Queen's University Belfast

The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice

'FEMALE EX-COMBATANTS AND THE SIERRA LEONEAN DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESS (DDR)'

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Except for the appropriately referenced materials, this thesis is entirely my own work carried out under the supervision of Dr Ulrike M. Vieten ☒

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Abstract

The Sierra Leonean civil conflict (1991-2002) involved a high number of women in war, not only as victims but also as part of both the confronted armies. Women were abducted and forced to recruit by the fighting groups, being one of the most targeted groups during the conflict. Once the war ended, they were still suffering from further violence due to the difficulties they faced in their social reintegration.

Since the female combatant's role transgressed the Sierra Leonean established gender stereotypes, women ex-soldiers experienced social exclusion during the aftermath. They were discriminated by their family and their community- what made it very difficult for them becoming and being part of the society again. This situation was aggravated by their limited turnout in the DDR programs. As a consequence, Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants did not participate in the DDR process and could not enjoy its economic benefits, neither to attend the vocational training and education programs. Moreover, many of the few women who attended the DDR faced several problems such as difficulties in accessing the DDR, social rejection, security's issues and deficient reintegration.

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Introduction

i) Problem Statement

Traditionally war has been perceived as a men's domain (D'Amico, 1998) in which women are portrayed as passive victims. However, women always have participated in violent conflicts and battles. According to D'Amico (1998) women have been silenced since women's social constructions depict them as naturally peaceful. Then, they remain invisible in history narrative as far as their role is concerned: during conflict women *"are often associated with their reproductive capacities and their ability to nurture, cooperate and sustain life"* (MacKenzie, 2012: 48). The understandings of female victim and male perpetrator are shaped by gendered assumptions about suitable behaviour and the so-called normal social order (MacKenzie, 2012).

It is true that women are one of the most vulnerable groups during wars. They are also one of the most targeted groups during civil confrontations. Nevertheless, women can also be perpetrators of terror and violent acts during wars. Especially in civil wars,

> *Women are also combatants; women resist and fight back; they take sides, spy, and fight among themselves; and even when they don't see active service, they often support war efforts in multiple ways, willingly or unwillingly* (Turshen, 1998: 1).

There are multiple cases that give evidence to female involvement in fighting forces, such as in Mozambique, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Eritrea, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Northern Ireland, among other examples. But, since women perpetrators deviate from norms associated with so-called feminine behaviour (MacKenzie, 2012), their involvement in war is denied.

As a consequence, women are less included and not a specific group relevant to post-conflict reconstruction processes, including the DDR. This situation leaves them unprotected and silenced in the aftermath of combat and war. Thus, women's lives are at risk as *"violence and the threat of violence against women do not end when the peace accords are signed" (*Turshen, 1998: 8). There is a need for incorporating a gender perspective into the post-conflict process in order to avoid these situations. Gender sensitive initiatives are required to achieve sustainable long-term peace and development (Moser, 2001). This process should start by *"recognizing that violence and conflict are both gendered acts because these acts involve ideologically ascribed male and female gender roles, relations and stereotypical identities"* (Moser, 2001: 30).

Contrarily, the lack of post-conflict intervention for and on behalf of women who have been actively involved with armed groups will increase their difficulties to become reintegrated members of their community. This situation is aggravated in highly patriarchal societies where gender stereotypes shape the social order. For this reason, this research aims to analyse the female ex-combatants participation in the DDR process of Sierra Leone.

The objective of this study is to provide some answers to the question: was there a gender perspective taken by the Sierra Leonean DDR? This question will be answered by looking at how the DDR was designed and implemented and at the female ex-combatants reintegration in their former community. My argument will support that there is a need of promoting post-conflict gender responsive measures for ensuring that unequal gender power relations are addressed. The transitional period between war and peace is particularly difficult for female ex-combatants, as they are stigmatized and socially rejected when they come back from the armed

groups. Therefore, this dissertation aims to highlight the importance of taking into account the particular needs of women's ex-soldiers during the DDR in order to facilitate their reintegration and their participation in a more peaceful society.

The methodology in this dissertation is based on document analysis. The revised material includes institutional reports, articles, United Nations documents and other secondary data that study the women's situation during the DDR process in Sierra Leone.

ii) Methodology

This qualitative research will use literature review and will analyse the data of United Nations documents and reports to explore the situation of female ex-combatants during the DDR in Sierra Leone. Since I will do a content analysis of documents, I will approach them as primary sources about the women`s situation during the DDR process. The authors of the documents are the United Nations; women´s research institutes, non-governmental organizations, African study centres and individual researchers.

The Sierra Leonean DDR practice will be investigated in order to determine some of the main issues that women suffered during this period. The collected information will be compared with gender- responsive DDR standards in order to check if there was a lack of attention to women's special needs in the aftermath. It will allow the reader to detect the absence of gender awareness during the DDR while defending the requirement of taking into account women's rights and vulnerabilities during the aftermath.

One difficulty that this study will face is the fact that some of the women ex-combatants were former child-soldiers. But, once the war ended, they were not

children anymore. Moreover, the social construction of childhood differs in each country, and an adult in one state could be considered a child in other. To avoid confusions, the material analysed studies the war experiences of women adults. Therefore, I would not take into account the age where they were abducted by the army.

Underpinning these strategies for collecting information, the research adopts a feminist methodology and feminist standpoint. The ultimate reason for carrying out a feminist research is to achieve "*the eventual end of social and economic conditions that oppress women (...) because society is still 'man-made'" (Letherby, 1003: 74).* This critical methodological approach supports the "new research ethics" since *"the point of producing feminist knowledge is both to understand the realities of gendered lives, and to be able to transform them"* (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 163). Therefore, the Sierra Leonean patriarchal system will be taken into account in order to analyse the situation of female ex-combatants in the country. Moreover, taking a feminist point of view while studying the post-conflict Sierra Leone is central to this investigation because this period had different repercussions for men and women ex-fighters.

Furthermore, since I am using document analysis and I am relying on findings of other feminist researchers I have to reflect the material I use: I depend on their standpoints, and consequently, their work will become part of my narrative. Therefore, I am aware of the consequences of using the referenced authors' subjective ideas. However, as MacKinnon's (1982, cited in Maynard, 1994: 18) affirms, *"Although objectivity and science represent supposedly neutral positions, they are, in fact, gendered and partial"*. Like Maynard and Purvis (1994: 7) note,

“*Feminists have to accept that there is no technique of analysis or methodological logic that can neutralize the social nature of interpretation”*.

As a female researcher, I feel especially in debt to society to study gender inequality and to fight injustice, which shapes situations of women. As a woman, I have also experienced social subordination and sexual violence’s threats in my life time. Therefore, I can identify structurally with the situation of other women and the structural vulnerability we all share. Stanley and Wise (1993: 161) remark that *“There is no way we can avoid deriving theoretical constructs from experience, because we necessarily attempt to understand what is going on as we experience it”.* However, I recognise my *“own intellectual privilege”* (Letherby, 2003: 77) as a woman researcher in front of the population studied.

Despite women sharing some common conditions of gendered existence (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002), there are social and cultural divisions that make women’s lifetimes extremely different. For this reason, it will be assumed that the concept of ‘woman’ is not the same in all countries. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 4) claim, there are *“intellectual and ethical implications of producing knowledge of gender as if ‘women’ were a unified category of being throughout history and all over the world”*.

iii) Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 presents the history of the Sierra Leonean Civil War (1991-2002) and how it affects the current situation of the country. It puts attention to the current situation of Sierra Leonean women. Then, Chapter 2 examines the theoretical framework around gender and violence. First of all, the fundamental dichotomies that structure the wider gender debate are exposed. Then these dichotomies are

applied to the Sierra Leonean female ex-combatants situation. The last part of the chapter shows the international post-conflict gender agenda that should lead the post-conflict intervention in war-torn societies.

In Chapter 3 a theoretical approach to the DDR process is given in order to help to understand the DDR practices in the aftermath of war. Moreover, it gives an insight of how gender responsive DDR should be designed and implemented in order to avoid the most common problems that women suffer during the programmes. Finally, it exposes the obstacles that many women encounter during the DDR.

Chapter 4 resumes the main issues that female ex-combatants faced during the Sierra Leonean DDR (1998-2002), such as difficult access to DDR, social rejection caused by joining the DDR, security issues and deficient reintegration. Further, the problems that female fighters experienced there are examined to deepen gender awareness as far as the Sierra Leonean DDR is concerned. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the main findings.

According to this outline, the next chapter will address particularly the current situation of the Sierra Leonean women. Firstly, an insight of the historical context of the war will be given in order to facilitate the understanding of the topic. Secondly, the general impact of the Sierra Leonean civil war will be explained. Finally, the living conditions of Sierra Leone's women will be studied to show how the social dynamics and the history of the country shape the women's lives.

Chapter 1. Sierra Leone's Context and History

1.1 The Sierra Leonean Civil War

The complex roots of the Sierra Leonean conflict and the involved actors should be explained in order to understand its consequences and the current situation of the country. First of all, the Sierra Leone's Civil War (1991-2002) is considered to have several sources of conflict, such as: *"the legacies of colonialism, international and local exploitation of resources, systemic government corruption, extreme poverty and inequality, and the outside influence of Charles Taylor and his troops from Liberia"* (MacKenzie, 2012: 30). Moreover, the dissatisfaction of some sections of the society produced by unemployment, the economic recession and the lack of educational opportunities (Richards, 1996) facilitated the emergence of government's dissidents.

The Sierra Leonean political economy is based on the semi-subsistence agricultural sector of the rural areas and on diamond mining; the latter is the main source of foreign exchange (Richards, 2016). The government mismanagement of the economy led by *All People's Congress* gave access to the valuable resources of the country to the elite. In addition, their unresponsive and unaccountable politics produced more social discrimination (Lema, 2009). Under these circumstances, the *Revolutionary United Front* (RUF), headed by Foday Sankoh, was constituted in order to achieve better living conditions in Sierra Leone. The group was initially formed by *"educated dissidents, convinced that Sierra Leone has been robbed of its minerals and forest resources"* (Richards, 1996: 1). The RUF saw itself as *"people's movement for national recovery"* (Richards, 1996:

1). For a movement whose stated aim was the population's self-empowerment, contradictorily, their effects spread terror among the people.

It was in March of 1991 when the RUF rebels (backed by Charles Taylor's forces) invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia taking the regions with diamond reserves. Nevertheless, the revolutionary ideas were not shared by all citizens. This is the reason why most of the people did not voluntarily join the RUF. Under these circumstances, the revolutionaries opted for abductions and forced conscriptions as a way of getting human resources. However, with the escalation of the conflict, part of the *Sierra Leonean Army* (SLA) joined forces with them, using the name of *Armed Forces Revolutionary Council* (AFRC).

On the other side, the peacekeeping force called the *ECOWAS Monitoring Group* (ECOMOG) supported the government, as well as the *Civil Defence Forces* (CDF), to stop the rebel's attacks. Paradoxically atrocities against civilians were done by each side of the conflict (Al, 2002, cited in Mackay and Mazurana, 2004: 32), including the CDF and the ECOMOG (Graybill, 2011).

After almost ten years of war, in July of 1999, the *Lomé Peace Accord* was signed by the revolutionary leader, Foday Sankoh, and the head of the government, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Despite the agreed ceasefire, the peace would not arrive until years later, in the second half of the 2000s (Gershoni, 2004), when a new cease fire was signed in November. Afterwards, democratic elections were arranged to take place in May of 2002; then the war was officially over.

The Sierra Leone's Civil War left more than fifty thousand people dead, half a million refugees and two million internally displaced people (Gershoni, 2004). Moreover, the infrastructures, services and transports of the country were

absolutely destroyed. However, the worst damages were inflicted to people. As Gershoni (2004: 25) notes, children, women and men survivors "*have to fight a battle for physical and mental rehabilitation, a battle without end".* This fact affected especially child soldiers and women fighters, who were heavily conscripted by all revolutionary armies and suffered the greatest casualties.

1.2 Conflict Transformation and the Current Situation of Sierra Leone

The current situation of the country is still affected by the events of the past conflict. As a result of the war costs, among other factors, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index ranks Sierra Leone the most deprived, as their percentage of people living under the poverty line is 70% (Hosein, 2011).

Furthermore, the living conditions are aggravated by the *"lack of attention to the underlying socioeconomic inequalities emerging from the conflict"* (Roth-Arriaza, 2009: 152). For this reason, the Sierra Leone's population continues suffering from structural violence due to the weak social welfare system. Moreover, the need of capital resources and the limited access to education are threatening any chances of positive development of the country. As a result, experts agree that the *"necessary conditions for restoring government authority, the economy and utilities are long lasting peace, (...) reconciliation, rehabilitation of warrior and substantial financial aid from international donors"* (Gershoni, 2004: 25). Galtung (1969) summarises these issues as the urge to establish social justice within the country, which he calls 'positive peace'.

The society's reconciliation requires discrimination to be tackled in order to achieve a situation of positive peace. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, the stigmas

surging from the war continue to damage the social cohesion. Following from the previous violent conflict the population is still divided along the lines of the side they took (forced or voluntarily) during the war. Therefore, people who were related to the rebel forces are still thought of as being aligned with them, especially women. Even if they were not considered perpetrators, they were labelled as 'wicked' people due to the drugs they took during the war (Coulter, 2009). Under these circumstances, *"a coherent transitional justice strategy would have to pay a large amount of attention to reintegration of both abductees and fighters into their old communities (or into new ones)"* (Roht-Arriaza, 2009: 151).

Another fundamental method for supporting a new democratic society is the extension of the civil rights to the whole population. Not only the assurance and protection of their human rights are required, but also their acknowledgement as citizens with the right to participate in their community. However, this recognition never arrived for the female ex-fighters, and then, their participation in the reconstruction of Sierra Leone has not been fomented. Although *The Lomé Peace Agreement* established in its article 27 that women should play a central role in helping with the moral, social and physical rehabilitation of Sierra Leone (Bartoli and Bundschuch, 2009) their contribution in the process was not facilitated by the government. This absence of gender awareness in the new structures (Bartoli and Bundschuch, 2009) helps to maintain the disadvantaged position of women in the Sierra Leonean society.

1.2.1. The Situation of the Sierra Leonean Women

The women of Sierra Leone are considered the most marginalized in the world, socially, economically and politically (McFerson, 2011). *"According to the*

United Nations, nearly all Sierra Leonean women suffer some form of violence in their lifetime" (UNDP, 2010, cited in Denney and Ibrahim, 2012: 2). This pain can be physical, economic, emotional/psychological, domestic, cultural, sexual and structural (Denny and Ibrahim, 2012).

Firstly, the violence against women is legitimised by the dominant patriarchal idea that considers wives as property of their husbands. This consideration is transmitted to new generations as part of their socialization's process[1]. Moreover, these groups teach women to keep their husband's interest before their own in order to be a 'good wife' (Bledsoe, 1984; Fanthorpe, 2007, cited in Denny and Ibrahim, 2012: 5). Secondly, female discrimination is reflected in the patrilineal inheritance's system, which does not allow women to have access to land[2] and to passing on property (McFerson, 2011).

The UNICEF Report of 2011 shows that 84% of women's incomes come from working in the informal sector, what provides no protection, and makes them vulnerable to labour exploitation (in the 27% of the cases). Their economic insecurity makes them dependent on their marriage contract, as well as their social status and treatment (McFerson, 2011). Therefore, the lack of financial independence leaves them vulnerable and insecure, especially in the less urbanized areas where the customary laws strongly shape their lifestyle.

Even in the situations when marriage supposedly could give an economic support, because of the imbalance of power women are more prone to sexual abuse. The sexual violence issue is also present in schools (African Development Bank Group, 2011) and on the streets (sexual assaults). These facts mean the girls'

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[1] The socialization's process is carried out by secret societies based on ethnicity and gender.
[2] Although the 64% of women are engaged in the agricultural sector (UNICEF, 2011).

parents do not allow them to attend the classes due to the genuine fear of sexual assault. Moreover, the insecurity in educational centres increases the risk of rape and pregnancy for teenagers. Due to this structural sexism and discrimination, the percentage of literacy among women in Sierra Leone is only 30% (McFerson, 2011). Moreover, poverty has been proved to be linked to sexual abuse. Deprived women might accept having transactional sex in order to cover their basics needs and to receive valuable things. On the top of this, the lack of sexual protection during sexual intercourses spread the rates of HIV infection among women. Hence, in this country, 1.7% women between 15 and 49 years old (UNICEF, 2011) are considered to be directly affected by HIV.

Another issue with sexual harassment is that it is not reported to the legal authorities in the 90% of all cases (McFerson, 2011) for two main reasons. There are hidden figures for two main reasons: on the one hand, rape is not taken seriously by courts, and it is not prosecuted most of the times (UNICEF, 2011). Among the consequences of this lack of justice UNICEF (2011) reports a naturalization of rapes from an early age and the women's mistrust of the justice system. On the other, rape crimes are not taken to courts due to the fear of being shamed, blamed and stigmatised for publically admitting being a victim of rape (African Development Bank Group, 2011).

However, it is not adequate to jump on easy conclusions here as geographical and religious[3] factors influence the living conditions of women in Sierra Leone, too. Moreover, as Coulter (2009) highlights, the population is not homogeneous; it is

[3] Sierra Leone is 60% Muslim, 10% indigenous beliefs and 30% Christians (Coulter, 2009).

divided into categories[4] based on languages. As it has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, living in an urban or in a rural area also impacts highly on the women's lifestyle. In response to this more diverse context, in 2007, the Sierra Leonean government established a legal framework *"to protect women under formal, customary and Muslim law*" (UNICEF, 2011: 13). The three gender acts that form it, are the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act.

The government also developed the Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2000), the National Policy on Advancement of Women (2000), The National Gender Strategic Plan (2009-2012) and The Sierra Leone National Action Plan on the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2010) (African Development Bank Group, 2011) to improve the status of women in the country. However, Sierra Leone's policies should be more consistent in their applications, especially to promote the women's participation in the public sphere and in political life[5].

1.3. Concluding Chapter Remarks

It has been illustrated in this chapter that the history of Sierra Leone's war is still affecting the country and the living standards of its society. Furthermore, the Sierra Leonean perspectives on a positive development continue to be limited by the absence of economic resources, which –in the end- restricts citizens' opportunities to establish a better life. Under these deprived circumstances, the female population is the most affected by social exclusion, poverty and marginalization.

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[4] MacFerson (2011) differentiates three groups: the Krios (better educated, 'richer', descendants of the original freed slaves), relatively enlightened tribes and the more traditional patriarchal tribes.

[5] In 2017 there were only 16 women in the parliament, out of 124 members (Denney and Ibrahim, 2012).

The local traditions and the limited female rights in Sierra Leone leave women in a disadvantaged position, especially for the ones living in the rural areas. However, it is not possible to make a sole definition of the women's living conditions in the country, because they are affected by variables such as religion, customs and regions.

The next chapter will address the theoretical framework surrounding the position of women in war, focusing on the role of female combatants in Sierra Leone. Given the participation of female fighters in the Sierra Leonean war, it is necessary here to sketch some aspects of gender theory addressing the situation of women and violent conflicts.

Chapter 2. Gender and Violence in Sierra Leone

This chapter will examine the theoretical framework around gender and violence. First of all, the fundamental dichotomies that structure the wider gender debate will be exposed to contextualise the constructions of female and male stereotypes in Sierra Leone.

Secondly, the situation of female soldiers will be described and contextualized in the Sierra Leonean society. Topics such as their recruitment, their roles within the armies and the gendered risks they suffered will be analysed in relation to the gendered relations of warfare. These women's experience of violence will be circumscribed in a patriarchal society that supposes a 'continuum of violence' for them. All the previous themes outlined will be applied to the Sierra Leonean conflict.

Finally, the need of taking a gender sensitive perspective when examining armed conflicts will be discussed. Wartime will be understood as an extension of the social relations which strengthens traditional gender identities. Once I have explained this, the question 'how gender shapes the experience of Sierra Leonean female soldiers?' will be approached and cautiously answered.

2.1 Feminine and Masculine Dichotomies in Gender Theory

The traditional statement of *"men make war, women make peace"* (Lorentzen and Turpin, 1998: 3) has its roots in essentialist ideology. However, gender differences could be regarded as dynamic social categories (man and woman) that are constructed differently in every culture (Lorentzen and Turpin, 1998). Petersons (1998: 41) explains that *"gender refers not to anatomical or biological*

distinct but to the social construction, which is always culturally specific, of masculine and feminine as hierarchical and oppositional categories". Consequently, gender categories govern the social dynamics by creating ideal manifestations, symbols, behaviours, attitudes, appearances (Coulter *et al.,* 2008) practices and qualities (Cockburn, 2001) of masculinity and femininity that every citizen should follow to be socially accepted (Peterson, 1998). The consolidation of the patriarchal system has naturalised these standards and they have become institutionalised cultural expectations (Coulter *et al.,* 2008). As a consequence, certain acts of the female population are understood as not normal because they do not follow the established social order. Then, these people are considered as transgressors or deviants from the expected behaviour in that community.

The feminine stereotype draws the image of a kind, careful, obedient women who represent the values of emotion, nurture, peacefulness, etc. (Burguieres, 1990, cited in Salla 2001: 71). Those attitudes are not neutral and are linked with less desirable social principles (Burguieres, 1990, cited in Salla 2001: 71).The supremacy of the maleness over the feminineness is supported by the existing hierarchy and asymmetry (Cockburn, 2001) within the two essentialized sexes. Therefore, women and men are not born into equal positions, since the power historically has been predominantly allocated to the male/masculine side.

The *'hegemonic masculinity'* (Connel, 1987, cited in Moser, 2001: 37) makes women reliant on a submissive, passive and dependent position. Male dominance is also linked with the conservative imaginary of men being the breadwinners while the women are mothers (Macdonald, 1987) in charge of housework responsibilities and the domestic sphere. This underlying assumption features the activities and interactions within a community. Warfare can be understood as one

of these social dynamics, though as the opposite of peace. However, equally the violent conflict is also shaped by female and male identities and roles.

War is traditionally interpreted as a victim and perpetrator relation and it is typically assumed that women are victims while men are perpetrators. In this context, the idea of a woman to be protected by the man (Salla, 2001; Macdonald, 1987) is reinforced. Historically, war has been perceived as men's domain where women are victims, spectators or prizes (D'Amico, 1998). During war conflict, women have also been defined in relation to men as wives, girlfriends and mothers waiting for their soldiers (Carter, 1998, cited in MacKenzie, 2012: 48). However, as Turshen (1998: 1) explains,

> *The binary stereotype of active males/passive females also breaks down as the type of war changes, Conventional wars were waged between states by national armies, but contemporary conflicts privatize violence and engage an array of state and non-state actors*.

As a consequence, *"the conventional separation of male belligerents and female inhabitants no longer prevails*" (Nordstrom, 1992, cited in Turshen, 1998: 1).

Even if female roles progress during wartime, this wider participation in society is not maintained during the aftermath. Women are only allowed to occupy a different position in the army, temporarily. Once the conflict was over, the traditional gender-based social values and hierarchical power structures (Peterson, 1998) restrict their positions again. Moreover, the militarization process *"magnifies already existing gender inequalities"* (Turpin, 1998: 15), as well as women's subordination (Turpin, 1998; Turshen, 1998). It also supposes additional risks for women (Peterson, 1998), such as sexual abuse, what will be exposed later on this chapter.

War militarism exacerbates values derived from masculinity (Enloe, 1983; Francke, 1997, cited in Turshen, 1998: 5) and makes female presence invisible because the feminine traits are not considered valuable in that context (York, 1998). Following the assumption of Turpin (1998: 15), *"militarism relies on patriarchal patterns, and patriarchy relies on militarization"*. Consequently, armies can function thanks to the male privileges which are based on the structural and cultural forms of a country (Turpin, 1998). Turpin (1998: 15) links this fact to the equated masculine values to the military ones, as aggressiveness, violence, bravery, courage, etc.

As Turshen (1998: 1) explains,

> *The enduring wartime picture of "man does, women is" has depended on the invisibility of women's participation in the war effort, their unacknowledged, behind-the-lines contributions to the prosecution of war, and their complicity in the construction of fighting forces.*

2.2 Women Combatants in Sierra Leone

It has been said, that *"female soldiers wholly disrupt gendered binaries associated with war, particularly the contrasting image of the male warrior and female victim"* (MacKenzie, 2012: 45). As female combatants challenge the myth that women are naturally peaceful (MacKenzie, 2012), they are seen as atypical individuals (Coulter *et al.*, 2008). The fact of women using weapons and not following the feminine social ideal is conceived as an unethical attitude by the male population (York, 1998). These preconceived ideas lead to issues in the determination of the roles carried out by women, as well as reducing women to merely victims. Both misunderstandings blur the picture of women's participation in war.

Women's gendered role is one of the first things that should be taken into account at the time of studying women's participation in armies. Like Skjelsback and Smith (2001: 6) affirm, *"it is widely felt that women should not be in the military –and further, that if they are there, their roles should be strictly limited"*. These authors discuss the idea that women are not seen as suitable for combat roles (due to their preconceived physical and psychological abilities). Moreover, Macdonald (1987) adds that this supposed limited participation is part of the control exercised over women and an attempt to keep their femininity grounded.

The previous misconception leads to the denial of female participation in combat acting out male traits and roles. As a result, they are not recognized as ex-combatants during the aftermath and their rights become forgotten. The femininity ideal limits the understanding of women's roles to the supportive ones (medical, secretarial and clerical, in transport and communications, in the nursery, as technicians, in munitions' factories etc.) because they are not expected to use weapons (Skjelsback and Smith, 2001). They are supposed to play secondary roles like conservative gendered roles within the army (Turpin, 1998).

Nevertheless, MacKenzie's research (2012) with female ex-combatants of the Sierra Leonean Civil War includes women and girls who have participated during the war in activities such as killing, using weapons, commanding armed groups, spying, looting, raping and burning houses. Asher (2004) also detects women's involvement in rending and conscription. Furthermore, Mazunara and Carlson (2004) notice that at least half of the recruited women and girls received military and weapons training; even when they were a minimal part of the army (estimated between a 10 and a 30 percent) in comparison with male soldiers (Asher, 2004).

Coming back to the case of Sierra Leone, female fighters have been mostly addressed as victims of sexual exploitation. For instance, Coulter's interviews with ex-combatants (2009) noted that women were selected by commandos to be their 'wives' or sexual slaves. However, the main purpose of female conscriptions was not related to satisfying sexual desires of male soldiers. Women were abducted because their working capacity could help to maintain the war system. The most important thing that this author wants to show is the wide and not exclusively roles that women served during the conflict.

Due to wide evidence of the female participation in war, MacKenzie (2012) criticizes the lack of government's appreciation and policy attention that these women have received. As a consequence, female ex-combatants did not enjoy the benefits deserved by ex-soldiers. She explains this ignorance to the gendered norms and assumptions associated with conjugal order, and the previously discussed feminine stereotypes, that leave male combatants as the sole actors within armed movements.

The women involved with MacKenzie's research were categorized as rebels' wives, abductees, camp followers, or sex slaves. Hansen (2006, cited in MacKenzie, 2012: 46) critiques that they were described as *"associated with war"* instead of identified as central political actors in the conflict. MacKenzie (2002) argues that using *"non-soldier titles"* marginalized women from the state protection in order to desecuritize them and silence them. What this author points out is that not recognizing women's agency leaves them out of the priorities in the DDR process. Furthermore, she notes their exclusion returns to a highly gendered order, reinforcing myths, norms, stereotypes that exert informal control over women (MacKenzie, 2012). The differentiation ideology (Hansen, 2006, cited in

Mackenzie, 2002: 46), underpinning the belief that female soldiers are victims and objects rather than legitimate subjects, facilitates the continuing vision of women as *"the other"* (Macdonald, 1987: 11).

The fact that females were conscripted as soldiers in the army also affects the determination of women's victimhood. Furthermore, since these abductions usually included sexual abuses, the main focus while studying female soldiers is kept on gendered forms of violence (MacKenzie, 2012) rather than analysing also their hidden, but significant contribution (Peterson, 1998) to the war effort. This argument is reinforced with *The Lomé Peace Accord* only mentioning women as victims (MacKenzie, 2012).

Asher (2004) studied in depth female participations in the forces, and her research points out that almost all girls and women were captured, inducted as members and drugged by the rebel leaders. As she mentions, women complied to stay alive, as a survival and sustainment strategy. Moreover, structural violence such *"illiteracy, poverty, ideological thinking, coercion, marginalization, domestic labour and the failure of the State to provide its citizens"* (Asher, 2004: 18) can be considered as additional causes for joining. However, their pain did not finish once women were among the rebels,

> *Even though female fighters were in commanding positions and thereby had higher status positions, most women and girls were also forced to be 'wives' to male fighters and were repeatedly subjected to sex violence, rape, and gang rape* (Coulter *et al.,* 2008: 12).

Sexual violence was a permanent risk for Sierra Leonean women during the Civil war. Turshen (1998) explains the massive rapes occurring during wartime as the consequence of men's sense of superiority and social license during this period.

Coulter (2009: 127) described them as a reflection of *"the low status of rights for women in Sierra Leonean society, which was magnified by the war"*. It has to be noticed that the deeply rooted patriarchy in the Sierra Leonean traditional culture is based on the idea of *"women are wild and dangerous and therefore they need to be controlled"* (Ferne, 2001; Leach, 1994; both cited in Coulter, 2009: 142). Then, rapes maintain inequality and female submission and highlight those *"preexisting sociocultural dynamics*" (Olujic, 1990, cited in Coulter, 2009: 127).

The categories involved in the victim-perpetrator dichotomy are mutually exclusive and oppositional (Carperter, 2006, cited in MacKenzie, 2012: 49) and do not embrace the complexity of the female fighter figure from Sierra Leone. As Mackenzie (2012: 51) argues, they *"were often perpetrators of violence, destruction and crime as well as victims of abuses such as sex violence, abduction, and injury*". However, the role of women ex-combatants remained invisible. This topic should be addressed from a gendered perspective that covers the whole experience of violence experienced by women, from the peace time to the aftermath.

2.3 The Impact of War on Female Ex-Fighters Lives

The costs and consequences of war change the physical, human, natural, social capital and their associated assets (Moser, 2001) for all people involved in war. The women's war experiences are as wide as the number of human lives affected by the conflict. However, most women suffered from the armed violence as well as from gendered violence. Sexual abuse affected both female civilians and female soldiers during the Sierra Leonean Civil War. The rape experience

impacted on their lives during the following peace time in many ways: reconfiguring their identity and stigmatizing and traumatizing them.

Firstly, female combatants transgressed the traditional gender stereotypes and that makes them deviants from the social norms. Inside the armies, they were required to play "male" roles, but when the war was over, they were asked to fit into feminine ideals again. McKay (1998: 348) makes a reference to *The National Committee for Development Education* (1994) to argue that during the period of society's reconstruction women may easily be marginalized because of the tension arising from their lifestyle during the war, which is not accepted by the newly changed non-war-society. In communities where women were considered dependents of men, they are highly likely to be rejected by the male population, accused of *"bushlike behaviour*" (Coulter, 2009: 153).

Turshen in her work 'What women do in wartime' (1998) clarifies what rape does to their victims in some African countries. As she argues,

> *In societies with strict constructions of patriarchal honour, to complain about rape is to admit to illicit sexual intercourse, and accusation frequently turned back on the women and used to convict her of adultery or prostitution* (Turshen, 1998: 8).

Therefore, they are blamed for being abused, instead of being protected by the state and by their own family. Turshen (1998: 11) adds that they are considered *"unacceptable to the patriarchal community and to herself"*. Being a victim of sexual abuses make women lose their bodily integrity (Bop, 2002), and also become socially excluded. The same labelling process is applied to the women who gave birth within the army, and whose sons and daughters are called *"bad blood"* children (Coulter, 2009: 115).

The warfare memories create a trauma for these women. Moreover, the social rejection that they suffer in the post-conflict society makes overcoming the traumatic experiences more difficult. Turshen (1998) considers living under fear, pain, guilt anxiety, revulsion, hatred, loss of dignity, and sadness as part of the trauma. Moreover, these feelings are magnified by the double trauma suffered by ex-female fighters. In addition to the lack of reintegration, once they are back in their communities, they also have to deal with the mental agony of having perpetrated horrendous crimes when they were in the armies. The double traumatization is part of the complexity of being simultaneously a perpetrator and a victim. This fact is described by Coulter *et al*. (2008) as part of the multifaceted experiences of women in fighting forces. However, the mental health conditions of these women could get worse if they did not receive the adequate services when the war is over.

2.4. Post-conflict Gender Agenda

International organizations that are aware of the specific impact of violence on women, such as The United Nations, have attempted to establish some guidelines to address this phenomenon. The United Nations Security Council adopted the Resolution 1325 (2000) to highlight the gender perspective among state interventions to protect human rights in conflict. The key elements of these guidelines are the participation, the protection and the prevention in the societies constructed after a war. Essentially, the objective of this resolution is to make women and children a priority during and after the struggle by recognizing them as the most targeted groups. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for creating measures particularly directed to protect women and girls from gendered forms of violence.

The commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/52/231) also aim to eliminate the obstacles that women face in the public sphere. This Declaration strengthens the notion of equality among women and men and reinforces the idea of women's empowerment as a way to achieve social justice. Another tool to guarantee women's rights was *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It determines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The countries that signed this convention (as Sierra Leone did in 1998) are legally bound to follow its principles. Moreover, *The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* acts as a monitoring body of women's issues and makes recommendations to the states so that they put more attention on them. These approved regulations must be taken more seriously in the aftermath.

In spite of the international legislation and jurisdiction about women's rights and their protection, women are still vulnerable in post-conflicts societies, as in the Sierra Leonean society. Other case studies also show evidence that the gender perspective is forgotten when state interventions are taking place after the war. For instance, when the Liberation's war of Mozambique (1964-1974) ended, the rights, protections and guarantees of women soldiers were relegated to a political second trier of interest.

2.5. Concluding Chapter Remarks

As it has been argued above, the armed conflict is a gendered scenario, as well as the society that suffers from it. Therefore, gender affects causes and motivations of conflict and has gendered costs and consequences (Moser, 2001). Moreover,

this phenomenon is circumscribed in a continuum of conflict and violence (Moser, 2001) which generates limitations for women in the political, economic and social areas, even in peace time.

These underlying social conditions in patriarchal societies create gender oppositional dichotomies that differentiate the position and rights of women as subordinated to men. This is true even if both sexes have their own ideals and expectations which must be followed in order to be integrated in the community. Under these circumstances, the female soldiers are understood as a group of deviants from the social order, and as a consequence, mainstream society treats them as if they do not deserve the attention of the post-conflict state interventions. Furthermore, their agency and presence in the armies are denied, and they are labelled with 'non-soldier titles' in order to maintain the traditional women's role and portray them as outsiders. These ideas reduce women involved in wars to victims (especially sexual violence victims) or to players of supportive roles. They are victimized as women, who fought and were armed, and did not behave according to a strict femininity gender regime, on top of have been raped or sexually mistreated. They became double victims as in the aftermath of war they are rejected even by their close family. In effect, Sierra Leonean society accepts high rates of female marginalization once the ceasefire took place.

The United Nations established guidelines to address female mistreatment during conflict, but the states' responsibility is not taken further as they should. As a result of the little attention female ex-fighters in Sierra Leone received, there is a gap in research and knowledge that continues until today.

Chapter 3. DDR into Practice: The Aftermath of War

This chapter will explain how the "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Process" (DDR) generally works. First of all, the definition of the DDR elements will be given and the importance of the aftermath's first period will be highlighted. Then, a gender perspective will be taken on board in order to show how a gender-responsive DDR should be planned and implemented so that female ex-combatants' needs are attended to.

The DDR process is especially significant for female ex-fighters. This period is a key factor for supporting their reintegration and for building equality among men and women. However, this process rarely addresses all the gender sensibilities arising from a post-conflict society. This failure is caused by a lack of gender awareness among DDR designers and implementers. As a consequence, women face several problems during the DDR phases, which will be explained in the last part of the chapter.

3.1. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Process (DDR)

The United Nations DDR Standards (2006b: 7) define the DDR as

> *A process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods.*

This mechanism is one of the first strategies taken in the peace-building agenda. It is typically discussed in the early peace process (Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011), in order *"to prevent the resurgence of conflict and to create the conditions necessary for a*

sustainable peace in war-torn societies" (United Nations, 2006b: 15). Once the peace agreement has been signed, the DDR is initiated (Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011).

As the framework for most DDR programmes is set in the official peace accord (Coulter *et al.,* 2008), the national governments are directly involved in planning and implementing it in partnership with international organisations and donor countries (Anderlini and Conway, 2004). Moreover, the United Nations, as a third-party intermediary, frequently oversees the process and the World Bank funds and assists its operation and its evaluation (Anderlini and Conway, 2004).

The objective of the DDR process is to enhance the recovery and development of the society (United Nations, 2006a). It focuses its interventions (political, military, security, humanitarian and socioeconomic) mainly on ex-combatants (United Nations, 2016a). The enrolled ex-soldiers in the DDR programmes *"are usually provided with some monetary and material assistance and also given some vocational or literacy training"* (Coulter *et al.,* 2008: 20). This measure aims to deal with the post-conflict security problem that arises when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks (United Nations, 2006a). It tries to encourage members of armed groups to give up their weapons and enables them to go home (Kingma, 2001, cited in Ní Aoláin *et al*., 2011: 131).

The social reintegration of ex-soldiers is monitored gradually by the different dimensions of the DDR. Its phases usually overlap and are interdependent (Anderlini and Conaway, 2004). However, the three DDR main components will be separated in order to give an insight on the different working areas and the specific problems arising when implemented. This research will adopt the

definitions of each phase established by the *United Nations DDR Standards* in 2006.

On the first place, the term "disarmament" refers to the collection, documentation, control of all kind of weapons, arms and ammunition of combatants and often also of the civilian population. This part also develops responsible arms management programmes. The second element, "demobilisation", is the formal and controlled discharge of participants in armed groups. It starts with the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites[6], encampments, assembly areas or barracks). Then, ex-combatants and their families receive a short-term (up to one year) material and/or financial assistance to meet their immediate needs. This stage is called reinsertion. It can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools.

The reinsertion is also part of the long-term reintegration of ex-fighters, which is a continuous social and economic process of development[7]. It enables ex-combatants to acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Their reintegration is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often requires extended external assistance. Following Specht (2010: 15) the success of the ex-combatants' reintegration will *"ground for wider economic recovery and conflict transformation"*.

[6] A cantonment is a group of buildings where soldiers live and train.
[7] There is a need to make a difference between "reintegration process" (individual and log-term) and "reintegration programme" (clear time, from 2 to 4 years established in the DDR design, with an specific budget and exit strategy) (Specht, 2010).

Then, the re-entry of the ex-combatants in their former community is a fragile process which needs to be supported by external agents. The main objective of this period is to give the opportunity to former fighters to build a new and sustainable livelihood[8] by benefiting them with *"vocational training, credit, scholarships, land distribution and employment with a new police or security force"* (Anderlini and Conway, 2004: 3). Nevertheless, reintegration is not just an economic affair. Greenberg and Zuckerman (2009: 16 cited in United States Institute of Peace, 2012: 7) argue that it should

> *Focus on preparing men and women for positive household and community relations, and for nonviolent mechanism for resolving differences. Building more peaceful societies requires addressing such gender issues resulting from war.*

The reintegration processes of women and men are different and the sexes face different obstacles. Female ex-combatants suffer from higher barriers to return to their peacetime lifestyle. According to the literature, DDR programmes are not addressing efficiently the existing gender differences. Even if their designers understand the need and benefit of including women in DDR, there is still a gap between the existing guidance and its actual implementation (Ní Aoláin et *al.,* 2011).

3.2. Gender- Responsive DDR Programs

Male and female fighters are received differently when they come back from war (Coulter *et al.*, 2008). As Utas (2005) and Christensen (2007) (both cited in Coulter *et al*, 2008: 24) confirm, *"while male are perceived to have strengthened*

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[8] *"A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and maintain or improve its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base"* (United Nations, 2006: 13).

their gender role through life within the fighting forces, women are instead increasingly marginalised". Since women's and men's situations are not equal during the aftermath, the DDR interventions should adopt a gender sensitive perspective. Traditionally their focus has been put on male combatants, and there is a need to move away from this position and *"to recognize that a gender focus requires paying attention to female issues"* (Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011: 131).

The United Nations DDR standards (2006c) dedicate a chapter on giving guidelines for designing gender respective aftermath's programmes. The principles that they follow are: gender equality, non-discrimination, fairness and equitable treatment and centred on people. Those assumptions recognise that *"people representing different sexes and gender, as well as those of differing ages and physical ability have different support needs"* (United Nations Inter-Agency Group on DDR, 2012: 9). Therefore, the programme services have to offer specifically designed activities for addressing men's and women's needs. However, a gender-responsive approach must be taken into account not only in some activities but also during the DDR planning, implementation, monitorization and evaluation (UNDP, 2012: 10).

Specht (2010) also supports that DDR should include tailor-made assistance to each group (women, men, boys and girls) to be sensitive to gender dynamics. Especially during the reintegration programs, the women's situation (characterized by their limited access to land, their relatively few skills, their restricted mobility and the strict division of labour) should be taken into account in order to adapt the economic reintegration activities to the different opportunities for female and male ex-combatants (Bouta, 2005). The Secretary-

General of the United Nations recommends in his 2002 *Study on Women, Peace and Security* (cited in United Nations, 2006c: 5):

1. Incorporate the needs and priorities of women and girls as ex-combatants, ‘camp-followers’ and families of ex-combatants on the DDR but also,

    > *include them in the design of camps; the distribution of benefits; and access to basic resources and services, including food, water, health care and counselling, in order to ensure the success of such programmes, women and girls' full participation, and their access to benefits* (The Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2002, cited in United Nations, 2006c: 5).

2. Recognize the impact of armed conflict and displacement on family relations and the risk of increased domestic violence, especially in the families of ex-combatants; and develop programmes for preventing it (particularly among male ex-soldiers) (The Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2002, cited in United Nations, 2006c: 5).
3. Ensure women and girls’ full access to all resources, incentives and benefits provided in reintegration programmes, including skills development programmes. This should be achieved by recognising their role as ex-combatants and promoting their participation in the disarmament (The Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2002, cited in United Nations, 2006c: 6).

The design part is one of the most important during the DDR process for ensuring a gender-responsive approach. Tarnaala (2016) recognizes that a pre-programme assessment is a key factor for drawing the socioeconomic profile of the potential beneficiaries, their physical and psychological needs, the risks of exclusion they may suffer, their skills and their competencies. Furthermore, understanding how the host communities perceive returning ex-combatants helps to avoid their future

social exclusion (Tarnaala, 2016). Having all the previous information in advance will make the following interventions more adequate for the participants.

As it has been explained, this kind of DDR does not mean to include some specific measures for women; it means correcting gender imbalances in the post-war society by the time benefiting equally women and men (IAGW, 2012). It requires applying a gender lens to apparently neutral DDR situations in order to check if equality is effectively taking place or if, men are *"effectively overprivileged"* (Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011: 131). Moreover, as Ní Aoláin *et al.* (2011: 132) claims *"expansive visions of DDR understands its utility in serving as a broader basis for post-conflict development and healing".* Ní Aoláin *et al.* (2011: 132) also adds that *"It is under this broader visions that and understanding of the power of challenging gender roles and constructs takes its place".* Following these arguments, Tarnaala (2016) explains that gender-sensitive DDR programming should be linked with the entire peace-building process.

One of the main issues that have to be addressed during the DDR is the deconstruction of militarized masculinities (Hauge, 2016). Eliminating them will facilitate the female ex-combatants' reintegration in their former communities. One of the measures aimed to challenge sexist ideas is to achieve gender balance among the professionals working on the DDR. Tarnaala (2016: 3) makes a reference to Douglas *et al.* (2004) in order to point out that, *"Without women leaders men are unlikely to take seriously education efforts aimed at changing their attitudes and ideas about militarised, masculine power".* These dynamics should be adopted in order to prepare ex-fighters to return peacefully to civilian life (Bouta, 2005).

The rationale of the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 underpins the logic of the gender-responsive DDR processes. Its objective is to ensure the security of female ex-combatants in the short and in the long-term (Bouta, 2005). Nevertheless, gender mainstreaming is still facing limitations to be implemented in DDR processes. Otto (2009, cited in Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011: 139) identifies the *"general weaknesses of a lack of commitment by senior managers, poor resourcing, lack of expertise, marginalisation within the implementing institution and a failure to translate its content into action"* as the main causes of overlooking gender. The little/or lack of attention given to female's circumstances increases the possibilities of women ex-combatants' exclusion and insecurity during the DDR.

3.3. The Importance of Female Attendance to DDR Processes

Female ex-combatants are one of the most vulnerable groups during the post-conflict time due to their bad social, health and labour conditions. In addition to this, they experience severe difficulties in adapting to civilian life due to the physical scars from warfare, torture and sexual violence, and war traumas (Coulter *et al.,* 2008). They are also likely to face the rejection of their former community and family (United States Institute of Peace, 2012) once they return from the army. As Anderlini and Conway (2004) detect, tensions between families and returning ex-combatants can be extreme, leading to an increase of domestic violence. Violence against women and girls during the aftermath can also be perpetrated by ex-soldiers gangs who have not been efficiently reintegrated (Anderlini and Conway, 2004).

For the reasons outlined above, the reintegration of these women ex-fighters should be monitored by the official DDR process in order to ensure their best personal conditions during the transition from war to peace. Therefore, the military demobilisation should include more than the decommissioning of soldiers. It should address the military's masculinities settled on the civil society so that reintegration could take place effectively. As Sorenson (1998, cited in Turshen, 2001: 91) argues,

> *Social integration is about defining new, guiding, social values and establishing corresponding relationships and institutions based on many factors, including kindship, social and economic interests, and shared experiences and circumstances.*

Reforming and remaking masculine structures and mentalities will dismantle wartime behaviours (Ní Aoláin *et al.,* 2011) that limit female ex-combatants reintegration. Not only women would benefit from this process, but it also would improve the living conditions of all members of the Sierra Leonean society (Turshen, 2001) because social cohesion (McKay, 1998) will progressively increase. Moreover, the inclusion of women in the DDR is crucial to strengthen female profiles and leadership roles in the public sphere (Tarnaala, 2016). As Ní Aoláin et al. (2011: 133) clarifies, it has

> *The potential to enable women to undo the dominant conflict script of their victimhood, making possible articulations of accountability for sexual harms and enabling women's access to economic distribution and political representation.*

However, women ex-combatants usually remain overlooked in DDR programs due to the multiple roles they carry out. This contrasts the female role complexity (combatants, sex slaves, supporters and customary and dependents), which

demands to include all women militants in the DDR programs. As Ní Aoláin *et al.* (2011: 133) argue, failing to consider them as combatants *"can be seen as an attempt, with both positive and negative possibilities, to depoliticize their role"*. Furthermore, Tarnaala (2016: 1) adds that the "non-soldier titles" given to female fighters "*reveal the reluctance of reintegration agencies to identify women who participated in war as full members of armed groups".* Among the causes for this denial of participation can be found: women ex-soldiers are not a threat to security (Bouta, 2005) nor are women expected to have used weapons.

Female ex-combatants who do not participate in DDR programmes may encounter threats to their security, lack of acceptance in their community and high levels of stigma (Tarnaala, 2016). Moreover, if those women do not receive the required attention during the DDR, the new skills and knowledge they developed within the army while playing supportive roles (such as cooks, radio operators, messengers, transporters, medical caregivers and logistical supporters) (Anderlini and Conway, 2004) will be lost. This process is called "loss of social capital", and it leads women to re-take their pre-conflict roles (Anderlini and Conway, 2004). Their rather silent adoption of traditional functions can be caused by their will of not being identified as a former combatant or by their fear of being discovered (in case they escaped from the army[9]) (Bouta, 2005). For these reasons, female ex-fighters tend to disappear as soon as the war ends (Bouta, 2005). Bouta (2005) suggests that DDR technicians should trace and reach women before the start of the official DDR for preventing women to "self-demobilize" and disappearing.

[9] This situation is especially complicated for rebel's wives who escaped from the army. They were considered as property of their captures and they were afraid of see them again in DDR programs (Bouta, 2005). Therefore they do no attend the DDR and "self-demobilize" themselves.

3.4. Concluding Chapter Remarks

It has been shown that DDR processes facilitate the transition from conflict to peace by constructing new livelihoods and support networks for ex-combatants while stopping them living by the gun (African Development Bank Group, 2001). They also aim to build trust among ex-fighters and their communities to create a long-term peace (African Development Bank Group, 2001). A gender perspective should be taken in order to achieve the previous goal. The women's reintegration in society is one of the main issues in post-conflict societies, as female ex-combatants create suspicion among the population. Therefore, the first step to initiate their reintegration is their participation in DDR.

The gender analysis should be used to design DDR policies and interventions so that all the different population's needs can be taken into account (United Nations, 2006: 9). Not only gender awareness interventions should be organised, but also female specific activities in each DDR phase should be established. However, gender-blindness (United Nations Women, 2015) is still an issue among DDR processes. This fact violates the fundamental human rights of equal opportunities (McKay, 1998) for men and women. Moreover, the lack of post-conflict intervention with women may directly put them in a disadvantaged position in society, from which many of them will never recover (Bouta, 2005).

As Coulter *et al.* (2008: 20) explains, "*It is assumed, most women do not demobilize unless specific measures are made to include them in the process"*. Nevertheless, the low female attendance is due to several reasons. On the one hand, they could be deliberately excluded; on the other hand, they could have chosen not to take part in it. The next chapter will discuss the main issues that

Sierra Leonean women experienced during the DDR, including the causes of the low female attendance to the programmes.

Chapter 4. DDR into Practice: Unresolved Issues for Female Ex-Combatants

This chapter resumes the main issues that female ex-combatants faced during the Sierra Leonean DDR (1998-2002). First of all, entering the process was a major problem for most female ex-fighters since their militaristic activity was denied by different actors (family, former commanders and DDR designers). This problem was aggravated by a lack of gender awareness in the DDR policies. As a consequence, problems for women soldiers appeared during its implementation.

Those obstacles were not anticipated and overlooked by the DDR professionals. This chapter will give an overview of the gender approach taken by the DDR in Sierra Leone, and the problems that it created for female ex-combatants.

4.1 Gender Awareness in the Sierra Leonean DDR

The Sierra Leone's DDR process demobilized a total of 72, 500 combatants, of whom 4,751 (6.5 percent) were women and 6,787 were children of whom 506 (9.4 percent) were girls (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004, cited in Coulter *et al.,* 2008: 21). Those few women and girls do not represent the actual number of female fighters (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004, cited in Coulter *et al.,* 2008: 21) who took part in the Sierra Leonean different fighting forces. These low numbers were interpreted by UNICEF (2005, cited in MacKenzie, 2012: 86) as a failure of the DDR designers to engage with female combatants.

Therefore, the Security Council Resolution 1325 seemed to have little reflection on the DDR design and implementation, even when the United Nations celebrated the Sierra Leonean DDR as a success and as a model for future DDR processes (Coulter *et al.*, 2008). Coulter *et al.* (2008: 21) argue against those affirmations

claiming that the DDR of Sierra Leone was, *"if not gender-discriminatory, then definitely 'gender-blind'"*.

Among the consequences of the DDR lack of attendance to female ex-soldiers needs in Sierra Leone can be found, for example, their difficult access to the DDR, the social rejection caused by attending the process, several security issues and their deficient reintegration.

4.1.1. Difficult Access to DDR for Female Ex-Combatants

As Van Gog (2008) notes, the problem for female ex-fighters in Sierra Leone started with the way selection and registration for the DDR was arranged. During the first part of the DDR, a "one-man-one-gun" (Van Gog, 2008: 68) criterion was adopted; it constituted the first barrier for women registering to the programs. Not every woman in the army possessed a gun (Sesay and Suma, 2009), they sometimes shared them (Tarnaala, 2016), because they played defensive and supportive roles within the forces.

The requirement of carrying a weapon in order to be defined as a combatant (Coulter *et al*., 2008) shows a lack of understanding of the wide positions women took in the war. MacKenzie (2012) describes this policy as dysfunctional because other rudimental weapons were used during the war (like machetes) and also because many soldiers had escaped or left their armed group leaving their weapons behind. Coulter (2004, cited in Coulter et *al.,* 2008: 22) found that 22% of the interviewed female ex-combatants reported that the main reason for not attending the DDR was that they did not have access to a weapon. Moreover, in many occasions, female ex-combatants' weapons were taken by their

commanders[10] (Mazunara and Carlson, 2004), excluding them from being eligible for the programme (Mackenzie, 2012).

Even when in the last phase of the DDR this requirement changed, the percentage of female attendance remained almost stable. There was only an increase from 0.6 to 0.7 percent (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). This data evidences that there were more reasons that prevented women to benefit from the programs. Among those obstacles, the inaccurate categorization of female ex-combatants was one of the main sources of exclusion.

Women fighters were not considered real soldiers (MacKenzie, 2012); then they were classified as women related to the armed forces, wives[11] or sex slaves. This fact also reflects a lack of understanding about *"the complex social reality of violent conflict and its aftermath"* (Van Gog, 2008: 69). Gender stereotypes led to an indistinct classification of female soldiers and left many women out of the DDR process. The militarised and masculine discourses used also increased the policy blindness for the female roles and positions taken in war (Van Gog, 2008). Moreover, previous to 2006[12] the United Nations definition of 'ex-combatant' available did not define women as fighters (Kenney, 2008). As a result, most women and girls who played non-combatant roles were left out of the process (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004).

The female attendance was also prevented by the *"widespread denial among the CDF that there were not female combatants among them"* (Sesay and Suma,

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[10] When giving the weapons to the DDR means being rewarded with money, senior commanders tricks out women (Mazurana, 2005, cited in Coulter et al., 2008: 22) so that prioritizing male soldier's disarmament.

[11] Girl mothers were classified as wives and their involvement in war was denied (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). Therefore, they did not receive DDR benefits.

[12] The United Nations Integrated DDR Standards were published in 2006.

2009: 14). This assumption *"was propagated by influential figures such as the Deputy Minister of Defence and National Coordinator of the CDF Samuel Hinga Normannota"* (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 20). Consequently, other armed groups suppressed the number of female soldiers within their ranks (Sesay and Suma, 2009).

Finally, some female ex-combatants claimed that they did not know about the DDR and its benefits. There was limited access to information (Tarnaala, 2016); therefore the DDR design did not succeed in reaching the entire population that participated in the war. All the mentioned obstacles to women entering the DDR led them to self-demobilize and not receive the benefits they deserved as ex-combatants. This exclusion propitiated young girls with no alternative to engage in rioting in Freetown during 2002 (Anderlini and Conway, 2004). Afterwards, these young women joined the guerrilla in Liberia (Anderlini and Conway, 2004). As Anderlini and Conway (2004: 6) notice, *"when women are not at the peace table, they often organise and begin campaigns during the peace process and once disarmament has begun"*.

4.1.2. Social Rejection Caused by Joining the DDR

Many of the female combatants were forcedly recruited or abducted as indicated above. For this reason, once the war ended (or when they escaped from it) and they returned to their families, they did not want to be associated with the armed groups again (Tarnaala, 2016). They regarded the DDR as a new link to the army, and because of that, some female soldiers avoided it. They considered that participating in the DDR was *"emphasizing their connection with the fighting forces"* (Van Gog, 2008: 69). Moreover, since joining the DDR would mean

being publicly identified as a soldier, some women feared to be stigmatized. If they attended the DDR their relatives would see them as rebels (MacKenzie, 2012), and they could not accept them again according to the discussed gendered expectation to 'behave' as obedient women. Even sometimes their husbands and parents, concerned about the existing risk of social stigma, did not let them participate in the programs (MacKenzie, 2012).

As it was explained in previous chapters, female ex-combatants usually faced high social rejection by their communities. For this reason, they did not want to be recognized as former fighters. Consequently, some of them avoided the DDR since the programs require soldiers carrying an identity card with a picture to join them. This identification made ex-combatants eligible for training programs, financial assistance, or start-up packages (Mackenzie, 2012). However, the fear of being stigmatized made women ex-soldiers do not come forward to receive the benefits they were entitled to (Person, 2005, cited in Coulter *et al.,* 2008: 35). For the previous reasons, the DDR process was conceived as counter-productive by female ex-combatants. It was perceived as a risk of being ostracised for having been a fighter.

This social stigma made female ex-combatants feel "unmarriageable". They worried about their marriage prospects. Consequently, some of them avoided the DDR in order to prevent difficulties of getting married (Coulter *et al.*, 2008).

4.1.3. Security Issues

Firstly, *"The facilities in Sierra Leon were perceived to be dangerous for women and girls, because of the large number of men and inadequate protection"* (Coulter, 2004; Mazunara and Carlson, 2004; both cited in Coulter *et al.*, 2008:

26). The United Nations Women (2015) also denounced that the demobilization sites frequently lacked facilities and equipment for women and girls, including the Sierra Leonean case. There was also a need for resources for women's children. The reintegration camp's atmosphere was not appropriate for small children; accordingly, mothers were also reluctant to participate in DDR (Lema, 2009). In addition to this, women who had children faced high barriers to attending the reintegration programmes. They had to take care of their children and there was no childcare option available (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). The DDR dysfunctionality here reflects the lack of gender perspective taken in when it was designed.

Under these circumstances, female ex-combatants did not trust the security measures of the DDR programmes. Sesay and Suma (2009) detect as reasons for not attending the DDR and for self- demobilizing the fear of further abuse, of revenge in DDR centres, and the intimidating number of male participants. The last fact made many women feel that they could be exposed to sexual violence in the DDR (Lema, 2009).

Some female ex-combatants were raped[13] during the DDR, which resulted in more unwanted pregnancies (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008). The poor security measures left women vulnerable to abuse and continued violence, particularly from former fighters from a different faction (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008). Solomon and Ginifer (2008) link the lack of attention given to women's physical protection with the fact that the camps were run mostly by men, who lacked understanding of gender issues. As a consequence, women did not feel secure in that

[13] Rapes took place in the camps but also in the transit to camps, and on leaving them and returning to communities (Solomon and Ginifer, 2008).

environment (Sesay and Suma, 2009). They returned directly to their families in order to avoid being raped, and consequently even been more stigmatised. This failure might have been prevented if single-sex cantonments sites for women would have been available.

Women were afraid of suffering from further violence from the rebels (MacKenzie, 2012). Mackenzie (2012) also notes that female ex-fighters were scared of being identified as perpetrators of war crimes and then, being targeted by their former enemies. They also wanted to preserve their family security, as they feel they could be at risk of being attacked (Mackenzie, 2012) as a form of revenge. Mazurana and Carlson's research (2004:20) found out that interviews conducted by DDR staff did not protect women's affiliation with regard to fighting force. As a result, *"CDF[14] girls reported immediate threats to their lives when RUF[15] youth became aware of their affiliation"* (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004: 20) and afterwards left the programmes.

The evidence suggests that the DDR in Sierra Leone did not establish special measures to ensure the protection and integrity of female ex-soldiers. This applied especially to forced wives and to escapee women. On the one hand, escapee women did not want to rejoin their former 'husbands' in the disarmament (MacKenzie, 2012). If the DDR would have offered them any security's guarantee to protect them against their former perpetrators, their participation may have increased. MacKenzie (2012: 90) suggests that this population should have been especially targeted *"by making efforts to inform them that they were still eligible for the DDR and that their safety would be ensured"*.

[14] Civil Defence Forces girls.
[15] Revolutionary Armed Front youth.

On the other, Bouta (2005: 12) claims the DDR *"did not pay sufficient attention to the needs of women and girls playing support role in the army or those who were forced to act as the 'wives' and 'sex slaves' of army commanders"*. As a result, some of them got away from their 'husbands' without receiving demobilization and reintegration assistance (Bouta, 2005). Sadly, *"even those who stayed did not receive any assistance as they were considered dependents of demobilizing male soldiers and not granted individual rights"* (Bouta, 2005: 12).

The gender-blind measures left abducted women *"linked to the group of combatants through their captors,* [and] *they still had to depend on male combatants to be registered"* (Van Gog, 2008: 68). Hardly any protection was available if they wanted to escape from these relations (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2002, cited in Bouta, 2005: 12). Therefore, their suffering was perpetuated by the lack of gender awareness in the DDR analysis. This situation also denotes little knowledge about warfare social relations among women and men, as it was said previously in the chapter.

Finally, the DDR did not pay attention to health security. The Sierra Leone's war involved a massive number of sexual abuses, which spread sexually transmitted diseases. This was a major problem for young women associated with fighting groups (Coulter *et al.*, 2008). McKay and Mazurana (2004, cited in Coulter, 2008: 34) found that this problem was not addressed, as *"the few girls who were tested and found to be infected with HIV have not had any access to treatment other than supportive counselling"*.

4.1.4. Deficient Reintegration

Following Graybill (2011: 113),

> *Women who returned with some financial resource (either through a DDR grant, or skill training) were much more likely to be accepted back into their communities -despite the stigma of having been raped, or having fought with the rebels- rather than been ostracised as were so many women who returned.*

For this reason, the attendance of female ex-combatants to the DDR could be identified as a key factor for their successful reintegration in their communities.

However, as argued here, and following the literature, many women ex-fighters were self-demobilized without participating in the official DDR. McKay and Mazurana (cited in Bouta, 2005: 11), refer to this process as *"spontaneous reintegration"*. It means that,

> *A large number of girls spontaneously found their way home and thus did not receive DDR benefit or social reintegration assistance in the forms of physical, material or psychological help* (McKay and Mazurana, 2004, cited in Bouta, 2005: 11).

As a consequence, *"they often face huge demobilization and reintegration challenges, and in many cases may end up in sheer isolation and poverty after conflict"* (Bouta, 2005, 11).

Women who did not attend the DDR missed the opportunity of getting additional skills and starting capital (Van Gog, 2008) that could have made easier their return to civilian life. Some female ex-combatants experienced severe social exclusion during the post-conflict time. As several authors evidence, "*it is well-known that many of the 'girlfriends' and prostitutes in Sierra Leone are female ex-combatants, women who see few options for surviving in post-war society"* (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004; Persson, 2005; both cited in Coulter *et al.,* 2008:

38). Under these hard circumstances, other women resorted to armed conflict[16] to survive (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004, cited in Kenney, 2008: 46).

Lema (2009:84) affirms that female combatants *"were offered training only in gender related activities, such as sewing, hairdressing or clerical work which simply perpetuated gender discrimination"*. These trainings were little related to the roles that women had during the civil war (GIZ, 2010) and did not facilitate female ex-combatants access to the labour market. Moreover, Lema (2009: 98) adds that the *"livelihood skills acquired through DDR were often irrelevant to the recipients' reality, hindering family reunification and community acceptance processes"*.

In addition to this, Mazunara and Carlson (2004: 22) detect that *"social workers associated with implementing DDR programs at times discouraged or prevented older ex-combatant girls and girl mothers from entering school, instead urging them to attend skills trainings"*. They argued that young women and girl soldiers needed to develop technical skills rather than continue education in order to support themselves, their husbands and their sons (Mazunara and Carlson, 2004). It supported the misperception of older girls and young women who considered themselves too old to attend school, and who did not join the educational services offered in the DDR (Mazunara and Carlson, 2004).

In spite of the DDR reintegration programmes' offer, Coulter *et al.* (2008:30) claim that *"no matter how many projects a female ex-combatant participates, if her ability to put her skills into practice is circumscribed by society's negative view of her"* (Coulter *et al*., 2008: 39). This argument denounces the little efforts

[16] "*Roving armed militia groups from Sierra Leone, many of which included women, have contributed to the conflicts in neighboring Guinea, Liberia and Cote D'lvoire"* (Kenney, 2008: 46).

made to deconstruct the prejudices against women ex-fighter in society. As women were aware of the social rejection they may face in their communities, some of them thought that attending DDR projects would not be the most beneficial to their reintegration (Coulter *et al.* 2008).

Furthermore, while the reintegration of men was framed as a process that was a necessary component of achieving security post-conflict; the reintegration of women was largely framed as a process of socialization or returning to normalcy (Lema, 2009). It is evidenced that instead of changing the community's mentality, the DDR tried to teach women how to adapt themselves to their former society.

In relation to the aids given to support the women's economic reintegration, "wives" could apply for microcredit to help maintain their families in the late DDR (Mazurana and Carlson, 2008). Mazunara and Carlson (2004: 18) problematize this situation saying that:

> *"…For a female applicant to access the loans, she had to be present with a "husband," who was willing to identify her as his wife (…) If women had been permitted to apply alone, it could have enabled them to abdicate their "relationships". But this was not considered by senior DDR officials, one of whom said that "even if they were raped and abducted, 70 percent of the women and girls wanted to be with their 'husbands'".*

4.2. Concluding Chapter Remarks

The female turnout in the Sierra Leonean DDR did not reflect the number of female ex-combatants involved in the war. As it has been shown, the main reason that research has stressed is that women experienced multiple obstacles for accessing the official DDR programs. Firstly, they had no weapons to disarm, and

consequently, they were not identified as ex-fighters. Secondly, many women were excluded because they were not categorized as “real fighters”. The different roles women played within the armies (support roles, wives, sexual slaves, combatants etc.) were not recognized by DDR designers. Therefore, only women who had carried guns were allowed to participate in the process.

Female stereotypes which portray women as mere victims in war underpinned the DDR design and implementation. The evidence suggests that a gender perspective was not taken on board in order to guarantee that all population’s needs were attended to. Moreover, the professionals that implemented the projects and services (mostly men) were not aware of the issues that female ex-combatants could suffer during the DDR. The lack of gender-sensitive policies led to the denial of women’s access and to issues for the female ex-combatants who participated. Furthermore, the DDR also failed to expand the programmes’ information to all the population involved in war. As a consequence, some women reported that they did not know about the DDR.

The DDR did not put enough attention to the social stigma that was created by being a female ex-combatant within the Sierra Leonean population. Women did not want to be recognised as a former member of the fighting forces because they would be socially rejected otherwise. Then, they did not attend the DDR to cut their connection with the army. Under these circumstances, there should have been more community work in order to deconstruct prejudices about female ex-combatants. The designers should have identified the different situations of women related to the army. Escapee women and forced wives were especially vulnerable and should have enjoyed more protection against their perpetrators.

The situation of girl mothers was also not attended to since their participation was limited by the lack of child care services available.

As a result of the little pre-analysis of women's situation, the DDR put women at risk. The security in the camps and in the programs' centres did not ensure women's protection. This fact made women wary of attending the DDR, as they were afraid of being attacked or sexually abused. The women that avoided the process were not able to enjoy its benefits, nor its trainings and education opportunities. This fact left them in a disadvantaged position in the post-conflict society, that sometimes led to severe social exclusion (prostitution, re-engagement with armed groups, extreme poverty etc.).

Women's situation was also characterized by their difficult access to the labour market. The DDR did not offer useful trainings to women that would have facilitated more chances to get a better economic position in the future. Moreover, the trainings did not have any relation to their previous positions in the army. This produced a loss of social capital and reduced their possibilities of generating better incomes.

All the previous issues suffered by women (difficult access, social rejection, security issues and inefficient reintegration) evidence the gender-blind design and implementation of the Sierra Leonean DDR. Female ex-combatants' situation in war and in the aftermath should have been regarded by its designers in order to attend their reintegration needs and to protect their integrity during the process.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The Sierra Leone's Civil War spread suffering, cruelty, chaos (Asher, 2004) among the population of the country. Women were one of the most targeted groups during the conflict time. They suffered the greatest casualties; they were *"recruited, manned, and exploited by all part concerned"* (Gershoni, 2004: 25). The first chapter of this dissertation highlights that, once the war was over, women were still vulnerable to abuses due to the lack of health, education and social services and to the destructed infrastructures of Sierra Leone (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). The Sierra Leonean country continues trying to repair the social welfare system's weaknesses caused by the war. Due to the deprived living conditions, its population continues suffering from structural violence. Women are especially affected by it because dominant patriarchal ideas legitimise their subordination to men. As a result, the women's position in the public sphere still being limited and marginalized.

Chapter 2 analyses the situation of women ex-combatants in the country using the feminine and masculine dichotomies in gender theory. Sierra Leonean women who were part of fighting groups faced difficulties to be part of the post-conflict community again. Their reintegration obstacles and their stigmatization have their roots in gender stereotypes that traditionally regard men as perpetrators and women as victims. These patriarchal ideas prevented women being seen as soldiers and reduced them to passive actors. For this reason, women ex-soldiers were considered deviants from the social norms; they had broken the traditional values and were considered impure (Eno, 2000, cited in Bop, 2001: 29). Then, when women returned to their community they lived situations of extreme poverty

and social degradation (Eno, 2000, cited in Bop, 2001: 29). As it is argued here, the peace-building process should have taken into account the situation lived by female ex-combatants in order to improve the social cohesion in the country.

Chapter 3 illustrates that DDR programmes are a key element in this process because they facilitate the transition from conflict to peace. However, gender-blindness was an issue in the Sierra Leonean DDR, what put women in a disadvantaged position in the war-torn society. When they returned from the army they had no money, hardly any work, and little education, especially rural women (Hale, 1999, cited in Bop, 2001:29). Besides, women expected to get married is a very important value in the Sierra Leonean society. Marrying became a problem for female ex-fighters, as they *"find themselves unmarriageable"* (Hale, 1999, cited in Bop, 2001: 29). They thought no man would like to marry a woman who has been inside the armed forces. This is due to the fact that female ex-combatants are thought to be violent, unsubordinated and also to have had multiple sexual partners (what make them likely to be infected with HIV).

The female ex-fighters' aftermath experiences were linked to their training for war, the conditions of demobilization, and the availability of services (Meintjes *et al.,* 2001). Consequently, the fact of attending the DDR could have made a change in their life during the aftermath.

However, Chapter 4 shows that most of the Sierra Leonean women who were part of the fighting groups did not participate in the process. The main reason that explains the low female turnout in the DDR is that its policies were not gender-sensitive. International DDR monitoring institutions that ensure and supervise the implementation of a gender perspective during the different parts of the

programmes are required in order to avoid gender-blindness on them. Only turning to a gender sensitive approach as far as DDR processes are concerned is likely to empower women and to make a change in their subordinated position in the war-torn society.

As the dissertation makes clear, the official DDR programs in Sierra Leone did not address the issues that female ex-combatants faced in the post-conflict society. Particularly, deconstructing war masculinities and eliminating the social stigmas that the community had against women fighters, should have been priorities in their working plan. As a result, many women did not attend the process fearing being identified as a female ex-soldier. They avoided the DDR as they regarded this as counterproductive to their reintegration and inappropriate for women (Coulter *et al.,* 2008). Following Coulter *et al.* (2008:27), *"local cultural taboos"* about young women and violent practices must be considered by planners and implementers of DDR.

The fact of women traditionally been regarded as wives or sex slaves during the war prevented them from enjoying the DDR benefits. Their actual participation in the war was also denied because of as women that often did not own the weapons, no disarmament was applicable. Therefore, gender stereotypes prevented DDR measures to acknowledge the different positions of female ex-combatants within the forces and ignored the active role they played. These narrow understandings of the women's roles created a discriminatory and non-inclusive participation criterion in the Sierra Leonean DDR.

When using a *"gender perspective that analyses the impact of social constructions of the masculine and feminine"* (Ní Aoláin, 2011:135), a number of

female issues are detected in the DDR of Sierra Leone. Its strategies lacked gender sensitivity. Consequently, the integrity and the dignity of the women who achieved accessing the process were not protected. Women's security was not ensured on the programs, neither in the camps. The facilities were not adequate for female ex-combatants safety and did not take into account the needs of women soldiers who have children. As a result, women opted for self-demobilizing and lost their opportunities to benefit from the DDR monetary and service aids.

A gender-responsive DDR would have included issues such as setting the appropriate criteria for women to entering DDR processes; understanding identity issues, promoting women's post-conflict political participation; targeting women as larger units with their children and partners; ensuring women's health and psychological well-being; and dealing with the gender dimensions of violence and community acceptance (Tarnaala, 2016).

Moreover, it should have solved not only practical problems but also the disadvantaged women's position in society (Moser, 2001). The underpinning gender power relations should have been addressed by using DDR policies that recognize that traditional gender ideologies create women's exclusion. In spite of the United Nations Resolution 1325 declaring that women's needs in post-conflict time should be addressed, the situation of Sierra Leonean women was not taken into account (Coulter *et al.,* 2008).

As a consequence, female ex-combatants had a disadvantaged position in the war-torn society, which sometimes led to their extreme social exclusion. Although women ex-soldiers do not occupy a position that can be easily reconciled with

predominant gender ideologies in Sierra Leone (Coulter *et al.,* 2008), the DDR services did not facilitate their reintegration in society.

The Sierra Leonean case evidences that women and men have different needs that require being addressed during the aftermath. They did not experience violence in the same way during the war, as victims and neither as perpetrators (Moser, 2001), and it needs to be reflected on the DDR interventions. A gender perspective was not effectively taken in the DDR design and implementation in Sierra Leone and that this perpetuated gender inequality in the war-torn society.

Gender mainstreaming should have been taken into account in its design in order to ensure the women ex-soldiers' attendance. Nevertheless, the majority of female fighters did not participate in the DDR programs, and the same occurred with women soldiers from Angola, Burundi, DRC, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe (Coulter *et al.,* 2008). International agencies should take more seriously the supervision of the post-conflict gender agenda commitments and follow The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in order to protect women and children's human rights during the aftermath. Furthermore, they should ensure the implementation of *The Beijing Declaration (A/52/231)* and of *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).*

Following the analysis in this dissertation, I urge international policy makers to implement more gender mainstreaming as the DDR has to be revised and reformed, accordingly. There also is a lack of the specific research that systematically analyses the distinctive needs of female ex-combatants, not only in Sierra Leone but also in other war-torn countries. DDR programmes have the

potential to change women’s disadvantaged position in society. Therefore, women’s social conditions need to be acknowledged and consequently approached in DDR processes with the required gender-sensitivity.

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