

This article was downloaded by: [Tel Aviv University]

On: 07 February 2012, At: 04:06

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Security Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fsst20>

### Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone

Megan MacKenzie

Available online: 18 May 2009

To cite this article: Megan MacKenzie (2009): Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone, *Security Studies*, 18:2, 241-261

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900061>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## **Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone**

MEGAN MacKENZIE

*This article focuses on the construction of “soldier” and “victim” by post-conflict programs in Sierra Leone. Focusing on the absence of individual testimonies and interviews that inform representations of women and girls post-conflict, this article demonstrates that the ideal of the female war victim has limited the ways in which female combatants are addressed by disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs in Sierra Leone. It is argued that titles given to female soldiers such as “females associated with the war,” “dependents,” or “camp followers” reveal the reluctance of reintegration agencies to identify females who participated in war as soldiers. In addition, I argue that men and masculinity are securitized post-conflict while women—even when they act in highly securitized roles such as soldiers—are desecuritized and, in effect, de-emphasized in post-conflict policy making. The impact of this categorization has been that the reintegration process for men has been securitized, or emphasized as an essential element of the transition from war to peace. In contrast, the reintegration process for females has been deemed a social concern and has been moralized as a return to normal.*

---

Megan MacKenzie is a Postdoctoral Residential Fellow in Gender and Security through the Women and Public Policy Program and the International Security Program at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She will be joining the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand as a lecturer. MacKenzie has produced research in the areas of sexual violence and war, gender and security, and development policy. Recent publications include “Silent Identities: Children Born of War in Sierra Leone,” in *Born of War: Protecting Children of Sexual Violence Survivors*, ed. R. Charli Carpenter (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007).

The author would like to thank Laura Sjöberg for her dedication to this project and for the unconditional support she lent to this and other feminist projects. In addition, a special thanks is extended to Father Joseph Turay in Makeni, Sierra Leone for his leadership and the anonymous reviewers at *Security Studies* for their thoughtful comments.

Sierra Leone is recovering from over eleven years of civil war and decades of corrupt governance. After the signing of the Lome Peace Accord in 1999, international organizations and development institutions began implementing a variety of peace, development, and reconstruction programs. In particular, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process was initiated to help former soldiers transition from soldiers to citizens. Following Sierra Leone's conflict, nearly seventy-five thousand soldiers were received at over seventy centers for disarmament.<sup>1</sup> The reintegration phase of the program for adults and children officially ended in 2002 and 2005 respectively; however, there is evidence that frontline workers and citizens of Sierra Leone still feel reintegration and rehabilitation are not complete.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous sources have described the disarmament process as a key element for achieving security and sustainable peace.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the DDR program in Sierra Leone was touted as a fundamental element of the country's transition out of civil conflict.<sup>4</sup> I argue that the DDR is a prime example of Mark Duffield's account of the radicalization of development, or the coalescence of development and security policies.<sup>5</sup> The three phases of the DDR were designed with the understanding that peace will not result merely from the removal of guns from the hands of combatants; rather, a regimented process of rehabilitation and societal reconstruction is a prerequisite for a secure nation.

This article examines the inconsistencies within post-conflict programming—particularly the DDR—in the treatment of male and female soldiers. I argue that the exclusion and silencing of women in the post-conflict context in Sierra Leone is representative of the systematic and historical omission of women from post-conflict planning and development activities. From the wars of independence in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, violence in Mozambique, the two decades of civil war in Uganda, the genocide in Rwanda, to the current genocide in Sudan, the insecurities of women have been systematically neglected. The DDR in Sierra Leone is one of many humanitarian and development policies and programs that serve to construct natural, peaceful female subjects in contrast to securitized male soldiers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sanam Anderlini and Dyan Mazurana, "Boys and Girls Who Also Carried Guns: Forgotten in the Peace," *International Herald Tribune*, op-ed, 12 March 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Dehegue Shiaka, Sulay Sesay, Edward Abu, and Joseph Momo, interview by Megan MacKenzie, December 2005, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

<sup>3</sup> "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," Women, War, Peace and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), *WomenWarPeace*, accessed at <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/node/4>.

<sup>4</sup> The disarmament processes in other African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique were very similar to the model used in Sierra Leone. In these cases, the DDR was also viewed as an essential element in the transition from war to peace.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (New York and London: Zed Books, 2001), 37.

<sup>6</sup> See Charli Carpenter, *Innocent Women and Children: Gender Norms and the Protection of Civilians* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates that the failure to address gender as a factor in post-conflict programming as not only sacrificing gender equality, but also the overall effectiveness of the DDR process and the chances for a true and lasting transition from conflict to peace.

Focusing on the example of Sierra Leone, I demonstrate the extent to which females participated as combatants during Sierra Leone's civil conflict in contrast to the low numbers that participated in the DDR process. Using the Copenhagen School's conception of security as constructed through speech acts, I point out that even when women participate in the activities of high politics or sectors traditionally categorized as security priorities such as conflict, they are effectively shuffled out of the public political sphere and into the domestic realm through post-conflict development policies. I argue that the valorization of traditional issues of "high politics" (men and states with guns) relies on the devaluation of "low politics" (sex, domestic work, childbirth, and the family).<sup>7</sup> In effect, securitizing post-conflict development, or the ranking of development issues from securitized to normal politics to the domestic realm, requires both that a domestic realm exist and that it be relegated to the margins. The DDR program in Sierra Leone effectively (re)constructed female soldiers as "wives," "camp followers," or "sex slaves" in order to desecuritize them and to distinguish them from securitized male soldier subjects. The DDR in Sierra Leone, like similar failed programs in countries such as Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, was inadequate primarily because it was based on gendered assumptions, including the notion that female soldiers are not a security concern in the same way as male soldiers.

The Copenhagen School's approach to security can be used to explain the tendency for actors to highlight particular security concerns while neglecting others.<sup>8</sup> The Copenhagen School's rendering of securitization as a speech act places the securitizing actor and the audience as the central players in the construction of security. Those parties handling a particular security concern are said to be bestowed with a "particular legitimacy."<sup>9</sup> Securitization then becomes a strategic practice aimed at swaying a targeted audience to accept their interpretation of a threat. In this way, securitization is an intersubjective process in the sense that it is only when the audience accepts a securitizing actor's speech act that an issue will become securitized.

Mark Duffield's work on the "radicalization of development," or the merging of security and development, is useful in conceptualizing the

<sup>7</sup> See Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, Justice, and the Wars in Iraq: A Feminist Reformulation of Just War Theory* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press, 1998); and Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Lene Hansen, *Security As Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 35.

prioritization of perceived security issues that takes place in the post-conflict development context. For Duffield, the radicalization of development is a declaration that there is no distinct line between the development and security; “achieving one is now regarded as essential for securing the other.”<sup>10</sup> Duffield argued that the underdeveloped South has increasingly been viewed as a source of international instability “through conflict, criminal activity and terrorism.”<sup>11</sup> For Duffield, the securitization of development has produced shifts in the priorities and approaches to development. Under this new security regime, development issues that are classified as security matters are prioritized above issues that may be considered “everyday politics.”

Work on securitization, generally, and securitization of development, specifically, lays the groundwork for understanding the DDR’s treatment of male combatants as security issues and women combatants as so called low politics. Still, the Copenhagen School (and critical security studies generally) has not systematically included gender as a category of analysis. This article, then, extends and applies those analyses to consider imperative questions associated with gender and power relations in post-conflict Sierra Leone, the construction of the subject, and the spaces of silence in so-called intersubjective policy dialogue.

This article begins with an evaluation of the DDR process in Sierra Leone as reliant on gender stereotypes that assume men experienced the conflict as soldiers and women experienced it as victims or noncombatants. Using material from more than fifty personal interviews with female former soldiers, the second section demonstrates that, contrary to the stereotypes used to construct the DDR process, many women experienced the conflict in Sierra Leone as soldiers. Next, by “challenging the key representations of identity that underpin the policy in question,”<sup>12</sup> I develop an account of the failure of the gendered DDR process to reach women former combatants and the resulting policy failures. I argue that securitized subjects, such as male soldiers, receive significantly more attention and funding from post-conflict policy makers. The article concludes by analyzing what the desecuritization of female soldiers reveals about the social limits placed on the notion of soldier, perpetrator, and victim.

### Engendering the DDR: Why Women Were Overlooked

The DDR process in Sierra Leone was advertised as a success and has been recommended as a model for future programs.<sup>13</sup> Despite its praises, one of

<sup>10</sup> Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen, *Security As Practice*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> See “The World Bank, Sierra Leone: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in ‘The World Bank’s Engagement Africa Region,’” Good Practice Infobrief, World Bank, no. 81, October 2002, accessed at <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/findings/infobeng/infob81.pdf>.

the lessons learned from the DDR has been drawn from its treatment of women and girls. The exact number of women and girls involved in the fighting forces is unknown; however, estimates range from 10 percent up to 50 percent for the number of women and girls in various armed factions.<sup>14</sup> These numbers are not reflected in DDR statistics. Of the approximately seventy-five thousand adult combatants disarmed, just under five thousand were females.<sup>15</sup> The number of girls that went through the children's DDR was abysmal; of the 6,845 child soldiers disarmed, 92 percent were boys and only 8 percent were girls. UNICEF has admitted, "DDR programmes have consistently failed to attract female combatants . . . Sierra Leone was no exception."<sup>16</sup>

Along with a growing body of research that critically examines gender and the DDR process in Sierra Leone, one of the most common explanations for the low numbers of females in the DDR is the argument that women and girls were not "real" soldiers; rather, they were primarily abductees, camp followers, domestic workers, and sex slaves. In some cases, the attention given to the widespread use of sexual violence by all warring parties during the civil war in Sierra Leone has eclipsed investigations into female soldiers and female perpetrators. Reports by organizations such as Amnesty International<sup>17</sup> and Physicians for Human Rights<sup>18</sup> are extremely valuable in providing rare insights into the extent of sexual violence in Sierra Leone; however, these publications have contributed to a narrow perception of women and girls primarily as victims of the conflict.

The international humanitarian response to Sierra Leone's conflict has also tended to concentrate on female victims. There are numerous examples of internationally supported programs directed at female victims of conflict; however, there are few programs (in fact almost none) that are directed at former female combatants. Unfortunately, there are also numerous media accounts of the conflict that depict women and girls solely as victims. In a gender profile conducted by AFROL news, the only independent news agency exclusively focusing on Africa, it was reported that

---

<sup>14</sup> These estimates were confirmed by Sulay Sesay (Information and Sensitization Unit Manager, DDR/Project Manager, Capacity Development in Sierra Leone). Interview with Sulay Sesay, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 December 2005. See also Anderlini and Mazurana, "Boys and Girls Who Also Carried Guns."

<sup>15</sup> Dyan Mazurana and Kristopher Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone* (Massachusetts and Washington: Women Waging Peace, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> "The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF Response," UNICEF, February 2005, accessed at [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact\\_final.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact_final.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> "Sierra Leone: Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence Against Girls and Women," Amnesty International, 29 June 2000, accessed at <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR510352000?open&of=ENG-SLE>.

<sup>18</sup> "War-related Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone: A Population Based Survey," *Physicians for Human Rights* (Washington: Physicians for Human Rights, January 2002).

women and children are however known to be the principal war victims, often submitted to rape, sexual slavery, forced labour, torture, mutilation and forced recruitment [*sic*] by the RUF [Revolutionary United Front], known to use terror against the civil population as one of their principal war tactics.<sup>19</sup>

Another report identified women as the “worst losers” of Sierra Leone’s War. This article claimed: “Women [are] the symbol of love, kindness, mercy and spend her life in coping with sexual and mental abuses done by one or more men in countries dealing with war like situation.”<sup>20</sup>

Vast numbers of Sierra Leone’s population experienced various sources of violence and trauma during the conflict; however, the policy community has focused almost exclusively on women and girls’ victimization while largely ignoring any active role they may have played in the conflict. Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson determined that in Sierra Leone there was an “over-classification of girls and young women abducted by the RUF, AFRC [Armed Forces Revolutionary Council], and SLA [Sierra Leone Army] as ‘camp followers,’ ‘sex-slaves,’ and ‘wives’ by some within the international community and the Sierra Leone government.”<sup>21</sup> They argue this over-classification led to a disarmament process that did not address the “actual lived experiences” of girls and women.<sup>22</sup> Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana argue that having “DDR processes planned and implemented by military officials has resulted in a bias against those the military does not consider ‘real soldiers’ (i.e. men with guns).”<sup>23</sup>

Another justification given to explain the low numbers of women in the DDR was that women and girls were simply overlooked. In particular, women and girls who did not go through the DDR process have been portrayed as victims left behind and neglected by the local and international community. For example, in UNICEF’s report on the lessons learned from the DDR, they cite the consideration of gender and the inclusion of girls as a major shortcoming of their programming. In fact, one of the major programs initiated in response to criticisms about the inclusion of girls and women in the DDR process was called “The Girls Left Behind.” According to UNICEF, this program was created to target “young girls and women who were either still living with their captors or who had been abducted (before the age of 18) and had

<sup>19</sup> “Gender Profile Sierra Leone,” AFROL *News*, accessed at [http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/sierraleone\\_women.htm](http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/sierraleone_women.htm).

<sup>20</sup> “Sierra Leone’s War: Women the Worst Losers,” *We The Women*, accessed at <http://www.wethewomen.org/entry/help-war-time-sexual-abused-sierra-leones-woman>.

<sup>21</sup> Mazurana and Carlson, *From Combat to Community*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting forces in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After the War* (Ottawa, Canada: Rights and Democracy, 2004), 114.

been released or escaped.”<sup>24</sup> The program was designed to be a short-term, intensive intervention “for abducted girls and young women to ensure their protection and reintegration and to offer them basic education and skills training.”<sup>25</sup>

Both of these explanations deny any agency on the part of females during the war. There is an assumption that women and girls were either victims caught up in the fray of a male dominated conflict or that they were left behind by programs that likely would have benefited them in the same way they benefited male soldiers. These explanations ignore how socially constructed ideas about the roles and place of women and men during war impact policies, depictions, and our ability to accept and acknowledge violent female soldiers with agency. My interviews with female soldiers and an investigation of the discourses used to construct males as securitized subjects in contrast to desecuritized female victims disrupt these stereotypes of women and girls as exclusively passive victims of the conflict.

### Women, Violence, and War

One only has to peruse the literature on conflict to find evidence of the gendered assumption that men make war, women make peace.<sup>26</sup> War, in general, has been described as “a masculine endeavour for which women may serve as victim, spectator, or prize.”<sup>27</sup> Aid agencies and military and peacekeeping operations have historically based their operations on the assumption that women and children are the most vulnerable victims of conflict.<sup>28</sup> Women’s peaceful nature and their perceived aversion to risk<sup>29</sup> are sometimes described as stemming from their natural capacity as mothers.<sup>30</sup> In effect, roles that are depicted as natural for women during conflict are often associated with their reproductive capacities and their ability to nurture, cooperate, and sustain life. Instead of soldiering, women’s primary roles during conflicts tend to be described as “wives, girlfriends, and mothers, waiting for their soldiers to return and caring for wounded.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls,” UNICEF.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Turpin, “Many Faces: Women Confronting War,” in *The Women and War Reader*, eds., Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3–19, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Francine D’Amico, “Feminist Perspectives on Women Warriors,” in *The Woman and War Reader*, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 119–26.

<sup>28</sup> Charli Carpenter, *Innocent Women and Children: Gender Norms and the Protection of Civilians* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> See Rawwida Baksh, Linda Etchart, Elsie Onubogu, and Tina Johnson, ed., *Gender Mainstreaming in Conflict Transformation: Building Sustainable Peace* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> See Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (London: The Women’s Press, 1984); and Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> April Carter, “Should Women Be Soldiers or Pacifists?” in *The Woman and War Reader*, eds., Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 33–41.

Certainly there are a growing number of researchers who have been challenging assumptions about the natural qualities of men and women—particularly from radical, postmodern, and poststructural feminists, critical security studies, postcolonial studies, and development studies. Feminist international relations scholars, such as Christine Sylvester and Laura Sjoberg in particular, have highlighted the historical contributions of women during war.<sup>32</sup> In Africa, specifically, there is evidence that women “have had a long history of participation in the liberation struggles of their continent” including organized resistance movements, protests, and bearing arms.<sup>33</sup> Despite this burgeoning research, the message that “men are natural soldiers and women are not” remains prominent in many mainstream messages about war, including the media and government and NGO reports.

### Women as Soldiers in Sierra Leone

Although it is indisputable that women and girls, as well as men and boys, experienced trauma, abuse, malnourishment, fear, and neglect, the manner in which females are consistently and continually portrayed as victims—often helpless victims—must be critically examined. Interviews with a group of former female soldiers in Sierra Leone help to shed light on the multiple roles and activities of women during the eleven-year civil conflict.<sup>34</sup> Every woman responded positively to the question: “Would you define yourself as a former soldier?” Women were quick to point out which armed group they were a part of, what rank they held, and what roles they carried out: one woman identified herself as a commander with the RUF; another woman specified that she was a soldier “because [she] was given one week training on how to fire a gun and subsequently became active”;<sup>35</sup> another woman identified as a soldier because she “took part in most of the horrible activities of the evil conflict in SL”;<sup>36</sup> and several women admitted that they voluntarily

---

<sup>32</sup> See Christine Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Christine Sylvester and Swati Parashar, “The Contemporary ‘Mahabharata’ and the Many ‘Draupadis,’” paper prepared for presentation at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, CA, 26-29 March 2008; Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, Justice, and the Wars in Iraq* (New York: Lexington Books, 2006); and Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Patricia T. Morris, “Women, Resistance, and the Use of Force in South Africa” in *Women and the Use of Military Force*, eds., Ruth H. Howes and Michael R. Stevenson (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees 1 through 50 are withheld by mutual agreement), interviews by Megan MacKenzie, 12 November-20 December 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Interviewee 28, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Interviewee 14, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

joined a particular faction. Women even reported going to places like Burkina Faso for military training.<sup>37</sup>

One of the few women interviewed who went through the DDR process reported participating in the war as a soldier for two years. Her reported activities included fighting and killing. When she went to the demobilization center she was held for two months and given a small amount of money; however, after the program she could not find her mother and discovered that her father had died during the conflict. Mary concluded that the counselling she was given “not to do bad” was useful, but argued that she needed help with the children she gave birth to from the rebels. She noted that men had the advantage of being able to leave behind their children while women were left to care for them. Mary’s most provocative report was that there were at least one hundred women fighting alongside her in her group—“all had guns.”<sup>38</sup>

The duties carried out by this group of women were incredibly diverse. When asked “what were your role(s) during the conflict,” over 75 percent of the women I interviewed declared that they were involved in active combat duties. The variety of responses to this question indicates the range of the roles carried out by women during the war. These responses include: “leading lethal attacks,” “screening and killing pro-rebel civilians,” “combatant,” “poison/inject captured war prisoners with either lethal injection or acid,” “I trained with [the AFRC] bush camp how to shoot a gun,” “killing and maiming pro-government forces and civilians,” “gun trafficking,” “killing,” “planning and carrying out attacks on public places,” “do execution on commanders of my age group,” “fighting,” “murdered children,” and “weapon cleaner.”<sup>39</sup> Although a significant number of the women admitted to acting as sex slaves, the vast list of duties carried out by these women defied any strict gendered notions about the roles of women during conflict. In fact, Edward Anague from a local community development organization in Freetown reported “some of the most vicious soldiers and commanders were women.”<sup>40</sup> From these interviews it becomes clear that women and girls participated in all facets of war including active combat, commanding, and military training.

## Beyond Gendered Stereotypes

My interviews with female soldiers in Sierra Leone not only demonstrate that women were actively involved in combat, but also that the answer to the

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Ferrero (Country Director for Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Sierra Leone—an organization that helped run the DDR), interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Interviewee 8, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 13 December 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Interviewees 44, 12, 38, 9, 21, 22, 33, 4, 18, 39, 2, 25, 42, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 13–15 December 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Anague, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 28 November 2005.

question “why did so few women and girls go through the DDR?” requires a more in-depth answer than, “they were left behind.” Women’s explanations for why they did not go through the DDR ranged from “I had escaped and was trying to find my parents,”<sup>41</sup> to “I had [another] mission in the Ivory Coast.”<sup>42</sup> No women I spoke with indicated they felt “left out” of the DDR and very few women indicated they thought the DDR would have been helpful for them.

To begin with, a significant number of the women I interviewed had an incredibly negative perception of the DDR process and did not see it as an attractive option for them post-conflict. For example, descriptions of the program included “a trap to screen anti-government combatants.”<sup>43</sup> Some women claimed they were not convinced the program benefited anybody other than international NGOs including Sonia<sup>44</sup> who reported, “we were used as everything for them [NGOs/international aid community] to have and be everything they want to be in their war and political ambitions.”<sup>45</sup> The program was also described as a tactical “use of ex-combatants as tools for fund raising” for NGO workers to “enrich themselves.”<sup>46</sup> Another woman commented, “all I saw was expensive vehicles being used by those NGOs and so much bureaucracy.”<sup>47</sup>

An additional concern expressed by former female soldiers was their distrust of the promises made by the Sierra Leone government and the organizations involved in the DDR. Some witnessed the first phases of the DDR while they were still involved with the fighting forces and concluded that the “flamboyant promises”<sup>48</sup> made to ex-combatants were not fulfilled. This distrust also stemmed from accusations of corruption with “funds [being] directed to families of program officials”<sup>49</sup> in the program. These testimonies demonstrate that negative perceptions impacted women and girls’ decisions not to participate in the DDR. In these cases, these women did not feel left out of the process; rather, they chose to avoid it because they were critical of the program and the way it was implemented.

In addition to negative perceptions of the DDR, women listed various other reasons why they did not participate in the process. A frequent response was that women believed that they needed to have a gun to be eligible for the DDR, and they either did not possess a gun or no longer had one in their possession at the time of the DDR. Initially, the disarmament

<sup>41</sup> Interviewee 15, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Interviewee 1, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 12 December 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Interviewee 42, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Interviewee 44, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Interviewee 37, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 12 December 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Interviewee 12, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Interviewee 8, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 14 December 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Interviewee 19, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Interviewee 25, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

process for adults required soldiers to present a gun to be eligible for benefits; during the last phases of the DDR the possession of a gun was not required. For children, the possession of a gun was never a requirement; however, many children were not clear on this fact. DDR procedures for children defined eligibility as follows: “aged 7 or above; have learned to ‘cock and load’; have been trained; have spent 6 months or above in the fighting forces.”<sup>50</sup> Despite this, the primary understanding of the DDR for a striking number of the women interviewed was that it was “just about men with guns”<sup>51</sup> or that it was a “gun for money”<sup>52</sup> program directed at male rebels.

Given that the conflict in Sierra Leone lasted over eleven years, involved various armed factions, and erupted in several phases, each individual combatant did not necessarily possess his or her own weapon. The types of weapons used to fight were diverse and included machetes. These weapons were acquired, lost, or stolen and transferred from one area and faction to another. This made the DDR policy of each combatant turning in a gun for eligibility unreasonable and ineffective. Although numerous women I interviewed admitted to carrying and using guns; several admitted they had their guns taken away from them before the DDR, while others told me they left their weapons behind when they escaped from their armed group. In some of these cases, commanders or comrades deliberately took weapons from women and girls before the disarmament process so they would not be eligible for the program. In addition, both males and females who performed support roles during the conflict (including domestic tasks, acting as spies or messengers, and looters) may or may not have ever possessed a gun.

Interviewee forty-nine was one of the women who explained that she did not participate in the DDR because she did not have a weapon. Conscripted by the AFRC/RUF at the age of fourteen, her roles during the conflict included fighting, gun trafficking, acting as a “bush wife,” and acting as a spy. Despite her role as a fighter, she reported that her commander deliberately prevented her from participating in the DDR: “I was excluded by my commander as they [sic] took my gun from me—the symbol to guarantee me to be part of the reintegration program.” For her, the strengths of the program included the huge amount of international support; however, she felt that the program did not fulfill its promises to ex-combatants. She felt that female soldiers were deceived and were not given sufficient information about the program: “girl soldiers were part of the ‘real’ people that mattered to the program.” She also felt that most reintegration initiatives ended prematurely and heard about embezzlement of program funds by officials. She

---

<sup>50</sup> “The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF Response,” UNICEF.

<sup>51</sup> Interviewee 23, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 14 December 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Interviewee 17, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 14 December 2005.

reported that she finds her current situation frustrating as she is “just trying to survive” despite poverty.<sup>53</sup>

Of the fifty women I interviewed in Makeni, forty-four had escaped from the armed group with which they were associated. Women who had escaped from their armed group avoided the DDR not only because they did not have a weapon, but also because they had returned to their families and had begun to disassociate themselves from the armed groups. For example, interviewee one explained that she did not see herself as eligible for the disarmament process because she had escaped and “wasn’t with the rebels any longer.”<sup>54</sup> Another woman told me her priority upon escaping was finding her parents rather than going to the DDR.

In a way, escapee women left the DDR behind because they no longer saw themselves as soldiers or no longer wanted to be connected with armed forces. It makes sense that women who had risked their lives to escape from an armed group would not want to join them again for a disarmament process. In order for the DDR to have met the needs of the large number of women and girls who escaped from the armed forces, the DDR should have specifically targeted escapees by making efforts to inform them that they were eligible for the DDR and that their safety would be ensured during the process.

Escapees also mentioned the fear of stigmatization that kept them away from disarmament facilities. The shame associated with going through the DDR and being connected to the armed forces was mentioned by a number of women. Women who had escaped either chose to avoid the stigma caused by going through the DDR or, for some, their families prevented them from participating because of the shame that would be brought to their families. The stigma associated with the DDR was a result of both local attitudes about the armed groups and the actual process of the DDR. Although the people of Sierra Leone have done a remarkable job “forgiving and forgetting” the atrocities that took place during the war and accepting the former rebels and soldiers back into communities, former soldiers—particularly women—faced stigma through their association with armed groups. Women described the DDR as “shameful” and spoke about the negative effect it would have on their families. Also, some women were anxious to start a new life and to break ties with their lives as soldiers. Their association with programs designed for former soldiers meant they were continually identified with the conflict. This was not an option for women who “didn’t want people to know that [they] took part in [the] mad war.”<sup>55</sup>

In terms of the structure of the program, one of the procedures that was linked to stigmatization was the identification process for former soldiers.

<sup>53</sup> Interviewee 49, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Interviewee 1, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Interviewee 25, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

During the disarmament, each soldier had his or her picture taken and was given an ID card, which made the soldier eligible for training programs, financial assistance, or start-up packages. Several of the women I talked to expressed unease with this process. They did not want their “faces to be on the computer,”<sup>56</sup> felt nervous that their photos would be kept by immigration, and that they would “never be able to leave the country.”<sup>57</sup>

Stigmatization was a major source of insecurity for former female combatants. One woman told me she did not want to be “seen publicly as an ex-combatant” out of “fear of retaliation”<sup>58</sup> from community members or other rebel factions. Similarly, a young woman told me she had reason to believe that if she showed up at the DDR she would be killed by the Special Security Death Squad, a brutal, specialized armed group. Given the fact that the DDR took place at the dubious end of a ten-year civil war, some women and girls were not convinced that the fighting was truly over and did not want to label themselves openly at the DDR out of concern for their security. Another far less talked about aspect of the fear associated with the DDR is the use of witchcraft or magic by rebel forces. One woman explained that her role during the conflict was to “do concoctions and oracle activities in the holy shrine”<sup>59</sup> for the Civil Defense Forces. She told me she was “warned not to appear [at the DDR] . . . [because of] fear that the demon of protection during the war will consume me and my family and all CDF.”<sup>60</sup>

One soldier in particular, interviewee fourteen, was recruited by the Kamajors before she was twelve years old. She reported that her duties as a soldier included spying, “toting property,” and being used as a sex slave for her commander. She recounted that she did not go through the DDR: “the Kamajors prevented me because they have a taboo that they do not touch or come close to women—but that was a lie . . . they use women as combatants.” She admitted she did not know the details of the DDR program; however, she had heard of the foreign involvement and the large amounts of money directed through the program. She expressed frustration at how females were treated in post-conflict Sierra Leone: “all of us were combatants but treated as house wives and sex slaves.”<sup>61</sup>

Another structural problem with the DDR related to the manner in which the child and adult disarmament process was separated. This division was informed by international legal definitions of “child” rather than Sierra Leonean understandings of these categories. Joseph Momoh, founder of Children Associated with the War (CAW) illustrated the gap between local perceptions

<sup>56</sup> Interviewee 16, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 11 December 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Interviewee 18, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 13 December 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Interviewee 1, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Interviewee 14, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Interviewee 14, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

of “child” and “adult” and Western legal definitions. He explained that for many ethnic groups in Sierra Leone there are cultural ceremonies that mark the passing from childhood to adulthood. For most ethnic groups in the country, ceremonies take place within separate male and female secret societies. These groups are responsible for educating members about cultural traditions, histories, and skills and trades deemed essential for survival and success within the community. There has been growing scrutiny of women’s secret societies because some ceremonies marking a female’s transition to adulthood, or bondo ceremonies, include female circumcision. Bondo ceremonies were disrupted during the civil conflict and, as a result, there was some confusion as to the status of women and girls in their communities and their eligibility for the DDR. Momoh explains

... some girls that were around the age of 16 would feel strange going through the DDR because they were not seen as adults because they didn’t go through ceremonies but they didn’t see themselves as children because they had had sex and some had children . . . . You can have a baby but if you haven’t gone through the ceremonies you are not considered mature enough to have a child and you are still considered a child. A mother is someone who has gone through the ceremonies . . . . If you give birth to a child you are not an adult and you cannot carry out adult responsibilities so that is why some parents don’t want to sent their girls through the DDR because their girls had babies and it was shameful.<sup>62</sup>

Although, at the end of the war twenty-eight of the fifty women I interviewed would have been under the age of eighteen and therefore defined as a child according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1990). These women would have been eligible for the children’s DDR; however, a surprising number did not see themselves as children either because they were already mothers or, because of the loss of parents, some had taken on adult roles for a number of years.

Pride was an additional theme in the responses given by women who were asked about their attendance at the DDR. Several women I interviewed indicated either that they had “better plans” for themselves than the DDR or that they felt the DDR was “below them” somehow. For example, one woman told me she avoided the DDR because she had been promised by the head of the Civil Defence Forces that she would be given “a lucrative house and educational support”<sup>63</sup> if she remained with the forces. Theresa told me she had money from the war and did not need the handouts offered at the DDR. A few women had made plans to go on missions in the Ivory Coast and Guinea

<sup>62</sup> Father Joseph Momoh, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 20 December 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Interviewee 42, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

or had hoped to travel to South Africa with the Executive Outcome Forces—an armed group from South Africa. These women were not left out of the DDR but had charted courses they saw as more attractive than participating in the process.

Perhaps what was most interesting about the answers the women gave me were the discussions I had with women who felt they were “above” the DDR. One woman explained to me that she thought her “looks would carry [her] a long way”<sup>64</sup> and that she did not need the resources offered by the DDR. Another informed me that she was “too popular”<sup>65</sup> to go to the DDR and that people would recognize her and target her and her family. After reading numerous accounts of the oppression and victimization of women during and after the conflict, it was surprising to hear the pride—even arrogance—women associate with their role as a soldier. For some women who had achieved higher ranks within the warring factions, the notion of attending the DDR with lower ranking soldiers was insulting. One woman explained, “I was not convinced to see myself parade before people I had authority over for years.”<sup>66</sup> Several other women mentioned their disapproval of the “segregation within the command ranks” at the DDR.<sup>67</sup> The lessons learned from the DDR in Sierra Leone do not account for these shifts in power that occurred during the civil war (and numerous other wars) and the difficulty women had with losing this power.

These interviews indicate the complexities associated with women’s decisions not to go to the DDR. Programs for female victims of the war, abducted girls and women, and girls left behind were developed in the absence of women’s own accounts of what roles they took up during the war, how they perceived the DDR, and why they did not participate in the DDR. Although these were choices made in extremely constrained circumstances; by ignoring women’s accounts of why they made these decisions, useful lessons to be derived from the DDR become buried. The decisions that female soldiers made in relation to the DDR should be seen as political decisions and must be taken into account when considering the effectiveness and impact of the DDR process.

### Beyond Followers and Sex Slaves: Engendering Representations

Even for the few women and girls who were recognized as playing an active role in Sierra Leone’s conflict, a variety of titles were constructed to avoid calling them soldiers including: “camp followers,” “abductees,” “sex

<sup>64</sup> Interviewee 23, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Interviewee 43, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Interviewee 42, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 15 December 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Interviewee 19, 42, 43, 26 interviews by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 14–15 December 2005.

slaves,” “domestic slaves,” or “girls and women associated with the fighting forces” and “vulnerable groups associated with armed movements.” One of the facilitators of the DDR program admitted, “women were just seen as camp followers even though some were active combatants and some went through military training.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, even major international organizations that helped oversee the DDR process have been reluctant to name women and girls as combatants. The Girls Left Behind, the program established by UNICEF to address women and girls that should have benefited from the DDR, makes little reference to the title “soldiers.” In an hour-long interview with Glenis Taylor, a senior director at UNICEF Sierra Leone, she never used the term soldier to refer to these women and girls. Instead she identified them as “girls with the fighting forces” and “girls who were involved with the fighting forces.”<sup>69</sup>

The logical maneuvering that categorizes females out of the rank of soldier goes something like this: most females acted in support roles for the fighting forces rather than in combat roles. Therefore females were primarily noncombatants, and noncombatants are not soldiers. This logic is fallacious both because of the problematic assumption that women and girls were not combatants and because it wrongly assumes that the support work carried out by females during the conflict does not render them soldiers. Vivi Stavrou notes, “Not labelling the work of non-combatant women soldiers as soldiering, continues the gender discrimination of the division of labour whereby critical work that is essential for survival, is simply considered a natural extension of women’s domestic obligations and hence neither worthy of remuneration nor significant enough for women to qualify for training and livelihoods programs.”<sup>70</sup>

Even though the term soldier refers to anyone who is a member of an armed group, questions and concerns over the distinction between *combatant* and *soldier* have been raised in relation to women and girls. A review of the capacities, ranks, and services of any army reveals that a variety of duties and contributions are required for almost all combat operations; however, typically there are few who question if male officers who fulfill support roles, such as medical operations or communications, are real soldiers. When men act as porters, cleaners, domestic help, or messengers during war they are considered soldiers; there is little debate about the extent to which they deserve the soldier title. However, there has been extensive debate about the functions of female soldiers in Sierra Leone and the extent to which their

---

<sup>68</sup> Ferrero, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 30 November 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Glenis Taylor (Project Officer for Child Protection, UNICEF, Freetown), interview by Megan MacKenzie, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2 December 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Vivi Stavrou, “Breaking the Silence: Girls Abducted During Armed Conflict in Angola,” final report, Canadian International Development Agency and the Christian Children’s Fund, September 2003–March 2005.

work counts as soldiering. While great effort was made by post-conflict policy makers to name women and girls something other than soldiers, “men involved with the military in support functions are defined as soldiers, and not as ‘men involved in armed groups or forces,’ or as ‘men directly associated with the war’; or as dependants of male or female combatants.”<sup>71</sup> In effect, active female combatants became desecuritized through the process of being stripped of their title as soldier while male combatants were unquestionably categorized as soldiers and a security concern.

The manner in which male and female soldiers have been categorized post-conflict has had several interrelated impacts: first, stripping women and girls of their titles as soldiers by distinguishing them from true or real combatants depoliticized their roles during the conflict; second, as development grows evermore concerned with people and issues identified as security concerns, depoliticizing the role of women and girls during the conflict meant that they were not targeted as primary beneficiaries for the DDR program and other reintegration initiatives; third, politicizing and securitizing the DDR process for male soldiers and deprioritizing and depoliticizing women has meant that the reintegration process for women has largely been seen as a social process, a returning to normal that would happen naturally. In effect, the maneuvering to designate females as camp followers, victims, wives, or any designation other than soldier should be seen as an example of the power relations at play in securitizing an issue and defining a securitized subject. Eliminating women from the category of soldier and security priority also removes them from significant policy discourses.

### The New “Normal”

For the case of Sierra Leone, the role of the development community in reshaping gender roles during the reintegration process cannot be overlooked. Organizations in Sierra Leone largely treated the reintegration of women and girls as a social process, a returning to normal that would either happen naturally, with time, or through sensitization—meaning talking to communities and families about the need to take women and girls back. In particular, there was great concern about the marriageability of female soldiers largely because it was assumed they had been raped or they had given birth to children out of wedlock.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, grandmothers offered to raise the children of former soldiers so they could marry without men having to worry about supporting “rebel children.”<sup>73</sup> Some organizations even

<sup>71</sup> Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 99.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Shelper, “Les Filles-Soldats: Trajectoires d’après-guerre en Sierra Leone,” *Politique Africaine* 88 (December 2002): 49–62.

<sup>73</sup> Interviewee 42, interview by Megan MacKenzie, Makeni, Sierra Leone, 16 December 2005.

encouraged former female soldiers to marry their rape perpetrators in order to avoid shame and to blend into the community.<sup>74</sup>

Women were given few choices in their reintegration process: silence or stigma, limited training or nothing, isolation or marriage, motherhood, and returning to their families. Each of these choices was seen as an opportunity to hide their identities as soldiers and to “blend in” “naturally” to the community and family unit. Jaqueline Stevens argues, “to ‘naturalize’ is to express the necessity of a form of being or practice, to make something seem impervious to human intention and immutable.”<sup>75</sup> Understood this way, naturalizing the process of reintegration for women and girls in Sierra Leone effectively desecuritized female soldiers and justified the limited attention given to them.

By encouraging women and girl soldiers to return to their “normal places” in the community, any new roles or positions of authority they may have held during the conflict are stripped from them, and any opportunities to rethink and reshape gender stereotypes and hierarchies are destroyed. Normal women become defined primarily as victims of the war while women and girls who were soldiers, who were perpetrators of violence and destruction, who volunteered to participate in conflict or who were empowered by the conflict, become categorized as deviants. Lene Hansen posits that “the positive value ascribed to ‘women’ is preconditioned upon women’s acceptance of the subject position bestowed upon them. If ‘women’ were to be constructed, or construct themselves, as less motherly, less caring, and less publicly passive, their supplementary privilege would in all likelihood be suspended.”<sup>76</sup>

### Implications of a Gendered and Securitized DDR

The interviews I did in Sierra Leone showed a different face of concepts such as “post-conflict,” “reintegration,” “rehabilitation,” and “reconstruction.” In the experiences of the fifty women that were interviewed for this project, these terms were not gender neutral. The overwhelming message my interviewees was that there is no “post” conflict for many female soldiers in Sierra Leone. For a large number of the women interviewed, different forms of violence such as forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and isolation continue despite the cessation of formal conflict. In addition, female soldiers’ social and political choices seem more constrained by notions of loyalty, duty, and identity in the post-conflict period as they were during the conflict.

---

<sup>74</sup> See Shelper, “Les Filles-Soldats,” 49–62.; and Baldi Giulia and Megan MacKenzie, “Silent Identities: Children Born of War in Sierra Leone,” in *Born of War*, ed. R. Charli Carpenter (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007), 78–94.

<sup>75</sup> Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>76</sup> Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 21.

In post-conflict Sierra Leone, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and aid agencies have funding, networks, and influence that garner them significant positions of power in comparison to Sierra Leone's shaky government. As a result of this power, these organizations possess the ability to selectively securitize issues and determine their priority. Given the radicalization of development, or the increasing attention to security as a major factor in development, NGOs and aid agencies have a particular stake in designating a societal phenomenon a security concern requiring immediate attention. Due to the escalating emphasis placed on security by development actors and governments, securitizing an issue is an effective method for garnering funding; it indicates that an urgent response is required and that addressing this particular issue is central to stability and peace.

The radicalization of development in Sierra Leone has meant that issues understood as traditional security concerns, including disarmament, unemployed men, and male soldiers have been given significant attention in the post-conflict context. Moreover, matters relating to women, including sexual violence and female soldiers, continue to be categorized as domestic, social, or private matters. Male soldiers continue to be securitized post-conflict in contrast to the naturalization and domestication of women. The reintegration process for men has been emphasized as vital to the transition from war to peace while the reintegration process for females has been deemed a social concern and has been moralized as a return to normal. Post-conflict programs that assume women and girls are victims lacking agency have dismissed, isolated, and silenced a vast cohort of women and girls. The reluctance by international aid agencies, the United Nations, the World Bank, and other international organizations to name female soldiers as soldiers rather than "females associated with the war," "dependents," or "camp followers" ignores and depoliticizes their roles during the conflict. In addition, this construction relegates them spatially to the private realm—well away from the attention given to securitized and politicized matters.

This research verifies the Copenhagen School's insight that security is a political category resulting in the prioritization of particular issues or events as significant over everyday politics. In the case of post-conflict Sierra Leone, however, it is important to see that one of the political forces operating on the selection of security concerns is gender—male former combatants are securitized, while female former combatants are marginalized. **This understanding lends support to Hansen's argument that "new" conceptions of security such as human security<sup>77</sup> do not free us from the hierarchy of policy**

---

<sup>77</sup> Although there are varying definitions and conceptions of human security, this concept generally refers to an understanding of security that extends beyond a traditional militarized and nationalistic definition. For example, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines human security as: "Human security can be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from such

priorities associated with traditional conceptions of security. Human security or individual security concerns still do not receive the same amount of attention and funding as so-called hard security matters; even human security funding (such as that in the DDR) is often distributed in a gender-biased manner. This means that in patriarchal societies, security threats that typically concern women do not make the cut for securitization because women and gender issues largely remain in the domestic sphere rather than the political, international, or security sphere.

The relationship between notions of stability, peace, victim, and violent, threatening, conflict to presumptions about femininity and masculinity must be unpacked in order to illustrate how security discourses not only continue to discount the role of women and girls in otherwise securitized activities but also contribute to the reconstruction of normal female subjects as benevolent, nurturing, or victims in contrast to violent and aggressive males. Women and girls have been victimized during conflict; however, they have participated in violence out of coercion and out of choice. There are obvious limits to theorizing about violent women that must be deconstructed. Feminist scholars in particular can contribute a great deal by continuing to discover ways to intercept security discourses and to disrupt characterizations of the female victim. Feminists also need to contemplate whether there is room within feminist work on violence, the state, and the political and domestic sphere to theorize about women who choose to be violent in the name of the state and women who choose to inflict sexual violence.

Further examination into the reordering that takes place through programs like the DDR in the name of development and security must be taken in order to expose the canyons of silence that continue to surround women's and girls' experiences. As Carolyn Nordstrom has noted, "what we hear and do not hear about the world we occupy is no accident . . . . Shaping knowledge, and a lack of knowledge, constitutes a basic element of power. Silences, spheres where knowledge has been kept from public awareness—are undeniably political."<sup>78</sup> Sierra Leone's disarmament process should not be hailed as a success or exported as a model for other countries without accounting for women's and girls' own depictions of their roles and experiences during the conflict. Real attention to women's and girls' experiences would produce a more complicated understanding of women (who can be both victims and aggressors/agents) and of conflict (as consuming of the entire society and extending beyond the official timelines of war).

---

chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development." *Human Development Report 1994*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (New York: Oxford University Press), 23, accessed at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/>.

<sup>78</sup> Carolyn Nordstrom, "Girls Behind the (Front) Lines," in *The Women and War Reader*, eds., Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 81.

Such complicated notions of both women and the conflicts they participate in would bring new solutions and new questions to policy analysis in post-conflict reconstruction. One solution such an analysis offers is insight that it is crucial to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate female former combatants on the terms of their needs and their experiences in the conflict if the society is to transition from conflict to peace. Another important realization is that the needs of former female combatants cannot be determined solely by understanding the ways in which they have been victimized by the conflict—it is also important to consider the ways in which they have participated in the conflict as agents, as supporters, and as soldiers. A third important tool that this analysis provides is a broader implication of the omission of women from the DDR: it is crucial to take note that securitization in post-conflict reconstruction and development is selective and political, and that the ultimate success of peace-building efforts relies on appropriate recognition of security threats and peace potential.

If the ultimate success of peace-building efforts relies on political decisions about what to securitize and what not to, this analysis brings up a number of new questions as well. The negative impacts of the DDR process in Sierra Leone on women suggest that there is a need to reconsider the positive association of reintegration and reconstruction with progress and development. In other words, if the reintegration process for females is called “a return to normal” guided by gender stereotypes and a return to prewar limiting and oppressive understandings of women’s capabilities, then the DDR process risks entrenching gender inequality. It follows that a truly progressive or developmental post-conflict reconstruction program would include more radical change in the area of women’s status in society, both for its own sake and for the sake of the success of peace efforts.

What this analysis does make clear is that the time has come that the voluntary participation of women and girls in traditionally male-dominated activities such as war can no longer be overlooked. In Sierra Leone, the effectiveness of post-conflict programming, an inclusive transition from conflict to peace, and gender equality post-conflict have been compromised because of this omission; an error that will be repeated as long as reconstruction programs remain blind to the needs of women not only as victims but as participants in conflicts around the world.