pre-colonial Rwanda was also achieved through gender as a social boundary marker. Hutus could ascend class by way of marriage to a Tutsi woman from a rich aristocrat family. It is the correlation between gender and social identity that changed through colonial and post-colonial times into gender and ethnicity to produce the sexual violence endured by Tutsi women in 1994.

The social mobility system changed after contact between Rwanda and the colonizers. Germans colonized the country between 1887 and 1919. At the beginning, their policy in Rwanda was based on indirect rule with respect for the pre-existing political and cultural entities. However, Germans saw Rwanda through Western eyes. Their understanding of Rwanda was based on the classificatory system adopted by British explorer John Hanning

Speke, who applied an 18<sup>th</sup> century European theory of racial types to the peoples he encountered during his quest for the source of the Nile. Following Speke, the Germans introduced the “Hamitic theory” in their understanding of Rwanda and especially of Tutsi people. According to the “Hamitic hypothesis,” Tutsis were more civilized than other groups, and presumed to be descendants of Ham, the Biblical son of Noah (Semujanga, 1998). The first writings by Germans about their early contacts with Rwanda were not translated but a summary can be found in a document published by Louis Lacger (1961) titled *Ruanda*.

Belgians colonized and ruled the country after the Germans between 1919 and 1962. They drew upon the German writings and in their own documentation, attributed the same “racial” superiority to the Tutsi group. Gérard Prunier summarized this Western understanding of Rwanda in the following terms:

The Europeans were quite smitten with the Tutsi, whom they saw as definitely too fine to be 'negroes'. Since they were not only physically different from the Hutu but also socially superior, the racially obsessed nineteenth-century Europeans started building a variety of hazardous hypotheses on their 'possible', probable, or, as they soon became, 'indubitable origins' (Prunier, 1995: 6-7).

The following is a racially constructed description of Tutsi found in the 1925 Belgian Colonial Report:

The Mututsi of good race has nothing of the Negro, apart from his color. He is usually very tall, 1.80 m. at least, often 1.90 m. or more. He is very thin, a characteristic which tends to be even more noticeable as he gets older. His features are very fine: a high brow, thin nose and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth. Batutsi women are usually lighter-skinned than their husband, very slender and pretty in their youth, although they tend to thicken with age. [...] Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feelings which is rare among primitive people. He is a natural born leader, capable of extreme self-control and of calculated goodwill.<sup>10</sup>

The Belgian colonizers reinforced the notions of intellectual superiority and beauty attributed to the Tutsis by the Germans. In the beginning, Belgians governed Rwanda according to the indirect rule policy established by the Germans. It was only between 1926 and 1931 that the Belgians changed their policy and introduced a series of reforms that drastically changed the socio-

economic rapport between Hutu and Tutsi. The introduction of forced labor which exacerbated the “*ubuhake*” system practiced by the Tutsis, intensified the economic exploitation of the Hutus. It was also under Belgian rule that ethnic construction reached new levels with the introduction of schools for Tutsi children. Tutsis were given administrative positions from which Hutus were excluded. This widened the gap between Hutu and Tutsi especially when the so-called ethnic differences were written and fixed on the identity card issued to each Rwandan.

With the institutionalization of ethnicity, the colonial-ascribed characteristics became generalized for each group. Tutsis and Hutus themselves internalized the identities assigned to them by the colonizers. In other words, Rwandans were deeply affected by what Frantz Fanon (1968) identified as the “historical void” in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, as they knowingly and unknowingly became victims of the colonial “representation”.

“Hutu were deprived of all political power and were materially exploited by both the whites and the Tutsi. They were told by everyone that they were inferiors who deserved their fate and came to believe it” (Prunier, 1995: 39).

It became common to hear the word “*ibihutu*” instead of “*abahutu*” from the mouths of some Tutsis. Here, we have a shift in the noun class marker. The Kinyarwanda noun “*umuhutu*” which belongs to the class of humans is shifted into the class of animals and objects by using “*ibihutu*.” The common noun “*ibihutu*” used in this context has a pejorative meaning. It was also common to hear Tutsi mothers telling their children not to “act as a Hutu” or to acquire “Hutu manners.” Hutu women themselves would say, “my kid is ‘*agatutsi*’” (a small Tutsi). Here the use of a diminutive noun denotes a Hutu child who is thin or tall or who has the “so called Tutsi good manners”.

The “Hamitic theory” was Eurocentric, racist and promulgated a theory of natural superiorities based on race, language and culture. However, within Rwanda, the domination by Tutsi and the exclusion of Hutu from political and economic centres of power was not entirely accepted. Strong Hutu resentment and resistance became manifest. In the late 1950s, following pressure from the Catholic Church, the Belgians began to introduce reforms that ostensibly encouraged the growth of modern political institutions. Traditionalist Tutsis resisted these reforms as they considered them a threat to Tutsi supremacy. In 1959, there was an attack against a Hutu activist that sparked the first spate of violence against the Tutsis by bands of Hutu militia.

Many Tutsis were killed, their houses looted and burnt. After this killing spree, the Belgian administration abolished the monarchy and replaced Tutsi administrative personnel with Hutu. Many Tutsis left the country in search of exile. In 1962, Rwanda became independent and was governed by Hutus. The latter established a strong policy of discrimination against Tutsis. This was the beginning of Hutu nationalism, dominated by the “Parmehutu” political party which defined Rwanda as a nation understood in terms of ethnicity namely, the Hutu ethnicity.

In *Nation and Narration*, the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba (1990) proposes that “Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being” (Bhaba, 1990: 1). Hutu nationalism emerged out of forced divisions, legacies of dichotomized identity, and complex power struggles exploited by colonialists and Rwandese alike.

After the establishment of the First Hutu Republic, several Hutu party leaders married Tutsi women as a confirmation of their newly acquired power. During the massacres of 1959, a song sung by Hutu militiamen while attacking Tutsis stated the fate of Tutsi women as follows: “*Ibyo bigore byanyu, tuzabipfakaza, ibyo bikobwa byanyu tuzabirongora,*” meaning “We will make your big wives (Tutsi wives) widows, and as for your daughters we will marry them.” The verb used in Kinyarwanda is “*kurungora*”, an ambiguous verb that can mean to marry or to rape. In the mind of a Hutu singing this song, a Tutsi woman was the representation of a mystic beauty, an object of desire, a trophy to acquire. The process of “*kwihutura*,” as social ascension in pre-colonial era became somehow perverted during colonial rule, especially after the creation of consolidated ethnic identities. It seemed that a Hutu marrying a Tutsi woman realized what Frantz Fanon (1966) called the “racial dialectic”. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1966) writes about the alienation of a black man in the following terms:

“I wish to be acknowledged not as Black but as white . . . who but a white woman could do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her noble love takes me onto the road of self-realization. I marry white culture, white beauty, whiteness” (Fanon, 1966: 188).

The love and hate relationship between a black man and a white woman is at the basis of what Fanon (1966) sees as the ambivalence between “race

and sexuality.” In the case of Rwanda, one can speak about the ambivalence between “ethnicity and sexuality”. During the post-colonial period, the racial/ethnic division was used by Hutu leaders to incite Hutus to massacre Tutsis in 1959, 1963 and in 1973. This hate and violence against Tutsis did not stop Hutus from marrying Tutsis. On the contrary, in the late 1970s and 1980s, there were frequent intermarriages between Hutus and Tutsis. These unions were not considered out of the norm, and were often experienced as being based on romantic love among young people of the post-independence Rwandan generation.

What then triggered the misogynistic images of Tutsi women present in the pre-genocide media propaganda? The answer to this question lies in the history of Rwandan militarism and in the overt and covert active military role that was played by women during the pre-genocide militarization and militarism of Rwanda.

### The Military and Ethnicity in Rwanda

In pre-colonial times the traditional army of the king was recruited from among the three ethnic groups in Rwanda: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. All Rwandan men were a part of “*intore*”: Rwandan historian Gérard Prunier states: “All men were part of the *intore* (fighting regiments). And the scruffy Twa pygmies were greatly appreciated as soldiers....” (Prunier, 1995: 15). It was also known in Rwanda that Hutu men were appreciated by the king because they were equally efficient on the battle field. It has been argued by many scholars<sup>11</sup> of Rwanda that reference to the concept of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa as “ethnic or tribal groups” is paradoxical in pre-colonial Rwanda. This is because Hutu, Tutsi and Twa share the same language and beliefs. Prunier shows that the army can also be seen as another element of cohesion between groups. “[W]ar acted as a kind of ‘social coagulant’ where Tutsi, Hutu and Twa, although still unequal, were nevertheless first and foremost Banyarwanda facing the common enemy” (Prunier, 1995: 15).

The king’s ethnically diverse army continued to operate in Rwanda even under German rule. The Germans, unlike the French and Belgians, allowed the system of indirect rule that left the Rwandan monarchy and its administration intact. However, during the unrest and killings in 1959, Belgium used some Belgian and Congolese military to restore the peace in Rwanda. The king’s traditional army of warriors that used to defend the king was dismantled and divided after the Belgians dropped their allegiance to the Tutsi and began to

systematically privilege the Hutu elite. In 1960, at the request of the territory's new Hutu leadership, the Belgian administration created a new modern styled army called the "Garde territoriale" (Weinstein, 1997: 61). Recruitment was exclusively Hutu men, intended to provide a military shield for the new Hutu regime that the Belgians were helping to put in place.

This pre-independence period also marks the beginning of modernization of the Rwandan army to replace the emergency colonial army made up of Belgians and Congolese that stabilized the country during the massacres of 1959. It was only following the military coup led by Juvénal Habyarimana in 1973 that a few Hutu women were admitted to the Rwandan national army.

### **From Militarization to Military Rule**

After the coup led by Juvenal Habyarimana in 1973, the power and leadership of Rwanda were in the hands of the military. The glorification of the ideals of a professional military class came into existence after the coup. The military title was revered in the new military government of Rwanda. For example, President Habyarimana was simply referred to as "The General Major". Many military officers occupied the role of leadership in the government. In fact, being in the army provided protection from internal Hutu enemies from the North. There was no threat from Tutsis either, because when Habyarimana assumed the presidency, he promised to end the cycle of violence and to allow those Tutsis who had fled to neighboring countries out of fear to return. He calculated that with his promise, no Tutsi from outside would shake the "peaceful Rwanda".

However, the discrimination policy against Tutsis established in 1959 continued even under the new president. Exiled Tutsis held Habyarimana to his promise and asked to return to their country. Habyarimana refused because he believed that Rwanda did not have sufficient resources to provide for everyone and land was also scarce and thus could not accommodate everybody. After many unfulfilled demands, the exiles formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-led army that mounted an attack in 1990 from across the Ugandan border and occupied a part of Rwanda. The counter-offensive from the Rwandan army was the real beginning of a sharp escalation of militarism in Rwanda. Recruitment by the Rwandan army increased tremendously and Dina Temple-Raston estimates that: "The ranks grew from a few thousand soldiers to forty thousand in just three years. By 1992, the military consumed almost 70 percent of the Rwandan government's



budget. Between 1985 and 1990, the military gobbled up 1.6 percent of the nation's GNP; by 1993, three times that amount" (Temple-Raston, 2000: 26). Small arms were distributed to the Hutu gangs who were later trained to form what is now known as the "Interahamwe," militia which did most of the killing of Tutsis in 1994. While the training and recruitment of new soldiers was going on, Rwanda sought the help of neighboring Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Zaire sent a contingent of soldiers to Rwanda. The Zairian soldiers were not the best combatants. They suffered losses and had discipline problems such as looting and raping women. They were called back to their country shortly after their arrival. There was also a short presence by Belgians and a longer stay of French soldiers sent in to support the Rwandan army. French military co-operation is alleged to have included arms deals with the pro-Hutu government and contributing to the training of the army. French special military forces were also suspected of having armed and trained soldiers who later organized the militias that carried out most of the genocide killing. Whatever the French government's motive for their presence was, it undoubtedly contributed to the rise of militarism in the country.

In October, 1993, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was established by Security Council Resolution 872 to provide peacekeeping service in Rwanda with 2,548 military personnel. This UN peacekeepers' mission was to stabilize the country and to push for a peace settlement between the Rwandan government and the RPF rebels. However, this mission failed when President Juvénal Habyarimana's plane was shot down on his return from signing a peace agreement in Arusha, Tanzania. This event triggered the genocide, the mass killing of Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers. The Rwandan military and Hutu militia, assisted by Hutu civilians, went on a rampage, killing almost one million people in about 100 days in 1994.

## Militarism and Sexual Violence

During the months preceding the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, militarization escalated, fuelled by anti-Tutsi propaganda. During this time, the number of women, all of them Hutu, in the Rwandan army increased.

In the pre-genocide propaganda against Tutsis, this active role of women in the military was used against Tutsi women, who were called "*ikizungerezi*," a word which means "dizziness." The word "*ikizungerezi*" comes from the verb "*kuzengereza*," which means to make dizzy. To have "*ikizungerezi*" is to be dizzy. To call someone *ikizungerezi* (especially a woman) is to imply

that this person can make your head spin. In other words, the “*ikizungerezi*” woman is someone who can make a man lose his mind through her art of seduction. In the pre-genocide media propaganda, the word was applied to Tutsi women in general.

The recruitment into the RPF was done through different cultural manifestations, plays, songs and dances. Some of the songs were aired on Radio Muhabura, which was run by the RPF. The most popular songs were those sung by a famous female Tutsi singer, Cecile Kayirebawa who lived in exile since 1973. Among her songs was one titled *ikizungerezi*. This metaphoric word was not used in everyday life in Rwanda, but it became fashionable during the months leading up to the genocide, and was applied to all Tutsi women by Hutu extremists.

The Hutu extremist newspaper *Kangura* published many images showing Tutsi women engaged in all kinds of sexual orgies with General Dallaire, the head of UNAMIR and his peacekeepers. The caption on one of the pictures reads: “*General Dallaire n’ingabo ze baguye mu mutego w’ibizungerezi*”, meaning “General Dallaire and his army have fallen into the traps of ‘*ibizungerezi*’” (plural form).<sup>12</sup> During the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan extremist Kantano, a very well-known announcer on RTLM radio, broadcast a message in which he asked Hutu women to become “*ibizungerezi*” towards the French soldiers of the Operation Turquoise - “seduce them so that they become our allies as do the Tutsi women”. By inciting his own women to become “*ibizungerezi*”, Kantano indicated that these Tutsi women had seduction powers desired by the other group. The Tutsi woman was concurrently an object of envy and desire, as well as the object of hate in the eyes of extremist Hutus. In his book, *Récits fondateurs du drame rwandais*, Josias Semujanga states that the “*ikizungerezi*” as a woman, is desirable because she is beautiful. She is considered the “Rwandan Delilah” (Semujanga, 1998: 194).

This hate and love discourse assumed greater transparency in *The Hutu Ten Commandments*, another pre-genocide document published by the extremist journal *Kangura*. In four of these commandments, there is fear that the dangerous Tutsi woman has reached the Hutu heart, and more pertinently, the mind of the Hutu in the military. She is seen as the most dangerous spy who works for her brothers in the RPF army. The so-called Commandments are:

1. Every Muhutu should know that a Mututsi woman, wherever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall

consider a traitor any Muhutu who:

- marries a Tutsi woman;
- befriends a Tutsi woman;
- employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine.

2. Every Muhutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife, and mother of the family. Are not Hutu women beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

3. Bahutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.

7. The Rwandese Armed Force (soldiers) should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October (1990) war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi (*Kangura*, 1990: 6-8).<sup>13</sup>

In the Seventh Commandment, “the usual criteria of beauty common to all Rwandans, are subverted to imply another discourse, a discourse which forbids military officers of the first and second (all Hutus with only one exception) republics to marry Tutsi women” (Semujanga, 1998: 193). Tutsi women are therefore the forbidden objects, and are at the center of the forbidden desire.

Towards the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the different practices of ethnic discrimination and the anti-Tutsi propaganda have helped Habyarimana legitimize and radicalize the Hutu nationalism. Many studies on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, nation and genocide (Fein, 1999; Sharlach, 1999; Hutchinson & Madut, 2002; Jones, 2000; Jones, 2002; Baines, 2003), have analyzed how ethnic identity is created, constructed and maintained through the use of gender as a marker, and how gender, by blurring the purity of ethnic boundaries, poses an obstacle to the purity of the “ideal nation.” In her article, *Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis*, Erin Baines regrets the fact that “fewer analyses examine the genocide in terms of a gendered nation building process, inscribed on the physical body despite the visceral role of body in any genocide narrative” (Baines, 2003: 479). Baines shows how “Hutu extremists considered Tutsi women as “sexed” and not ethnicised in Rwandan nationalist discourse” (Baines, 2003: 479). She argues that the 1994 genocide was an extreme attempt not only to purge the “Hutu nation” of the Tutsi, but also to actively engender a vision of the “Hutu nation”.

In his book, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, Eric Weitz (2003) argues that the polarization created by leaders into an “us”

and “them” based on artificial categorizations of race/ethnicity and nation led to the “necessary” elimination of “them” for survival. This mandatory elimination and exclusion of Tutsi for the sake of Hutu ethnic survival was illustrated by the rejection of mixed marriages between Hutu men and Tutsi women during months preceding the genocide. Marrying a Tutsi woman was somehow considered an act of treason, a rejection of one’s Hutu identity. This can also explain why some Hutu militiawomen incited militiamen to rape; they were more resentful towards the mixed unions because they felt betrayed and rejected by their own men who preferred Tutsi women.

Gender as ethnicity marker, which was considered as a means of empowerment for the leaders of the First Hutu Republic, was seen as a dangerous arm of disempowerment under the Hutu nationalism. Mixed marriages constituted an obstacle to ethnic divisions in the society and to the purity of the Hutu ethnic group:

“Because official ethnic identity (marked on everyone’s national ID card) was decided by the father in pre-genocide Rwanda, a Hutu man who married a Tutsi woman produced offspring who were legally Hutu. Inter-marriage between Hutu men and Tutsi women thus conferred the full benefits of Hutu to progeny who were perceived by many as racially impure” (Taylor, 1999: 155).

The confirmation of Hutu nationalism sees Tutsi women as carriers of gender markers that produce ill marked progeny dangerous to ethnic boundaries. As Christopher Taylor puts it, Tutsi women were “liminoid beings” (Taylor, 1999: 155).

In the Human Rights Watch report, *Shattered Lives*, one Tutsi woman stated that when a group of raped women passed by the roadblock, the militia shouted: “Kill them, you have to kill them. They will make Tutsi babies” (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 54). In the militia’s words, we see the clear purpose of the Rwandan genocide – the purification of the Hutu ethnic group. Any marriage or any sexual union with a Hutu military officer was seen as polluting the masculine sanctuary of “Hutuness” and masculinity.

In reviewing research on women as boundary marker in India, Bosnia and other countries that faced ethnic conflicts, Lori Handrahan found that:

“[B]ecause of the patriarchy of ethnicity, a man can produce children that are ethnically *his* by raping any woman, regardless of the latter’s ethnic distinction, because in fact, she is a boundary-marker for male defined collective ethnic identity, and only enjoys her ethnicity as long

as she remains inside and adheres to the 'boundaries' of ethnicity as assessed by male ethnic leaders" (Handrahan, 2004: 438).

The pre-genocide Rwandan media recuperated many colonial images of beauty attributed to Tutsi women in the colonial discourse and manipulated them to create a sexualized enemy to be demystified and punished by rape. Sexual images, i.e. images of nudity and sex created all kinds of sexual fantasies in the mind of many militiamen. A genocide survivor from Kigali told me that a few weeks before the genocide, she surprised some of the neighborhood housekeepers viewing sexual and pornographic images published by *Kangura*. She asked them, "What are you doing with the newspaper?", since they were illiterate. They answered her in Kinyarwanda: "*Reka twihere ijisho*" which means literally, "let's nourish our eyes". Many rape survivors' testimonies can attest to this: "They said they were raping me to see to see if Tutsi women were like Hutu women" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 42); "Before he raped me, he said that he wanted to check if Tutsi women were like other women before he took me back to church" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 43); "One Interahamwe said 'you Tutsi women are very sweet, so we have to kill the men and take you.'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 45-46); "He said many things during the rape and he hit and kicked me. He said: 'we have all the rights over you and we can do whatever we want'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 46); "They were saying: 'we want to see how Tutsi kazi (Kinyarwanda word for Tutsi woman) look inside'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 47); "They said that they had to take Tutsi women because before the war they were not able to take them. They said that Tutsi women stayed to themselves before" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 48); "Eight young men did bad things. I couldn't breathe... After raping me, they told me: 'we thought Tutsi women were different but we found they are just the same'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 51); "Then, they told me to show them what I used to do to my husband" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 55).

In his book, *Sacrifice as Terror*, Christopher Taylor explains the active role played by women on both sides:

"During the genocide... women were important as both agents and symbols and this can be seen in several different ways. As agents, women played important roles on both sides during the conflict. In the Rwandan Government Army, for example, there were many female Hutu soldiers (6). Although no woman to my knowledge was involved in actual combat operations against the Rwandan Patriotic Front, in the Hutu extremist militia groups there were women who engaged in

the killing of Tutsi civilians. Other extremist women acted as neighborhood informers keeping note of Tutsi individuals and families who resided in their section. After the onset of the violence on 7 April 1994, these informers indicated where Tutsi families lived to bands of Hutu extremist youth, the Interahamwe. Informers of this sort were often rewarded with the property of their victims. On the other side, the side of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, composed of about seventy to eighty percent Tutsi (7), women were active in fund-raising activities and in the preparation and dissemination of RPF literature. Whether there were women in the military organization of the RPF, I do not know. The fact that Tutsi women were killed during the 1994 genocide in numbers equal to, if not exceeding those of men bears witness to the fact that they were not perceived as innocent non-combatants. This fact should be seen in contrast to earlier incidents of ethnic violence in Rwanda, in 1959 to 1964, for example, and again in 1973, when women were not killed in numbers comparable to that of men" (Taylor, 1999: 154).

Abasa (we are all the same), a Rwandan association of 60 women who were raped during the genocide, is comprised of Tutsi and Hutu women who were married to Tutsi men. Some of these Hutu women were told by the rapists to do what they used to do with their Tutsi men. It was assumed that these Hutu women had somehow learned the sexual practices of Tutsis. This illustrates their existing fantasy, because sexual education for Tutsi and Hutu women was the same.

The testimonies cited above suggest a sexual mystification of the "Tutsi woman" who became much sought after, particularly by senior military officers. In this respect it is notable that many Tutsi women were raped by the militia, whose members were recruited from the underprivileged and destitute young men of the streets, many of whom had come to the city to make a living, and failed. The genocide had somehow allowed the men from the lower rungs of the social ladder to reach up and touch what had hitherto been out of reach. In many cases, it shows that Hutu militia used rape to demystify Tutsi women and to put an end to the myth of the idealized image of a Tutsi woman. The above testimonies clearly reveal how the bodies of Tutsi women became a battleground, a space where men took their revenge and marked their victory, an "expansion of ethnic territory by the male conqueror" (Handrahan, 2004: 437).

## Conclusion

This article presented an analysis of the cultural and political construction of masculinity in the heavily ethnicised (Hutu dominated) Rwandan military and I have shown how militarism reached its peak in the pre-genocide months and extended to broader cultural and sexual myths that fuelled the worst sexual violence against Tutsi women in the history of Rwanda.

By way of a postscript, it is worth noting the manner in which women have responded to the devastation wrought by the genocide. Women's organizations, along with constitutional provisions, have catapulted women into political power in unprecedented numbers. Women are now playing important roles as political leaders in Rwanda. With regard to militarism, it appears that the name *Ndabaga* may have lost its essentialist meaning, thanks to the activities of the Ndabaga Association. During the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process in Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi ex-combatants had to face harsh, poverty-stricken lives. A group of women ex-combatants banded together to form the Ndabaga Association in order to help each other find and create possibilities for work. They became advocates on behalf of women ex-combatants, who currently face numerous gender-specific obstacles. Thus, the association Ndabaga brought a gender perspective to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in Rwanda. Ndabaga Association was the first female ex-combatant association to be formed in the Great Lakes Region. In 2004, the Ndabaga association extended its activism across borders when its members requested to be a part of the UN Peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Using the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 clause on peace and security from a gender perspective, they defended their position and their demand was honored.<sup>14</sup> The Ndabaga association has profoundly challenged the patriarchal society and its reification of differences, and has rejected the conventional and conservative norms in which the character of the Ndabaga folktale was entrapped.<sup>15</sup>

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## Endnotes

- 1 See Colleen Burke (not dated) "Women and Militarism", article posted on the website *Women International League for Peace and Freedom*. <http://www.wilpf.int.ch/publications/womenmilitarism.htm>.
- 2 See "The power and promise," February, 2005: 1, [http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/41c6b7355083931ec1256c14002d2a77/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c/\\$FILE/LF\\_MilitarismWeek3.pdf](http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/41c6b7355083931ec1256c14002d2a77/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c/$FILE/LF_MilitarismWeek3.pdf).
- 3 See "La Fille dans l'impasse" in Pierre Smith, *Le récit populaire au Rwanda*, Paris: Association Classiques Africains, 1975, pp.181-83. The English translation of passages from the tale that appear in this article is mine. The title of the

- folktale in the original version is “Ndabaga”. In this article, I will refer to the tale as such.
- 4 For a lengthy study of the Ndabaga folktale, see Gallimore, Rangira Béa. “From ‘Ndabaga’ Folktale to the Modern ‘Ndabaga.’ From the Construction of Masculinity to the Deconstruction of Masculinity in Post-genocide Rwanda.” (Forthcoming). *The Construction of Masculinity*. eds. Helen Mugambi and Jita Allan Tuzylina. USA & UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd & Lynne Rienner Publishers.
  - 5 The only woman who ever transgressed this patriarchal law in Rwanda is Queen Nyirayuhi, also known as Queen Nyiratunga, during the regency of her son Yuhi. Queen Nyiratunga was known in Rwanda as a rebellious woman who violated many other patriarchal laws. According to Simon Bizimana, researcher of “Institut de Recherches Scientifique et Technologique” in Butare Rwanda, Queen Nyiratunga also presided over Gacaca trials (traditional trials), smoked in public and broke many more taboos. However, Nyiratunga was forced to abandon those male privileges when her son became a major and then king of Rwanda.
  - 6 I am referring here to the kingdom of Burundi and the Nkole kingdom in Southern Uganda.
  - 7 The translation is mine. The original text in French as stated in the Haguruka (2001) report titled “*La femme rwandaise et l'accès à la justice*”: “S’agissant de la structure militaire du Royaume du Rwanda, tous les hommes rwandais appartenaient à une armée.... Au commencement de chaque règne, une nouvelle année était formée. A cet effet le Mwami ordonnait à ses clients de lui amener leurs fils (jamais les filles) qui n’étaient pas encore membres d’une armée,” (Haguruka, 2001: 34) - <http://www.grandslacs.net/doc/3989.pdf>
  - 8 Prunier (1995), Bigirumwami (1958), Chrétien (1974), Kagame (1972), Muzungu (2003), Newbury (1988), Newbury (1991), Vansinam (2001). An exhaustive list of other scholars who studied this issue can be found in a document published by the Rwandan Ministry of Science and Technology titled *The Teaching of History of Rwanda. A Participatory Approach*. 2006. Available at <http://www.hrberkeley.org/pdfs/Rwanda-Curriculum-English1.pdf>.
  - 9 In this study, I do not engage in these debates that go beyond the scope of this article. However, a good summary of these historical polemics can be found in the book, *Aiding Violence. The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, by Peter Uvin (1998), especially in the section titled, “Rwanda before Independence: A Contested history”, pp. 13-18.
  - 10 Ministère des Colonies, *Rapport sur l’administration Belge du Rwanda-Urundi* (1925), p. 34. Quoted in Jean-Paul Harroy. 1984. *Le Rwanda, de la féodalité à la démocratie* (1955-1962), Brussels: Hayez, p. 26. Quoted by Prunier (1995: 6).
  - 11 Kuper (1977), Destexhe (1994), Prunier (1995), Chrétien (1997), Braeckman (1994).
  - 12 See, Kangura, February 1994, no 56, p. 15. Image reproduced by Jean Pierre Chrétien, *Rwanda: les media du genocide*, Paris: Karthala, 1995 p. 366. Many images of the type were published in the same journal.
  - 13 In Jean-Pierre Chrétien, 1995:141-42; the translation is mine.

- 14 In 2006, I had the opportunity to travel with Ndabaga women who were returning home from the peacekeeping mission in Darfur. In my conversation with some of them, they all agreed that integrating women in the peacekeeping forces had given the organization an important gender dimension. Their service had also given the Ndabaga association world recognition which has increased and reinforced the ranking of Rwanda in the highest position on the issue of gender balance in government.
- 15 For a longer study of the modern “Ndabaga Association, see my forthcoming study mentioned above, titled “From ‘Ndabaga’ Folktale to the Modern ‘Ndabaga:’ From the Construction of Masculinity to the Deconstruction of Masculinity in Post-genocide Rwanda”.



# Militarization, Gender and Transitional Justice in Africa<sup>1</sup>

Helen Scanlon

Addressing past injustices is a critical concern within women's struggle for human rights, especially in those societies emerging from civil war and authoritarian rule. The desire for justice in Africa's post-conflict societies is often juxtaposed against the need for reconciliation in countries emerging from conflicts. Among the evolving mechanisms to tackle histories of brutality and violence, some progress can be seen in the recognition of the need to address gender-based human rights violations as a critical facet of dealing with the societal wounds of conflict. Indeed, a number of African examples have been hailed as ground-breaking, significantly expanding the understanding of gender and the need for transitional justice over the last decade.

The upsurge in militarization in the post-Cold War era in Africa has resulted in some three million African people being killed directly through conflicts and 160 million living in states where intra-state conflict was prevalent. Since 1990, intra-state conflicts occurred in some 79 of the 82 conflicts on the continent and this has created huge implications in the realm of transitional justice and gender. Civilians have been increasingly targeted during conflicts, and in particular women and children; while 100 years ago, war affected ten percent of the civilian population, it now impacts on 90 percent, of which women and children constitute the majority (Heynes, 2003). Sexual violence has been integral to war strategies in many African contexts, but unfortunately the role of armies and non-state actors as perpetrators of gender-based violence is often simply viewed as an "unfortunate" consequence of war. For example, assessments from Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) indicate that as many as 70 percent of women were victims of gender-based violence during its nine year conflict, but prosecutions have been negligible.

The development of peace-building initiatives in Africa has been mirrored by the expansion of various models of transitional justice. These encompass a range of judicial and non-judicial approaches adopted by post-conflict societies to address human rights abuses of the past. War crime tribunals

and truth and reconciliation commissions have been set up in Africa since 1974 with varying degrees of success.<sup>2</sup> Recent experiments on the continent have ranged from United Nations (UN) tribunals to “hybrid” criminal courts, domestic trials and TRCs. Within these, numerous gender concerns are at play, and these range from the need to address the impact of the high levels of gender-based violence, occurring during conflicts, to the recognition of the numerous roles played by women beyond that of “victim”.

Despite the statistics, women’s experiences of human rights violations often remain overlooked in transitional justice approaches which ostensibly seek to redress abuses. Recent examples have shown the fissures existing in addressing gender-based violence, whether through the poor conceptualisation and enforcement of truth commission mandates, the inadequate implementation of international criminal law, or ill-conceived reparations and security sector reform (SSR) ventures. Analysts such as Christine Bell and Catherine O’Rourke (2007) conclude that feminist notions of justice should not simply be slotted into existing transitional justice processes. They argue that instead, emphasis should be placed on how transitional justice can best be re-conceptualised to better address the rate of gender-based violations that occur as a result of conflict (Bell and O’Rourke, 2007).

Currently, Liberia is undergoing TRC hearings which have revealed the scale of gender-based crimes that occurred during its 14-year conflict. Yet, to date a gender advisor has not been appointed to the Commission to analyse these testimonies, and dedicated gender hearings only started in July 2008. In Burundi, popular consultations about transitional justice for the country’s protracted conflict have yet to fully incorporate strategies capable of addressing the epidemic rates of rape, and documentation of this still needs to be collated. In Uganda, the now stalled 2007 Juba peace agreements outlined clear commitments to gender-sensitivity in the transitional justice mechanisms being proposed. These need to be pursued, but women observers are expressing fears that the inbuilt reliance on traditional justice mechanisms with the same agreements may undermine these commitments. The recent electoral conflicts in Kenya and Zimbabwe create new challenges regarding the integration of measures for addressing the violent abuse of women into the envisaged human rights mechanisms.

There is evidence to suggest that in some instances, political transitions have provided a “window of opportunity” for enhancing women’s access to justice, by allowing greater representation in the public sphere, as well as

through some legal and policy reforms (UNRISD 2005). This paper uses the particular scenarios offered by post conflict situations in Africa to explore the question of whether transitional justice mechanisms provide such opportunities for improving women's rights. To what extent have transitional justice mechanisms – whose language generally encourages gender sensitivity – actually made any positive contribution to women's struggles for justice? The conceptual as well as the legal dimensions of transitional justice mechanisms need to be further scrutinised in order to ensure gender-sensitive practice in the field (Nesiah *et al.*, 2006).

A number of fundamental questions bedevil the task of assessing whether transitional justice mechanisms fully attend to gender-based human rights abuses and whether they have wholly addressed realities in Africa. These include the following: how effective have recent war crimes prosecutions in Africa been in dealing with gender-based human rights violations that occurred during conflicts?; what has been the significance of truth commissions in Africa in recording and addressing gender-based human rights concerns?; what role have reparations played in addressing gender-based violations and how can they be strengthened?; how can security sector reform help to advance gender and transitional justice?; do traditional justice mechanisms have a role to play in increasing women's access to justice or do they reinforce stereotypes; and finally have transitional justice mechanisms in reality addressed issues of women's vulnerabilities during both conflict and in the post-conflict setting? These questions will be explored in an introductory feminist analysis of the progress and prospects of transitional justice mechanisms in the recent African context.

## Gender and Transitional Justice in Africa

Numerous countries emerging from conflicts in Africa in the last decade have been forced to consider gender in their transitional justice mechanisms largely as a result of the activism of women's organizations in demanding redress for the high rates of gender-based violation. As a result, mechanisms such as truth commissions have both come to incorporate attention to the gendered nature of human rights violations, as well as recognise the need to record these in their mandates. The Liberian Truth Commission provides the most recent example of this but a few years earlier the Sierra Leonean Truth Commission created an important precedent. Integrating gender concerns is also becoming standard in the appointment of Commissioners and staff. For example, the

recently formed steering committee for popular consultations in Burundi has made equal representation of women and men mandatory. Commissions have developed a variety of methods to encourage women to participate in their processes, such as ensuring more sensitive statement-taking as well as in-camera hearings.

Furthermore, reparations programs are increasingly considering how the gendered definitions of 'victim' may constrain rather than enable women's access to benefits. Traditionally, victims have been defined narrowly in terms of what constitutes violation (such as deaths and disappearances) which often excludes women's specific violations. More recently, attempts have been made to consider gendered concerns in the distribution of reparations, such as the reality of family structures which impact on women's ability to access finance as well as the gendered responsibilities of care.

The need to address security sector reform as both connected with, and inter-related to, transitional justice is becoming increasingly acknowledged, as is the need to incorporate gender within this. In February 2007, the UN Security Council released a presidential statement requesting a detailed study on SSR issues and the UN's role which included only one reference to gender. Clarke explores this aspect of transitional justice in her contribution to this issue and rightly notes that recent re-evaluations of the meaning of security have called for a more holistic approach which incorporates "the broader human security position that security consists of a range of inter-related factors rather than simply freedom from fear of violence and conflict".<sup>3</sup>

African debates around transitional justice have provoked discussion over the potential role of traditional mechanisms of peace and justice and whether they can be adapted to respond to the needs of societies which have experienced mass violations. The best known example is the *gacaca* court system in Rwanda which has been viewed by many as a positive resurrection of the use of indigenous understandings of justice and reconciliation. In Rwanda, the sheer extent of the casualties meant that retributive justice would be an inadequate and even catastrophic response to violations experienced, and that a major healing process would also be necessary if the country was ever to recover from the atrocities

*Gacaca* courts are based on a pre-colonial system of justice where misdemeanours were tried by male members of the community. Traditionally, elders mediated in intra- and inter-familial disputes as well as other disputes in the broader community. The controversies mediated included issues such as



land rights, inheritance rights, loans, minor attacks, and damage to property (Chakravarty, 2006). *Gacaca* courts had no jurisdiction over serious cases such as homicide or rape. This was also true of the post-genocide version of the institution, as least until June 2008. However, a recent legal amendment will now allow the 6808 alleged rapists who are still awaiting trial to have their cases heard before the *gacaca* courts. It is an amendment that has provoked great concern over the seriousness of the expressed commitment to the pursuit of gender justice in the country (Hirondelle, 2008). Such concern is not assuaged by the suggestion that only the “best” *gacaca* judges will be used, or that they will be provided with special training. The fact remains that women will be forced to provide public testimony in front of their community, in a cultural context that strongly opposes women’s public authority or voice at local levels.<sup>4</sup>

In nearby Uganda, the proposed 2007 Juba Agreement makes the Lord’s Resistance Army eligible for an alternative justice framework that includes traditional justice mechanisms. The reality is that the vast majority of perpetrators will in all likelihood be reintegrated into the community through the employment of local mechanisms rather than through formal justice, and here too careful attention to gender is warranted. While the relevance of indigenous justice mechanisms should not be overlooked, it is extremely important to ensure that these do not simply reinforce systems that have been inherently unjust and oppressive to women, both before and during the conflict.

Across Africa the context of heightened gender awareness favours the possibilities of gender equitable transitional justice mechanisms. There are relatively high numbers of women in decision-making and political positions in a few key post conflict countries, among which Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and Mozambique are most often cited for having over one third women in their parliaments. Women’s activism has also generated developments in regional institutions.<sup>5</sup> A number of articles within the 2005 African Union Protocol on Women specifically note the need to protect women’s rights during conflicts, as well as the need to ensure gender justice during the transition to peace. Internationally, United Nations Resolution 1820 adopted in June 2008 adds to the legal frameworks for addressing the gender abuses perpetrated during conflicts through its recognition of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war.<sup>6</sup> This is a significant achievement in view of the fact that just one year previously South Africa had joined forces with China

and Russia to argue that sexual violence was an “unfortunate by-product of war” and “not a matter of international peace and security” (Farley, 2008).

However, despite the growing regional and international public acknowledgement that gender justice is critical, much of the progress in transitional justice mechanisms remains uneven and disjointed.

## **Key Challenges for Gender and Transitional Justice in Africa**

The need to take account of sexual violence against women, and its impacts, in post-conflict contexts has been a critical platform for the emergence of “gender justice concerns”. There is, however, a growing concern over whether the emphasis on sexual violence in African contexts risks obscuring the need for a more broad-based approach to women’s rights. Another concern is that the existing women’s organisations and movements are often sidelined when it comes to establishing transitional justice mechanisms. Certainly there are grounds for noting that the wider gender consequences of conflicts can be obscured by a limited focus on women as victims, which can contribute to failures to recognise the weighty matters of internal displacement, loss of livelihood, breakdown of social infrastructure and the huge increase in the number of woman-headed households. Women are still largely excluded from formal peace negotiations and the ensuing reconstruction processes reflect this in their gender bias. Even where women are acknowledged as combatants rather than solely as victims, they are often further stigmatised rather than assisted, because as female combatants they have stepped out of traditional gender roles, and may have perpetrated violence.

Many of the challenges to fully integrating gender into transitional justice mechanisms stem from the way that “conflict” and “harms” have been interpreted, leading to numerous examples where gender has been quite simply overlooked and the male experiences of human rights violations are seen as normative. This manifests in the emphasis that transitional justice mechanisms give to economic and social reintegration, while neglecting the psychosocial or medical needs which are particularly stark for victims of sexual abuse. Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) among other countries have shown the grave need for addressing issues of reproductive health linked to these crimes. A recent study revealed some 30 percent of women raped in the Eastern DRC to be infected by HIV. The Panzi hospital in Bukavu, capital of South Kivu has been overwhelmed by women requiring surgical treatment and management of fistulas and other

gynaecological consequences of the mass sexual violence committed in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The limited understanding of the intersection of gender and conflict has been obvious in the exclusion of women from peace negotiations where transitional justice mechanisms are often crafted. However, the recent peace negotiations regarding northern Uganda did require some involvement of women's groups, albeit limited. Liberia and Burundi have seen women's organisations mobilising extensively in efforts to have their voices heard in male-only peace processes.

Once the peace agreements have been signed, flaws are also apparent in the construction of demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) strategies on the continent, all of which shape the transitional justice possibilities. Many contexts have simply overlooked women as ex-combatants in DDR, the multiple roles they play as cooks and porters to guards and fighters remaining unrecognised. Recent reports on DDR in Liberia has highlighted the inadequacy of the most recent process, attributing it to the continued assumption that DDR simply means disarming men, thus excluding all other aspects of military service. According to UNIFEM, in Sierra Leone women constituted as much as 20 percent of the combatants, yet only 6.5 percent of DDR participants were women and 0.6 percent girls (UNIFEM, 2005).

The reality is that women, even when abducted and coerced into joining a military force, are automatically given some degree of training in the use of weapons, and in any case, women perform a multitude of productive and reproductive roles which are integral to the survival of armed groups, ranging from food production to reproducing the army (Turshen, 2001). In northern Uganda, it has been shown that 72 percent of girls in the LRA receive weapons and military training but they are often the last to be released due to their critical role (WomenWarPeace). The lack of sensitivity and awareness about women's actual involvement in and experience of conflict is thus compounded during the post-conflict reconstruction processes that still largely fail to recognise the particular difficulty of reintegrating female ex-combatants into communities. In this respect women are being treated unfairly, and the supposed "new opportunities" do not seem to be manifesting.

## Legal Mechanisms

The pervasive nature of gender-based violence in conflicts, especially sexual and reproductive violence has resulted in increased acknowledgment in

international criminal law. While sexual violence in conflicts has been recognised under international law since the Second World War, it remained largely invisible until the 1994 Rwandan genocide – during which as many as 500,000 women were raped (Human Rights Watch, 1996). This led to a more radical recognition of the need for a gender-based prosecution strategy to address sexual violence in conflicts as a war crime.

The Arusha-based International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was established by UN Security Council Resolution 955 in November 1994 to prosecute those “responsible for serious violations of international criminal law committed in the territory of Rwanda and Rwandan citizens responsible for such violations committed in the territory of neighbouring states between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994” (Moghalu, 2005). The tribunal was set up on an *ad hoc* basis with the intention of trying those most responsible for crimes against humanity during Rwanda’s 100-day genocide, including former Prime Minister Jean Kambanda.

In 1998, the ICTR found former mayor, Jean-Paul Akayesu, guilty of nine counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes that included his having incited and encouraged his troops to commit acts of rape. While the initial charges against him did not include rape, the presiding judge, Navanethem Pillay, insisted this be probed. As a result of her intervention as well as mounting pressure from women’s groups, charges for rape were investigated. This was particularly significant as it was the first time an international court had ever punished sexual violence in a civil war; and it was the first time that rape was found to be an act of genocide, aimed at the destruction of a group. It was also indicative of the need to have adequate gender representation in the judiciary as well as open interaction with women’s groups. The Akayesu judgment was to affect future principles for the prosecution of sexual violence and served to influence the jurisprudence of a permanent International Criminal Court.

In Sierra Leone the nature and extent of atrocities committed during the civil war from 1991–2002 prompted the creation of the Special Court to try war criminals in 2000 (Lamin, 2003). By this time, the innovation of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, coupled with developments at the ICTY addressing events in the former Yugoslavia had created significant precedents for addressing war crimes in domestic conflicts. The subsequent creation of the International Criminal Court in 1998 made it difficult for the international community to overlook events in Sierra Leone. While the 1999

Lomé Peace Agreement granted the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel leadership “absolute and free pardon” from prosecution, this immunity did not extend to prosecution for war crimes (Malan *et al.*, 2002). In 2000, in an effort to address the perceived failings of the Arusha Tribunal, as well as other transitional justice initiatives, the government of Sierra Leone urged the UN Security Council to authorise the creation of a Special Court to address these crimes. This move was supported by both the United States and Britain, resulting in the creation of a national institution which was subject to UN oversight. This Special Court was to operate under both Sierra Leonean domestic law and international humanitarian law and, while beyond the control of the UN Security Council, was supported by its major funders: Britain and the USA.

Sierra Leone’s Special Court was established in 2003, in Freetown, and mandated to prosecute those who “bear the greatest responsibility” for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law (Cruvellier, 2004). It also resulted in the development of the Court’s “mixed” composition, which included Sierra Leoneans at every level and in all organs. The intention was to make international justice locally relevant. The Sierra Leone Special Court, a hybrid transitional justice experiment, led to a number of landmark legal developments which had significant implications for international gender justice. These included recognising gender crimes in its definition of crimes against humanity and widening their interpretation to include sexual slavery and forced marriages. The Court was also groundbreaking in its provision of health facilities to perform procedures such as fistula repair in order to help those women who were to testify.

Sierra Leone’s Special Court ensured that 20 per cent of its investigative team was focused on sexual offences, a marked improvement on the Rwandan International Tribunal which never worked with more than one to two percent of investigators for the area. However, currently even the extent to which the Special Court has pursued sexual violence convictions is increasingly coming under scrutiny. In a recent study of the Special Court, Kelsal and Stepakoff have argued that by excluding evidence from women’s testimonies, their experience was effectively silenced before the Court (Kelsal and Stepakoff, 2007). Furthermore, in addition to a legal framework, other criteria need to be considered in the pursuit of gender-sensitive prosecutions such as victim support (whether psychological or physical), witness protection, and the need to address certain realities such as transport and childcare which may

affect women's access to the court. In short, the record of the international mechanisms suggests incapacity to prosecute sex crimes, and as many as 90 percent of the ICTR judgements have so far not included rape convictions.

On an international level, the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC), which came into existence in 2002 as the first permanent international criminal tribunal, was set up as a court of last resort to prosecute offenses where national courts failed or were unable to respond. The 1998 Rome Statute establishing the ICC expanded the definition of crimes against humanity and war crimes to recognise rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, trafficking or any other form of sexual violence after the intense lobbying by women's groups globally. As such the ICC can both prosecute these crimes and create an obligation that all investigations include gender-based crimes. To date, the Central African Republic, the DRC, Uganda and Sudan have all come under the scrutiny of the Court and in a number of the arrest warrants issued, GBV has been cited. However, various criticisms have been leveled regarding the ICC's stated aims and its ability to pursue GBV crimes.

The ICC's recent release of Thomas Lubanga, charged with the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the DRC occurred amidst outcry by gender activists that charges against Lubanga had failed to include sexual violence, despite evidence of his links to the widespread sexual enslavement of girls. ICC prosecutors had also charged two further DRC militia leaders, Germain Katanga, the former senior commander of the FPRI militia group, and Matthew Ngudjolo, the former leader of the National Integrationist Front militia group. However, in a controversial decision in May 2008, prosecutors removed counts of sexual slavery from the indictments on the grounds of their inability to ensure witness protection.<sup>7</sup> Hence, despite the fact that the International Criminal Court is believed to have the opportunity to establish precedents in addressing gender-based violations, in reality this is simply not happening. It is not surprising that women's organisations in post-conflict contexts, are becoming increasingly frustrated because in spite of clear evidence of extraordinary rates of sexual violence, and the heightened awareness of this fact, the ICC is failing to prosecute these crimes.

On the domestic level, despite often depleted and fragile legislative and judicial infrastructure post-conflict, a number of countries - Liberia, Burundi and the DRC among them - have undertaken commitments to protect and enshrine gender concerns through both international and domestic

commitments (some more explicit than others). However, the reality is that while the successful prosecutions of those leading actors involved in orchestrating GBV during conflict may provide some deterrent, the majority who have perpetrated serious human rights violations against women have enjoyed almost complete impunity and never have even been prosecuted. Furthermore, while recent transitional justice mechanisms in Africa have brought greater attention to the impact of conflicts on women, they have not stemmed the widespread occurrences of violence against women, as this remains shockingly high in post conflict settings. Domestic and sexual violence statistics emerging from post conflict countries such as South Africa, Liberia and Sierra Leone are elevated and structures for the redress of violations against women are clearly inadequate.

### Truth Commissions

Truth commissions have also come under increasing pressure to report the often-overlooked range of abuses suffered by women during conflicts (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006). Adopting a gender-sensitive approach to the work of a Commission in terms of its structure and ambit should assist in identifying the different experiences of men and women during particular conflicts (Nesiah *et al.*, 2006). Apart from helping to create a fuller historical record, it is hoped that a gender-aware process will enable the creation of gender-sensitive programmes for post conflict reconstruction.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the best known of Africa's modern TRCs. It was set up in 1995 as a far-reaching effort to address of the human rights violations committed during the apartheid era, with the expressed intention of facilitating reparation and conflicts (Boraine, 2006; Walaza, 2000). The TRC was tasked with compiling a detailed record of the nature, extent and causes of human rights violations that happened between 1960 and 1994, and to hear and document testimonies of those who had experienced violations. The initial neglect of women's experiences provoked mobilisation by women's groups, which led the Commission to set a precedent by holding dedicated hearings organised specifically to create a platform for women to recount their experiences under apartheid. Nevertheless, a clear weakness of the process was the fact that in the accounts given, women tended to speak about the experiences of others, such as their partners or children, rather than their own experiences. The South African TRC was also perceived as failing to respond to calls for a more integrated

understanding of the gendered nature of the apartheid state whose policies particularly afflicted African women and as a result, the experience of women was relegated to 'a chapter' in the TRC report (Meintjes, 2007).

Despite South Africa's purportedly successful transition to democratic governance, major criticisms have abounded over its failure to properly address gender-based abuse that occurred under apartheid. Ten years after the publication of the TRC's final report, the legacy of apartheid is still seen to have an impact on gender relations in South Africa and the sub-region. Furthermore, to date there has been no investigation centered on the extent of gender-based abuse within the African National Congress (ANC) ranks, notably in its bases and camps. The 2006 rape trial of the current president of the ANC and Thabo Mbeki's heir apparent, Jacob Zuma, revealed a number of stories concerning the treatment of women in the ANC camps during the apartheid era. Testimonies of a number of witnesses at the trial revealed allegations of widespread rapes, which had not emerged in the TRC. The Jacob Zuma rape trial also prompted a number of former combatants to claim that the trial helped to "unblock" memories of sexual abuse within the liberation movement.

TRCs which have emerged in Africa subsequent to the South African TRC have achieved varying degrees of success. Ghana set up a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) in 2000 to examine the detentions, arrests, killings, and torture that took place under president Jerry Rawlings' three terms of rule (June-September 1979, 1981-92 and 1992-2000) (Attafuah, 2005). Provisions in Ghana's 1992 Constitution absolved all military personnel from judicial scrutiny, which meant that a judicial route was unavailable to prosecute perpetrators of abuse (Wain, 2003). Instead, President John Kufuor established the NRC in 2002. The Commission began public hearings in 2003 and sat for twelve months. It was composed of nine members appointed by the president, just three of whom were women.

Ghana's NRC elected to "mainstream" gender throughout its operations, and did not hold separate public hearings for women. As a result, gender-based abuses were subsumed among the broader violations, and there was no separate focus on gender-based violations in its final report. The lack of focused attention on women - who submitted less than 20 percent of all testimonies - rendered gender-based violence largely invisible within the process.

Drawing from the South African experience, the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the assistance of the United Nations Fund



for Women (UNIFEM), set out to pay special attention to the experiences of women and children during the conflict. The TRC was an initiative agreed to by all parties during the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement and was subsequently established through an act of Parliament. The TRC was composed of seven commissioners, four of whom were from Sierra Leone and three of whom were non-nationals. Among these three were women, including former South African TRC Commissioner, Yasmin Sooka. Sierra Leone's Commission operated in two phases. During the first phase from December 2002 until March 2003, statements were taken from 3000 victims who had suffered more than 4,000 violations - out of which 1000 related to killings and 200 to rape (Lamin, 2003). The second phase involved hearings of victims and perpetrators from April to August 2003. A unique element of Sierra Leone's TRC was that it was asked to utilise the experience of religious and traditional leaders in resolving local conflicts arising from past human rights violations. Integral to the development of the TRC was the role played by civil society during the public hearings. Nowrojee (2005) has noted that women's groups were primary actors in the gender hearings, organising marches through Freetown, which ultimately resulted in the women's hearings being the most attended.<sup>8</sup>

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, an estimated 72 percent of Sierra Leonean women and girls experienced human rights abuses during the war and over 50 percent were victims of sexual violence (Nowrojee, 2005). The public hearings brought national attention to the plight of women during the war and the Commission also focussed on the marginalisation and discrimination of women prior to the war. The Commission's mandate, which in effect allowed investigation of the experience of Sierra Leonean women both pre- and post conflict, added a new dimension to the ability of TRCs to address the past. Consequently, the final report was able to highlight cases of gender violence as well as the multiple roles women played. The Commission's recommendations have been used by civil society groups such as the Mano River Women's Network (MARWOPNET) to advocate for legal reforms to advance gender justice.

The National Transitional Legislative Assembly set up Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June 2005 in accordance with the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Liberia's TRC began public hearings of both perpetrators and victims in February 2008 which have consistently highlighted the play of gender violence in the conflict, but how this will be

represented within the report and recommendations has yet to be seen.

Despite these important achievements that indicate the real impact of TRCs in the advancement of gender justice, truth commissions have been criticised for advancing a narrow and partial truth rather than taking a more holistic approach which integrates gender fully. The failure to look at the broader issues of the impact of conflict on women's lives holistically is still lacking. These problems are amplified by certain factors which have made many women reluctant to engage fully in "truth telling", which have yet to be fully integrated into TRC's mandate. These include social stigma or shame around discussing GBV, worry about security or retaliation from perpetrators still living in the community and the prevailing tendency of women to focus on experiences of others rather than their own.

## Reparations

Reparations have increasingly been viewed as critical to ensure the acknowledgement of human rights abuses suffered by individuals in countries emerging from conflict or authoritarian rule such as in South Africa, Rwanda, Morocco and Sierra Leone. With the exception of Rwanda, reparation policies tend to emanate from recommendations by truth commissions. In the past, specific violations were legitimized as sites for discussion of reparation and this was reflective of a limited view of human rights violations which centred on deaths, disappearances, and imprisonment (Rubio-Marin, 2006). As such, reparation policies have often failed to recognise the specific abuses suffered by women during conflicts such as forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, and displacement.

Following the United Nations General Assembly adoption of *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*, a number of women's organisations mobilised to examine how to better incorporate gender into reparations policies. This led to the 2007 Nairobi Declaration which redefines reparations and guides policy-making for implementing this right specifically for victims of sexual violence.

A significant development in this area has been the delivery of reparations by military tribunals in the DRC. In April 2006, a military court in Mbdandaka found seven army officers guilty of mass rape of more than 119 women (according to the UN estimate, the number was over 200) at Songo Mboyo on

21 December 2003. This was the first time rape was tried as a crime against humanity in DRC, and the first such sentence against military personnel for these crimes.<sup>9</sup> The officers had rebelled against their commanders and attacked the villages of Songo Mboyo and Bongandanga. For the destruction of the villages and the mass rape, they received sentences of life imprisonment and the verdict required each victim's family to receive reparations in the amount of US \$10,000. Rape victims were to receive US \$5,000.

There are a number of lessons to be learnt from recent examples. Reparations are often last on the agenda of transitional justice mechanisms and first to be overlooked. Reparation programs often fail to recognise and address areas where women's vulnerability may be particularly heightened, including violations of human rights in relation to displacement, sexual violence, and health care, as well as the secondary impacts of conflict in relation to areas such as education. Human rights abuses often impose familial care burdens on women such as additional care for "dependents" or "secondary" victims. As principal caregivers in most societies, especially where health and other infrastructure have collapsed, women are often responsible for the reintegration of their families, many of whom may be injured and frequently traumatised. The roles of women as agents of reintegration are key, particularly in those societies that have overlooked transitional justice such as Mozambique. Furthermore, gender power dynamics in controlling financial decision-making in the household have often been overlooked, with financial reparations being given to women who did not have access to banking facilities in South Africa and Morocco.

## Conclusion

So, to what extent have transitional justice mechanisms in Africa actually allowed advances in gender justice? The examples discussed here suggest that advances have been limited, even though there is some evidence of a cumulative effect as these institutions have been introduced in one context after another. Women's movements demand that women's access to justice be enhanced, and seek to claim greater public space in the context of post-conflict momentum for general legal reform. Women look to the new constitutions, to affirmative action strategies and quotas, and push for gender sensitive judicial reform.

A key potential of transitional justice lies in the possibilities for addressing extreme violations of women's rights, and seeing this transfer to broader

changes in gendered socio-political relations. Transitional justice mechanisms such as prosecutions, security sector reform and truth commissions may be just some of the measures that can provide a critical role in addressing the gendered human rights record in post conflict situations.

The 2007 Nairobi declaration noted that gender-based violence committed during conflicts “is the result of inequalities between women and men, girls and boys, that predated the conflict, and ... this violence continues to aggravate the discrimination of women and girls in post-conflict situations”. This perspective is supported by the evidence that very high levels of domestic abuse characterise post-conflict settings, and may even increase, as has been the case in Rwanda, Liberia and South Africa. The apparent rise in post-conflict domestic violence may result from a number of interrelated processes but it is increasingly acknowledged that transitional justice has a potential role in creating mechanisms to ensure that violence does not simply move from the war front into the home. The extent to which the potential of transitional justice processes are actually advancing gender justice remains compromised, but these processes have nonetheless shown their potential as an important site for the pursuit of women’s basic human rights in transitioning societies.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Many thanks to Kelli Muddell from the ICTJ's gender program for her comments on this paper and general guidance in this field.
- 2 TRCs include Uganda (1974), Zimbabwe (1985), Uganda (1986), Chad (1991), Rwanda (1992), Burundi (1995), South Africa (1995), Nigeria (1999), Sierra Leone (2002), Ghana (2002) and Liberia (2006). War Crime tribunals were established for Rwanda (1994) and Sierra Leone (2002).
- 3 See also Hamber *et al* (2006).
- 4 See Gallimore's feature in this issue.
- 5 See the editorials in *Feminist Africa 3 National Politricks*, and *Feminist Africa 4 Women Mobilised*.
- 6 For details of the resolution, see "Security Council Demands Immediate and Complete Halt to Acts of Sexual Violence against Civilians in Conflict Zones, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1820" (2008) Available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sc9364.doc.htm>.
- 7 See, for example, "Sexual Violence Charges for DRC Cases Scrapped, ICC - Africa Update" [http://www.iwpr.net/?p=acrfts=fcto=344835&tapc\\_state=henh](http://www.iwpr.net/?p=acrfts=fcto=344835&tapc_state=henh).
- 8 Kelli Muddell emphasised this in her comments on the paper.
- 9 UN Action Report Work in Progress.

# Security Sector Reform in Africa: A Lost Opportunity to Deconstruct Militarised Masculinities?

Yaliwe Clarke

Under the guise of peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, countries that have been through years of civil war (Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, Southern Sudan, Mozambique, Angola, etc), have committed to reforming the security sector. There are a number of gender researchers and activists (Koen, 2006; Meintjes *et.al.*, 2001; Pillay, 2000) who regard post-conflict reconstruction as an opportunity for African women to advance their status in the public arena. I will explore whether this perceived opportunity is being taken up within security sector reform, particularly in relation to the need to deconstruct, understand, and transform the militarised varieties of masculinity pervasive in post-conflict situations. Does security sector reform present an opportunity for engagement with these militarised masculinities in a way which would allow for the emergence of an alternative society?

Countries described as post conflict have invariably undergone a formal peace process in which conflicting parties have made a commitment to work together to redress fundamental inequalities that are perceived to be the root cause of the conflict. Whereas unequal access to resources (such as oil) and political power are often posited as the main 'cause' of the conflict, there is hardly any (if at all) interrogation of prevailing constructions of masculinity and femininity, and how these are always a key dynamic within oppressive institutions. There is equally minimal insight into how these dynamics might lie at the heart of the tendency for given polities to revert to war, the ultimate expression of masculine violence and aggression. Although security sector reform entails a reconstitution of a wide range of institutions - including the army, militia groups, intelligence services/networks, private security firms, the police, the judiciary, and prisons - the most contested institution is the military (both formal armies and informal militia groups). However, not only have all key institutions been historically male-dominated, serving as essential vehicles

for the production of masculinity in modern nation-states, but the military has operated as the most intensively coercive of these in its relation to the authority and force of masculinity.

Security sector reform (SSR) often arises out of peace processes and forms part of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Other imperatives driving the push for SSR include fiscal reform, deficit reduction, improved control of crime, desire to enhance civil control, human rights, or legitimacy of security institutions. This article will focus on the more specific instances of SSR that have occurred as a result of peace agreements. This is because the most comprehensive SSR processes in Africa have been attempted in the aftermath of conflict, and these scenarios dominate the discourse of SSR in Africa (Hutchful and Fayemi, 2005).

The prevalence of aggressive masculinities institutionalised in armies and security structures has featured prominently in contexts where political institutions have been displaced by militias and armies engaged in violent conflict. In such militarised societies, violence has become a political tool to retain power amongst the elite, and in a growing number of instances (notably Rwanda, DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone), mass rape and gender based violence have been widely deployed as a military strategy to terrorise the 'enemy'. Yet it would seem that there has so far been limited attention to this aspect of conflict in security sector reform. For example, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security commits member states to involve women in all aspects of peace-building processes at national, regional and international levels and makes specific mention of measures required to end violence against women. The Resolution also requires commitment to the inclusion of women in peace keeping operations and military structures (including civilian police). While there is no specific mention of security sector reform, there is explicit mention of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and the need to take into account the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and the needs of their dependants (see article 13).

It is worth questioning the extent to which these international commitments – which result in part from women's mobilisation in peace-building – have endeavoured to go beyond merely considering women's involvement in African militaries. Is there any critique of the militarised masculinities that are key to militarism, or indeed any exploration of the possibility that these may in fact be a root source of violence and conflict, obstructing any hope for the attainment of security?



## Defining Security

Conventional notions of security – including its use in security sector reform – are defined in relation to the nation-state. National security is perceived as the primary concern of the state, and the use of force and militarism are generally accepted as legitimate ways to protect state sovereignty. Despite feminist critique of both the state as a unit of analysis, and of its reliance on the use of force – seen as being embedded in militarised masculinities – security institutions and governments across the world (as well as proponents of mainstream international relations) remain deeply gendered, and privilege masculinity in all their operations. Women’s experiences generate definitions of security that are multilevel and multidimensional. Feminists have taken these up to re-define security to mean the complete absence of violence whether it be military, economic, or sexual. Not until the hierarchical social relations, including gender relations, which have been hidden by the depersonalised and universalising political discourses of Western political thought (including the discourse of the modern state) are brought to light, can we begin to construct a language of national security that addresses the socially differentiated experiences of insecurity, and women’s particular vulnerability to violence (Stearns, 1998).

Feminist efforts to redefine security (Okazawa-Rey and Kirk, 2000) resonate with the conceptualisations of human security that have recently made inroads in African security thinking. This has partly been the result of pressure from international actors such as the UN. Furthermore, the most recent poverty reduction programmes of the IMF and World Bank have begun to push for African security structures to take socio-economic security on board. This discursive shift is evident in the changed policy approach of traditional defence structures such as the Southern African Development Community’s recent Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (SIPO) insofar as this makes specific reference to human security threats such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and governance issues (CCR, 2005). The same shift in the definition of security can be seen in the recent publications of defence organs such as *The Ugandan Defence Review*. This identified 134 “security threats” of which only three were military in character (Hutchful and Fayemi, 2005: 77).

Despite these recent rhetorical shifts, traditional concepts of security which posit military and police forces as being central to maintaining national security still dominate African security discourse. Thus, security sector reform

has been largely interpreted in conventional ways that focus on reforming conventional security institutions – police, armed forces, intelligence services and the like.

I argue that post-conflict situations provide us with a unique opportunity to make fundamental shifts in the ideology of the military and its role in perpetuating militarised masculinities. I have two reasons for doing so. The first is that communities and states which have endured decades of violent conflicts have experienced intense dissatisfaction with existing security forces, and therefore may be more willing to explore non-conventional forms of military and security structures. The second is the fact that security sector reform is being placed as conditional for the international funding required for the economic reconstruction of devastated economies.

However, making use of this opportunity requires a careful consideration of the links between militarism and masculinity in African contexts, and the manner in which this has sustained such militaristic security paradigms.

### **Historical connections: Masculinity and Militarism in Africa**

Being a soldier is purposefully linked to being a 'real man'. The military attempts to mould all men in a uniform guise of masculinity. This is done through an organisational culture that encourages ideal assets of soldiery such as physical ability, endurance, self control, professionalism, sociability, heterosexuality - these traits tap on masculine performance by contrasting them with images of 'otherness' such as femininity, homosexuality, etc. Soldiers are drilled to conform to virile heterosexuality where women are viewed as either sex objects that need to be abused or loved ones that need to be protected. Femininity is equated with weakness, vulnerability and feebleness.

In her analysis of the South African Defence Force (SADF), Cock (1991) explains how notions of masculinity are a powerful tool in the process of making men into soldiers. Rigid aggressive masculinities that idealise aggression, competitiveness, censure of emotional expression and the creation and dehumanisation of the 'enemy' continue to dominate armies, police forces, and other security structures.

With the advent of international and continental commitments to address gender inequality, African military structures have purported to be interested in the needs of women. This has been done either through the efforts of wives of commanders (in the case of military regimes) and/or through the establishment of national structures for the advancement of gender equality.

In her analysis of the military regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha, Mama (1998: 13) explains how Nigeria's military regimes involved the wife of the Head of State as a "Commander of Women". Wives of commanders directed the establishment of national women's structures such as the Mrs Babangida's Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BPL), Centre for Women and Development and the National Women's Commission. During Abacha's regime, Mrs Abacha dominated the running of the Family Trust Fund Programme that was coordinated by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Gender machineries (with interference from African first ladies)<sup>1</sup> have contributed to an entrenchment of patriarchal notions of women as appendages of male authority whose primary role is to care for the family under the protection from the state.

The increase of women in military structures has not shifted dominant notions of masculinity and femininity, except to the extent of the recognition that women can take on militarised masculine roles - further entrenching oppressive gender constructions. Cock's (1989) study on the white women's involvement in the SADF demonstrated that even a substantive increase of women in the military did not challenge traditional sexist ideologies, but in fact reinforced them.

One of the results of such sexist ideologies has been seen in the fact that most national militaries and militia groups around the world have had to address the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse. According to a study by Refugee International on sexual exploitation in militaries: "even the best trained militaries must still work to eliminate this problem among its forces. According to the US Department of Defence Inspector General's 2004 survey of three military academies, one in every seven female cadets reported they had been a victim of sexual abuse in the previous five years and 50% of the women at the three academies reported being sexually harassed."<sup>2</sup> Turshen's (2001) article on the political economy of rape during armed conflict in Africa reveals that systematic rape and sexual abuse of women are among the strategies used to strip women of their reproductive and productive labour power as well as their possessions and access to land and livestock. The abduction of women and girls to serve as porters, farmers, cooks, cleaners, launderers, tailors, and sex workers is perhaps the crudest way of using women's productive labour to sustain armies and militia groups (Turshen, 2001: 61). Militia groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, and DRC are known to spend much time looting villages - many of which are sustained by women's labour in the absence of men who have either fled or joined the armed struggle. According

to Turshen (2001: 63), “militia disguised rape as sanctioned intercourse between husband and wife by performing bogus weddings; they then used the ‘marriage’ to legitimate the seizure of land”.

UN peace keeping missions have also been implicated in extreme forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women. Sexual misconduct has long characterized UN peacekeeping missions. During the UN mission in Cambodia (UNTAC) from 1992 to 1993, the number of sex houses and “Thai-style” massage parlours multiplied and the number of prostitutes rose from 6,000 to 25,000, including an increased number of child prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, the media erupted with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse levied against UN uniformed and civilian peacekeepers based in Bunia, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Following this, the then Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked the Permanent Representative of Jordan, His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid al-Hussein, a former civilian peacekeeper and the UN ambassador of one of the major peacekeeping troop contributors, to prepare a comprehensive report on strategies to eliminate future sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations.

The report revealed how sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers in Africa mostly involved the exchange of money (an average of US \$1-3 per an encounter), food for immediate consumption (to barter later) or job opportunities for sex.<sup>4</sup> Recommendations included the need for the UN to put in place institutional procedures (in the form of codes of conduct, investigatory processes and disciplinary procedures) to deter soldiers from getting too close to local communities and inevitably engaging in abusive sexual relationships with women in local communities. The United Nations has continued to push for sexual and gender-based violence to be put on the international agenda of peace building efforts. The most recent UN Security Council resolution 1820 passed on 19 June, once again called on “..all sides to armed conflicts around the world to stop using violence against women as a tactic of war and take much tougher steps to protect women and girls from such attacks.”<sup>5</sup>

Cynthia Enloe (1993: 38) points out that “ironically, the more a government is pre-occupied with what it calls national security, the less likely its women are to have physical safety necessary for sharing their theorizing about the nation and their security within it”. It is well known that traditional security systems are ill equipped to prevent and or respond to sexual and gender-based violence – particularly domestic violence, violence by security officials, and human trafficking. How did these security institutions come about? How did

these forms of aggressive masculinity come to take on such central importance in conventional security structures in African states?

The origin of the African militaries (as we know them today) is largely located in the colonial project. With the advent of colonial regiments, standing armies were formed and these bore allegiance to the colonial administrative and political structures. Regiments and armies were ideologically attached to the visions of the colonisers and became the ‘protectors’ of colonial ‘territories’ - set by the Berlin conference of 1884 where Africa was demarcated into imaginary pieces (we now call countries) that were shared amongst 14 western states with Great Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal taking the largest share (Tandon, 1989). The Northern Rhodesia Regiment, for example, is the historical forerunner to the Zambian Army and grew out of the Northern Rhodesia Police that in turn administered Northern Rhodesia on behalf of the British Crown in 1891.<sup>6</sup> Colonial regiments and armies were thus closely tied to the western concept of the nation state and were used for the domestic task of protecting the (British/French/Portuguese) colony and policing colonial subjects.

However, we must recognise that the concept of defence and protection was evident and very much present in pre-colonial colonial Africa. The Nguni (of southern Africa), for example, comprised of centralised societies with controlled use of force. Chiefs maintained some form of direct control over men of fighting age who were, from time to time, called upon to raid other communities and defend their territory from outside attacks. The Nguni of eastern Zambia, for instance, fought many wars before the arrival of the ‘white man’ and drew lessons from Shaka Zulu’s approach to warfare. A distinguishing factor between these regiments and those of colonial regimes was that warriors in pre-colonial African communities tended not to constitute a standing army central to the control of the broader society.

Whereas the history of armies and warriors reveals the evolution of particular types of aggressive masculinity and thus militarization of society, there are other institutions that highlight the extent to which African societies became militarised.

Years ago Claude Ake astutely observed that “it was not the military that caused military rule in Africa by intervening in politics; rather, it was the character of politics that engendered (*sic*) military rule by degenerating into warfare, inevitably propelling the specialists of warfare to the lead role.”<sup>7</sup> It is unfortunate that during Africa’s ‘liberation’ from the west, the role of the military in the state (in situations where there was a distinction) was

not questioned. Post-colonial states took on institutions left by the colonial powers (Tandon, 1989). While this argument can be made for all institutional remnants of imperialism, I have always found it quite intriguing that there was no critical analysis of the military, army, police (including the secret police networks), judiciary, prisons, nor of the role that they ought to play in the 'new' Africa once colonial oppression and domination had ended. The only interrogation of the military and its relevance was in terms of how the soldiers' allegiance to the new government could be kept. In Zambia, for instance, two years after independence, Zambia's first President Dr. Kenneth Kaunda reminded the third battalion of the Zambia Regiment in Kawbe that:

"Under our constitution the right is given to the people of Zambia to elect their own government. This is legally exercised at the general elections and, in the same manner, the people can reject a government during properly constituted elections. Constitutionally, therefore, your role is to be loyal and to protect and defend the constitution of the land as well as other institutions emanating from the provisions of the constitution."<sup>8</sup>

The defence force was expected to respect the young independent state. Kaunda's speech was prompted by events elsewhere in Africa where the defence forces had already begun taking over constitutionally elected governments through military coups. In an early incident, an uprising of the army occurred in what was then Zaire in July 1960, when Belgian officers were resisting the 'Africanisation' of the army.<sup>9</sup> African soldiers' main concern was that they were still being given orders by Belgian generals, but the new government also feared that British/Belgian/etc. soldiers would act sympathetically to white regimes in African countries still under colonial rule, holding back the ongoing liberation wars in the region. Thus, although the ethnic and racial composition of armies of newly independent countries changed significantly in the first decade following independence, their culture, traditions, and gendered practices remained strongly influenced by discourse and ideological themes of Western armed forces.

Even the South African Government maintained the status quo, and did not pursue legislation disbanding the Scorpions until after it was revealed that the Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi was linked to criminal networks. This illustrates how governments only seem motivated to reconsider the role of certain security institutions when they show signs of undermining powerful elites and state power.<sup>10</sup>

What Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere

and other leaders of the new African states did not interrogate, was the purpose of the military and security systems in liberated Africa. How could an institution that was responsible for keeping Africans suppressed under colonial rule be transformed into an institution that would facilitate nation-building and the rehabilitation of African communities? Just as there was no interrogation of the gendered nature of the liberation movements, there was also no interrogation of how the entrenched masculine culture of the military and entire 'security' system could provide real security for both men and women, after carrying out extreme violence, and being premised on dichotomised gender relations.

Perhaps as a result of heavy reliance on a warfare-oriented politics and the entrenchment of extreme inequalities (across gender, class, race, and ethnicity), several African states have degenerated into militarised, organised, collective, violent conflict – and this time it is called war rather than liberation because there is no 'legitimate' common enemy (the colonisers). Many African states face new, and often closely inter-related, forms of violent politics and crime, the proliferation of small arms, and competition from a variety of community and private security organisations. The African state has metamorphosed (perhaps not surprisingly given the fact that Africans inherited oppressive systems) into an autocratic enemy of the people – either entrenching inequality along ethnic lines (Rwanda and Burundi are clear examples) or along class and race lines (South Africa), or through their sheer inability to redistribute wealth to the poor masses that took on the brunt of the liberation struggle (Zimbabwe).

It is interesting that even the current wave of multi-party politics and democracy discourses has not led to an interrogation of the anti-democratic culture of the military itself – or to a questioning of the relevance of the military (aside from the police's role of protecting and upholding rights of citizens) to democracy. Critique of the military has often stopped at questions of military expenditure, the issue of civil-military relations and civilian control over the military.

Hutchful and Fayemi's (2005) survey of 43 of Africa's 53 countries across five sub-regions shows that all African governments have considered some degree of reform in their security institutions. Several of the reforms have taken place under the ambit of regional and sub-regional collective security mechanisms such as ECOWAS, SADC, and IGAD. The survey also refers to various states and security systems. There is however, absolutely no gender analysis of security and its concomitant reliance on militarised masculinities.

William's (2005) overview of African armed forces and the challenges of security sector reform, similarly debate options for reform with absolutely no gender analysis. A point worth noting in both articles is the recognition that the most comprehensive security reforms have been attempted in the aftermath of armed conflict, as part of a peace agreement. Given that a gender analysis of contemporary armed conflicts points to men's dominant role as soldiers and women's multiple roles as both perpetrators (bush wives, porters, looters) and victims (refugees, sexual slaves, and civilian targets), it is imperative that gender be taken seriously in SSR.

### **Security Sector Reform: what about gender?**

To date, there are several ways in which we can see that gender is taken into account in security sector reform processes. A recent training toolkit on Gender and Security Sector Reform (2008) developed by the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and the United Nations Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) encapsulates some of the main arguments that have been put forward by gender activists and security technocrats (or "securocrats") calling for gender mainstreaming in SSR.

A main theme of gender mainstreaming SSR is the inclusion of women in security reform processes. In post-conflict situations, this entails increasing the number of women employed in mainstream military structures such as the police and army, and ensuring that women are taken into account in demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration processes (DDR). Other efforts have involved the inclusion of women in bureaucratic structures by bringing on board gender experts, or ensuring that women (preferably from the women's peace networks and women's rights NGO's) are represented in various reform committees and processes. Another approach has been to ensure civilian oversight of military expenditure, with gendered budget analyses of SSR processes.

A fourth, and perhaps the most widely used strategy, is that of providing gender training for military personnel. The curricula of such training packages vary from an introduction to gender and its conceptual and practical links to military structures, to a narrower focus on sexual and gender-based violence and the role of the military structures in preventing and combating this.

An intrinsic weakness of these approaches has been the emphasis on the inclusion of women in security systems and process in an instrumentalist way



that treats them either as overlooked beneficiaries (in the case of DDR), or as a resource of knowledge and skill which will enhance the work of security structures. This falls far short of a feminist approach that would consider deeper transformation of the gender relations that characterise security institutions and systems, and addresses questions of hierarchy and masculinity.

Just as the early women-in-development approach to development resulted in a proliferation of women's projects and national women's bureaus and ministries that did not address unequal gender relations, so has gender mainstreaming in security sector reform generated bureaucratic interventions that seek to 'add' women, without questioning the gendered premises of the security sector and its role in government.

This 'add women in' approach is evident in the introductory section of the Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit (Bastick and Valasek, 2008). The first 'tool' (or section) of the manual begins with a quote from Margret Verwijk, Senior Police Officer of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs who laments the absence of policewomen as a possible threat to efficiency of the Afghanistan police:

"... interviews with new male recruits for the Afghan National Police in the province illustrated the need for an increase in the number of police women at both police stations and checkpoints... Performing a body search was simply out of the question, due to lack of female colleagues" (Bastick and Valasek, 2008: 1).

Apart from the suggestion that a central rationale for mainstreaming gender in SSR is to ensure that there are enough women in the police and army to conduct regular cordon searches of women, the manual goes on to various other examples in which women's involvement in SSR opens up options for a more efficient and effective security system. A central theme of the tool kit is the various ways in which women's networks can widen the net for gathering intelligence information; ensure local ownership of SSR by bridging the gap between local communities and security policymakers; provide support to victims of sexual and gender based violence; and design 'community-level security-related programming' to prevent, for example, gang violence or human trafficking (Bastick and Valasek, 2008: 6). With reference to the recent 103-strong, all-female Indian peacekeeping unit in Monrovia<sup>11</sup>, the manual makes mention of the positive impact women are likely to have on the morale and behaviour within peace-keeping units, suggesting that this will automatically result in an increased recruitment of women, which will in turn

limit the prevalence sexual exploitation and abuse by peace keepers (Bastick and Valasek, 2008: 8).

Similar gendered assumptions were evident during a recent meeting of police and gendarmerie women in peace operations in West Africa which considered options for mainstreaming gender in national and international peace operations under the ambit of the West African Police Project (WAPP). High-level military officials debated reasons for integrating women in peace operations. It was agreed that women's presence provides operational advantages by virtue of their links with conflict-affected communities and sensitivity to the experiences of women during armed conflict – particularly sexual and gender based violence. The report also suggests that an increase in women peace-keepers is likely to result in a reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of vulnerable communities. The same report insinuates that women will provide 'calming effects in tense situations' and are more likely to be 'attentive and safety conscious' (Marks and Deham, 2006: 17).

These approaches seem more likely to reproduce rather than to question existing gender identities and relations within security reform processes. At no point is masculinity questioned, nor the manner in which the notion of combat remains central to military masculinities. The emphasis on women as being useful for searching women is particularly worrying, as is the stereotypical assumption that female military officials will be calm and safety conscious, and less likely to engage in sexual abuse and exploitation. This assumption is not upheld in the studies of women's integration in military structures, which have shown that women rather tend to take on masculine roles resulting in an entrenchment, rather than transformation of traditional sexist ideologies (see Cock, 1989; 1994). Women's involvement in liberation movements such as Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) did not ensure an absence of sexual harassment either within MK or in MK's military interactions with the broader community (Cock, 1989: 1994).

It is however worth noting that SSR does provide (at least on paper) spaces for women's rights activists and gender experts to intervene, and to place the transformation of militarised masculinities on the agenda. For example, if women's links with local communities are taken seriously, this could broaden the scope and reveal insights on different kinds of insecurities experienced by different communities, and across ethnic and class structures. If women's perspectives – as well as their kinship, trading and distribution networks – were taken seriously, perhaps security itself would be reconsidered, and

incorporated into the reform of security structures.

El-Bushra's (2008) article *Feminism, Gender and Women's Peace Activism* explores the 'different feminisms' that have manifested in the field of peacebuilding. She suggests the need "to adopt a definition of 'peace' which encompasses the totality of women's needs and interests and which emphasizes structural change towards justice and towards representivity in political decision-making" (El-Bushra, 2008: 140).

She further argues that an essentialist approach to women's peace activism – that draws on women's roles as wives, mothers, care givers, and inherently peaceful and gentle people – can undermine efforts to deal with the structural causes of patriarchy. In relation to SSR, I argue that it is questionable whether women's peace activists and gender securocrats are likely to go beyond a liberal feminist approach to SSR.

Liberia provides an interesting case study for two reasons. Firstly, it has a history of a relatively prominent women's peace movement that has, to date, influenced Liberia's peace processes both prior to and after the August 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Secondly, SSR is one of the four major objectives pursued by the Liberian government as it rebuilds after a fifteen year civil war. For fourteen years, women in Liberia bore the brunt of the two brutal wars characterised by the use of child soldiers, mass displacement, sexual violence, and extreme poverty. Their Mass Action for Peace involved drawing on women from the market place, churches, mosques, civil society, refugee camps and the government. (Douglas and Hill, 2004: 10). Even the then President, Charles Taylor, granted them an audience to hear their plea for peace talks between his government, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and political party leaders. The mass action followed the delegates to Accra where the peace talks took place. With the support of Accra-based women's groups and Liberian women refugees, the women barricaded the entrance of the hall, blocking the delegates from leaving, until they had reached an agreement. Even though the women were not directly involved in the content of the peace agreement, they made substantive impact on the process of the peace talks and challenged the patriarchal power of political leaders who were using the peace process as a platform to advance personal political interests (as documented in the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* reviewed in this issue by Yaba Badoe).

Neither the peace agreement nor the CPA makes any mention of gender, or of efforts to address gender-based violence that was such a widespread feature

of the Liberian conflict. The CPA addresses SSR in Part four (articles 7 and 8) which requires the disbanding of irregular forces, reforming and restructuring of the Liberian Armed forces, and restructuring the Liberian National Police (LNP) as well as other security forces. Human Rights Watch (2004) describes how all three parties to the conflict gang-pressed and abducted girls and women to become cooks, domestics, wives, sexual slaves and fighters. Sex on demand was used to “boost the boys’ morale” and many girls were sexually assaulted to the point of death. DDR was one of the first elements of SSR that took place.

Fortunately, in his report to the Security Council on the Situation in Liberia (11<sup>th</sup> September 2003), the then Secretary General, Kofi Annan, directed special measures and programmes to address specific needs of female ex-combatants, as well as wives and widows of former combatants. UNIFEM’s article on gender and DDR (Douglas and Hill, 2004: 10-19) provides a detailed account of the various stages of the DDR process undertaken by UNMIL, other UN agencies, government agencies and international funders. This included special provisions for female combatants such as separate interim care centres in cantonment sites, reproductive health, counselling and training on women’s rights and sexual trauma support. However, due to the flood of combatants eager to trade their weapons for US \$300, UNMIL was unable to contain over 12,000 combatants at a cantonment site equipped to cater for only 1000 combatants. After much unrest, the DDR programme was suspended. At this point, under the banner of the “Concerned women of Liberia”, the Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), the Christian Community, the Government of Liberia and local NGO’s held a press conference to identify key flaws in the DDR process.

Apart from logistical limitations of transporting and containing the influx of combatants at cantonment sites, it became apparent that women combatants were not showing up at these sites. It took the assistance of women’s networks to investigate the issue, because even with the elaborate facilities available to support female ex-combatants in cantonment sites, DDR experts could not explain why women stayed away. For these women, the risk of exposing their links with rebel groups presented a security risk for which no sum of money could compensate: devastating social ostracism and stigma. Liberia’s DDR process did not make adequate conceptual and policy shifts to respond to women’s human security needs, in part because there were obscured by existing gender relations. Only the longstanding women’s peace

networks were in a position to unearth the possibilities of a demilitarisation that could begin to acknowledge the meaning and cost of the war for those Liberian women who survived it.

We are yet to see if women's peace activism will come to influence mainstream reform of the reconstituted Liberian Armed Forces.<sup>12</sup> SSR processes are at risk of being led by external governments and private companies. In the case of Liberia, the Government of the USA is playing the leading role in restructuring the Liberian Armed Forces, as this was requested in the 2003 CPA. There are grounds for concern over the fact that the US Department of State has contracted two US based private companies to 'deliver' US support to the Government of Liberia (Malan, 2008). DynCorp International has been contracted to provide basic facilities and basic training to the Liberian Armed Forces, and Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) has been contracted to build a base and provide 'specialised and advanced' training, including mentoring, to Liberian army officials.<sup>13</sup> Given the track record of the role of US militaries in the rest of the world, Liberia seems less likely to demilitarise than to face a remilitarisation of its armed forces, complete with the entrenchment of the aggressive masculinities currently characterising the US 'War on Terror' approach to state security.

However, given that the DDR process was to some extent successfully influenced by international and local pressure to adhere to principles of gender equality, it can be hoped that women peace activists will continue to engage with Liberia's SSR process.

## Conclusion

The evidence presented in this article suggests that even in post-conflict situations, security sector reform processes do not necessarily lead to any questioning of militarism, or of the cultures of masculinity sustained within military institutions.

Existing efforts to mainstream gender in security reform will need to go beyond the technocratic liberal feminist approach of merely adding women into conventional security systems.

The key role played by women's peace activism suggests that it would be worthwhile engaging in further research which analyses the gender implications of women's peace activism and their resistance to militarisation in Africa, and considers redefinitions of security that are suggested by feminist analysis.

Given the prevalence of violent conflict in Africa, and the fact that it is now

clear that national liberation struggles did not liberate women, it becomes imperative to interrogate the dominant masculinities that are profoundly implicated in militarism, and which have sustained the oppression and marginalisation of women in Africa.

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## Endnotes

- 1 A recent example is the August 2007 SADC Heads of State Summit where SADC First Ladies presented the draft Gender and Development Protocol to the Heads of State. This was despite the existence of 13 national gender machineries and hundreds of vibrant women’s rights NGO’s that are in fact legitimate institutions tasked to represent and champion women’s rights issues in the region. (See [http://www.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=20070821&ti=Gender\\_protocol\\_freezes](http://www.gov.bw/cgi-bin/news.cgi?d=20070821&ti=Gender_protocol_freezes), accessed on 7 July 2008).

- 2 Refugee International, *Men Must be Boys?* 2004 (available at [http://www.refugeesinternational.org/section/publications/pk\\_missions/](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/section/publications/pk_missions/), accessed on 16 May 2008).
- 3 Refugee International, *Men Must be Boys?* 2004 (available at [http://www.refugeesinternational.org/section/publications/pk\\_missions/](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/section/publications/pk_missions/), accessed on 16 May 2008).
- 4 United Nations Report by Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, *A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations*, 24 March 2005, A/59/710 (2005), p8 (available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/reports.htm>, accessed on 16 May 2008)
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- 6 B J Phiri, 'Civil Control of the Zambian Military since independence and its implications for democracy' in Rocky Williams, et.al (eds.), *Ourselves to Know: Civil-military Relations and Defence Force Transformation in Southern Africa*. Institute for Security Studies, 2002, (available at [http://www.issafrica.org/static/templates/tmpl\\_html.php?node\\_id=158&mlink\\_id=211&mlink\\_type=12&tlink\\_id=3](http://www.issafrica.org/static/templates/tmpl_html.php?node_id=158&mlink_id=211&mlink_type=12&tlink_id=3), accessed on 16 May 2008)
- 7 Quoted in Charmaine Pereira's article in Feminist Africa, 2002
- 8 J J Mphaisah (1988) 'Politics and Governance', *The State of the Nation Volume 1*. Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, Lusaka, p 172.
- 9 Ludo De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*. Jacana, 2001, p213-214.
- 10 MailandGuardian:[http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=339268&area=/breaking\\_news/breaking\\_news\\_\\_national/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=339268&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news__national/)
- 11 See article by the Christian Science Monitor, "All-Female Unit Keeps Peace in Liberia", available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0321/p06s01-woaf.html>, accessed on 1 April 2008.
- 12 For information on the link between DDR and SSR in Africa see an Issue paper by titled "Linking DDR and SSR" presented at the Second International Conference on DDR and Stability in Africa, 12-14 June 2007, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), available at <http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/speeches/ddr-ssr.pdf>, accessed on 8 July 2008.
- 13 See Refugees International, available at <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/10188/>, accessed on 6 July 2008.



# Women's Responses to State Violence in the Niger Delta

Sokari Ekine

This paper will discuss the ways in which the women of the Niger Delta have responded to acts of violence by the Nigerian State and its allies, the multinational oil companies. I first briefly outline the background to the crises in the Niger Delta and then discuss the responses and resistance of the women.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Nigeria, for the past 39 years, has been a militarised state even when so-called civilian governments, including the present one, have been in power. Militarisation consists of the use of the threat of violence to settle political conflicts, the legitimisation of state violence, the curtailment of freedom of opinion, the domination of military values over civilian life, the violation of human rights, extra judicial killings and the gross repression of the people (Chunakara, 1994). Turshen describes the militarised state as one in which “violence becomes a crisis of everyday life, is disenfranchising and politically, physically and economically debilitating” (Turshen, 1988: 7). The Niger Delta is a region of Nigeria that has been subjected to excessive militarisation for the past 13 years, where violence is used as an instrument of governance to force the people into total submission (Okonta & Douglas, 2001; Na’Allah, 1998). It is where, by far, the majority of the people live in abject poverty and where women are the poorest of the poor (Human Rights Watch, 2002; 2004; 2007). This region has little or no development, no electricity, no water, no communications, no health facilities, little and poor education. In contrast, the region generated an estimated over US \$30 billion in oil revenues, over a 38-year period, through in the form of rents for the government and profit for the multinational oil companies (Rowell, 1996).

The multinational oil companies, mainly Shell, Chevron/Texaco, and Elf, have treated both the people and the environment with total disdain and hostility (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). They have worked hand in hand with a succession of brutal and corrupt regimes to protect their exploitation of the

land and people by providing the Nigerian military and police with weapons, transport, logistical support and finance. In return the Nigerian government has allowed the oil companies a free hand to operate without any monitoring. In fact, the oil companies in the Niger Delta have one of the worst environmental records in the world.<sup>2</sup>

## **Destruction of the Ecological System**

The Niger Delta has become an ecological disaster zone, a place where rusty pipelines run through farms and in front of houses (Rowell, 1996). Day and night huge gas fires rage in massive pits and towers, spewing noxious gases and filth into people's homes and farms. Oil spills and fires are a regular occurrence, often causing the death of local people as well as the destruction of wildlife and property. Michael Fleshman, of the New York-based Africa Fund, describes what he saw at the site of one oil spill:

The impact of the spill on the community has been devastating, as the oil has poisoned their water supply and fishing ponds, and is steadily killing the raffia palms that are the community's economic mainstay. Lacking any other alternative, the people of the village have been forced to drink polluted water for over a year, and the community leaders told us that many people had become ill in recent months and that some had died. The sight that greeted us when we finally arrived at the spill was horrendous. A thick brownish film of crude oil stained the entire area, collecting in clumps along the shoreline and covering the surface of the still water. The humid air was thick with oil fumes. (Fleshman, 1999)

Often, the spillages lead to raging fires as in the case of the Jesse fire (17th October, 1998<sup>3</sup>) when over a thousand people were killed and thousands more horrifically burned and left homeless. To date, not a single person has received compensation. Indeed, in a region where medical care is scarce and only available to the rich, it is easy to envision the fate of these people. Ponds, creeks, rivers and land are soaked with thick layers of oil. Terisa Turner, co-director of the United Nations NGO, International Oil Working Group (IOWG), describes one particular oil spill that she personally witnessed as follows:

150,000 residents of the community of Ogbodo battled a massive petroleum spill from a Shell pipeline, which burst on 24 June, churning crude into the surrounding waterways for 18 days until Shell clamped the pipe on 12 July. Severe environmental damage and threat to life by Shell's neglect is the other side of the 'corporate rule' coin of ever-expanding

neo-liberal license. The dangers to human life, human rights and the environment were dramatically experienced by Ogbodo community members in Nigeria's 'Shell-Shocked' oil belt. (Turner, 2001: 11)

This scene is typical. The common response of the oil companies to such spills however, has been to blame the villagers for sabotage. The question is, why would the villagers commit acts of sabotage that will only worsen the environmental damage and pollution of their land and prevent them from engaging in their livelihoods, namely farming, fishing and trading? In this particular case, the pipeline in question was buried 6 feet deep (many pipelines in the region are built above ground, running through farm land and through villages), and split underneath the ground (Turner, 2001). In addition to air and water pollution and other kinds of environmental degradation, lands have been expropriated and personal property damaged. The people have received only very little compensation for the land taken or damages from oil spillage and fires. Indeed, efforts at compensation have been “case(s) of broken promises, development programmes that are abandoned halfway, poor quality facilities that break down and simply rust away as soon as they are installed” (Okonta & Douglas, 2001: 106).

## Militarisation

As the dispossessed communities demand corporate responsibility, environmental, economic and social justice and proper compensation, their protests have been met with violence including extrajudicial killings and mass murder, torture, rape, the burning of homes and property, and increased military presence. As such, the Niger Delta has become completely militarised and “secured” by unrestrained and unaccountable Nigerian military personnel. The report by Human Rights Watch, “No Democratic Dividend”, notes that violence in the region continues despite the change from military to civilian rule (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

The Niger Delta is a particularly extreme example of a culture of violence that is woven into the fabric of a society ruled by military dictators. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo was a key player in no less than three successive military regimes. He was a senior officer under General Gowon and participated in the 1975 *coup d'état* that overthrew General Gowon. He then served as the Deputy Supreme Commander under Brigadier General Murtala Mohammed until the latter's assassination in the 1976 coup. General Obasanjo then took over as Supreme Commander until he handed power to the second civilian

government of Shehu Shagari in 1979. Four more military regimes followed this brief interregnum, including the particularly brutal regime of General Sani Abacha between 1993 and 1998. It was during this period that Ogoni activists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, were murdered. Despite the fact that the Obasanjo government, which ruled from 1999 until 2007, was viewed as a transition to civilian rule, the level of violence in the region continued to escalate. Examples of this escalation include: intensification of the military option to control the oil fields and pipelines - through the specially created Nigerian Military Task Force for the Niger Delta with specific orders to “shoot-to-kill” protesting indigenes, Obasanjo demonstrated his propensity to use brute force to compel silence and acquiescence<sup>4</sup>; invasion of Odi Town on the direct orders of Obasanjo in retaliation for the murder of 12 policemen by youths in the town in 1999; brutal rapes of women and young girls by Nigerian Army personnel in Choba; gunning down of unarmed youths who protested against unemployment in Bonny Island; ravaging of communities in Ke-Dere in Rivers State for protesting unwanted and forceful return of Shell Oil to Ogoniland; killings of women and children, burning and looting of property in Oleh town in Isokoland; and the massacre on 17 October 2000 of 15 youth protesters in Tebidaba in Bayelsa State (INAA, 2000).

The government of the newly elected President of Nigeria, Umaru Yar'Adua, continues the policy of militarisation of the region in response to the increased militancy of local people.

## Forms of Resistance

Resistance can take many forms, some of which are explicit in their actions and consequences and others less so. Despite the intangible nature that resistance can sometimes take, any forms of resistance are nonetheless worthy of recognition and can be just as powerful as overt acts. Women experience oppression in the domestic sphere, within the context of the community, cultural and traditional roles and mores, as well as through formal organisations and social institutions controlled by men (Hill Collins, 1990). Often women experience all three simultaneously and may engage in acts of resistance that challenge all three levels of oppression either singularly or simultaneously.

In *Gender Violence in Africa*, December Green uses a schema developed by Jane Everett, Ellen Charlton, and Kathleen Staudt to illustrate the efforts of women to protect themselves and their interests in areas where they have little formal power as “strategies of disengagement” (Green, 1999). This schema is a

useful framework to analyse the acts of resistance of women of the Niger Delta. As Green (1999: 154) states, the schema is not rigid and one or more strategies may be used at any given time. It also allows for the inclusion of a broad range of actions and forms of resistance. The schema consists of four categories:

“The *management of suffering* occurs when women living under imposed hardships seek out survival or coping mechanisms. Although survival requires active pursuit, this activism is often regarded as passive. *Insulation* consists of a turning inward to family and kin as an alternative way of gaining recognition, power, and resources. In *collective action*, women as a group, confront authority in order to resist its growth or to demand adherence to norms of behaviour. *Escape*, the fourth type of resistance, is often taken as a last resort and is perhaps the most extreme, escape is often ventured under only the most dire circumstances” (Green, 1999: 154).

The ways in which women engage in acts of resistance range from everyday simple acts, which when maintained over a period of time, can become transformational and extreme, leading to organised and confrontational acts (Green, 1999). Women in the Niger Delta have used and continue to use a variety of forms of resistance such as dancing and singing, collective action including demonstrations and strikes, testimonies, silence, and the use of culturally specific responses such as stripping naked. They have also refused to alter work routines and habits such as opening up market stalls, collecting water, participating in women’s meetings and they have struggled to maintain their daily routines amidst the chaos and violence that surrounds them. These acts of resistance are bound within local cultures as well as with the socio-economic and political context.

## Resistance and Responses to State-Sponsored Violence

One of the most common forms of violence is destruction of property: burning homes and shops, looting and stealing money. Communities often respond to these attacks by fleeing either to a nearby village or to a hiding place in the bush (forest). In Green’s (1999) schema, escape is considered to be the most extreme form of resistance as it is usually ventured only in the direst circumstances.

During the invasion of Odi town in 1999, many townsfolk escaped, leaving behind their meagre possessions accumulated over a lifetime, often losing family members during the escape, and eventually returning to find other family members killed, their homes burnt to the ground, and

property looted. For women, this was particularly difficult as the following interviewees explain:

"I left everything to run for my dear life and pleaded with people to let me in their canoe with my children.... I pleaded with people to take my children. I don't even know the destination they were, where they ran to. I started to trace my children.... As God would have it none of them died and at the end all of us came here. When I saw my house I cried.... People were hugging me. We will survive this thing with God." (Charity, Odi Woman)

"When the soldiers came we were in our various houses, we only heard that soldiers have come and surrounded everywhere. Since the soldiers were coming we were all afraid. Everyone started packing and running away, we were not able to stand soldiers. We carried a few things and we left. When we came back we saw all our houses, food had been burned down, all burned down money that we left in our houses. Since then we have been trying to manage with nothing again. We are lying on the ground nothing to sleep on." (Amasin, primary school teacher, Odi).

"We ran to a nearby village called Odoni. We were crying our houses are finished. We also heard the gunshots and knew people were being killed. Others ran to the bush. Those who could not get boats ran to the bush.... Women, not men, only women, the men were dead. One woman was captured, she came out with her children because they couldn't stand it (the bush) so the army were feeding her with gari (cassava). The soldiers did that – gave people burnt gari to drink and burnt yams to eat." (Imegebe, school teacher, Odi Town).

During this invasion, however, many of the elderly women refused to run with their families and therefore witnessed the horror of shooting, burning, and looting by soldiers, including those of their own homes. One elderly woman explained how soldiers broke the doors of her house and started packing her personal property to steal. They came with a big lorry to pack all the things they looted. According to her, some of them even slept in her house. However, these women were protected from physical violence by their status as elderly women and mothers/grandmothers. In some instances, the soldiers ended up giving them food, albeit very meagre amounts. These elderly women were able to command sufficient respect to protect them from the abuse of the soldiers.

The testimonies in *Blood and Oil* (Ekine, 2000) and in other interviews conducted by activists and researchers in the region, are all examples of

women speaking out about their personal and community experiences of violence. Women narrated their stories of rape, beatings, sexual harassment, burning of their property, arrest and murder of their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers. They spoke of the loss of their fishing ponds and farmlands to pollution, and the poverty of their lives. They also mentioned the lack of employment opportunities for the male family members, the harassment of their young sons by police and army personnel. Moreover, these women talked about both the support and, in most cases, the lack of support they received from their husbands and traditional elders in their activism. They discussed their decisions to take action and the consequences of those actions.

### Silence as Resistance

Closely related to the act of speaking out is the act of silent resistance, by which I mean not speaking and choosing to do nothing. The question of whether silence constitutes resistance, an exercise of choice, is worth exploring.

Before undertaking fieldwork for *Blood and Oil*,<sup>5</sup> I had never considered silence as an act of resistance. However, during the interviews with groups of women, I observed that there would often be some women who did not speak or spoke very little. As a researcher and observer, although “listening to their silence” was difficult, I was very conscious of the need to respect it. I became aware of the power of these silent voices. I saw their silence as an act of defiance and strength and also a way to manage the pain in their lives. Traci West (1999) states that resistance includes any coping mechanism used for survival, including silence when it is used as an aid to the survival and healing of the individual. Building on this, Mamphela Ramphele includes as part of women’s coping mechanisms “the decision not to act as a powerful act in itself” (cited in Green, 1999: 153). In other words, what may appear as doing nothing is, in effect, making a choice not to do anything. In local parlance, this kind of deliberate inaction is referred to as “sitting on oneself.”

One example of silent resistance took place in the small town of Kaiama in Western Ijaw. Here, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1998, representatives of over 40 Ijaw clans issued a communiqué known as the Kaiama Declaration and created the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) to administer the affairs of the Ijaw youth. The communiqué called for an end to 40 years of environmental damage and underdevelopment in the region and asserted the right to ownership of resources and land by the indigenous people. In response, the Nigerian government created a Naval Special Task Force and, on the 29th of

December, sent 1500 federal troops to the nearby state capital at Yenagoa and occupied it and the surrounding area. Following a massacre, rape and burning of properties in Yenagoa on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1999, the army invaded the town of Kaiama on 2nd January. On the 4<sup>th</sup> January, using Chevron helicopters and boats, the army invaded seven other Ijaw towns.

During interviews with women, one woman stood out because she was not interested in speaking. We learned that her son had been killed on the day of the invasion. Whereas most people had fled upon hearing that the soldiers were coming, he had run back to the house to collect an item he had forgotten and was fatally shot in his stomach. Standing face to face with her silence was an overpowering experience which conveyed her profound grief and loss at least as effectively as speech. In this case, a woman had survived by a silence that allowed her to disengage herself from her surroundings and she continued to live and hold herself with a dignity that denied her violators any sense of victory. Given that Kaiama is still under occupation today, she lives a situation in which she has to face her son's murderers everyday, possibly even having to sell them foodstuffs from the stall she runs in order to earn a living to support her surviving children. Her silence, her stance and her body language thus serve her well in an inescapable situation, that many other women living under occupation share.

## **Responses to Sexual Violence**

Rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution by the military are all acts of violence and demonstrations of power used in times of war and conflict. Rape serves to gratify the soldiers, feeding their hatred of the enemy whilst also being used as an effective weapon of war, especially to spread terror amongst the people (Turshen & Twagiramariya, 1998). In this instance, rape also has an ethnic dimension as the military and police deployed in the Niger Delta are not indigenous to the region with many of them coming from the North of the country.

In the Niger Delta, rape and other forms of sexual violence such as forced prostitution, have taken place repeatedly in communities that have been invaded by the Nigerian army, where paramilitary forces have been used to quell demonstrations, or simply to make a particular town or village an "example" of what would happen should the people assert their human rights.

Blessing, one of my interviewees, explained that the soldiers and police often forced girls to "befriend" them. If they refused, they were threatened



with rape and beatings. She had managed to avoid being “befriended” by her lack of fear and sheer stubbornness. She explained that at first she had tried to make friends for protection and was bought drinks following which the soldiers attempted to force her into having sex with them. She said, “the pressure was terrible and most girls just gave in.”<sup>6</sup> Another woman reported seeing a soldier walking into the bush with a girl of about 12 years. After the abuse (the woman did not know what actually took place) they came out and the soldier gave money to the child.

The responses to rape have varied from community to community. Several factors explain the varying responses of the women, the male members of their families, and their wider community. Using two different incidents of rape in two different ethnic groups, I will examine the different responses.

The town of Choba is an Ikwerre community in Rivers State and the headquarters of a pipeline construction company called Wilbros Nigeria Ltd. (a subsidiary of Wilbros Group, an US company). Community relations between Wilbros and the people of Choba were poor mainly because of two reasons. The company demonstrated disdain and disinterest in Choba and its people and they failed to employ local people, even at lower unskilled levels. This led to a number of demonstrations against Wilbros. In June 1999 the youth of Choba began a series of demonstrations and sit-ins outside the company gates. The youth demanded that Wilbros replace 600 of their employees with Choba residents. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, the mobile police – a paramilitary group – invaded Choba and once again, unleashed murder, destruction of property and rape on the people of the town. The rapes of women by soldiers were captured on film by a journalist and published in the Nigerian daily press. President Obasanjo’s response was to declare the photographs a fake, asserting that *his* soldiers would never do such a thing. The response of the women of Choba was one of insulation, turning inward towards their community. These women not only had to cope with the trauma of being publicly raped but also with the shame that they and their community felt when the photographs were published in the newspaper. Some months later, a local journalist spoke anonymously to some of the rape survivors.

“It is a taboo to rape a married woman... (now) these women cannot sleep with their husbands and cannot cook for them. It is our tradition and we have to respect it, not just for the sake of respecting our custom but because there are grave implications for disobedience....”

“At the time, we rallied our women to protest to the wife of the governor so

that she can help us to push the case but we were arrested and detained for four days. It took the intervention of well-meaning elders before we were released.... We, the women of Choba, appeal to those behind the ugly event to come and do the necessary things to appease the gods. ....This is important to us because without this, these women are as good as divorced."

The community did not judge the women survivors totally negatively. On the contrary, they acknowledged the women's pain and suffering. The women supported each other and organised themselves according to traditional ways. They sought help from their village elders and the governor's wife. Their response was part of their healing process and, seemingly, of the community, so they could all move past the trauma to some kind of normalcy in their lives.

The responses of rape victims and their families in Ogoniland were very different from those of Choba. The Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) was launched on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1990. The OBR, like the declarations and communiqués of other ethnic groups, articulated the basis of a struggle for ethnic autonomy and self-determination for the Ogoni peoples and challenged both the Nigerian government and Shell's legitimacy to determine the economic and political affairs of the Ogoni people and the entire Niger Delta communities (Ekine, 2000). The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni peoples (MOSOP) was to become the mechanism to carry out the objectives of OBR along with the Federation of Ogoni Women's Organisations (FOWA) (Turner, 2001).

The troubles in Ogoniland came to a head in November 1993 when the Nigerian military government began a three-year campaign of violence, murder, rape, burning, looting, beatings and torture, against the Ogoni people.<sup>7</sup> For the Ogoni women, resistance was a daily norm as they faced both the impact of Shell's destruction of their environment and the presence of the Nigerian army and mobile police everyday. Women were harassed on the way to their farms, on the way to their markets, in their villages minding their homes, and at night when they were asleep.

In interviews with members of FOWA, woman after woman stood up, said their names, and described in graphic detail the rapes and other types of sexual violence they had been subjected to.

"They started beating the women, dragging them into the bush. And they started losing their cloth and raping them...my mate was with pregnancy. One army man just used his leg and hit her stomach and she miscarry. That was the beginning of suffering in Nyo Khana." <sup>8</sup>  
Comfort Aluzim

"They started beating us; all that we were carrying to the market to sell, they took. They took our things, our bags. They asked us to raise our hands and jump like frogs. There was an old woman with us that could not jump. What the army man did was to use his double barrel gun to beat the old woman's back and she fell down." Mercy Nkwagha

"One day we were demonstrating. We sang as we moved from our town to Ken Khana. Singing near the main road we met face to face with the army... they asked us to lie down on the road. After using the koboko (whip) on us they started kicking us with their foot. They dragged some of the women into the bush. We were naked, our dresses were torn, our wrapper were being loosed by a man who is not your husband. They tore our pants and began raping us in the bush. The raping wasn't secret because about two people are raping you there. They are raping you in front of your sister. They are raping your sister in front of your mother. It was like a market." Mrs Kawayorko

Unlike in Choba, the Ogoni women were able to stand up and publicly speak about the violence they had suffered. Through the actions of FOWA and MOSOP, the women became highly politicised and engaged actively with elders and youth in the struggle against Shell's activities and for the political autonomy of their land. Together with the youth branch of MOSOP, FOWA was given "unprecedented power within a democratic configuration...a steering committee was created in which each of the nine constituent organisations had three votes" (Turner, 1997). Thus, FOWA was able to use a strategy of collective action as an act of resistance in their struggle and coordinate their activities with men in the community. Another strategy of the Ogoni women was to use their position and status as mothers to work with the youths who were, in effect, their sons or the age of their sons:

"During the period, the women of Tai kingdom suffered a lot... Many of the women were beaten; many of the houses destroyed. At that time the women decided that come dead or alive they would still hold their meetings. FOWA women had their meetings in the bush. We arranged with the youth wing of the movement, the youth of Tai dug a very big pit in the ground and we the women entered the pit and the youth used bushes to cover us." Ogoni woman farmer

Women were not ostracised or excluded because they had been raped, as explained by a FOWA member:

"Our men just take it as what happen because they know their wives did

not just go out like that but it was forceful. Also the other women took it the same way." Ogoni woman

FOWA, in opposition to some local politically motivated traditional leaders, actively advocated the boycott of the 1993 presidential elections. Diana Barikor-Wiwa explains:

"Of course they spoke with their men – if that is translated into English, it's a bit like 'bedroom talk'. They tried to work on that within the home. But besides that they had a lot of strife with their children, especially their sons. It was most effective with their sons, and of course, somebody's husband is another woman's son. And so it was, there was always that bond. It's a traditional thing. You were a great man if you could respect your mother. So they did that." (Barikor-Wiwa, 1996)

The women became agents of change by using culturally specific methods and their position as mothers to persuade their husbands and sons, thereby MOSOP, to take the decision to boycott the election.

FOWA's response to violence was a combination of collective action, individual courage and sheer defiance in the face of military aggression and environmental destruction. More recently, women of the Niger Delta have used both collective action and traditional methods in response to the complete neglect of their ecosystem: natural environment, health, education, infrastructure, employment and general underdevelopment by the government and multinationals.

## Mass Protests

Between June and August 2002, thousands of women occupied no less than eight oil facilities belonging to Chevron Texaco and Shell Petroleum including Chevron's main oil terminal at Escravos in Delta State. This series of direct action by women in the Niger Delta was unprecedented for a number of reasons.

First, never before had so many women taken a series of actions against an oil company within such a short period of time. Second, the actions, in particular the initial occupation of Escravos oil terminal, were highly organised. The women divided themselves into seven groups, each occupying a different strategic area of the complex, including the main office building (Okon, 2001). Third, because the actions taken by the women – all mothers and grandmothers whose age ranged from 30 to 90 – had been organised collectively in the interest of the community at large, they had the complete support of their communities including their husbands, the youth, elders and chiefs. Finally, and

most important, although in the first instance the actions were taken separately by women from three different ethnic nationalities, in the final occupation, for the first time women from three different ethnic nationalities, Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Ilaje, came together in a united action against corporate irresponsibility, putting aside previous inter-ethnic hostilities and grievances.

One of the strategies used by both the multinational oil companies and successive Nigerian governments has been to deliberately exploit existing tensions between the various ethnic nationalities in the region and also, to encourage antagonisms between youth and women, elders and youth, and elders and women in towns and villages. Therefore, the importance of the solidarity between women in this instance is indeed major. This solidarity across different ethnic divides was forged because the situation had become so desperate that many women realised that such cooperation was essential for their success. Their political awareness of the divide-and-rule tactics encouraged them to put aside previous hostilities and fight the common enemy together.

The women occupied the operational headquarters of Chevron-Texaco and Shell Petroleum, singing songs of solidarity to protest years of plunder of their rural environment by the oil companies (Okon, 2001). In this particular siege, about 800 women were injured during a particularly brutal encounter with security forces belonging to the oil companies. The voices of the women speak of their coming together and their grievances:

"The rivers they are polluting is our life and death. We depend on it for everything.... When this situation is unbearable, we decided to come together to protest. Ijaw, Itsekiri and Ilaje we are one, we are brothers and sisters, it is only people who do not understand that think we are fighting ourselves. Our common enemies are the oil companies and their backers". Mrs Bmipe Ebi (Ilaje)

"We don't want Shell, Chevron, Texaco or any other oil companies again. They should leave us alone. We don't have guns, and we don't have any weapon to fight them. Since they have treated us like this. We are prepared to die." Mrs Rose Miebi (Ijaw)

"If Chevron no keep the promises, next time I ready to go naked." Mrs Funke Tunjor (Ilaje)

The women were relentless in their protest and demands. In a final act of defiance, they confronted the oil companies with one ingenious and powerful weapon: they threatened to remove all their clothes in what is known as "the

Curse of Nakedness”. The stripping off of clothes, particularly by married and elderly women, is a way of shaming men, some of whom believe that if they see the naked bodies they will go mad or suffer great harm.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the types of violence and violent situations to which women in the Niger Delta are subjected and I have commented upon some of their responses. It is indeed necessary to look beyond one’s own expectations and preconceptions about resistance to violence to avoid the risk of neglecting the entire range and variety of women’s responses in different cultural and political contexts. What may appear initially as passive inaction may actually be a show of strength. For example, “sitting on one’s self,” that is, to stand silently with dignity as a mature woman, is a response that becomes a very powerful act. Individual acts such as these are ways of managing suffering on a personal level by turning inwards for strength.

Women in the Niger Delta resorted to using the “curse of nakedness” as a weapon after they had failed to have their demands met through more conventional protest actions. Though greatly feared and rarely used, nakedness as a form of protest is legitimate within the cultural context of the Niger Delta. In this instance, it was one of the few occasions when women were able to manoeuvre themselves into a position of power. Also, because it is used only under extreme provocation, it has remained a powerful weapon of women’s collective resistance. It is also critical to note that while the scale of destruction and violence within the Delta is overwhelming, at a day to day level women continue not just to survive but also to put up resistance within the territories, using the means at their disposal: *If Chevron no keep the promises, next time I ready to go naked.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 The testimonies used in this paper were gathered by members of the Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ), the Ijaw Council for Human Rights (ICHR), and myself during fieldwork undertaken between 2000 and 2003. NDWJ works with other women's organisations across the Niger Delta; ICHR works alongside Environmental Rights Action, Oil Watch Nigeria, and NDWJ.
- 2 For more on the activities of multinational oil companies (Shell, Chevron-Texaco, Mobil, Elf) and their unholy alliance with successive military and civilian regimes, read *Where Vultures Feast* (Okonta & Douglas, 2001) and *Green Backlash* (Rowell, 1996). Further information can also be found at [www.seen.org](http://www.seen.org) and Project Underground at [www.moles.org](http://www.moles.org).



- 3 ERA field report 17 - <http://www.essentialaction.org/shell/era/eraField17.html>
- 4 The Military Task Force continues to operate under the new Presidency of Umaru Yar'Adua
- 5 *Blood and Oil: Testimonies of Violence from Women of the Niger Delta*, is a collection of testimonies of women from seven different ethnic groups of the Niger Delta. The testimonies cover the period from 1990-2000 of state and multinational violence against Niger Delta communities and the impact of the violence specifically on women's lives.
- 6 I have paraphrased Blessing's testimony because, due to her use of local English, the reader would find it very hard to understand.
- 7 When the brutal military dictator, General Sani Abacha, came to power in November 1993, one of the first things he did was to create the now notorious Rivers State Internal Security Task Force led by Lt Colonel Paul Okuntimo and to appoint a new military governor of the Rivers State, Lt Colonel Dauda Komo. These two together with Shell Oil spent the next three years terrorising the Ogoni people culminating in the judicial murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 other activists on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1995. Following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the women of FOWA became prime targets of the RSISTF who in the words of a FOWA member "were looking for us the way children look for rats in the bush."
- 8 Nyo Khana – Ogoniland is divided into six kingdoms (or clans) of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Nyo-Khana, Ken-Khana and Tai.



# We Need an International Campaign to Resist Androcentric Militarized Neo-Colonial Masculinities!

Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge

"It is in the interest of patriarchy not to reject the legitimization of state violence as much as it is to avoid gender equality. Its exclusive claim to the lawful use of lethal force maintained the patriarchal state and limits the potential challenges to its power raised by rivals and dissidents, including the challenges of democracy, and especially of women's equality." -Betty Reardon

Women have increasingly been incorporated into armed forces worldwide, both in conventional and guerilla armies. For many years however, the roles of women in war and other types of violent conflict remained almost invisible throughout the world. Accounts of war tended to cast men as protectors and doers while women were portrayed as the passive, innocent victims. As women's experiences have become more broadly known, it has become clear that there are many different ways in which women live through and participate in wars: as fighters, community leaders, social organizers, workers, farmers, traders, welfare workers, among other roles. Nonetheless, many conflict narratives highlight a common theme of women seeking to minimize the effects of violence through their different social roles. The bravery of those women who go against the general tide of opinion, and sometimes literally place themselves in the line of fire, has come to be much celebrated.

Feminist scholars have begun to analyze the intersection of militarism and patriarchy and the impact they have on gender roles. They are discovering that merely becoming involved in a military force does not automatically liberate women from exploitative relationships. Rather, women who choose to join military forces have to combat both the external enemy and the patriarchal attitudes and actions within the military force itself. Whereas it was believed that the incorporation of women into the military would transform gender relations and roles and free women from patriarchy, the reality is

that militarism serves to reinforce and reproduce unequal gender relations. Although we have produced some powerful new identities for women, and military forces internationally are enlisting more women, military organizations remain distinctly patriarchal institutions by maintaining a sexual division of labour, with most women soldiers occupying sub-ordinate positions resembling stereotypical female roles in the civilian sector.

Understanding war involves understanding militarism and how it shapes military forces as social institutions. Military forces are not gender neutral. Together the ideology of militarism and the military organizations they produce, interact, mobilize and construct gender identities in ways that promote patriarchal ideology and practices. Understanding the intersection of militarism and gender is central to the achievement of sustainable and positive peace. Contemporary accounts of women's involvement in wars show that women play both 'peace making' and 'war-mongering' roles. Studies of war highlight women's direct involvement in violence, as well as in motivating the men in their communities to fight. This is particularly so where wars are about national identities, as women in most societies take the major responsibility for passing on values and cultural identities to children, and thus play active roles in supporting exclusive and aggressive ideologies about nationalism. We also know very well that women can and do commit acts of violence.

However, the extent of women's involvement in violent acts in warfare remains poorly understood, and violence is still commonly believed to be the preserve of men. The role of women in militarization – the proliferation of weapons and military force – has been largely obscured and mystified by two competing perspectives – those of sexism and feminism. Both sexist and feminist analyses exclude women from war on the grounds that they are bearers of 'special qualities'. Sexism excludes women from the ranks of the military on grounds of their physical inferiority and unsuitability for fighting. Women are constructed as the 'weaker sex', to be 'protected' and 'defended' by strong men. There is an essentialist feminist discourse that similarly excludes women, but on opposite grounds – that of their supposedly innate nurturing qualities, and their pacifism. The outcome of these perspectives is that war is understood as an exclusively male affair, and the military as a masculine institution – the last bastion of male power – from which women are excluded and by whom women are often victimized.

The dawn of democracy and the end of the violent system of Apartheid in South Africa presented new opportunities for South Africans to re-think the

issue of security. The democratically elected government led by the African National Congress (ANC) began a process of transforming all the country's institutions, as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). This process, based on the new Constitution, established a broader perspective on security, which went beyond state security to include the security of people, broadly known as human security. The new government has adopted a policy that allows women to serve in the military in all aspects and at levels of defence, including combat.

Subsequent to the adoption of this policy, the number of women in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has increased dramatically to around 20%. Most of South Africa's military women have come from the non-statutory former liberation armies, the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the PAC's Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA). However, this influx of women seems to have done little to change the male domination of the SANDF, as few women have risen to the higher levels of command. Currently only one Rear Admiral in the Navy and a few Brigadiers and Major Generals in the Army, the Air Force and the South African Military Health Service, are women.

Analyzing the role of women in conventional and guerrilla armies of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), Cock (1991) says although in both the SADF and MK in the period between 1976 and 1990, the numbers of women had increased significantly, in both armies however, women were under-represented in positions of leadership and authority. In addition, militarized notions of masculinity where the presumption that a man is unproven in his manhood until he has engaged in collective, violent physical struggle against someone categorized as the enemy, have increased social violence, particularly violence against women and children.

Looking back, I see my appointment as the South African Deputy Defence Minister in 1999 within the context of the political transformation that was taking place. This saw women being actively encouraged to enter previously male-dominated environments. This transformation drive was inspired by the spirit of the new Constitution, as well as by the commonly held view that South Africa faced no immediate external military threats, and was unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. In contrast to the secrecy of the past, this brought with it a new culture of relative openness about defence matters. For the new government, the national defence force needed to change to reflect the demography and values of the democratic state. The integration process and the subsequent rationalization and reduction of the Defence Forces were

primary tasks.

My appointment was a surprise to me and many of my friends and colleagues as although I had been active in the liberation struggle and the underground structures of the African National Congress, I had not served in any military capacity. Furthermore I was known to be a Quaker, and hence a pacifist.

The militarization of Africa through the arms trade in particular, coupled with poverty and other inequities, plays a major role in promoting and prolonging conflicts, increasing their intensity and destructiveness, and making them more intractable and the issues they raise harder to solve. With this in mind, I joined those who opposed to the purchase of new weapons by the South African National Defence Force. We argued that South Africa did not face any external enemies and therefore did not need to procure new conventional weapons. However, the biggest controversy has been over the allegation of bribes of senior government officials in the Arms Deal. Although these allegations had not come to light at the time of my appointment to the Ministry of Defence, I do now ask myself if I should not have done more to press for answers on both the offsets that had been promised as part of the deal, and regarding the allegations that have since come to light. The fact of the matter is that most military business is conducted in conditions of secrecy. The deeper question is this: how much can be done to transform the institution, given that the culture of secrecy remains so dominant in the military? How compatible is such a culture with democracy and public accountability?

My appointment drew much media and public attention. One news report said the appointment was 'either a monumental guffaw or stroke of genius', while another said 'having a Quaker in the Ministry of Defence was 'like putting a vegetarian in a butcher shop'. As a feminist, I had argued that the incorporation of women into the Defence Force would have the negative effect of changing the women and not the military institution and culture, in which they would be present only in small numbers or would not be in positions of control and power.

Militaristic notions of masculinity serve as a powerful tool for making men into soldiers because military forces encourage masculine identities based on aggressiveness, competitiveness, the censure of emotional expression and images of weak soldiers as effeminate. Women need the 'critical mass' in such male dominated institutions in order to be able to make a significant change in such institutions.

As an exercise, I once asked one of the generals who had integrated from

MK, what the reaction had been to my appointment. The answer I received was that the military did not mind at all that I was a Quaker, but they certainly did mind that I was a woman. My guess is that the military men felt quite confident that they could make me change my mind about being a pacifist. They argued that ‘in order to achieve peace, you have to prepare for war’. On the other hand, they could not change the fact that I was a woman, and it bothered them much more that they now had to take orders from a woman.

As Deputy Minister, my responsibilities included the transformation of the Defence Force. This primarily involved overseeing the integration process which brought together statutory and non-statutory forces – those from the conventional defence force and those from the guerrilla liberation army. I broadened the definition to mean transforming the military culture as well. This did not go down very well with the established order which valued what they termed a universal military culture that could not be changed. Yet, the people of South Africa, through the new Constitution, adopted a new approach to Defence attuned to democratic principles that required all institutions to fall under civil oversight, and to contribute to the national imperative of reconstructing our country. Under the new order, South Africans wanted schools, bridges and houses to be built, and they argued that the military had the resources and the duty to contribute to the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

As part of the transformation process, I facilitated an annual gathering that brought together women soldiers with peace activists and academics to look at peace through a gender lens. We called this forum the African Women’s Peace Table. Its purpose was to provide a space for analyzing conflicts and to provide a gender perspective to the interventions for ending the conflicts and for the post-conflict reconstruction. The African Women’s Peace Table conducted a critique of the approach of the Beijing Platform for Action to women and conflict, which characterized women in conflict situations only as victims and refugees, rather than as active participants both in conflicts and in the resolution of the conflicts.

Another aspect of transformation I introduced was a different approach to peacekeeping, to ensure that it included a strong element of development. Called Developmental Peacekeeping, the doctrine is premised on the fact that most wars in Africa result from competition for resources and the solution must therefore be developmental. Thus, when peacekeepers are deployed, they should in addition, carry shovels and picks in order to begin reconstructing

the country as they keep warring factions apart. Rolling peacekeeping and post conflict reconstruction into one process is an essential component towards achieving sustainable peace. Related to this was the need to ensure a code of conduct for the peacekeepers, one which protects women's human rights. Reports of sexual exploitation of women by peacekeepers are rife and strong measures are needed to ensure that those who exploit women they are supposed to protect are dealt with accordingly.

When women fight in wars, we are compelled to examine the complexities and interrelationships of gender and war. Indeed, merely becoming involved in a military force does not automatically liberate women from unequal and exploitative gender relationships.

As feminists, it is in our interest to explore the use of non-violence in dealing with conflict and efforts towards social change. Budding research shows that feminist consciousness will assist African men resist androcentric militarized neo-colonial masculinities. We need to strengthen the voices of women in policy development and implementation requires that we act together across borders to develop feminist leadership that truly understands and appreciates the importance of examining all our policies and programmes from a gender perspective. Our future as a continent depends on this co-operation, bringing together feminist researchers, activists and women's organizations in building a strong and effective women's movement.



# Lessons from Kenya: Women and the Post-Election Violence

L. Muthoni Wanyeki

On December 27, 2007, Kenya held its General Elections – the fourth since the return of multiparty democracy to Kenya in 1992. Given that the General Elections of 2002 had seen, finally, the removal of the Kenya African National Union from power by the National Rainbow Coalition, largely without incident, there was little expectation that anything could or would go wrong.

In some ways, that optimism was not misplaced. The 2007 General Elections were the most contested in Kenya's history, at all three levels – civic, parliamentary and presidential – even though it was clear that the presidential contest had come down to a struggle between the incumbent Mwai Kibaki, standing for the new Party of National Unity, and his erstwhile National Rainbow Coalition colleague, Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement. Despite facing sexism and, in at least one instance, lethal violence, more women made it through competitive political party nomination processes to stand for elective office than ever before. Furthermore, the fallout from those nominations led to the flourishing of political parties, which for the first time, enabled more young candidates to vie for elective office. More money was spent on campaigning than ever before – and, given the credence paid to accountability and transparency in word, if not in fact, by the NARC to accountability and transparency, much was made of the fact that campaign financing had not been drawn from the public purse. The Kenyan private sector and Diaspora reportedly contributed to both the PNU and ODM causes.

In retrospect, however, the warning signs were clear. The PNU and ODM, despite high-sounding, professionally run campaigns, complete with both presidential and political party visions, increasingly came to be regarded in ethnic terms. The PNU came to represent the incumbency dominance of the so-called 'Mount Kenya mafia' – that is the economic and political elite which is disproportionately represented in the executive branch and the public service sectors of government by the Gikuyu and allied communities such as the

Embu and Meru. The ODM came to represent essentially everybody else – but particularly the Luo and the Kalenjin. These facts brought to mind both the immediate post-independence contests between Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga, the father of Odinga, as well as the pre-NARC KANU government of former President Daniel Arap Moi – spectres of the much maligned left as well as of the equally maligned dictatorship.

The ground was thus fertile for what ensued. Campaigning, particularly through local language radio stations, took an ugly bent, with ethnically prejudiced and stereotyped coverage of both parties. The Kenyan blogs and online sites, populated primarily by a younger generation of Kenyans, many of whom lived abroad, did the same. Text messages circulated around the country, playing on angers and resentments arising from the material reality of historical and contemporary inequalities and injustices, but once again articulated and promoted as being ethnically based, and experienced as such too.

Given the ethnicities of the two presidential contenders – Gikuyu in the case of Kibaki and Luo in the case of Odinga – perhaps insufficient attention was paid to similar angers and resentments in other ethnic communities, particularly among the Kalenjin, whose leading politicians had cast their lot in with Odinga's ODM. What they did was entirely against the wishes of Moi and other senior Kalenjin politicians, who had thrown their weight behind Kibaki's PNU, (presumably in the interests of continuing to enjoy the impunity they had been afforded by NARC), and it should have raised more eyebrows. After all, pre-election violence had already been taking place in Kuresoi, a constituency in the predominantly Kalenjin Rift Valley. This violence was similar in form and outcome, to that experienced under Moi during the politically-instigated clashes that occurred during the lead up to the General Elections of 1992, 1997 and 2002. During those clashes, smallholding farmers who were not of Kalenjin origin had been forcibly and violently displaced by Kalenjin militia as part of a deliberate strategy to alter the presumed voting patterns of constituencies in the Rift Valley in favour of the incumbent KANU. Clashes also took place in coastal constituencies of the Coast for the same reason – the rationale being that those 'indigenous' to both the Coast and the Rift Valley would support KANU, while all those who were not non-Coastal and non-Kalenjin would support the opposition.

### **Fast forward to 2007**

Despite concerns raised about the displacement, and thus disenfranchisement

of would-be voters within Kuresoi, the campaign period proceeded relatively smoothly. Different domestic observers did express concern ranging from the pre-election violence (in Kuresoi and in Mount Elgon in the western part of the country, where violence was provoked by an unpopular settlement scheme) to the use of 'hate speech' that invoked both gender and ethnic animosities and objected to the misuse of public resources in campaigning. The Electoral Commission of Kenya continually stressed its lack of legal powers to address these issues. Additional concerns arose when new Commissioners to the Electoral Commission were appointed by the incumbent President, in a manner which breached the Inter Parties Parliamentary Group agreements made on the eve of the 1997 General Elections. These had stipulated that all such appointments were to be made in consultation with the official opposition.

Polling day proceeded relatively smoothly. As anticipated, domestic observers reported intimidation in the strongholds of both the ODM and PNU presidential candidates. There was an early morning alarm about missing registers for voters whose names were recognisably Luo (that is, names beginning with 'O') in the low-income areas of the Nairobi constituency of the ODM presidential candidate, which was fairly quickly resolved. Given, the intensity of the competition, voter turnout had been unusually high – ranging from 75 to 80 per cent as compared to previous highs of 65 per cent. Everything had nevertheless proceeded well and congratulations were due to both Kenyan citizens for turning out and the ECK for its management of the turnout. All settled down as the counting began that evening.

The night passed and results began coming in fairly fast from some constituencies. The next day, citizens began to anticipate an ODM win at the presidential level, especially since in the Rift Valley, constituency after constituency went to ODM. This went against the express wishes of former President Moi, whose three sons failed to make it through. However, all of a sudden, results stopped coming in. Official results – that is, those announced by the ECK Chair Samuel Kivuitu – in the ECK's headquarters began to differ from provisional results announced by returning officers on the ground in the presence of domestic and international observers, as well as the media, which was reporting live. The next morning, Kivuitu appeared and demanded that returning officers file their returns, stating that the only reason they could be taking so long was if they were altering the results. The day passed and at ODM's insistence, the ECK opened its tallying centre to representatives from both ODM and PNU, as well as to domestic observers, to verify the results

received. They worked overnight and by the next morning, it became clear that a host of anomalies, malpractices and illegalities had occurred with respect to some of the presidential returns and the tallying of these.

Tension built across the country. Towards the end of the day, Kivuitu attempted to declare Kibaki president. There was an immediate outcry within the ECK's headquarters from political party representatives, witnessed by both domestic and international observers, as well as domestic and international media. He retreated, together with his Commissioners to instead deliver a private announcement, witnessed only by the state 'public service' (still state) broadcaster, in which he declared Kibaki the winner. He appeared again about half an hour later at State House to attend the swearing in of Kibaki as President of the Republic by the Chief Justice in front of a small reception of PNU politicians and senior public servants.

Celebrations began in Central province, Kibaki's stronghold. The rest of the country – with the exception of Eastern province, home to the third but insignificant presidential candidate, and North East province – erupted in rage. Immediately, suppression followed and constitutionally-guaranteed rights to the freedoms of expression and association were violated, and bans imposed on live broadcasting and public demonstrations. The Kenya Police Force and the General Service Unit (a paramilitary force) were deployed in large numbers throughout Nairobi, particularly around Uhuru Park, where the ODM had called for a public rally to install Odinga as Kenya's legitimate president. Roads were blocked and commercial as well as residential properties were burnt and otherwise destroyed in all ODM strongholds – the low-income areas of Nairobi as well as Coast, Nyanza and Rift Valley provinces. Reports of extraordinary use of force by the Kenya Police Force, including extrajudicial executions were received from Nyanza province. Nairobi Women's Hospital reported an upsurge in cases of sexual violence – with such cases being three times the normal intake. The cases primarily involved girls and women from the low-income areas of Nairobi. In these areas, on the one hand, protest demonstrations by ODM supporters were being suppressed by the Kenya Police Force and, on the other hand, confrontations between ODM and PNU supporters had taken an ethnic bent – with those from communities perceived to be aligned to either side being forced into ethnically homogenous areas for their own safety. The cases of sexual violence against women were, at this point, believed to be largely opportunistic – related to the general breakdown of law and order and the upsurge of criminality of all kinds. However, reports were also received of

the forced circumcision, and in some cases castration, of Luo men believed to be ODM supporters. In these instances, obviously, the sexual violence was instrumental. Forcible and violent displacements were reported throughout the Rift Valley – with initially all non-Kalenjin, believed to be supporters of the PNU being the primary targets. Later, counter-attacks moving out from Nairobi into the Rift Valley targeted all non-Gikuyu, believed to be supporters of the ODM. At the end of it all, an estimated 350,000 Kenyans had been internally displaced and the death toll from the post-elections violence had mounted to a final tally of over 1,000.

The violence initially took three forms, with sexual violence cutting across all three. First, in the low-income areas of Nairobi as well as the Coast and Nyanza, there were spontaneous protests, expressed violently. Second, the Kenya Police Force and the GSU responded with extraordinary use of force, including EJE in these areas. And third, there was organised violence in the Rift Valley, involving forced displacements and the destruction of property.

All three forms soon mutated. As the spontaneous protests in the form of attempted demonstrations involving the destruction of property, died down – or rather, were violently suppressed, also by informal militia allied to the PNU – the protests took the form of economic sabotage. Mombasa's port – key not just to the capital, but also to the hinterland of Somalia, Southern Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi – was blocked. The railway line leading from Mombasa to the hinterland was torn up in Nairobi and at the Ugandan border. The Kenya Police Force and the GSU retreated in the face of national, regional and international condemnation, but began intimidating human rights defenders and the media. And the organised violence in the north Rift also turned to economic sabotage as those targeted left, blocking key transit roads passing through the Rift Valley. They were responded to by equally organised violence in Central and Nairobi against perceived ODM supporters. This counter-offensive, backed by PNU and the formal security sector then moved out from Nairobi into the south Rift. As the Kalenjin and the Gikuyu militia entrenched themselves in the north and south Rift, with Nakuru being the dividing line, the country began to fear that civil war was imminent.

The sexual violence included not just the rape of women, but also the forced circumcision (and, in some instances, castration) of Luo men who, traditionally, do not circumcise. The outbreak of sexual violence seems to have been facilitated by the general breakdown in law and order, but the forced circumcisions of women and men seems more specific. Similar acts were

perpetrated during the counter-offensive of the Gikuyu militia moving from Nairobi into the south Rift. This militia claimed the name of *Mungiki* (the masses), a Gikuyu militia that has been active in Kenya since the politically-instigated clashes of the 1990s. Mungiki's leaders deny being involved, although they admit that they had been approached by PNU politicians interested in the 'self-defence' effort. Indeed, at Mungiki's formation, it had urged a return to culture and tradition (as defined by itself, predominantly young Gikuyu men), including for women, a return to female genital mutilation and a prohibition on wearing trousers. The Gikuyu militia that moved into the south Rift, although not Mungiki as such but under the leadership of a former Mungiki leader, enforced the ban on women wearing trousers in Naivasha and Nakuru towns and 'punished' – through gang rape and other violence – Gikuyu women found to be involved with men from other communities or sheltering those from other communities.

Other forms of gender-based violence also emerged within the camps that had been rapidly set up to house the internally displaced. The Kenya Red Cross, despite not having the capacity to handle a humanitarian effort of this size, insisted on leading the humanitarian and relief effort. The International Red Cross quietly backed it, as did all of the UN agencies normally involved in humanitarian and relief efforts. The face of the response was thus Kenyan – and Kenyans, following appeals through the media and the private sector – gave in quantity. Donations did not only include goods, but also services such as trauma counselling from Kenya's professional counsellors, psychotherapists and psychologists. However, reports soon emerged about girls and women within the camps engaging in transactional sex with volunteer relief workers and formal security workers in exchange for supplies and security. Sexual violence among internally displaced persons was also reported – particularly for girls and women, many of whom had lost the male members of their families, in the post-elections violence. Other gender related concerns quickly came to the fore, such as the disruption of livelihoods and access to social services within the camps. One example here is of women smallholder farmers in the Rift Valley, Kenya's cash crop and food breadbasket, who had been responsible more for subsistence agriculture than cash crop export agriculture (with the exception of female workers on the horticultural farms around Naivasha and on the tea farms around Kericho). The sale of surplus to domestic markets had nevertheless been an important income-earner at the household level. However, they had been entirely unable to access their farms.

Women living with HIV were unable, in the initial period of the displacement, to access anti-retrovirals.

Fortunately, efforts by the African Union eventually paid off – enabled by increasingly intense domestic and international pressure. The full story of the turnaround has yet to be told – and it must be, for the complex, contradictory and yet ultimately principled response of Kenya’s civil society and, eventually, private sector together with that of the diplomatic community and the rest of the world, worked. The AU’s unequivocal response to Kenya was unprecedented – and stands out as one of its finest successes to date, with the full yet quiet logistical and technical support of the United Nations. Under the leadership of former UN Secretary General, Dr. Kofi Annan, as key negotiator, acting on behalf of the AU’s Presidency together with Graca Machel for the AU’s African Peer Review Mechanism, and former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa for the AU’s Forum of Retired African Presidents, the ODM and the PNU committed to the mediation process known as the National Dialogue and Reconciliation Process. Agenda Item One of the mediation processes was to immediately end the violence and included the disarmament and demobilisation of all armed groups and militia; the Kenya Police Force and the GSU required to act within the boundaries of the Constitution and the law; joint meetings across the country by the ODM and the PNU; and the possibility of preventive military deployment.

As the principals appended their signatures to the mediation process agenda on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2008, a ceasefire of sorts went into effect. Across the country, the bars filled with Kenyans wishing each other, finally, ‘Happy New Year!’ Although the hard negotiations still lay ahead, Kenya had pulled back from the brink.

For Kenyan women though, many concerns remain, which must be addressed in the mechanisms and processes arising from the mediation process, namely the Commission of Inquiry into the Post Elections Violence (to address the immediate violence), the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (to address the underlying causes of the violence) and the newly-begun re-settlement process for IDPs, Operation Rudi Nyumbani (return home). The Kenyan women’s movement responded to the violence with attempts to document women’s experiences and respond with increased services, as well as with advocacy to ensure that those involved in the humanitarian and relief effort did the same. However, a lot of work lies ahead to ensure justice for the women who were affected.





# In Conversation

## Women Mobilising for Peace:

Margo Okazawa-Rey speaks with Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff

In October 2007, the African Gender Institute began a new initiative on Gender and Militarism by convening a regional workshop on Gender and Militarism that was attended by a small group of researchers and activists working on conflict, peace building and security issues in Rwanda, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. Margo Okazawa-Rey of the International Network of Women for Peace and Security co-hosted the meeting, and took the opportunity to engage Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, a member of the Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission and Vice President of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in the following conversation.

**Margo Okazawa-Rey:** You are currently one of five Commissioners for human rights in Sierra Leone. Can you tell us a little bit about how you became involved in human rights work, and particularly, about your interest in gender?

**Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff:** I became involved in human rights work because I come from a family of active politicians. My father is a party-political person, and my mother was involved in all sorts of women's work and volunteerism and women's empowerment activism. I've always been interested in doing something in the public as well as my own private work. When I came back from the UK as a young lawyer, my mother would draft me in to attend all her seminars and write papers on women's human rights issues. All that prepared me to begin realising that women's situation was quite bad. I come from a background according to which when you see something wrong, you have to do something about it – I suppose that's how I got involved in women's organizations.

During the military rule and because of the war, like many other women in Sierra Leone, I became radicalized. Very early on we could see that women were suffering disproportionately, and we could also see that women's experiences weren't being seen or heard. You didn't hear what was happening to them on the news. People didn't talk about it, and I found myself getting

more active and involved in the women's movement, where my mother was already involved. I got involved with the question of trying to return to civilian rule and women getting involved in the peace process.

I continued with women's activism when we went to Guinea during the war, when we were forced out of Sierra Leone by the military coup. By then I was in the leadership of the women's movement and we very much supported the idea of non-cooperation with the military. We encouraged people to stay away from work and leave the country. So we went abroad because we took the position that we would not cooperate with government unless they returned power to the democratically elected government. In Guinea, I got involved with some other African women I had already met, who were also working on women's issues.

**MOR:** You mentioned the impact of militarism and wars on women as a specific turning point in your own development and consciousness. Could you talk a little bit more about how you were affected, and what insights you gained?

**YJS:** There were two experiences that had a great impact on me. While in Guinea, we did a needs-assessment amongst the refugee population, where we met a young woman who had been chased by the war from Liberia to Sierra Leone to Guinea. She suggested that the solution to this conflict was for women in the three countries to get together and take collective action to stop the war. The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was born out of her idea.

The second experience was also with a woman I met in a refugee camp in Guinea, who was someone I knew from Sierra Leone. She told me that one of the reasons that she was living in Guinea was because the refugee camp outside Freetown where she and her children had been living had been subjected to a terrible attack. The women there had taken their children and run for their lives – there were no men there. They came to a military checkpoint, and the soldiers told them they weren't allowed to go any further. It was too late in the day – they had to spend the night at that military checkpoint. So they lay down on the ground by the checkpoint with their children, without any shelter. They didn't want to go into the bush because they were scared. They were worried that armed rebels would come and attack them. So they stayed as close to the soldiers as they could. And as they lay there, they could hear the news on the radio when it came on at 8 o'clock. They said "Shhhh, listen! They are bound to say something about this attack!"

– because it was such a serious attack – everybody had been scattered. But they listened to the news right through to the end, and nothing was said about it. Yet many people had been wounded and killed, and had run for their lives! She said it was a really shocking experience.

The next day the soldiers allowed them to pass, and they came to Freetown and everybody was just going about their business. Nobody knew anything about what had happened. She went to look for me, but I wasn't in town. Now, she said to me, "You know we could have been killed and nobody would have known." And that really struck me. In some ways, we African women, we just don't exist. Nobody sees. People are just blind to us. After these experiences, I felt that I had to commit myself to hearing 'her' and seeing 'her'.

We had a similar experiences ourselves, when we got to Conakry, myself and my friends – elite women, professional women, women who were used to being 'somebody' normally. And we were treated with such contempt as refugees. Many of us did not speak French, but we were just Leone, as they used to call us. Many Guineans were very kind, but many of them felt that we had brought this thing on ourselves, that we were just slack. Guinea is a predominantly Muslim country, and there were Sierra Leoneans who drank alcohol, but there was just a lot of prejudice.

**MOR:** And moral judgment?

**YJS:** Exactly. Somehow we had brought this war on ourselves – "Look at them, they are decadent, they are lazy". We had to go and meet the UNDP resident representative to Sierra Leone, who now had an office in Conakry, because she called for a meeting with those of us she had been meeting with in Sierra Leone. We turned up in public transport, not in cars like we would have before. And we got to the front of this office and there were these guards. We tried to sweep past and go in, but they stopped us and demanded our identity cards. In Conakry you always have to produce your identity card. But you know, as Sierra Leoneans we didn't have identity cards, so he turned us back. It was a shocking experience. Some of the women were in tears. We were so disempowered!

All of these experiences showed me that I had to do something. I had to make sure I didn't behave in the way I had been taught. If this young woman with nothing could have this great idea about creating a regional women's peace organization, then I decided I had to do my best to actualize it. I could see that she had actually thought about it and it meant a lot to her. I

am really cross with myself that we didn't take her name. It was just in the nature of the conversation - while carrying out the survey - we didn't take anyone's name. But I am really sorry that we aren't able to acknowledge her more.

We had a women's group in Guinea, women who had been active in the Women's Forum in Sierra Leone. Starting in 1994, women had been very active in bringing about a return to civilian rule. Our 'Democratization and Empowerment Project' was interrupted by the military coup of May 1997. So when we went into exile, we were fairly well organized. I continued to work with these women, and to network with other African women, particularly with women from Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS). FAS is a regional organization that seeks to support and promote indigenous women's peace initiatives. So we talked to FAS and that's how we went about forming MARWOPNET. It took a long time. We met this woman in September of 1997, and the first meeting to establish MARWOPMET took place in May 2000.

**MOR:** Three years later!

**YJS:** Yes, and we went on from there. By May 2000, the crisis had really deepened. There was a lot of violence and many problems for Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees. The war was at its worst. I think that was the worst point - a lot of difficulties. Women were really spurred into action. It was good that we were able to connect to Guinean women, because all the time that we were in Guinea up until about May 1998, we had some contact with them, but we never really succeeded in getting them to understand or empathize fully with our situation. I understood where that was coming from, because we, ourselves, had not had complete compassion when we had looked at the situation of Liberian women refugees in Sierra Leone. I went to Liberia at this time, and the man who was driving around had told me about his terrible experiences in Sierra Leone as a refugee, with landlords who wouldn't allow you to cook on certain days of the week, or to cook certain things in their houses, or who got cross if you did your prayers at the wrong time of the day. So I wasn't as upset with the Guineans as some of the other Sierra Leoneans were, because I remembered that we hadn't been as good as we should have been to our refugees. That is a big issue for me - just being kind to strangers.

**MOR:** Yes, and here you were, three neighboring groups of women, who in some ways saw each other and in some ways didn't, and this crisis presents an

opportunity for you all to see each other in different ways than you had before. YJS: Absolutely. It not only enabled us to see each other in the three counties but also within the country. Because, one of the things that happened with that experience outside UNDP, was that for the first time I really understood women who did not speak English within Sierra Leone. It is not that you are not smart, it is not that you are not a good person. But you are completely disempowered – you don't have the language. You could be anybody, but actually you are just stupid.

MOR: That is a very important lesson.

YJS: That has shaped a lot of what I have tried to do. Therefore, I have always thought that part of what I should do is to facilitate more women to find their voices, in so many different ways.

MOR: You said that before the outbreak in 1997, there was a growing women's movement. What were some of the basic principles of that Sierra Leone women's movement, and how were those principles or values shaped by what happened subsequently?

YJS: The war had actually started in 1991. And in Sierra Leone there had always been quite a powerful and pervasive idea of women acting collectively. We have a lot of traditional women's societies. Women are in women's groups, they are in church groups, they are in *Bundu* societies (women's secret societies). Women normally would belong to some kind of collective. Having been forced out of direct party politics through violence, women put a lot of their efforts into welfare associations, women's organizations.

These women's organizations were galvanized by the inefficiency with which the authorities were handling the war. Right from the start of the war, there was this business of the difference between the propaganda and the reality. The government was "winning the war and there was nothing going on", but hundreds of people were turning up in Freetown in complete distress, coming with terrible stories of what was happening at the warfront. And the government was saying that nothing was happening. Throughout the 1990's, women's organizations had to fill that gap in the social safety net because the government refused to do anything, because it refused to admit that there was a problem. The women were saying, "we have to do something", because the government was not fighting the war very efficiently, and the rebels were moving in very fast, it seemed. We couldn't be sure that we weren't going to wake up and find them in Freetown.

MOR: So there was a great deal of insecurity and unpredictability.

**YJS:** Yes, and fear. So out of that, you had the Women's Movement for Peace in Freetown, which was an organization that set about bringing women together to work for peace, and other women's organizations also became much more active and vocal. There were now also newer, smaller organizations, like the ones I was a part of – women organizing for a more enlightened nation, which were more 'small 'p' political'. We were all very much concerned with bringing about an end to military rule. The Women's Forum, which had previously been a space created for women just to be able to meet and talk about their issues, now this was taken up as the space in which we could mobilize, radicalize, and empower women for more activity. We were helped by the fact that there were all these networks that had been in existence all over the country before the war – like YWCA, the Catholic women's organizations, the Women's Association for National Development. The national electoral commission said to us "Help us to bring women from all over the country", and we wouldn't have known what to do, but I spoke to my mother, and she knew 30 women from all over the country, and she knew exactly who to contact. So those networks were still there – they had been submerged, but they were operational, and the women all knew each other. If I phoned up and said "I am calling because your name was given to me by so-and-so", they would say "Yes, of course! I'll be there".

**MOR:** So you built on existing credibility and connections among women. So when the gatherings happened, did they represent all of the sectors of women? Rural women, urban women, middle class, upper class, poor women?

**YJS:** Yes, very much so. Yes, obviously, as these things are, the elite women will dominate. But in Freetown, we had many displaced women, a lot of displaced rural women, but women's organizations worked with them. They did a lot of training, capacity building, economic empowerment work. There were networks that concentrated particularly on them. So they would attend, and they had links into their communities, and we were able to get a broad spectrum. Even now, I can go to many parts of the country, and a woman will recognize me from something I did in 1995.

**MOR:** So that was a great feat, really, wasn't it?

**YJS:** Yes, it was a big achievement. It was very empowering. It is still.

**MOR:** So how was it empowering for you, and how do you take those lessons to the work you are doing now? How do you relate the lessons from those times to the work you are doing now?

YJS: Well, a lot of it is very positive. Ten years from when we started, women are still ready to continue political action, which is very good. So in MARWOPNET, when I became the head of the Sierra Leone chapter, I was very much interested in expanding it out of Freetown. At the time when it came into existence, because of the war, the countryside was not easily accessible. So from 2000 to 2004, MARWOPNET remained very much focused in Freetown. Women from Freetown would go out, and the people that we met out there were at first, more beneficiaries than actors. However, since 2004, what I have tried to do is to make real this business of bringing in the marginalized. To go to the border communities and make the connection, so that they can talk to me, and I can either help them to talk to whoever they need to talk to, or I can speak to someone on their behalf. I felt really wonderful when I overheard a woman in one of the districts telling a friend, "If they tell you that they are going to take you to see the President, they will take you to see the President. You will get there!" So we try to keep to the principle of facilitating them to be able to speak for themselves. It can be difficult, but it is actually not as difficult as you think, because they are really talented. It is just opportunity or skills or introductions that they lack.

MOR: So these experiences challenged your assumptions about who the women really are?

YJS: Yes. Well, maybe not. When I think back I recall that my grandmother was a very big influence on my life. On the surface you would see a non-educated, poor African woman. If you saw a photograph of her, you would think, "Who is that?" But in fact, I knew that she had a lot of capacity, a lot of resources, a lot of skills. When I went to do my Masters in human rights law, I did Islamic law. And as I was reading through Islamic matrimonial law, I recognized all these things that my grandmother used to say to me. I realized that her knowledge of Malachi law, Islamic law, was absolutely spot-on. She knew it in and out.

MOR: And she didn't have an LLM...

YJS: Exactly! And everything she had said was correct. Many of the younger Muslim generation, my own generation, do not know anything about it. I remember my aunt telling me how their father insisted that the women learn the Koran as much as the men. She used to grumble about it because he said that they had to do it in spite of all their other chores. I realized that he had insisted, and he really had taught them, because after that I spoke

with my aunts, and they also were quite learned.

I also didn't realize until recently that there is a tradition of female scholarship in Islam. I hadn't been aware of that. There is a book, the biography of Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Usmanu 'Dan Fodio, the Nigerian Islamic warrior king who established a theocratic state, the Sokoto Caliphate, in Northern Nigeria. Apparently, he had a daughter who was a scholar and a teacher.

MOR: So your grandmother inspired you?

YJS: Yes, definitely.

MOR: Who else inspired you?

YJS: Well, many of the women in my family were very inspirational, I think. My mother is a librarian who is interested in history and family history, genealogy. That is why I have all these wonderful stories.

MOR: Yes, I can see it. Earlier when we were in the workshop, you mentioned the "difference between the ladies at the border and the ladies on the hill" as a metaphor for division between the women in the academy and the women in the grassroots or NGOs. What kind of relationship would you like those two groups of women to have? What do you see as the potential for the two groups to be working together?

YJS: There was another woman who I was very friendly with, a woman called Hajia Aisha Sasu. She was a Krio woman, a Christian woman who became a Muslim when she got married. One of the things that Hajia said to me was, "You are educated, and you have all these skills, now you have to use them for *us*. Don't imagine for one second that God educated you for yourself only. No, it's for a purpose." And that's what I think is lost. I think the women in the university don't understand the connection between themselves and the women in the community. When you live in some parts of Africa, you can be just overwhelmed by guilt because you have so much and others have so little.

MOR: Because of the vast inequalities within countries?

YJS: Exactly. I used to say to my friends in university who know that I am part of the comprador class, part of the enemy. But you can do what Hajia would ask you to do. For example, she said to us, "I don't like this word 'grassroots'. It means that we are down there and you are stamping on us. Go away and come back with another word." Eventually we came back with 'community-level women', which she approved of. So, if you can do what Hajia asked you to do, I believe that it is a very satisfying thing,



because it means that you can use your skills for other people and you get so much in return. If you have within yourself a tendency to the ‘collective’ (as opposed to the Western ‘individualizing’ culture), if you don’t work with the people at the community level, if you don’t keep yourself connected to your African-ness, this is where you begin to have problems.

In the university, women are very individualized, so they are easily victimized. I have had bad experiences in the public, official domain where I have felt very victimized, alone and unprotected. So, I think connecting is a benefit to both sides because our work will have value. Coming together gives people more ways to see and understand themselves, and to live with themselves. Because some of the experiences that the women have had, you don’t have language for it. It is beyond comprehension. In the kind of society you have been brought up in, some of the barbarity, you don’t have the language for it. Other people can come and give you the words that would help you to understand, process and deal with your experience.

MOR: So in some ways, part of the work is helping people to become multi-lingual – to have various languages for different situations. And in your experience with Hajia, it sounds like you also had to re-conceptualize. It wasn’t just about the word ‘grassroots’ but you yourself as ‘teacher’ were also ‘learner’. It was a reciprocal process.

YJS: Absolutely. One was constantly learning, and I think I am a natural disciple. I like to learn. Now I am beginning to realize that I do have some leadership capability, but I think my natural instinct has always been to be a follower.

MOR: Really? I can’t imagine that!

YJS: Yes. And it’s just more recently, now that I am coming to accept myself and say, “No, Yasmin. Some of your problems arise because in some situations, you want to lead, you can lead, and you should”. During such moments, forcing yourself to be the disciple is not helpful.

MOR: Also, we dichotomize leadership and follower-ship, and I wonder if you have thought about how the two are actually related. If you think about feminist leadership, what would you say are the three most important principles of feminist leadership – leadership for real women’s liberation?

YJS: Goodness! Well, it would have to involve listening, wouldn’t it? And I suppose the Christian idea of service – “The first shall be the last and the last shall be the first”. That would also be part of it. That’s two! You give me another one.

**MOR:** I think it would have to be something about a participatory process, and not a hierarchical process.

**YJS:** Yes. Because for years, for instance, in the Women's Forum, we had this idea of a rotating Chair. Each month one organization would take charge of the Forum and chair the meetings and implement all the activities. I thought it was a wonderful idea, but there were those who insisted that it wouldn't work. You know, the government wants to know, on any particular day, who the President of the Forum is, so that the President can talk to the President. In the end, they bureaucratized the Women's Forum, and it died!

**MOR:** It took the life out of it?

**YJS:** Yes. So now you have an executive that just talks to itself. Nobody else turns up. And you have all these formal structures, but no dynamism. The donors were very instrumental in this process.

**MOR:** I have one more question for you. We talked a lot about security and human security and human security for women. What do you think are the key elements of that?

**YJS:** I think one of the key elements of human security would be the need for consistency and certainty for people in their lives, at every level. That is an ideal, it is something to which we aspire. But I think the more certainty and coherence people have, the more they can understand their environment and be able to control it to some extent. That feeling – that it is not completely out of your control, whatever it is. And so for that, you would need to have some information and some openness. I think information is also important, because information allows you to make choices. So you can decide for yourself. You have autonomy. How people perceive themselves is a very important part of human security.

Then, I think human rights and economic and social rights are an important component – the fact that you are able to enjoy or have the opportunity to access your right to food, your right to education and health. Our own past experience shows that police and soldiers don't have much to do with security.

**MOR:** No, it's just the opposite, probably.

**YJS:** I know that if people have autonomy and information, they can secure themselves. And I think that creating the opportunity for people to be able to secure themselves is an important part of human security.

**MOR:** So that concept of self-determination, not just in the individual sense, but in the collective sense.

YJS: Yes. I think participation - the opportunity to be heard, to really participate in the decision-making - is very important. Local government, government that is close to you, is an important part of what I would see as security.

MOR: Thank you very much.



# In Conversation

## Healing Work with War Survivors:

Margo Okazawa-Rey speaks with Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng about ISIS-WICCE's work with women in northern Uganda

Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng, the Executive Director of the Kampala-based women's network Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE), attended the AGI workshop on Gender and Militarism held in Cape Town in October 2007, where she shared the many challenges of Isis-WICCE's pathbreaking work with women in conflict zones. In this conversation with Margo Okazawa-Rey, Ruth shares the personal experiences and insights that led her to establish an extensive outreach programme through which she and her team document and mobilize support systems, and develop self-help among women surviving in some of Africa's most marginalized and neglected conflict zones. She describes how the methodology they used to intervene and support women in local communities relied on the gradual building of trusting and close relationships with women who suffered shocking levels of violence and had little support or treatment. Instead, many have been compelled to secrecy and silence for fear of repudiation and ostracism, and hence are living with their personal trauma, sometimes for years.

Isis-WICCE is an international network that was originally based in Switzerland, but moved its offices to Uganda in 1993. It works to promote women's human rights by documenting women's realities and providing skills training. The core purpose of their work is to promote the fundamental human rights of women through networking, action oriented documentation of women's experiences, and cross-cultural exchange of skills.

**Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng:** My first degree was in Information and Communication, and then I did a Masters in Communication Studies. So when I came back home, I felt I needed to do something different, that would really show some change, while linking in with what I had studied. Isis-WICCE came along with

their advertisement – and the advertisement was put in such a way that I immediately said to myself, “This is it.” So I went to Isis, met my new director. I immediately told her, “If we wish to tap the voices of the African women, then the only way to do this is to go the women, not to sit here and women come to this process. The information we have in this documentation center has nothing to do with African women.” It wasn’t easy, but I did manage to convince her.

When we went out to start documenting the voices of women in situations of conflict, the first time I heard them – much as I lived in a conflict country – I could not believe that someone who had gone through such experiences could even be talking. I started feeling so pained that I began talking to everybody I met to try to make them understand the horrors that these women were living through. I started wondering: how do I attract the eye and the ear of whoever I am talking to? How do I get them to listen, to begin to comprehend what women are going through? I recalled that in communication studies we are taught ‘seeing is believing’. That’s when I decided that the only thing that is going to make these people believe what I am saying about women is to have them see it – to put it on film.

One of my colleagues said, “You are crazy Ruth. Who among the women who have been raped or who went through those humiliating experiences is going to be willing to talk on our video? Women are so shy about the camera.” She was right. I said, “Yes, that is true. But I must find a way to let them know that this is a way that their lives can be transformed.” So the documentation was not just about the idea of going and *talking* to women, but I planned it in such a way that I integrated the idea of *sharing*. When we go into a village, we start by just sharing – sharing their homes, their children. But in the back of my mind, I knew that in the course of the sharing we were going to touch on their lives in situations of conflict, even if we started with life at home. To my surprise, the women never even talked about life at home. They were ready to start talking about what they saw and experienced during the conflict, and how, if they had known what was coming earlier, they would have picked up their children and gone to another district. So, in that way we began talking in quite a relaxed manner, where someone would say, “I know the woman who really went through this ...” and they would not say “rape” they would say “Those soldiers forced themselves on her.” We would sit and talk at length – for three or four hours. Then they would begin to see how useful it is just to talk. It is only when one talks that someone can know what

is in your life, and share your burden. One woman said to me, “These three times you have come, I find myself not having this thing which was on my chest. I can now feel much better when I go back to remember.”

There were a lot of ideas about how to do this well. I would go to meet them with some gift - something like a pound of sugar. After all, we had brought them away from their homes, and when they returned, the men would say to them, “You went moving around and what have you brought back?” So small things - a kilo of sugar, or giving them transport back to their community would go far. They began to see that I was empathizing with them. We became very close. Every time I went, they would say, “How are you?! How is Kampala?” And that enabled them to open up and some of them are now coming in privately to say, you know, “I have something I want to say that I can’t say in that group”. I would say, “That’s fine. Do you want to come and say it in Kampala?” And she says, “Yes because I don’t even want my husband to know.” So that’s when I started getting the stories of actual sexual violence. In groups they would just be talking about how they were beaten and how husbands were taken, how they were tortured, how their children were abducted. But when it comes to sexual violence they would say, “I know of a woman in a village, eh!” But by the end of the first month, these same women were coming quietly, individually, to say they wanted to say something more. That’s where I got shocked, because some of them came with really terrible, terrible ailments.

**Margo Okazawa-Rey:** Physical injuries?

**ROO:** Physical! I was sitting with them and at first, little did I know. You know that most villagers cannot afford medical help. So I could smell something like urine, but as some had children, I thought it was just the baby’s urine, or perhaps they didn’t have soap - sometimes I would come with soap. It wasn’t until they opened up individually that I realized how terrible the things were. Because one day, one of them - Betty Nyambura was her name - she said to me, “I need a place to show you how I am *down there*” - she just said *down there*. And we agreed that she was going to come to Kampala and we would go to my house, for privacy. So she came, and my goodness... She opened up her clothes, and I had never seen anything like what I saw. At first I thought, “Why did God make this woman like this?” But then she told me:

“I was raped four times. One time they locked me in a room with others. I don’t know how many men raped me because it was dark - there was no light! They would come in and just rape. Then we were able to escape. While I was

running back into my village I came across a roadblock. There were other men”.

She was repeatedly raped, and she counted about 21 men on that occasion, and said that ever since, whenever she urinates or defecates, everything just mixes. I was deeply shocked and confused by what she showed me. Of course I went to my colleagues and I said, “I have seen something I have never seen in my life.” They said, “What is it?” So I described it to them, and they said, “No! Maybe you didn’t see properly.” I said, “No! It was in my house, there is light!” So, that actually just turned me around.

I consulted with a Professor of Gynaecology and she explained to me that what I was seeing was the woman’s uterus. She told me that, when you get that kind of rape – it can be dislodged because of the force. She had what is called a vaginal fistula. But worse still, because Betty was not treated for STIs, she had also suffered chronic infection. I said “Oh my God, now what are we going to do!?”

Later on, when we started documenting women’s experiences at other places, I saw this very often.

**MOR:** So that is what mass rape leaves behind?

**ROO:** When I saw all of these things, I began presenting this everywhere I went. In Europe they would tell me, “Please don’t tell us! No, that is too much, that is too much!” In African countries they would either brush it off or block it. At some stage I realized that I was simply not drawing these people in emotionally, to care about the fact that these things are happening to women in conflict zones, and this further motivated me to find women who would talk.

The Isis-WICCE exchange program works by bringing women from all over the world who have experienced conflict to come and share. So I decided that when we had an exchange in Kampala, we would get all these women to go to this rural district to share with local women.

**MOR:** Oh, what a great idea!

**ROO:** Yes. So there were Filipinas and Sudanese women, women who came from Kosovo, Colombia, Cambodia – many women who are not Africans. The whole idea was to take them to meet with the women in our villages. We sat down under a tree and these women started sharing with the help of a translator. Gladys looked at this woman from the Philippines, who was saying they have women who were raped during WWII, 50 years ago, and up to today they are asking for justice. And the only way they managed to continue with this is because they went on talking to different people, and then she



said, “We recorded all this”. When she finished Gladys put up her hand that she wanted to share.

MOR: That’s quite something!

ROO: She said, “Ruth this time I am going to talk on video. I know I have been telling you not to film, but I know I am already HIV positive and I am going to die. But my talking on video – now I have seen it will help other women to know what I went through. And maybe it will encourage them to stop war from coming to them. Because if I did not open up to you, today I would already be dead.” At that time ARVs were not available in Uganda – but we had made sure she got some treatment, and later we cared for her children.

MOR: She would have died without that.

ROO: When she was in the hospital on her deathbed she said, “I know even when I die, I will die in dignity because there are people who will care.” She allowed for that to be on video. I went and produced a very short video – just 5 minutes, about her life. And you can’t believe how it changed people’s lives! Even the women who had been silent now changed. I produced tapes with translation, but I also made them in the local language. Since then I have never had a problem with women not wanting to talk about their sexual abuse. Surprisingly, when we went to northern Uganda I didn’t really need to use this video. They were all ready.

MOR: They had heard about you.

ROO: Yes. So they were ready to talk, but I think its about the approach we use. Even in other countries – like Southern Sudan, we find that women will share their stories. The whole approach is respectful and confidential – I tell them we want to use their voices for people to hear and to know the truth. I avoid making promises to them, but tell them that when people hear their voices they will respond. In fact, after some time the women started mobilizing themselves. They started going back into their districts, after they had come to see the doctors we had mobilized, and actually began making their own interventions, which had nothing to do with Isis-WICCE. After a while, we went back to train them on how to identify victims, and how to counsel each other. They have now become group therapists within their own local communities!

MOR: That’s remarkable.

ROO: Yes. The women are now activists themselves. The only thing we did was to facilitate them coming out. There are some very strong women who

now advocate for their own communities. Even the government of Uganda has responded. Of course we engaged them on behalf of the women in the first place and said, “Look, you need to do something!” And the government was like, “We have done everything in that region! What are you saying? You are saying we have done nothing!”. The good thing was, by that time, the Minister of Disaster Preparedness, who used to be called the Minister of Post-Conflict Rehabilitation, was a woman. So she said, “No, no, no. Luwero Triangle? We have done everything!” So I said, “You know, it would be nice for you, if you have time, to let us take you to this district and you will really see how these women live.” When she agreed we were like, “Thank God!”. So what we did was to plan with the women. Then we went village to village to show her how women were living and she could not believe what she saw! Immediately she went back to her office and ordered that iron sheets and cement be given to the women to make homes for themselves. That also made the women say. “Oh my God! It is about speaking out.” So that gave us the energy to continue documenting.

**MOR:** It sounds as if initially though you had to bring yourself to the process so you were connected and developed some kind of reciprocity in your relationship with the women. There were all kinds of ‘little things’ you did that made a difference: the kilo of sugar, the ride somewhere.

**ROO:** That is very important. In academic research I know there is a saying, “Oh that means you are biasing people.”

**MOR:** That is a conventional academic view, but these days there is a deeper understanding of social relations in research processes, so that is not necessarily so.

**ROO:** No, it’s not about that. Having a relationship actually enables your respondent to realize that you actually care for her. I would even go and sit with them, and know their children too. Most of us had our own children – so we would gather our children’s old clothes for their babies and just go and say, “Look, we don’t have anything much, but – here”. As we grew closer, that’s how they started telling me – you know, “Even that one was raped” or “That one, the husband even refused to take her back, so she is by herself.”

**MOR:** And did they actually eventually start using the word ‘rape’ or did they still use euphemisms?

**ROO:** No. Traditionally, among African women there is that perception that the person who sleeps with you must take you as a wife, but here we were dealing with women who were already married. So they could not call themselves

wives of their rapists. But later on they started using their local language, the terminology for rape, “They forced themselves on me.”

**MOR:** So they developed a language for their experience.

**ROO:** Of course. I never knew that they had it, but they did. Because that is not my language. But now when they talked and we went and translated it, then the women who come from that community said, “What they are saying is that ‘they forcefully had sex with me’”, which is rape. Then of course they started opening up to say,

“I feel dirty. I have never told my husband. Whenever he wants sex, I just feel the hurt. It becomes so terrible, sometimes I just find myself throwing him away. And it has caused problems between me and my husband, because my husband thinks I am having sex somewhere else. He does not know that whenever he wants to have sex with me, that image comes back.”

**MOR:** Like a retraumatizing experience.

**ROO:** Exactly. And that’s how we now picked the issue of working with physiologists and psychiatrists. Because Professor M told me, “I have listened to this audio, but Ruth, these women, some of them have reproductive problems, but for others, it is their mind.” So you need to bring a holistic approach to whatever you do. Bring psychiatrists, gynecologists and psychologists. Some of them, because of the rape, would say, “My stomach is painful.”

**MOR:** Psychosomatic pain?

**ROO:** Yes. But then the doctors have found nothing. Professor M told me, “Yes, it is in their minds.” So when women started opening up, we realised that we needed to bring the professionals on board so they could see how these women could be helped. They would always say, “But Ruth, don’t ever tell my husband, because if he knows I was raped then he is going to throw me out because of HIV/AIDS and I don’t have anywhere else to go.” At the same time we also wanted them to enjoy their life, so it was important for us to find how to do it. So we brought some psychologists in and started working with them slowly. After two years, women began to come to me saying, “Thank you much. That doctor you sent me helped me quite a lot.”

**MOR:** And what kind of therapy did she do with her? Individual talk therapy or group?

**ROO:** It was group, because we identified them and they would come in a group and she would just talk to them. It proved to be an expensive

venture because we had to do it very many times. The ministry didn't have the money so we had to fundraise. But the most interesting thing that the psychologist did was, after putting them together for about 3 months in therapy, she developed it in such a way that they now came together and started as a group.

**MOR:** Kind of a self-help group?

**ROO:** Yes. She helped them to know that they had done nothing wrong, and what they had suffered should not stop them from enjoying sex with their husbands. This woman comes and tells me, "I have started enjoying sex with my husband. I try to do what the doctor says and the fear just goes and I continue. And the friction between me and him has also reduced." Of course she also helped those who were worried about HIV/AIDS, she helped them to get tested.

**MOR:** But how was this secrecy maintained? How can the husbands not know?

**ROO:** They do not know because the rape was not done in the homes. Most times the rape was done by government soldiers who would wait for women to go out to fetch water or firewood.

**MOR:** Didn't they hear rumors?

**ROO:** I think the only women who knew about each other were those who were raped in the same incident. Then because they both didn't want their husbands to know, it remained a secret between the two of them. So if you told my husband, then I would say, "But we were together! You were also raped!" So they kept their secret. Actually some of them became very good friends. It was a common experience. I think they just wanted to continue keeping it hidden forever. When we started introducing the psychologist, we did not let on that we knew that they had been raped. An individual would come and say, "We were in a group, and about five people were raped." So we know that this whole group was raped.

**MOR:** And they came as a group?

**ROO:** They came as a group. We just said look, there will be a doctor. Anyone who wants to come to the doctor can come.

**MOR:** One of the things you said that really moves me is thinking about the impact that listening to these conversations must have on you and the whole Isis group. While you are doing it, how do you all take care of each other? How do you deal with your own feelings as you listen to the stories, as you recognize that they are women like yourself?

**ROO:** Initially when we went out we never went out with a psychologist. We

just went out with a researcher – Professor Mwaka, who is a geographer. I remember one day we had just finished documenting and we were traveling back to Kampala from the village where we went to document, about 80 kilometers away from the city centre. And what struck me was that all of us were quiet for 80 kilometers.

**MOR:** That is a long time.

**ROO:** Yes. I would just hear us sighing. You would hear people sighing. We are normally quite a talkative team. So just before we reached I said, “Oh my God we have all been quiet. Why?” Then my other colleague Jessica Nkhule, said, “Ruth, you don’t know what I listened to today.” The next day was Saturday. I went home and just talked to my husband nonstop. We went to bed, and I was still talking. So he said, “Ruth, can you stop? I want to sleep. You know what? I am now sick and tired of whenever you go the field, you come home and there is nothing else you are talking about other than what you found. Don’t we have anything else to talk about?” Another colleague just cried the whole time. Her husband called me to ask, “What happened out there? Because my wife just cried and cried and cried.”

Then, on Monday when we met and began talking about our weekend, one of us suggested we have a cup of tea. So we sat down to have this cup of tea and started talking and talking. And whoever spoke, their voice would start getting hoarse. The researcher who was there said, “You people, you know what? You are going to go crazy. I will send a colleague of mine to talk to you.” Just like that! So he sent us a psychologist, who helped us begin to work through the pain and anger we were feeling.

**MOR:** So you didn’t recognize initially that you had been traumatized by the stories, by listening?

**ROO:** Not at first. We were just angry with the men, we were angry with the soldiers. I have a cousin who is a soldier and I picked the phone up and I said, “You know what? If you come in my house, never come in uniform. If you come in uniform I am going to lock you out!” So he was like, “What has happened to this woman!?” Now we have come to understand that this is what was happening to us. The psychologist taught us that the best thing to do is that whenever you come back from the field, wherever you sleep, you need to debrief. It helps you. So that is how our psychologist comes in to the picture. When we go out and train women in other countries to go out and document, we confirmed that we needed to integrate trauma management within the work. How do you handle a traumatized women? And how do

you handle yourself? Now I can do a documentation of a very painful thing. I have learned to hear it but not really put it in my heart.

**MOR:** And has the quality of your work changed?

**ROO:** No. It hasn't. But having said that, much as I distance it like that, when I am doing it, sometimes it comes back later.

**MOR:** Yes, I can imagine.

**ROO:** She told us how to handle it. But my handling is always through crying. I cry and then I listen to music. There is some music that really calms me down. But when I went to Darfur, there were things I'd never heard of... And I just can't forget - things still work on you. Even when I get home, back into my own bed I still feel something in me.

**MOR:** Yes, I noticed your eyes changing. It is still there.

**ROO:** Yes. It is still there; it is not something that will go away. But to my best knowledge, those terrible atrocities have given me the energy to move on. When we bring Sudanese, Rwandan, and other women to the institute, we start to hear things across places.

**MOR:** Right.

**ROO:** You see, we don't know the meaning of this rape to this woman's mental, spiritual, physical way of being. This is something that this woman lives with forever - if she is not helped.

**MOR:** And it is not the same for every woman. There may be some similarities but it is not the same.

**ROO:** One of the psychiatrists says, when someone cuts off your finger - immediately like that, the trauma will not be as much as if he comes and removes the nail first and then comes and... you see? That whole analysis, I put it to the rape. These women, who they say, you are found on the street and someone rapes you and runs away. It is not the same as these other types of rapes. He rapes you, he does everything on you, and it is a long thing. And worse still, they are doing it in front of people whom you love most.

**MOR:** So there is this deep humiliation and indignity.

**ROO:** So you are no longer yourself. And until we hear this whole full story, no one will understand the meaning - what this means to this woman who was raped.

**MOR:** What inspires you to keep doing the work? And what gives you the strength and the courage? And you are such a joyful person!

**ROO:** You know, I think it was my upbringing. I was brought up in a very modest home. My father was a priest and we were taught that God says

you must share. Also my mother died when I had just gotten married and all my brothers, even the older ones, wanted a mother figure, and I was the first girl. So now I grew up with all those, looking after them – even the bigger boys. So I think that also gave me that lineage. Then my career, my background is about talking about people and sharing, so that whole communication component.

**MOR:** You put it in a very different context, though. You're really communicating with women.

**ROO:** In my leadership as the Executive Director, I find my role always to be, to let the others speak. I am not a person who really likes limelight. But I always feel so satisfied when I see those who never had an opportunity to have the limelight, really come out and become different. I think that is it. I think it's my character also – people find me easy to talk to, a person who is flexible. When I go the village, I really become a village woman.

**MOR:** You mentioned in our conversation about the academic researchers, and how they think you have to have a PhD to be a researcher. If you could say one thing to them, directly, about their attitude, what would you say?

**ROO:** You know, I would tell them, knowledge is with all of us. And it would be very useful to use all ways of providing knowledge, sharing knowledge, and using the knowledge that we all have. I am saying that because, if I had not been pushed to do what I wanted to do, I would have given up, just accepted that I didn't have the methodologies and training, that I had no proper quantitative data. I would have missed out on getting the stories, the real stories of these survivors. If academics limit themselves to their own kind of data collection, they are actually missing what the women would like to tell the world about the violations they go through. Counting statistically how many women have been raped tells us nothing, and does not help us know how to respond and support their recovery. When they actually do share with you, it changes you.

**MOR:** Yes. We are transformed by what we hear and learn.

**ROO:** We are transformed. And once transformed, you become a different kind of researcher all together.

**MOR:** Thank you so much!





# Building Genuine Security: The International Women's Network Against Militarism

Gwyn Kirk

We are very pleased to have the following description of our Network included in this issue of *Feminist Africa* because of our concern about the implementation of AFRICOM. We are especially alarmed because Network members have observed and experienced first-hand similar developments and their impacts in Asia, the Pacific, and the US. We also want our African sisters, who face the possibility of new, and perhaps long-term, US military presence on the continent, to know we stand in solidarity with you.

Currently, worldwide, the US military maintains over 700 bases and installations, with facilities and operations on every continent. In addition, there are numerous secret sites, such as those in Israel, or other sites not yet considered official, such as newly established bases in Iraq. The most recent effort at military expansion, the proposed development of AFRICOM or the US Africa Command, is the newest of six regional structures designed to cover particular geographic areas. The other five are the Pacific, Middle East, Europe, South American, and North American commands, each led by a commanding officer responsible for the entire region. The goal is to maintain an integrated network of personnel, equipment, and weapons that can respond at a moment's notice "to protect US interests," that is, the interests of capital and ruling elites.

## About Us

This Network started in 1997 when 40 women activists, policy-makers, researchers, teachers, and university students from South Korea, Okinawa, mainland Japan, the Philippines and the United States gathered to share information and to strategize about the negative effects of US military operations in all our countries. These included military violence against women and girls, the plight of mixed-race Amerasian children abandoned by US military fathers, environmental contamination, and the distortion of local

economies. More recently, women from Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Guam have joined. We have developed a common analysis and understanding of how the US military, directly and indirectly, destroys lives, jeopardizes the physical environment, undermines local economies and cultures, and destroys opportunities to live in sustainable ways. We focus on military institutions, as well as military values, policies, and operations, and their impacts on our communities, especially on women.

The work of the network is significant in several key ways. First, it has brought together women across national, regional, class, race, and linguistic boundaries in a sustained way. Although some of us have met each other at activist and academic conferences, international gatherings such as Beijing Women's Conference (1995), Hague Appeal for Peace (1999), Tokyo Women's Military Tribunal (2000), and the World Social Forum (2004), the Network has provided a loose organizational structure and has combined resources to enable participants to meet regularly to exchange information, strategize together, to identify research needs, and to get to know each other personally and politically.

Another importance of the Network is our developing understanding of what is involved in transnational feminist praxis. We are a multi-national, multi-lingual group who subscribe to a range of feminist perspectives. This has both enriched our work and challenged us to think and re-think our collective and individual theoretical understandings of militarism, militarization, military occupation, and armed conflict. Most significant has been examining our relationships to each other while we struggle to resist US militarism and its impacts. Through the decade of our existence, we have faced and addressed, in a variety of ways, issues related to the following questions:

- What does it mean to work across, and in spite of, the asymmetrical structural power relations among us? These include intra-regional inequalities such as among Japanese, Korean and Filipino members, as well as interregional disparities between the US and all other country members.
- How do we address the contradictions and tensions raised by the nature of these relationships?
- How do we deal with linguistic differences, related to class, ethnicity, culture, so we can communicate effectively as we discuss issues that are intellectual and emotional, and sometimes traumatic?
- What are our collective responsibilities for our respective country's policies and practices that have impacted others in our Network? This is

especially true for US and Japanese participants, whose countries have heavily shaped geopolitical relations historically and contemporarily.

- What do we actually mean by “transnational feminist praxis”?

## Key Lessons Learned

We have learned many common-sense and profound lessons during our ten years together. Perhaps the most important is working multilingually. At the first meeting in 1997, we recognized the need for more adequate interpretation and translation among English, Japanese, Korean and Tagalog. This difficulty, and the tensions it generated, still persist. A group of volunteer translators have created a Feminist Activist Dictionary to be used by our interpreters and members, so that we can share common meanings and definitions of words that often cannot be translated directly from one language to another. These include terms such as *rape* and *gender* in English, *han* in Korean, and *giri* in Japanese. We realise that interpretation and translation take time. Talks and presentations should be finished before a meeting so translators can work on them, for example. Also, we must schedule meeting sessions to allow for interpretation, and identify women who are willing to act as interpreters. As we are not able to pay them for their time, we greatly appreciate the significant, and essential, contribution they make to our work.

One of the most profound lessons deals with privilege and access to resources – both assumed and real—based on race/ethnicity, class, nation, history, and language. One way this has manifested is in relation to money and funding, for example. Sometimes, women outside the US have assumed that US-based women and, to a lesser extent, Japanese women, have easy access to financial resources. Relative to poorer countries, this may be true, but it has not been easy for women living in the US to secure funding for the Network. The nature of work – opposing US military and economic policies and working outside the US – makes it difficult to secure sustained funding from most donors. Occasionally, we have been fortunate enough to secure grants from groups such as the Global Fund for Women. Another problem has been the assumption, by those outside the United States, that US women are a monolithic group. In reality, the US is characterized by serious inequalities based on region, language, race, class, and immigration status. As women living in the US, we have sought to raise awareness about these issues during international Network meetings, including trying to ensure adequate representation of a range of US participants.

## Our Vision and Mission

**We envision** a world of genuine security based on justice, respect for others across national boundaries, and economic planning based on local people's needs, especially the needs of women and children.

**Our shared mission** is to build and sustain a network of women to promote, model, and protect genuine security in the face of militarism.

## Our goals

- To contribute to the creation of societies free of militarism, violence, and all forms of sexual exploitation in order to guarantee the rights of marginalized people, particularly women and children, and to ensure the safety, well-being, and long-term sustainability of all our communities.
- To strengthen our common consciousness and voice by sharing experiences and making connections among militarism, imperialism, and systems of oppression and exploitation based on gender, race, class and nation.

## What is Genuine Security?

Security is often thought of as “national security” or “military security”. We believe that militarism undermines everyday security for many people and for the environment. Following the United Nations Development Program report of 1994, we argue that genuine security arises from the following principles:

1. The physical environment must be able to sustain human and natural life;
2. People's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education must be guaranteed;
3. People's fundamental human dignity should be honored and cultural identities respected;
4. People and the natural environment should be protected from avoidable harm.

Working for genuine security means:

- Valuing people and having confidence in their potential to live in life-affirming ways;
- Building a strong personal core that enables us to work with “others” across lines of significant difference through honest and open dialogue;
- Respecting differences based on gender, race, and culture, rather than

- using these attributes to objectify “others” as inferior;
- Relying on spiritual values to make connections with others;
  - Creating relationships of care so that children and young people feel needed and gain respect for themselves and each other through meaningful participation in community projects, decision-making, and work;
  - Redefining manhood to include nurturing and caring for others. Men’s sense of wellbeing, pride, belonging, competence, and security should come from activities and institutions that are life affirming;
  - Valuing cooperation over competition;
  - Eliminating gross inequalities of wealth between nations and between people within nations;
  - Eliminating oppressions based on gender, race, class, heterosexuality, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, able body-ism, and other significant differences;
  - Building genuine democracy – locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally – with local control of resources and appropriate education to participate fully in decision-making processes;
  - Valuing the complex ecological web that sustains human beings and of which we are all a part;
  - Ending all forms of colonialism and occupation.

## Issues

In our diverse communities we are working on: military violence against women/trafficking, problems arising from the expansion of US military operations, health effects of environmental contamination by preparations for war, and the everyday militarization of all our societies. In the US, low-income communities face aggressive military recruiting and inadequate services due to inflated military budgets at the expense of socially-useful programs. Part of our work is to redefine security, as described above, especially for women, children, and the environment.

Alongside our anti-military critiques, we are working on creating sustainable communities and putting forth our visions of alternatives, sustainable ways to live.

**Network Activities** vary from country to country and include the provision of services and support to victims/survivors, public education and protest, research, lobbying, litigation, promoting alternative economic development,

and networking. We seek to:

- promote solidarity and healing among the diversity of women affected by militarism and violence;
- integrate our common understandings into our relationships in the Network and in our daily lives;
- promote leadership and self-determination among all the sisters of the Network;
- initiate and support local and international efforts against militarism;
- strengthen our work by exploring our diverse historical, social, political, and economic experiences in each nation/country.

**Together, we address the challenge** of how to link these separate efforts, each focusing on small parts of the military system. We do it in the following ways:

- International meetings
- Facilitating links among country groups
- Coordinated activities
- Supporting each others' individual activities and campaigns through letters, donations, selling goods
- Educating people in our communities about how US militarism impacts women, children, and the environment in other countries of the Network
- Writing, talks and presentations

Network participants have organised 6 international meetings in:

Okinawa (1997 and 2000)

South Korea (2002)

Philippines (2004)

United States (1998 and 2007)

These meetings include site visits to US bases and women's projects, public sessions to share information and perspectives, internal discussions of the issues women are working on in each nation, art-related and cultural activity, and media work.

Network members have also participated in other international efforts:

Hague Appeal for Peace (1999)

Grassroots Summit for Bases Cleanup (1999)

World Social Forum (2004)

## Our expertise

- *Knowledge.* We know how US militarism impacts communities in the Asia/Pacific region and the Caribbean as well as in the United States.
- *Analysis.* We see important connections and continuities between US domestic and foreign policy that link communities impacted by military decisions, budgets, and operations in the US and abroad. We use the lenses of gender, race, class and nation to analyze the issues.
- *Solidarity.* Our Network comprises veteran organizers and relative newcomers. We have sustained this Network for 10 years across geographical distances, differences of language and culture, and complex histories among our nations.
- *Languages.* At the Network level we decided not to work only in English. This would limit participation to women with college education, whereas many activists who are doing cutting edge work are not fluent in English. Currently, the Network works in 5 languages: English, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Pilipino. We have dedicated interpreters/translators who facilitate clear communication. They have compiled a dictionary of over 400 terms that need precise, systematic translation.
- *Organizing and Leadership Development.* The country groups all involve skilled and experienced organizers working in their communities on these issues. The international meetings have been extremely effective in supporting this local organizing and creating opportunities for younger activists to develop leadership skills and experience.
- *Public education.* Many Network participants give talks and workshops, and publish popular articles, op ed pieces, and more scholarly papers.
- *Art and social change.* Network participants include visual artists, poets, writers, dancers, and performers. We see a crucial connection between the arts and action for social change.

## Future growth involves:

- Better communication among our country groups;
- Deeper understanding of the issues and how to address them;
- More country-country connections and activities;
- More Network-wide activities;
- Expanding the Network by adding more country groups and linking with other women's anti-military networks;
- Being able to support a Network secretariat, possibly with paid staff time.

**International partners** include women active with:

Asia Peace Alliance, Tokyo.

Japan Coalition on the US Military Bases, Yufuin, Oita.

Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, Naha, Okinawa.

Du Rae Bang (My Sister's Place), Uijongbu, South Korea.

National Campaign to Eradicate Crime by US Troops in Korea, Seoul.

SAFE Korea, Seoul.

BUKLOD Center, Olongapo City, Philippines.

Philippines Women's Network for Peace and Security, Manila.

WEDPRO (Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization) Quezon City, Philippines.

Institute for Latino Empowerment, Caguas, Puerto Rico.

Alianza de Mujeres Viequenses, Vieques, Puerto Rico.

DMZ-Aloha A'ina, Hawaii.

Nasion Chamoru, Guam

**Women for Genuine Security** is the US-based Network group with members in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Seattle. US partners include women active with Bay Area groups: AFSC, babae, FACES, KAWAN, PANA Institute, Women of Color Resource Center, and Women's International League for Peace & Freedom.

We are among the Network founders and have several distinct roles within it:

- Transnational collaborative work with women outside the United States – e.g. educating US audiences about the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region and the Caribbean, and writing letters to officials (in the US and outside) in support of local activism in Network nations.
- Working with US groups concerning the effects of militarism in the United States and bringing this perspective to the international Network.
- Fundraising to support travel and accommodation at international meetings for women from poorer countries.
- Providing informal co-ordination for the Network.

As women living in the United States, our model of transnational organizing means taking into account the unequal power relationships between the US and the countries where US bases are located. Taking our national privilege seriously, we strive to create working relationships that are equal, mutually respectful and democratic, between women across nations. We seek to avoid



recreating the same power hierarchy among us as exists between our nations. We want to work with women who are doing grassroots organizing, which means that translation and interpretation are key components of our work.

This international network includes strong friendships that have been sustained for over a decade. We believe that working together is possible despite language difference, cultural differences, and geographic distance because we have forged strong personal relationships, not just based on the issues we care about, but by really hearing and sharing each others' passions, life stories, and commitments. Our international meetings last from 4-7 days to allow time for translation, and the cultural sharing that grounds our relationships and commitments to one another's struggles and to our work together. We also build our connections through country-to-country exchanges of women activists visiting each other for consultation, study, speaking tours, research, and shared inspiration.

For more details see [www.genuinesecurity.org](http://www.genuinesecurity.org)

This website started out with a focus on Women for Genuine Security. We plan to expand it to become more international in scope.

Contact us at [info@genuinesecurity.org](mailto:info@genuinesecurity.org)



# Review

Yaba Badoe

Pray the Devil Back To Hell. Gini Reticker and Abigail Disney. Fork Films – USA

It's not often that I watch a documentary film, and immediately sign up to become a fan on the social networking website, My Face. But this remarkable film directed by Gini Reticker and produced by Abigail Disney had that effect on me. I may have worked in British television for over twenty years, yet never have I seen a documentary made and produced by Americans about Africa, which gives voice so eloquently to women peace activists on the continent.

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* tells a riveting, prescient story very well indeed. With high production values and a brilliant title sequence, the film begins and ends with a rousing invocation of West Africa sung by Beninese diva, Angelique Kidjo.

The real stars, however, are Liberian women peace activists: Leymah Gbowee, Asatu Bah Kenneth, Vaiba Flomo, Janet Bryant-Johnson, Ety Weah and Etweda "Sugars" Cooper, who after years of civil war and mayhem, came together to form a pressure group. Conceived initially as a Christian women's campaign, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace transformed an alliance between Christian and Moslem women into a movement to force Charles Taylor, the President of Liberia at the time, and rebel warlords in LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) to attend peace talks in Ghana in June 2003.

The film's reconstruction of how the peace movement was created, and then pressurised Taylor and warlords to negotiate an end to Liberia's protracted civil war, is spell-binding. Thanks to a charismatic cast of articulate contributors, and Gini Reticker's superb grasp of dramatic pacing, we follow, on tenter-hooks, the women's journey towards peace. And what a journey it is!

Past events are pieced together primarily through the testimonies of the women concerned. However, archival material - in the form of film and video footage, newspaper cuttings, photographs, and radio broadcasts - is used to brilliant effect. Hence, in watching the documentary, we not only understand the background to the civil war in Liberia, but we also get a terrifying glimpse of the chaos and brutality of war. As a result, the urgency

of the women's mission is accentuated.

The women raise money to send a delegation to picket the peace conference in Ghana, only to find that once Charles Taylor has been indicted as a war criminal by the International Criminal Court in the Hague and flees Ghana, the LURD participants treat the forum as little more than a prolonged vacation: a well-deserved rest from the more onerous life of waging war in the bush. In between times, of course, while they jockey for positions of power in a new transitional government, the LURD warlords orchestrate a final assault on Monrovia from their hotel bedrooms. While Monrovia burns, they throw petrol on the flames.

Not surprisingly, the tempers of the peace activists begin to fray, and in the nail biting climax of the documentary, we see the women lay siege to the conference hall in Accra. No food is allowed in or out. No one present can leave.

The offensive to make the warlords grasp the seriousness of the situation is led by Leymah Gbowee – a social worker and leader of the Liberian Women's Peace Movement. When the Ghana authorities attempt to arrest her for "obstructing justice," Gbowee goes ballistic. She takes off her head cloth and begins to strip off her clothes until General Abdulsalami Abubakar – a former Nigerian president and chief mediator at the conference – intercedes. In an impassioned speech caught on video, an outraged Gbowee condemns the warlords with the words: "These people came here, ECOWAS gave them big beds. When they came they were pale. No eating in the bush. Now they are wearing fine Ghana milled textiles...Today they will feel the hunger our people are feeling there!"

The women set a deadline. If an agreement was not reached in two weeks, they would reinforce the siege. Within a fortnight, a peace agreement was signed, and in January 2006, Liberia became the first country in Africa to elect a woman President: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Apart from telling an exhilarating story with drama, verve and poise – *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is an excellent example of how documentary filmmaking at its best, is much more than a vehicle for documenting the past. The film is keenly feminist and acutely political in so far as it demonstrates the tremendous clout of women's social activism. Indeed, the documentary is a valiant rallying call for people around the world working to change the status quo – women especially.

However, by focusing on the pivotal role of this particular women's movement in the Liberian peace process – the group was also instrumental in advising the

UN on how to disarm former rebels - *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* can, at times, appear simplistic. Men are rightly condemned, throughout, for their appalling violence and past mistakes. But are all men to blame when many were victims of appalling atrocities as well? And are women presidents necessarily the answer to Africa's social and political problems? What of Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir - the Iron Ladies of British and Israeli politics respectively? And would voting for Hillary Clinton as President automatically set America to rights? I do not think so. Reality, unfortunately, has a habit of being more complicated and nuanced than the simple dichotomy of women versus men; good versus evil.

What the film does touch on fleetingly, however, is a fascinating discourse on masculinity as articulated between General Abubakar and Joe Wyle, a Brigadier General in LURD. The latter wants to fight his way through the barricade of women in Accra, thrashing them in the process. Abubakar castigates him, questioning the younger man's cruel thirst for power, and disregard for the lives of his fellow Liberians. The pot calling the kettle black, perhaps, given Abubakar's service to the notorious Sani Abacha's regime in Nigeria. Nonetheless, his comment raises a salient question concerning the excessive brutality meted out to civilians by rebels in organisations such as LURD, the RUF (Revolutionary United Front, Sierra Leone), the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda ) and various militias in the on-going war in the DRC, to name a few. Where does this brutal disconnection between ostensible "liberators" and the communities they are supposed to be liberating come from? Can the "disconnect" only come to an end when men with guns are placated with enough wealth and power, as seems to have been the case at the Accra peace conference?

*Pray the Devil Back to Hell* is undoubtedly an inspirational film, which I strongly recommend to everyone concerned with the lives of African women, and the impact we can make on the political process. I warmly congratulate Gini Reticker and Abigail Disney as the director and producer, for bringing this moving story to an international audience. Though the film is wonderfully executed, and should garner an array of international awards, I cannot help wishing for the day when African producers and directors will have the resources and skills at their disposal so that we tell our stories ourselves.

Yaba Badoe

April 2008



# Review

Cheryl Hendricks

*The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs and The Resolution of African Conflicts: The Management of Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction.* Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (eds.) 2008. Addis Ababa: OSSREA, Oxford: James Currey, Athens: Ohio University Press and Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Understanding the nature and roots of African conflicts and building institutional frameworks designed to manage conflict have pre-occupied research and regional organizations in Africa for the past two decades. The African Union and regional economic communities have developed security architectures that include early warning capability, conflict resolution mechanisms, peace-keeping and peace-building institutions. Some successes in managing conflicts on the continent have been recorded, most notably, in Angola, Lesotho, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, other seemingly intractable conflicts remain, for example, in Somalia, Sudan and Burundi. Although there is a plethora of analysis on the sources of conflict and prescriptions for their resolution, many gaps in our analyses and recommendations remain.

The two-volume collection edited by Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza is therefore a welcomed contribution to the debates on this topic. The chapters in these volumes were presented at an OSSREA conference on “African Conflicts: Management, Resolution, Post-Conflict Recovery and Development” in December 2004, in Addis Ababa. The 22 chapters cover a wide range of topics, such as, the causes, costs and nature of civil wars, an analysis of the conduct of rebel movements, reflections on the African woman combatant, legislative responses to terrorism, food security policies, role of sub-regional schemes in conflict prevention, the continental early warning system, the International Criminal Court, local government and the management of conflict, elections and conflict case studies on Uganda, Somalia and Mozambique.

In his erudite introduction, Zeleza dispenses with the dichotomy between “old wars” and “new wars,” asserting that there is “no evidence that warfare

has changed fundamentally in terms of types of participants, and patterns in the prosecution of wars, and their purposes". His request is for more depth and complexity in our analysis of the causes and consequences of war, convincingly arguing that our studies need to be informed by political economy and a cultural ecology of war. By this he means an approach that emphasizes and examines how political, economic, social and cultural factors cause and sustain war and conflict, incorporates the interplay between the historical and contemporary processes, highlights the connections between local, regional and global systems and the role played by various national and international actors, and how material forces, popular discourses, institutional conditions and symbolic constructs, structure and reproduce conflicts. Alfred Nhema's introductory chapter, in the second volume, notes the realisation that Africa will have to increasingly rely on itself to provide long-term solutions to its own problems.

The volumes, especially the collection dealing with the roots of African conflicts, interrogate some of the linkages referred to above, providing new insights and contesting prevailing assumptions about African conflicts and processes of democratization. For example, Henderson's chapter, using regression analyses, disputes the linkage between semi-democracies and conflict. Mkandawire rejects rational choice explanations and shows that the predatory behaviour of rebel movements can be located in their urban origins, roving nature and the rentier characteristics of the state. White disputes Fanon's thesis on the emancipatory effects of violence, especially for women. And Scheidegger illustrates the need for greater nuance in the depiction of the linkages between social capital and democratization in segmented societies like South Africa. However, all fall short in their incorporation of gender as a central variable in the construction of new knowledge of African conflicts and recommendations for more creative and sustainable conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction processes and institutions.

Zeleza, cognizant of this gap in the texts, makes a valiant introductory effort to apply a gendered lens to conflict. There is also an excellent paper by Aaronette White on the African woman combatant, but apart from this, the volumes are astonishingly gender blind. The authors appear oblivious to the immense amount of scholarly work and policy analysis produced on gender relations during war and its aftermath, the effects of war on women, the participation of women in peace processes and the consequences of the absence of a gendered perspective to demilitarization, demobilization and



reintegration (DDR) and general security sector governance, as well as the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 (which does not receive a single mention). For what is projected as well researched conference papers, this is utterly inexcusable.

Zezeza, citing Goldstein, reiterates, “gender shapes war and war shapes gender.” Women and the girl child have been the victims of war in myriads of ways ranging from being displaced and impoverished to being abducted as sex slaves, maimed and killed. The very people sent in to protect them, UN and AU peacekeepers, have also sexually abused them. But, women have also exerted agency: as combatants, playing support functions in liberation/rebel armies, as active supporters of the rebels cause, mobilizing to bring an end to the conflict and organizing for their own liberation to be attained through peace processes. Though we must not overemphasize the empowering attributes of war for women, many have pointed to the space it provides for changed gender relations. Examples include the emergence of female-headed households, and the mushrooming of women’s organisations, many of which were formed initially to provide humanitarian assistance during conflict, but were reconstituted as organizational vehicles through which women mobilize for political representation and for a gendered peace. Moreover, the relationship between men during war, Zezeza mentions, is gendered. He writes: “war and militaries are critical mechanisms for the production and performance of masculinities”.

In the prologue, written by Mazrui, increased women’s representation is recommended as part of the ensemble of conflict resolution mechanisms necessary on the continent. However, he seems unaware of the adoption by the African Union and many sub-regional organizations of a 30 per cent, more recently increased to parity, representation for women in decision-making structures. He thus, quite paternalistically, appeals for women to be given greater voice in the legislative process and executive branch, suggesting an allocation initially of 10 per cent. Mazrui also calls for a changed military culture, through the inclusion of more women into the defence forces. Experiences of women in the armed forces indicate that their mere presence does not lead to transformed military cultures and that women are often relegated to perform stereotypically support functions with combat readiness, even in the markedly changed nature of combat, being the operative excuse for their role and functions within these institutions.

Ahmed, reviewing the prospects for reconciliation and unity in the Sudan,

points to the changed social relations within the IDP camps and its potential to produce new forms of leadership in the Sudan. The diversity of ethnic groups in these camps gradually leads to a softening of the ethnic boundaries and groups begin to express a higher degree of tolerance and desire for peace-full co-existence, i.e., IDP's have a different set of values, relations and expectations and the absence of traditional leaders in these camps creates the space for new leaders to emerge. Although he notes that among the major changes is that of gender relations, he fails to explore this further. There is also no follow up of what actually happens once people return to their homes: if Sudan did not present itself as a test case for this at the time of writing, in 2004, there were ample other case studies that could have been used as reference points. It is an interesting point for further analysis. Can we, for example, attribute the large representation of women in decision-making in Rwanda to the changed social relations that transpired in the IDP camps and/or in exile? Rwandan women often attribute their success to an enlightened leadership, but where and how did this enlightenment materialize and why did it not manifest in other countries with large displaced populations?

Mkandawire's chapter particularly lends itself to a gendered analysis of the actors and actions of rebel movements. Unfortunately, this is not forthcoming and he cannot claim ignorance of gender as an alibi. His thesis, on the behaviour of rebel movements, rests on their urban nature and the type of states they are formed in, namely rentier (characterized by a wider urban/rural gap than merchant states). These rebel movements are not able to find common cause with the peasantry, they are primarily roving and their choice for temporary location is governed more by security concerns. This then accounts for their plundering nature. However, plundering can take many forms. The fact that sexual violence is so central to their methods certainly cannot be reduced to an urban crisis and has to be explained through gendered power relations, the performance of masculinity and the militarized nature of our societies (succinctly captured by White's chapter). Apuuli's chapter details some of the gendered war crimes committed by these rebel movements (rape, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, etc).

The chapters on conflict resolution mechanisms and peace-building processes have no gendered content. The need to include women in peace processes to ensure that their interests are represented, or an account of the role they have played in peace processes, both formal and informal, is entirely absent. The only redeeming chapter in the two volumes, White on the African

woman combatant, deserves further comment in this review.

White employs Fanon's thesis on the transformative aspects of violence for the colonized, which she negates, as an entry point to explain why, despite their participation in the revolution, women's liberation is not attained in the post-war period. Drawing on the work of a number of African women scholars who have engaged this topic, she asserts that Fanon underestimated the extreme distortion of gender relations during the colonial period, the patriarchal nature of nationalism and militarism and consequently, African men's resistance to transforming entrenched neo-colonized and militarized mentalities: this is encapsulated in the phrase 'androcentricization of inferiority.' She highlights that war/revolutionary struggles are as much about the recognition of the masculine identities of African men and that this limits the efforts of women to achieve gender equity "before, during, and after such wars". Women's agency, for White, is severely curtailed both by the desire of men to impose and perpetuate patriarchy and by the patriarchal characteristics that are intrinsic to the form of liberation, namely war/armed struggle. Furthermore, this growth of a "militarized, neo-colonised masculine mentality makes it difficult to nurture a human rights culture".

This framework is useful in considering the disproportionate violence inflicted on women during and after war, and for understanding why women combatants/participants are reluctant to present themselves for DDR or lay equal claim to the spoils of office: while men become heroes through war, women are shrouded in shame. In some instances women are able to achieve greater representation after the war, but in most cases they are "put back in their place." It would have been useful to discern when women are able to gain greater voice – what are the key variables that lead to a distinction in the gendered nature of representation or willingness (even if only in legislation) to create gender equity in post-war states? Although I agree with White's overall thesis, I am sceptical of her particularization to African men – the explanation should hold for all other post-colonial contexts too. Moreover, if we are to accept the linkage between militarized neo-colonised masculine identities and the limits of a human rights culture, are we not merely back to colonialism as the distinguishing variable – for how else would we explain other societies in which patriarchy and militarism prevail but which are able to sustain a human rights culture, for example, Sweden? Is White also not, unwittingly, swinging the pendulum back to a positioning of women as mere victims in war and its aftermath?

For those who work in the peace and security sector, these volumes are a must read. For readers working in other sectors, it is informative and will also provide a strong indication of the lack of cross-disciplinary approaches within the peace and security field. If we, in the peace and security sector, heed Zeleza's appeal for complexity and interdisciplinarity, it would take us a long way towards producing more informed research and policy recommendations on peace, security and development in Africa.

# Review

Margo Okazawa-Rey

*"If I Were Given the Choice": Palestinian Women's Stories of Daily Life during the Years 2000-2003 of the Second Intifada.* Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling and Faiha' Abdul-Hadi, 2008.

This year, 2008, marks the 60th anniversary of *nakba*, “catastrophe,” for Palestinian people, and of the creation of the state of Israel for Jews. During the six decades, Israel has been found guilty of violating countless international human rights and humanitarian laws related to its maltreatment of Palestinian people, and has done so with impunity and near deafening silence from the vast majority of the international community. During much of this time, the voices of Palestinian women that tell of both their suffering and resistance have remained unheard in the wider world. This compilation of 29 Palestinian women’s oral histories chronicles their daily experiences of living under Israeli occupation and its material and emotional impacts. Women describe, in harrowing detail, the road and checkpoint closures that disrupt their daily routines, including preventing them and their family from securing necessary medical treatment, the unjust arrest and imprisonment of their husbands, sons, and daughters, and the routine, wanton destruction of their people, homes, property and land by the Israeli military. The women also speak about the negative effects of patriarchal cultural values and practices in their lives, even as the community collectively faces the harsh realities of military occupation, the proverbial “double jeopardy.” Among the narrators are women from all segments of Palestine: from rural and urban areas; housewives, professionals, students, activists, and former political prisoners; women of means and poor; grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. They have real names and tell real stories. Photographs and maps showing the people and the places supplement the stories. This book confirms that no group of Palestinian women is exempt from the suffering but also showcases the power of individual and community resistance to repression and violence, and the hopes and aspirations of women living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

## Contributors

**Yaba Badoe** is an independent film maker and novelist who has made over 20 documentaries and written several books. Her novel *True Murder* is being published by Jonathan Cape. Yaba divides her time between London and Accra where she is affiliated to the University of Ghana's Institute for African Studies. She is currently working on a new novel and completing a documentary 'The Witches of Gambaga', filmed during the AGI's Mapping Sexualities research project.

**Yaliwe Clarke** is a lecturer at the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town. She was previously a Senior Project Officer at the Centre for Conflict Resolution where she carried out case studies, developed training manuals and provided training to various civil society actors and senior government officials across Africa.

**Sokari Ekine** is an internationally renowned Nigerian feminist activist who has carried out documentation and advocacy work in the Niger Delta communities struggling against the transnational corporate and military repression and environmental destruction. She has written a number of reports and recently spent 3 years as an organic farmer in Spain.

**Rangira Béa Gallimore** is an associate professor in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, USA. She is the founder and member of the board of directors for the Interdisciplinary Genocide Studies Center in Kigali (2005), as well as the founder and President of Step UP! American Association for Rwandan Women in Columbia, Missouri (2004). Since 1998, she has served on the editorial board of *Wihogora, International Journal of Genocide*, University of California at Sacramento.

**Cheryl Hendricks** holds a doctorate in political science and is Head of the Southern Africa Human Security Program at the Institute of Security Studies. Prior to this she was a political analyst at the Institute for Justice and

Reconciliation, an Academic Manager at the Centre for Conflict Resolution and a Lecturer at the University of the Western Cape. She co-edited *Southern Africa: From National Liberation to Democratic Renaissance*, and is currently the Vice Chairperson for Southern Africa of the African Association of Political Scientists.

**Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff** is a lawyer and Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. She was previously the Executive Secretary of the Law Reform Commission (2003–2004), and the Executive Secretary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2002), both of Sierra Leone. In 2004 she was elected the sub-regional First Vice President and head of the Sierra Leone chapter of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET). She has also served as coordinator of the Network for the Promotion of African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (2001–2002), and since 1997 has been a member of Femmes-Africa-Solidarité, of which she is now on the board of directors. She has published numerous articles on women and Sierra Leone.

**Gwyn Kirk** is a scholar-activist concerned with gender, racial and environmental justice in the service of genuine security, peace-making, and creating a sustainable world. She has taught courses in women's studies, environmental studies, political science, and sociology at US universities and colleges. She publishes a textbook/anthology '*Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*' (McGraw-Hill), co-edited with Margo Okazawa-Rey, which is used in women's studies classes and by feminist activists. She has written widely on ecofeminism, militarism, and women's peace organizing. She is a founding member of the East Asia-US-Puerto Rico Women's Network Against Militarism, which links scholars and activists dealing with the negative effects of US military bases, budgets, and operations on local communities.

**Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge** is a member of the South African parliament, representing the African National Congress. She served as a Deputy Minister of Health until recently (2004–2007), and was a Deputy Minister of Defence (1999–2004). She serves on a number of organisations, including WOW, a network of local women leaders. During the struggle against apartheid, she was a full-time organizer for Natal Organisation of Women. Nozizwe also initiated the African Women's Peace Table, a forum that brought together

women soldiers and peace activists to look at their understanding of peace and their role in peacemaking.

**Amina Mama** has been the Chair in Gender Studies at the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town since 1999, and is currently the Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair at Mills College in California. Her main research interests centre around bringing gender analysis to bear on subjectivity, organisations, politics and higher education. Her major research projects have addressed women in government and politics in a variety of African contexts, women's organisations and movements, higher education and militarism. She is the overall editor of *Feminist Africa*.

**Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng** is the Director of Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) based in Uganda. Isis-WICCE promotes women's human rights through skills building and documentation of women's realities. Since joining Isis-WICCE in 1994, Ruth has coordinated six studies on women's experiences in armed conflict, mostly in Uganda. She is a member of the International Coordinating Committee of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD); an advisory member of the Women's Initiative for Gender Justice based in the Hague; coordinator of WSIS Gender Caucus, East Africa Sub-Region; a board member of the African Partnership for Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Africa (AMANTARE); and member of the committee for growth – Amnesty International. She has written and published many papers on the themes of communication, conflict and peace.

**Margo Okazawa-Rey** is Professor in the PhD Program, School of Human and Organization Development at Fielding Graduate University, and Professor Emerita at San Francisco State University. She has held endowed chairs at Hamilton College, Scripps College, University of Hartford, and University of Washington. She is a founding member of the International Women's Network against Militarism, and of Women for Genuine Security, its US partner. She co-edited *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* (McGraw-Hill), with Gwyn Kirk. Her work examines the connections between militarism, economic globalization and impacts on women of colour. Since the spring of 2005, she has been Feminist Research Consultant at the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in Ramallah, Palestine.



**Helen Scanlon** is currently the Executive Director of the International Centre for Transitional Justice, Cape Town office. Helen holds a PhD in South African history from the School of Oriental Studies at the University of London. Between 2002–2006 she has worked at the University of Cape Town’s African Gender Institute and the Department of Historical Studies in both teaching and research capacities. Her book *Representation & Reality: Portraits of Women’s Lives in the Western Cape 1948 – 1976* was published by the HRSC in 2007.

**L. Muthoni Wanyeki** is currently the Executive Director of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), a national non-governmental organization based in Nairobi, Kenya. She previously served for ten years as Executive Director of the Nairobi-based regional feminist training and advocacy network. Muthoni has a background in journalism and communications studies.