

Has the recent increased presence of women in military and civilian positions within the UN, along with the emphasis UNSCR 1325 has placed upon the need for women's inclusion within PSOs, resulted in a gendered perspective being adopted and ultimately a more inclusive reconciliation process?

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Working Papers in British-Irish Studies

No. # 2013

Institute for British-Irish Studies

University College Dublin

IBIS working papers
No. #, 2013

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ISSN #

ABSTRACT

Through a review of the various elements of reconciliation processes in the aftermath of conflict, with a particular focus on the impact of UNSCR 1325, this paper will discuss the inclusion or exclusion of women in rebuilding their post-conflict societies. As is made evident through the examination of several reconciliation processes, women in post-conflict societies have been de-securitized, ignored, silenced, oppressed, isolated and are often portrayed solely as peaceful victims of the conflict. However, an analysis of the Liberian reconciliation process demonstrates that initiatives such as UNSCR 1325 have had an impact on the adoption of a more gendered perspective, while also highlighting the need for further advancements in this area.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Louise Power has recently completed an MA in Peace and Development Studies in The University of Limerick. Her research interests include the position of women in conflict and post-conflict societies; gendered aspects of reconciliation processes; and the impact of UNSCR 1325 at all levels of PSOs.

Introduction

In recent years the role of women within reconciliation processes worldwide has been gaining increased attention among academics and those working in the field. This attention has, to an extent, resulted in positive implications for women in conflict and post-conflict societies. Their right to inclusion at all levels of reconciliation processes is acknowledged in several official international documents, particularly the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. However, due to the continuing impact of gender discrimination at all levels of society the reality of equal rights and participation in the rebuilding of their post-conflict societies is still non-existent for many women (Strickland and Duvvury, cited in Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2004). This paper will discuss this at length by reviewing the various elements of reconciliation processes in the aftermath of conflict with a particular focus on the impact of UNSCR 1325.

The first section of this paper will discuss what is meant by reconciliation, why it is needed and who should be involved. This will be followed by an overview of women's exclusion from reconciliation processes along with international efforts to highlight and combat this exclusion through such mechanisms as UNSCR 1325. The aims of UNSCR 1325 will be discussed, along with its strengths and weaknesses. This will lead onto a detailed discussion of the various elements of reconciliation processes - justice mechanisms, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, indigenous forms of reconciliation, and finally, grassroots initiatives. Several examples of reconciliation processes, mainly from the 1990s and early 2000s, will be used to highlight the reality of the situation leading up to the passing of UNSCR 1325. The Liberian reconciliation process will then be reviewed to discover if UNSCR 1325 has had a positive impact upon such processes.

The Reconciliation Process

There is no one single definition of the term reconciliation; how it is understood changes across time and cultures. Whatever understanding is adopted, it should be viewed as a process that breaks a cycle of violence and works towards solidifying a sustainable peace. For many, particularly western states or organisations, an introduction or strengthening of democratic institutions is also an integral element of reconciliation. The process is intended to deal with such issues as survivors' psychological healing, reparations for injustices, (re)building relationships within and/or among communities or nations, as well as uniting former adversaries on their understandings of the past and their visions for the future. The overall target of any reconciliation process is to socially, politically and sometimes economically enable survivors of a conflict, both the victims and the perpetrators, to move on with their lives in a unified and peaceful manner. The level of inclusion of the aforementioned issues and the order of which they are dealt with varies among reconciliation

processes and their specific contexts. (Huyse, 2003a) Some processes focus more so on justice while others focus on spiritual and/or cultural factors.

There tends to be considerable variations between 'indigenous' and 'international' forms of reconciliation, or between secular and religious forms. Generally speaking, religious approaches place significantly more importance on forgiveness as opposed to retributive justice, regarding it as the essence of reconciliation; while secular approaches on the other hand tend to view reconciliation, justice and forgiveness as all being necessary interrelated components of post-conflict. In reality such a dichotomy is not always evident; many reconciliation processes will have elements of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness, albeit in varying degrees of importance. (McKay, 2000) It is, however, becoming increasingly common that peace and justice are seen as incompatible, with amnesty becoming an ever increasing condition of peace agreements (Valji, 2007).

In order for reconciliation to be successful a number of goals need to be achieved. Fear of the opposition must be replaced with a willingness to coexist; trust and confidence must be built between previous adversaries; as well as the development of a readiness to listen to the experiences of the victims and the explanations of the perpetrators with the eventual aim of empathy. Depending upon the cultural context, it may be important for these issues to be approached from both an interpersonal and/or collective level. Furthermore, these goals must be targeted alongside the formation or strengthening of inclusive political, economic and legal institutions; for many this must happen within a democratic structure (McKay, 2000; Huyse, 2003a). A variety of procedures are employed to achieve these goals, they include disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes (DDR), truth commissions, prosecutions, indigenous forms of justice and reconciliation, symbolic or material reparations and the provision of amnesty to perpetrators.

Who Should be Included?

The question remains about who should be involved in the reconciliation process, both at the decision making and implementation levels, as well as within the various stages of the process. Clearly all survivors of a conflict must be involved in the actual reconciliation process at some point; both the perpetrators and the direct victims, as well as their families, friends and communities. All will have experienced or witnessed trauma and will have been impacted by the conflict to varying degrees; therefore, all must be considered within a broad and inclusive reconciliation process if sustainable, stable peace and trust are to be built. (Huyse, 2003a)

Due to the patriarchal nature of cultures and societies worldwide being ingrained within states and their institutions, as well as within international institutions such as

the UN, women tend to be excluded from many if not most elements of a reconciliation process. Furthermore, their limited inclusion can often represent a token gesture towards gender mainstreaming as opposed to indicating an equal respect for their varying roles and experiences throughout conflict and post-conflict situations. Within the context of the globalised nature of modern times, there is an element of international involvement within most or possibly all modern reconciliation processes, particularly by the UN. With increased attention being drawn to the limited inclusion, or invisibility, of women within such processes the UN passed UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

This resolution is intended to address issues around the role of women and children in conflict and post-conflict contexts, highlighting how women must be included within post-conflict reconciliation. It addresses the impact conflict has on women's security, as well as potential roles they can play in peace support operations (PSOs). It aims to mainstream gender within peace. It is hoped that through gender mainstreaming and gender balance international gender equality can be achieved, both within institutions such as the UN as well as on the ground (USIP, 2012; Cohn et al, 2004). UNSCR 1325 has both qualitative and quantitative targets. Qualitatively it calls on member states, parties of a conflict and the UN to adopt a gendered perspective at both the decision-making levels and during the implementation of PSOs. Examples include the consideration of differing needs of female ex-combatants during a DDR process and the provision of training for all peacekeeping personnel on the needs and rights of women in conflict situations. Quantitatively the resolution calls on member states, parties of a conflict and the UN to increase the number of women involved at all levels of PSOs, including at a community level. The needs and rights of children, particularly girls, are also integrated into UNSCR 1325. (UN, 2000)

Despite reference to the roles some women play as active combatants, UNSCR 1325 largely plays into the essentialist stereotype of both men and women - the nurturing and peaceful woman, in contrast with the highly sexualised, aggressive, 'masculine' man. It also portrays women as a single voice with unified experiences and aspirations. In doing so the multiple experiences, roles and motivations of women are overlooked along with their potential to equally share duties and power with their male counterparts (Simic, 2013; Hudson, 2013). This has considerable impact upon women's participation in all levels of reconciliation processes worldwide due to the UN's active or passive involvement within reconciliation processes.

Some quantitative results of UNSCR 1325 can be seen through an increase in the number of women in military and civilian positions within the UN (Simic, 2013). In 1993 only 1% of UN deployed uniformed personnel were women, by 2010 this had risen to 3.3%; in 2012 3% of military personnel and 10% of police personnel were

women. In 2010, 30% of all international UN civilian staff were female (UN, 2013; UN, 2010). While these statistics show considerable change there is still room for improvement. The UNDPKO have set targets for 2014 - female police personnel at 20%, female civilian personnel at 50% and an increase in female military personnel with no specific target (Simic, 2013). These targets are certainly a step in the right direction towards a gender balance within PSOs and women's increased presence will hopefully lead to the necessary qualitative change.

Qualitative change, while limited, is evident. Such change tends to be slow and difficult to gauge. A look at specific cases in the following sections will provide us with some indication of the reality of this limited change.

Justice Mechanisms

Justice, be it in the form of retributive or restorative, plays a major role in many reconciliation processes, albeit to varying degrees; it may be based on prosecution, on mediation, on compensation, or seeking historical justice (Huyse, 2003c). There are various mechanisms within a reconciliation process that deal with issues of justice. They include truth commissions, prosecutions, amnesty in the name of peace, war tribunals, and symbolic and/or material reparations. Gender justice, which McKay (2000) defines as impartial legal processes that are not dominated by patriarchal values and that acknowledges the atrocities experienced by women in conflict and post-conflict settings, has historically been neglected within post-conflict contexts. However, change is in progress; women's testimonies and experiences are becoming increasingly prominent within the aforementioned mechanisms, as well as in international documents such as the UNSCR 1325, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) and human rights documents (Brunet & Rousseau, cited in McKay, 2000). In 2005 the PFA stated that gender equality is an element of both human rights and social justice, as well as being essential for sustainable development and peace (UN, 1995). Despite these improvements and guiding documents over the last two decades, power relations in play within patriarchal societies often result in women's testimonies being underrepresented, depreciated and, can also result in gender justice being disregarded in the name of reconciliation. Reasons for the under-representation of women's testimonies also include feelings of shame, guilt and denial by the victims, fear of public reactions and cultural taboos; furthermore, within conflict settings, male testimonies are largely considered to be more relevant and important (McKay, 2000).

A prime example of the emphasis placed upon men's testimonies is Uruguay where no official record was kept of women's testimonies of their experiences of the dictatorship until 1994 when a local women's group took it upon themselves to collect such testimonies. In Rwanda, women were encouraged to remain silent and forget the atrocities they experienced during the conflict, which highlights the

pressure women can feel at all levels of society to remain quiet in the name of reconciliation (McKay, 2000). Resentment or feelings of powerlessness may build among victims of a conflict if their stories are not heard, their experiences acknowledged and/or if the perpetrators are not held accountable, this would prove to be counter-productive for any reconciliation process. Female Cambodian refugees in the U.S. were given the opportunity to provide testimonies of their experiences which they argue gave them a feeling of empowerment and control (Herbst, cited in McKay, 2000; Valji, 2007). A desire for retributive justice as opposed to restorative justice may have its roots in cultural, religious and/or historical norms and values; regardless of what the intended outcome and regardless of women's cultural status they must be represented and given a voice at all levels, equal to that of men, if there is a genuine goal of an inclusive and sustainable peace.

There are some examples of the experiences of women in conflict being officially recognised in post-conflict reconciliation. For example, in 2000 Yugoslavia's War Tribunal began prosecutions of gender-based war crimes against Muslim women by Serbian soldiers. Also, in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, due to pressure by women's groups and activists, gender was incorporated to some extent through such initiatives as the Special Hearings on Women, as well as the inclusion of testimonies of gender-based crimes. However, while undoubtedly being a step in the right direction, these have been criticised as being somewhat superficial and lacking in genuine conviction. (McKay, 2000, Kufuka, 2009)

Indigenous forms of justice/reconciliation

Traditional forms of justice, which fall into the restorative category, have their basis in mediation and have been in existence in many African and Asian countries since ancient times, as well as in some Western nations such as the U.S. and Australia among their indigenous populations. These forms of justice have many advantages such as geographical, financial, linguistic and social accessibility for local communities, furthermore, they have a community basis with emphasis placed upon restorative penalties (Huyse, 2003c). These factors can make them more appropriate for the often communitarian based societies of Africa and Asia. There is, however, a considerable risk of the society's marginalised being further disempowered; within patriarchal societies women fall into this vulnerable category.

The Gacaca Tribunals are an example of an indigenous form of justice that was adapted to deal with the large volume of cases waiting to be heard in post-genocide Rwanda. They began in 2002 with the aim of advancing reconciliation through the direct involvement of the community in establishing truth, while also speeding up the process of judging the accused and reducing prison overcrowding (Uvin, 2003). Gender-based violence was widespread during the genocide with an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 rapes between April and July 1994. Such violence was

acknowledged within post-genocide Rwanda; sexual torture was placed in Category 1 of the 1996 Genocide Law, meaning those accused of sexual torture were tried under the ordinary Rwandan criminal courts rather than the Gacaca Tribunals which dealt with the less serious crimes in Category 2 and below. Testimonies of survivors of sexual torture and rape could be heard within Gacaca, meaning these voices were not excluded from the community based tribunals. Additionally, women's participation in the Gacaca Tribunals was largely in relation to cases not related to sexual violence, as victims, witnesses, representatives and as perpetrators, representing the broad scope of roles played by women. Data collected indicated that almost as many women intended to participate in the Gacaca Tribunals as men. (Wells, 2005; Gabisirege and Babalola, 2001) As victims and perpetrators it certainly appears that women's varying experiences during the genocide were acknowledged and that they were given the opportunity to voice their experiences which many intended to do in relation to issues of non-sexual violence. However, their representation among judges within all categories of Gacaca was worryingly low; it ranged from one-third to one-fifth of judges at the various levels. Such a low representation meant that women were largely excluded from decisions relating to restitution, compensation and reconciliation in general (Uvin, 2003).

In Rwanda social barriers still remained that prevented women from recounting their experiences of sexual violence. Due to taboos and stigma surrounding sexual violence many girls and women refused to testify, or were prevented from doing so by their families for fear of community ostracism, shame, ineligibility to marry or other social consequences. Additionally, many in Rwandan society believe that discussions of and testimonies about sexual violence are counterproductive to community reconciliation. (Wells, 2005) Thus, while women's participation within Gacaca appears to be almost on a par with that of men in relation to non-gender-based crimes, gender-based crimes are largely excluded due to their categorisation as Category 1 crimes and due to the worrying social factors preventing women from speaking out. The lack of representation of women at higher levels of the Gacaca indicates that this repression of women and their weak status in society generally is unlikely to change (Uvin, 2003). Any conflict impacts all members of society, as does a reconciliation process; omitting women from the higher levels of the process, for example as judges in the Gacaca Tribunals, is damaging for the building of a peaceful and inclusive society. Women and their varying experiences must be included and represented within all levels of reconciliatory justice.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes,

Another element of many reconciliation processes is a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme, which is often UN supported. DDR basically involves disarming and demobilising ex-combatants once a conflict has abated, as well as a political, social and economic effort to reintegrate them into civilian life (UN Peacekeeping, 2013). It is thought that DDR can increase security after a conflict by

riding society of much of the weapons used during the conflict and by preparing ex-combatants for civilian life. The latter can also assist in building tolerance and trust among ex-combatants and civilians, hopefully preventing a return to violence. Women are regularly excluded from this programme as their presence within combatant groups as active members is often ignored. While it is undeniable that men considerably outnumber women in active combat, their presence must be acknowledged and accommodated within DDR programmes. Some examples of groups with a considerable number of female combatants include the Irish Republican Army, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, numerous Latin American guerrilla forces and the Ethiopian People's Liberation Front whose forces were made up of up to one-third women (Huyse, 2003b).

Female ex-combatants experience conflict differently to men and this fact must also be taken into consideration when planning and implementing a DDR programme; giving women a voice at all levels can assist in doing so. Whether forcibly recruited or volunteers, women play various roles in combatant groups including those that are an extension of the stereotype of traditional roles such as domestic servants, 'wives', sex slaves, finding food and water supplies, cooking and washing clothes. Additionally, they serve in militant roles such as spies, fighters, looters, first-aid workers, as well as holding command and intelligence positions. These multiple roles, along with the fact that many have illegitimate children during conflict, give them differing experiences and needs to men (UN Women, 2013; McKay, 2004). Despite their active participation as combatants women are generally regarded as "females associated with the war," "dependents," or "camp followers" (MacKenzie, 2009, p.241), feeding into the essentialist perspective of women as peaceful, non-combatant victims. This reluctance to acknowledge the actions of combatant women results in their exclusion from DDR, impacting negatively on the lives of these women, their children and their communities. Additionally, any status gained within these roles in a conflict setting and women's potential to actively participate in post-conflict reconciliation is undermined by their very exclusion.

Concrete examples of this can be seen in various post-conflict reconciliation processes. In Mozambique in the 1990s the DDR programme only distributed men's clothing to ex-combatants and resettlement allowances were allocated only to men (Baden, cited in UNODA 2001). In Sierra Leone women were silenced and excluded from the DDR programme. From 10% to 50% of armed factions within the conflict are thought to have been women and girls, while only 7% of DDR participants were female. Reasons for their exclusion include the previously discussed reluctance to acknowledge women's active combatant roles, their stereotyping as peaceful victims, as well as a general perception of DDR as a programme for armed men (MacKenzie, 2009). These examples of the reality of women's invisibility within the DDR element of reconciliation highlight the need for a gendered perspective to be adopted and a gender balance to be reached at a decision-making level to ensure their inclusion. This is important for their personal healing as well as that of their community and

society as a whole. This issue is highlighted by UNSCR 1325 which will hopefully result in more gender sensitive DDR programmes. The Liberian reconciliation process will be reviewed later in the paper in order to evaluate the impact UNSCR 1325 on its DDR, as well as its other elements.

Grassroots initiatives

The previously discussed elements highlighted how women are largely disregarded within reconciliation processes. However, the picture is not entirely grim; there are several examples of women's successful and influential involvement at grassroots and local government levels. This is particularly important considering that studies suggest that broad community involvement in reconciliation processes tends to result in a more sustainable peace (Karam, 2001). Under-represented at the higher levels, women have come together at grassroots levels to give themselves and their communities a voice. Many believe that women's status in most societies means that they feel the brunt of conflict and of the decisions made regarding peace; thus leading many women to view "peace in terms of basic universal human needs"; as a result they tend to seek more practical solutions that are inclusive of their community's needs (Anderlini, 2000, p.33). Some argue that female activists and women's groups have been successful in uniting victims of conflict across many boundaries such as religion, race, ethnicity, class and nationality, stressing the need for an inclusive, participatory and unifying reconciliation process (Anderlini, 2000; Huyse, 2003b).

There are many examples of such grassroots organisations worldwide. In Guatemala, pressure from grassroots women's groups ensured the involvement of indigenous groups in the peace talks, as well the inclusion of issues that were developmentally important for women such as equal access to a range of public services and rights. In Cambodia, women's groups ensured that the new constitution included the provision of political, economic and social rights for women, equal to those of men. The Liberian Women's Initiative brought, among other things, institutional change to Liberia with the creation of a governmental unit for women and children. (Karam, 2001; Anderlini, 2000)

Many more examples exist worldwide of the success of women in peace negotiations at the grassroots level and in local governments, indicating the important contribution women can bring to reconciliation processes. If these experiences, skills and voices are given the opportunity to participate at all levels of a reconciliation process then perhaps a more sustainable peace within an inclusive and stable society can be built.

Liberia

From 1989 Liberia experienced 14 years of conflict and unrest; the impact on the civilian population was immense - politically, socially and economically Liberia was in turmoil. The conflict left over 250,000 people dead and caused the displacement of more than 1 million Liberians as internally or as refugees. In August 2003 a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in Accra, Ghana by the parties of the conflict (UN, 2013; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2008). This agreement included a wide range of peace-building mechanisms with a focus on areas such as DDRR, security sector reform, issues relating to humanitarian needs and human rights, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and justice issues. Additionally, it included a request for the deployment of a UN force (Aboagye and Bah, 2004). This resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) which was mandated by UNSCR 1509 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. UNMIL commenced on October 1st 2003 and is still active today. It is currently mandated to observe and assist in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to support security sector reform and assist activities related to humanitarian support and human rights, as well as to provide protection for Liberian civilians and UN staff (UN, 2013).

Being mandated in 2003 meant that UNMIL came along three years after UNSCR 1325 was passed. UNMIL's mandate acknowledges the extent of sexual violence against women and children, as well as its use as a tool of warfare; additionally, it emphasises the importance of PSOs adopting a gendered perspective. It specifically refers to UNSCR 1325 stating:

"The Security Council ... Reaffirms the importance of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace-building in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000), recalls the need to address violence against women and girls as a tool of warfare, and encourages UNMIL as well as the Liberian parties to actively address these issues." (UN, 2000, p.5)

While the specific references to women and UNSCR 1325 are undoubtedly positive some issues remain. Firstly, despite stating that the special needs of female ex-combatants must be considered in the DDRR, women are still regarded as vulnerable victims of gender violence. This feeds into the essentialist view of women as passive victims of a conflict with their capacity to be active agents being largely overlooked. Secondly, the Security Council's choice of words when referring to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 somewhat lacks conviction. The Security Council 'demands' that certain elements of the mandate are carried out or adhered to, while they simply 'reaffirm' the importance of adopting a gendered perspective. Such documents are carefully compiled leading one to wonder how much importance is actually placed upon the inclusion of a gender perspective. Should they not also 'demand' the adoption of a gender perspective?

Various elements of Liberia's reconciliation process will now be discussed in order to discover if a gender perspective was in fact adopted and a more inclusive reconciliation process implemented.

Justice mechanisms

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Act was passed into law by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly of Liberia in June 2005. The TRC's aim was "to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation" by conducting investigations to identify the perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law, of human rights and of other crimes committed between January 1979 and October 2003. In doing so it hoped to discover the root causes of the Liberian conflict. Additionally, it aimed to provide a forum for the perpetrators, victims and witnesses of the conflict to voice their experiences. This was to be done through mechanisms such as public hearing, the collection of witness testimonies and public awareness campaigns among Liberians at home and abroad. (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009; National Transitional Legislative Assembly, 2005) The mandate made a specific reference to the experiences of women, stating that it would address the issue of gender-based violations, while providing women with the opportunity to recount their experiences of the conflict. The TRC intended to recommend rehabilitation measures for these victims (National Transitional Legislative Assembly, 2005). The TRC mandate stipulated that the commission must be comprised of nine commissioners, four of whom must be women. An International Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC) was also to be established, consisting of three people; there were no gender requirements for this committee (National Transitional Legislative Assembly, 2005). The Commission was launched in July 2006.

As made evident by the mandate the TRC attempted to address the issue of gender-based violence. The unique experiences and vulnerability that many women experience as victims of a conflict were acknowledged, along with the fact that all too often women's experiences remain unreported and are thus underrepresented in reconciliation processes. The role many women played as perpetrators was also acknowledged; the Liberian conflict is thought to have created more female perpetrators than any other conflict, some were willing participants while others were forcibly recruited (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009; Sherif, 2008). In order to address these issues and to conduct an equitable process the TRC incorporated many provisions regarding gender issues and women, including ensuring the "effective participation of women at all levels and in all aspects of the TRC process, including as Commissioners, managers and staff of the TRC, petitioners, victims, perpetrators, victim-perpetrators, and witnesses" (National Transitional Legislative Assembly, 2005, p.70). In an attempt to adequately address all issues regarding

women's participation, security and needs a gender committee was established that was composed of members of Liberian civil society and international partners (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009).

The actions of the TRC certainly indicate an attempt to tackle the issues of gender balance and gender mainstreaming. Quantitatively, statistics show that women's participation in the whole process was considerable. Of the more than 20,000 statements that were taken, 47% were from women. To facilitate women's participation, the TRC hired more female statement takers than male (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009, p.66). Participation in public hearings was higher for men (68% as opposed to 32%), this likely due, however, to the fact that the TRC found that during the conflict men were targeted more than women, with 62% of all reported violation victims being male. This does not count for sexual violence, of which women were targeted in dramatically greater proportions. (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009)

The recommendations made by the TRC in the *Final Report* also reflect the attempt to tackle issues of gender, not only within the context of the conflict but also in relation to the historical and cultural positioning of women in society generally. The recommendations cover a broad spectrum of issues such as health, education and training, economic empowerment, reparations for victims of the conflict, social welfare programmes, child care, and a sexual harassment statute, as well as addressing gender inequality in the economic, political, social and cultural rights of Liberian citizens. The TRC also recommended the establishment of an "Extraordinary Criminal Court for Liberia" to prosecute those found guilty of the most heinous crimes and a National "Palava Hut" Programme to assist the court with the large volume of perpetrators (discussed further below).

Overall the recommendations of the TRC have created great debate and division among Liberians. The political elite largely reject the recommendations as many, including the president, are on the list of individuals that the TRC recommend for prosecution and/or for public sanction due to their activities during the conflict. It is for this very same reason that the TRC's final report and its recommendations are so popular among the general population in Liberia, they feel those most responsible for the conflict are being targeted. There are those who are concerned about the methodology used within the TRC and question the recommendations' credibility and appropriateness, as well as the apparent inconsistencies in targeting alleged perpetrators, while others argue it threatens peace in Liberia (Weah, 2012; Steinburg, 2009; Harris & Lappin, 2010). Much, but not all, of this criticism comes from those whose power is threatened by the recommendations. Within civil society the report is acknowledged to be flawed but these flaws do not override the strengths of the report's findings and recommendations (Weah, 2012). While the recommendations made in relation to women do not receive such criticism, are commendable and are largely in line with the finding of the Pillay et al's study (2010)

and Gibson Caesar et al's study (2010) they are tainted by the overall attitudes of the political elite towards the TRC and therefore their implementation may be hindered.

Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR)

The Joint Implementation Unit (JIU) was established by the DDRR unit of UNMIL, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), for the purpose of implementing Liberia's Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme. The programme was separated into two components; the first component was disarmament and demobilisation (DD), followed by the rehabilitation and reintegration (RR) component. After a failed attempt in December 2003 the DDRR programme was successfully initiated in April 2004 with the aim of disarming ex-combatants while assisting them in reintegrating into civilian life and providing support such as education, training, psychosocial counselling and financial support (Jaye, 2009). Initially, entry into the programme was permitted only if a weapon was presented. This condition was later expanded to include groups (of no more than 5) with a single weapon and membership of any militia group; militia commanders were responsible for confirming identities of combatants (Jaye, 2009). By the completion of the first component in October 2004 a total of 101,496 ex-combatants had been disarmed and demobilised. Of these, roughly 90,000 continued onto the RR component which ran until April 2009 when the final stage of DDRR was officially completed. Once the programme had ceased special assistance was offered to any member of the community that was considered to be in need, ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants alike (Momodu, 2009). Overall, despite some issues such as the psychosocial counselling being largely unfulfilled, Liberia's DDRR programme is generally considered to be a success with an 8% increase in their socio-economic situation being experienced by those who completed each component of the programme (Jaye, 2009).

A number of measures were taken in an attempt to successfully integrate women into the programme; including the provision of a variety of female specific health care and information, post-natal and pre-natal care, as well as separate areas of cantonment sites for women. Additionally, interviews and focus groups with female ex-combatants were conducted in order to incorporate their views and needs into the programme (UNMIL, 2010; Jaye, 2009). While these measures are clearly a positive improvement from previous DDR(R) programmes there is still much room for improvement. It is estimated that from 30% to 40% of Liberia's combatants were female (women and girls) while only 22% of DDRR participants were women and 2% were girls (UNMIL, 2010; Sherif, 2008). This is a considerable gap that must be considered in order for future DDR(R) programmes.

There are various reasons for the lower participation of women such as fear of social reprisals for themselves and their children, fear for their security at the cantonment sites, or lack of information or misinformation about the programme (Jaye, 2009). The entry requirements listed above may have also deterred the participation of many women that were part of militant groups; many female combatants may not have had their own weapon, while others may have fled their militia groups and fear meeting their former 'comrades' in cantonment sites. Women were generally called "camp followers" and were not acknowledged for their various active roles within militant groups; this lack of recognition meant that they were not eligible for the DDRR programme. Due to the advocacy by UNMIL the term 'ex-combatant' was adapted to include women that were active in militant and non-militant roles within militia groups. Examples of possible roles include, spies, sexual slaves, 'wives', cooks, washing and messengers. The term 'camp followers' was replaced with 'women associated with fighting groups' (WAFF) and meant that women could enter the DDRR programme without a weapon (UNMIL, 2010). UNMIL and the Liberian government's attempts at gender mainstreaming are clear when reviewing the DDRR programme they implemented. However, the use of the term 'women associated with fighting groups' indicates the presence of an essentialist perspective. If mobilised within militia groups why not refer to them as combatants? It is vital for other post-conflict states to follow Liberia's example to work towards equitable and gender sensitive DDR(R) programmes.

Indigenous forms of reconciliation,

Traditional forms of justice have not yet played a role at the official level of reconciliation. As previously mentioned the TRC recommended within its final report that a National Palava Hut Programme be initiated to foster reconciliation at a local and national level, while also assisting in the reintegration of ex-combatants into their communities. The Palava Hut is a traditional mechanism of justice and accountability which bring perpetrators, victims and witnesses within and among communities together in dialogue that can promote acceptance, forgiveness and peace (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2009). The TRC report provides details of who should appear before the Palava Huts and how the process should be carried out. Whether or not this recommendation will be implemented remains to be seen but is unlikely due to the government's attitude towards the TRC's recommendations generally.

NGOs and grassroots organisations of the other hand have made use of traditional forms of reconciliation and justice. Their aim has mainly been to reconcile communities and ethnic groups that were enemies during the conflict through the use of methods of conflict resolution such as the Palava Huts. These are often accompanied by rituals, singing and festivals that bring communities together. As

part of the process perpetrators may receive punishment or be banished from their community (Jaye, 2009). There appears to have been no deliberate effort to incorporate a gendered perspective within these proceedings. Caution must be exercised when employing such traditional mechanisms as, historically, women's status within society has not been low, a fact that will be reflected in traditional rituals and events. Traditionally, within the Palava Huts, rape victims may be forced to marry their attacker (Pajibo, 2008). This highlights the possible danger of implementing indigenous forms of justice. However, if correctly adapted and made gender sensitive such mechanisms could prove useful to Liberia's on-going reconciliation.

Grassroots initiatives

Grassroots women's groups in Liberia have been advocating for peace and equality for many years. Their advocacy played a major role in the passing of the peace agreement and in the inclusion of women as voters and candidates in the 2005 elections; this has given them a positive reputation among Liberians (UNMIL, 2010; Randall & Paasewe, 2012). The 2005 elections resulted in Liberia becoming the first African state to have a female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Sirleaf has also been strongly behind the cause of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Women's groups have created alliances and networks to campaign for various aspects of women's legal rights in social, political and economic areas; they have had and continue to have success in their campaigning. They have also worked together to promote reconciliation and sustainable peace at the community level. Their work is largely based on the needs of the women themselves and their communities in areas that tend to be overlooked by governments (Gibson Caesar et al, 2010).

In 2009 the Government of Liberia launched its National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325, with a four year time frame. The following four pillars: promotion of 'protection', 'prevention', 'participation' and 'empowerment and promotion' are the foundation of the NAP (Government of Liberia, 2009). The NAP acknowledges the various roles that women play in conflict and post-conflict setting as care-givers, witnesses, victims, and perpetrators and based on this, plans to ensure their equal participation in the rebuilding of their society and state. If successfully implemented, the work of grassroots women's groups will be greatly supplemented at all levels. However, an analysis of the successes and failures of the NAP are outside the bounds of this paper.

Conclusion

As indicated by the above discussion of Liberia's reconciliation process that UNSCR 1325 has indeed resulted in a gendered perspective being adopted. This is not to say that the Liberian reconciliation process has been an equitable one but it certainly stands above many of the previously discussed processes where women were, at times, ignored. The elements of Liberia's reconciliation that have been discussed are but an overview of the attempt to implement women and UNSCR 1325 into the process. Acknowledging the progress made by Liberia in adopting a gendered perspective is not stating that the task has been completed. The work of UNMIL, the Government of Liberia and Liberia's civil society can be used as a foundation to be built upon to further improve the situation within Liberia as well as for reconciliation processes in general.

While no evidence exists indicating a woman within decision-making levels of reconciliation processes is more dedicated than a man to working for the benefit of all society, their differing experiences of the conflict and often of civil activism, as well as the fact that they make up roughly 50% of the population means they must be included at all levels of reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict (Anderlini, 2000). Female ex-combatants must be given equal access to DDR programmes; any initiatives towards justice, be they restorative or retributive, must give a voice to all women, as victims of gender-based violence, of violence generally and as active agents within the conflict. Women must be integrated, involved and represented within the reconciliation process at all levels (Karam, 2001). Their varied roles and experiences as equal citizens must be considered and acknowledged while breaking patriarchal barriers that de-securitise and silence them

As the above discussion highlights women are largely excluded from reconciliation processes worldwide. Within post-conflict reconstruction they have been de-securitised, ignored, silenced, oppressed, isolated and often portrayed solely as peaceful victims. This has resulted in their post-conflict matters being classified as domestic, private or social issues, as well as in their exclusion from the decision-making processes of reconciliation (McKay, 2004; MacKenzie, 2009). When one considers the earlier discussion of what reconciliation is, what its aims are and who should be included it seems logical that women would be equally represented and included at all stages of a successful reconciliation process. However, as indicated by the above discussion this is all too often not the case. Documents such as UNSCR 1325 and the PFA, as well as the increased influence of women at grassroots levels and in local governments, indicate that change is imminent. To ensure women's equal and respected participation in reconciliation great change is needed globally in cultural norms, values, traditions and attitudes, which are generally grounded in patriarchal assumptions; such change tends to be extremely slow. Post-conflict societies provide a basis for more rapid change as a society's

patriarchal structures are weakened or destroyed during conflict (Karam, 2001). If women's past experiences of conflict and varied potential within peacebuilding are recognised fully by all levels of society within a reconciliation process a stable, inclusive and equal society can be built.

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