



The role of women during the peace process in Liberia:

Perspectives of market women

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Dedication

I am dedicating this Research work to GOD Almighty, who inspired me with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Also to my grandmother, Samah Bonah Fofana who has encouraged and supported me all the way and whose encouragements and supports have made sure that I give all it takes to finish that which I have started. Additionally, I dedicate this research to my parents, Mr. & Mrs. Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, for their unwavering support in this academic sojourn and my children John, Massa Andella, Augustine Kpehe who were affected every possible way through this quest. Finally, I also dedicate this work and give special thanks to my professors at the International Institute of Social Studies who have taught me how to write a comprehensive research paper. Thank you all.

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Image 1: Pictures of the market women in their pursuit of peace

Image 2: Pictorial evident of the market women in their struggles for peace

List of Maps

Map 1: Map of Liberia with counties showing

List of Acronyms

ACCH	Agreement on Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities
AI	Amnesty International
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
ECOMOG	Economic Community Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IGNU	Interim Government of National Unity
LMA	Liberia Marketing Association
LIWOMAC	Liberian Women Media Action Committee
LURD	Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy
LWI	Liberian Women's Initiative
MARWOPNET	Mano River Union Women Peace Network
MoGD	Ministry of Gender and Development
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NAWOCOL	National Women Commission of Liberia
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
SBU	Small Boy's Unit
TJ	Transitional Justice
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNMIL	United Nations Mission to Liberia
WIPNET	Women and Peacebuilding Network

Abstract

This study aimed to recover the voices and experiences of market women during the struggle to end the war in Liberia that lasted from 1989 to 2003. By listening to the women who never got the chance to speak, talking about what happened has been like a catharsis of going through all these motions and, in the end, exhaling. The focus is to make sure the voices of market women who also shaped and struggled for sustainable peace and democracy in Liberia are heard. Considering their efforts and reasons why they opted to end the civil unrest, the study examines the context of this unusual story. Of course, ideally, beyond market women being heard and acknowledged, their living conditions should improve. They would like to have a better living, safe housing and maybe a car for their family so they can ride back to the rural area without any hindrance. This study does not only focus on such issues but enables them to tell their stories so that at least the young generation can listen to and learn from the heroism of those women. As a social scientist, I am motivated by finding out more about the past. The study's findings highlight Liberian market women's engagement in ending the war and in starting the peacebuilding process in Liberia. Despite the limitations of women in a patriarchal, class-divided society like Liberia, they were seen as victims of war and considered change agents interchangeably. Given their roles as women, no one would have believed beforehand that they could have joined to implement such dramatic changes on the scale needed to end the war.

Relevance to Development Studies

This paper sought to establish linkage between voice, class plus ethnicity, dominance, and peace on the roles and experiences of the market women during the peace process in Liberia, which is crucial to development. Narratives about how the market women form a strong network. Despite the competition they had among themselves, they also had some solidarity by staying together and organizing themselves to resist the police, the army the warring faction. Their stories of transitioning from war to peace cannot be forgotten. Therefore, this paper is relevant to developmental studies because it sought to explain how the coming together of the market women who had shared ideas was instrumental in changing the path of the Liberian society, thus creating a lasting effect and shaping the future of their society.

Keywords

Peace, Liberia, stories, voice, narratives, market women, war, peacebuilding, gender, development.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The Topic of this Research

Liberia is a country that had what we called relative peace for 133 years until the so-called rice riots of 1980, which ushered in the military government of Samuel Doe, which led to a decade of crisis in that country. An insurgency started in 1989, which quickly degenerated into a rebellion due to the previous marginalization of indigenous Liberians. At one point, seven armed-factions were involved in a full blown ferocious civil war, at the height of what became a 14-year civil war in Liberia (Hammer, 2006).

The background to this study is the high cost of the war to civilians between 1989 and 2003, which finally propelled market women of Liberia to design a better strategy, a strategy where the country could recover a sense of belonging, worth, and where these women could also recover their dignity as civilians. As they expressed it, they were tired of seeing the effects of the war, with three-quarters of the 3 million-strong Liberian population becoming either refugee or internally displaced and the country in ruins. All critical infrastructure was destroyed, and the economy was in shambles. During the war, children were recruited as child soldiers, women were raped, and all civilians could be killed. Having confronted the warlords and even Taylor, the dictator who came to power in 1997. They felt pushed out for various reasons, including suffering or unbearable conditions, people being cruel to them, which were antithetical to their place of comfort (Gbowee, 2009).

According to Mohanty (1988: 64), seeing women solely as victims is not recommended, however, since this tends to fortify “the binary divisions between men and women”, which denies “women’s agency to be critical to their humanity and dignity” (Simić 2012: 54).

According to Schneider (1993: 399), “Sexuality may at the same time be women’s source of experiences when talking about oppression and victimization, and a cite of women’s agency and resistance”. Simply, “thinking beyond the box of victimhood”, there is a possibility to comprehend the complicated and sometimes contradictory experiences of women which coexist in the context of armed conflicts and militarisation (Simić 2012: xiii). Nevertheless, generally, during conflicts, women and children have clearly defined gender roles and are often seen as victims, while armed males are generally seen as perpetrators. Statistically, it was estimated by one researcher that about 80 percent of all displaced people and refugees in the African continent are women and children (Puechguirbal, 2005). So, there could be some truth in the assertion that women are the main victims of war. This study considers whether women – in this case, market women - can also be seen as among the main actors ending the war in Liberia.

Image 1: Liberian market women under and rain and sun crying for peace
(PhotoCredit: UNMIL Photo/Christopher Herwig)



Image 2: Liberian Market Women protest in ‘uniform’ in Monrovia.



Taking into consideration the narrative analysis used in this study, adding the photos above adds a vital visual component of the study, reflecting and capturing in pictures how committed the women of Liberia were towards the cause of peace. Later in Chapter 5, by sharing their stories, the study shows how their experiences of peacebuilding in Liberia add to existing narratives of the end of the war. These pictures enabled me to analyze, learn, draw lessons, and come to some conclusions about these women’s shared experiences. The first photo shows that even in the rain, the women remained in their places, and constant. The second photo shows that even in the hot sun, they were also willing to march and raise their voices for peace.

1.2 Background of the study

Liberia known as the 'Land of the Free' was founded in 1822 as a colony for former African American freed slaves, as a home for returning them to Africa. Liberia became an independent state in 1847, in pursuit of reconstruction and development (Greaves, 1972). The Liberian state was governed by a small minority of African Americans between 1847 and 1980, suppressing the larger indigenous majority which made up 95 percent of the population. This situation continued until 1980, Samuel Kanyon Doe staged a thriving military coup d'état along with other tribal groups who also resented being marginalized by the Americo-Liberians minority, whom they still viewed as settlers. On April 12, 1980, Doe seized power, putting the Liberian state for the first time under the rule of a native regime. During the Doe administration, however, a harsh dictatorial atmosphere gripped the country, and his rule was corrupt and repressive.

In December 1989, Charles Taylor gained support from a coalition of armed groups, from among tribes that had opposed Doe. This led to a second coup d'état by Charles Taylor, an Americo-Liberian in the year I was born. In this way, a complicated ethnic conflict started within the country that continued into 14-years of very bloody civil-war. Between 1989 -1990, the "Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)" deployed its first peace-keeping troops to Liberia as a way of assisting in ending the conflict, and putting a transitional government in place through the enforcement of a ceasefire. The "Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)" was established by "ECOWAS" which succeeded in convincing Taylor and Johnson to accept intervention. "ECOWAS" organized several peacekeeping conferences and meetings. The declaration of the "Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU)" was made by "ECOMOG" with Amos Sawyer being appointed as the interim president in 1992. In 1993, a peace-agreement was negotiated by "ECOWAS" in Cotonou, the capital of Benin. In 1994, the "Liberian Women's Initiative" came into being with a focus on mediation and advocacy to "end the conflict through their support and networking". In May 1994, a new fight began with devastating results. Through the intervention of "ECOWAS", the Liberian warlords met in September 1994, and the "Akosombo" Accord was signed then in December, a supplementary agreement was signed in Accra, Ghana and LWI women attend these conferences, but only as observers (Shulika, 2018: 11).

In 1994, the "United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL)" was established by the United Nations Security Council to assist in implementing the "peace-agreement". In 1995 Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings initiated an agreement for peace which was signed by the warring factions thus pressurizing Taylor into agreeing to a ceasefire, and demobilizing, also disarmed his troops. The Abuja Agreement in Nigeria was signed in August 1996 and all armed groups were disarmed and demobilized which ended the war. Ruth Perry was elected president of the Liberian, Transitional National Government in September until elections were held in 1997 where she handed over power to Charles Taylor who was the president-elect in August 1997. In 2000, the "Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)", a sub-regional group was established by women of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. In 2002, "MARWOPNET" tried convincing presidents of the three neighbouring countries; Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia for a meeting in Morocco to

negotiate for peace (Shulika, 2018: 13).

The Liberian civil conflict induced the establishment and growth of too many women-founded organizations, with the focal point of ensuring normalcy, where peace and security could be restored to Liberia. In 2003, “Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)” and “Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace” was sequentially founded under both Leymah Gbowee and Mother Mary Brownell leaderships. They were committed to ending the war. A nonviolent campaign for peace was launched by “WIPNET” and “Women of Liberia Mass Action” to pressure Taylor and the armed groups to meet in Ghana for peace negotiations that eventually lead to an agreement ending the conflict. On the 17th of June 2003, John Kufour, the president of Ghana who was then serving as the chairman for ECOWAS organized peace-talks in Accra the capital city of Ghana to negotiate for peace with the conflicting parties. While the peace conference was underway, Charles Taylor was charged by the International Crime Court for “crimes against humanity” and “war crimes”. Amid an ongoing peace-talk in Accra, LURD forces besieged Monrovia, resulting in the murdering of mass numbers of civilians as well as displacements of families members (Shulika, 2018: 14).

On the 29th of July 2003, a cease-fire was declared by the “LURD” “warring faction”. ECOWAS’ troops were deployed in the country causing Taylor to turn over power to his vice president Moses Z. Blah on the 11th of August 2003 to go into exile. The signing of the “Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)” was done on the 18th of August 2003 (Shulika, 2018: 8).

The history of Liberia portrayed an exposition of how women were regrettably left unprotected to go through an excessive amount of pressure on the average of “armed conflicts” around the world. (Rehn et al, 2002, as cited in Shulika, 2018: 14). During the first civil war, there were more than forty-six peace talks held. However, to the chagrin of the proponents for “a lasting peace” and at the expense of “sustainable peace” in the future. All of the conferences failed so that women could be given a place at the negotiation table in shaping the path for peace (Tripp 2015, as cited in Shulika, 2018: 14). Against all odds, the women of Liberia continuously have shown in both conflicts how “resilient and determined” they were to overcome the so-called impossible challenges that the war and marginalization brought to womanhood (Alaga, 2011, as cited in Shulika, 2018: 14). In essence, these women's organizations enthusiastically set out to influence the outcome of the peace processes that ended the protracted conflict in Liberia. Their active engagement was widely supported by other women's groups and organizations, including the Mano River Women of Peace Network (MARWOPNET), which eventually signed the peace agreement at the invitation and under the auspices of ECOWAS (Popovic 2009, as cited in Shulika 2018: 14). In essence, the collective efforts and prominent role of women's organizations created the necessary platform for (re)building a new life for their families, communities and society at large (Alaga 2011, as cited in Shulika 2018: 14; Ouellet 2013, as cited in Shulika 2018: 14). A comprehensive analysis of women's initiatives and activism for peace during and after the conflict in Liberia. They fueled the movement that ended the fourteen years of civil unrest. the tyrannical rule of President Charles Taylor in 1997, transformed Liberia into a living hell for civilians, murdering men, kidnapping children, and turning them into child soldiers, as

well as raping women and committing other atrocities against humanity, The outbreak of the war was followed by fourteen years of chaos, plunder and violence against civilians and did not end until market women who in essence were the stars or heroines of the show (Cooper, 2012).

Prior to becoming peace agents, most market women had been born and raised in the rural areas of Liberia. Their typical life story, which I will reconstruct from my family background and those women I am familiar with, goes something like this: at a tender age, perhaps 10 or 11, rural girls would be sent by their parents or guardians to the city to live with relatives. The aim was for them to access quality education and secure a better future. Dramatically, what often happened once they arrived in the city, was that their lives changed, as they were forced by their relatives or guardians to sell in the market-place, or become domestic workers in their homes. Instead of attending school as they were promised, they received harsh treatment, and many ran away. One way out was to find a boyfriend and eventually get pregnant. Many were left alone as single mothers, and this once again denied them access to education. Others were forced into early marriages because little or no value was given to girls' education in situations of poverty, given young women's low status in the family and Liberian cultural norms. Others had the privilege to access education but might refuse to go to school because of low self-esteem, difficulties in learning, phobia, worries or anxiety about home, depression or social problems at school and end up getting pregnant out of wedlock which hindered them from furthering their education. Most women became market women because of the above scenarios outlined above. They could not further their education because of their social-economic status of being seen as illiterate. As a result, of these circumstances and limited choices, many market women found their only means of survival was to start selling and become market women so they could fend for their children. They sold varieties of products ranging from food to household materials. Due to the poor road network in Monrovia and its environment, these market women get up early as 4 am to get their goods from a general market called "Red-Light Market" in Monrovia where few farmers bring their farm produce for sale. Even though the proceeds from the sale of their goods is like what we called "hand to mouth" wherein they do not get enough profit, but they are selling just to provide daily bread for their family (Buckland, 2004: 1-2).

"The Inter-Faith Religious Council of Liberia founded by Sheikh Kafumba Konneh and Archbishop Michael K. Francis and Mary Brownell (all deceased) worked tirelessly together and were concerned about the general welfare of Liberians. Under this initiative, they met almost daily at the Catholic Secretariat to plan strategies for peaceful intervention and resolution of the Liberian conflict. Similarly, Mary Brownell worked with other women whose goal was "an end to the conflict and peace for our people." Mary Brownell's first involvement with the women was to work with displaced women and children living in squalid conditions in displacement centers, providing them with food and trauma counselling from 1990 to 1994. Burdened by the worsening conflict situation, the fact that her children were killed and forcibly recruited as soldiers, that her sisters were raped and murdered and were the majority breadwinners for their families, and that their husbands were killed and forced into hiding, she came up with the idea of a pressure group as the best way to address the conflict and its

consequences for our people and our society. She shared this idea with the women she had been working with and they decided to send out a mobilization message to meet at City Hall. On the day of the meeting, the hall was filled with women from all walks of life in Liberia. This meeting led to her eventually inviting the women to her home and they later formed the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) in February 1994” (Shulika, 2018: 120).

These women were mostly uneducated, generally unschooled in the possibility of their human rights decided after the Religious Leaders of Liberia which later changed to “Inter-Religious Council (IRCL)” and the “Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)” who had held almost of the peacemakers failed to bring an end to the war that they have had enough and organized groups like the Liberia Women’s League (Unesco, 2011: 2).

During the war, women civilians were seen as “activists for peace and as agents of reconciliation” (Ellis, 2009: 115). These women often worked as mediators during the war and tended to put themselves at great personal risk in the search for peace. As Ellis explains:

“There was far more peace-oriented activity by explicitly women’s organization going on in Liberia; furthermore, these organizations existed at all levels from the most powerful urban elites to the illiterate market women” (Ellis, 2009: 116).

The WIPNET, also known as Women in Peacebuilding Network, is comprised of approximately more than 2000 women coming from both Muslim and Christian religions ranging from the grassroots level to the hierarchy. They staged multiple marches in 1991 to advocate peace. By 1993, they started attending and holding peace talks. WIPNET headed the “Liberia Mass Action for Peace” campaign to confront the rebels. In March 2003, “Liberia Mass Action for peace” started making moves to get their movement noticed by the public. They started by getting help from local churches and mosques then going out in the street looking at the chaos but still having peaceful and nonviolent mindsets. “Donation” and “self-funding” from members and other regional network members were what WIPNET heavily rely on to finance its activism”. “Contributing factors included strong public support, the existence and support of regional women's groups, and the strength of Liberian women's groups and their existing personal networks”. The women of Liberia had to go through these processes so that their voices could be heard. International actors such as the United Nations, ECOWAS also fostered the widespread perception of women as peacemakers. (Tripp, 2015: 4).

“On the 1st of April 2003, Muslims and Christians women got together something that was never been seen before. They decided to work together demanding peace. They also used radio stations to disseminate the messages of peace. “Leymah Gbowee”, a Noble Laureate along with “Janet Johnson Bryant”, a broadcaster, motivated the Liberian women to gather together peacefully, dancing and singing together, praying and demanding peace. “Wearing all white clothing the women gathered at the fish market every day for a week”. Almost all of the women fasted and prayed while others held banners that read, “The women of Liberia want peace now” (Navarro, 2010: 1).

The women of Liberia held rallies called 'Queen Rallies' which were not only for public entertainment but were used in a way to get donations where they would have local contestants pass around donation bowls and the locals would put donations in the one, they believe to be most liked. They also saw that as one of their many ways of raising sufficient funds to support their activism/movement and it was quite exciting to them. "These women's organizations worked tirelessly to bring warring parties to the negotiation table so that the country might achieve peace" (Bekoe, 2003: 1).

Finally, the women of Liberia got the peace they were opting for. As the arrival of the peacekeepers on August 4, 2003, peacekeepers arrived, the ousting of the Taylor government on August 11, 2003, and the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace on August 18, 2003 (Navarro, 2010). They also rallied around the campaign in 2005 that elected Africa's first female president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf which was the significant accomplishment in the journey of Liberia.

1.3 Research Aims and Question

This study aims to make sure the voices of the market-women of Liberia, who tried to shape peace and forge democracy in Liberia, are heard. Taking into consideration their efforts and the reasons why they opted to end the civil unrest.

The main questions:

- How were market women able to organize to demand an end to the war in Liberia?
How do Liberian market women now see their role in ending the war?

Sub-questions:

- What were market women's experiences during the war?
- Why did their protest appear to succeed so rapidly (after a few weeks)?
- What were the challenges for market women as pro-peace actors in Liberia at that time?
- What can be learned from that history, for today's generation?

1.4 Justification of the study

This research will try to show that when it comes to talking about peace in Liberia, and the shift from war to democratic elections, the same group of women appear to be the ones talking in different fora and at different times. They are those with more education, who are more influential and well-known in Liberian society. These women sometimes tend to forget (or fail to mention) that there were women who were in the background, especially market women. So, after the entire peace process, what happened to the narratives of those market women who were actively involved in the entire peace-making process, was that they rarely were allowed to speak out and therefore their perspectives (their 'voices') were lost or

undermined. Sometimes their insights and experiences were co-opted by elite women who felt that could narrate the stories in a way that wider audiences could understand. In such cases, these elite women did not give market women the chance to narrate their own experiences. This tendency has (I will argue) continued up to the present.

Market women as peace actors were often overlooked by more elite women (and men) because of their low socio-economic status. Even their sons and daughters would be stigmatized in higher education. Indigenous Liberians might have to change their names to make their way into and through university. So, this research looked keenly at the market-women's role during the process of peace-building. This study suggests that although some of these barriers have now been broken, formerly market women and their families were seemed as uneducated, not influential, and unable to express themselves or explain their side of the story. This may be why elite women's narratives seem to have been so dominant. I will elaborate on this further in Chapter 3.

I believe that these market women have a very strong network, they had some competition among themselves but also had some solidarity by staying together and organizing themselves to resist the police, the army, and the warring factions. Their perspectives on the transition from war to peace must be heard for the history of the peacebuilding processes in Liberia to be completed and unique. Considering the fact that Charles Taylor who was the president at that time and the horrible civil war that raged for years with brutality which is unimaginable where both the Charles Taylor's people and then the resistance of the women that rose against the brutality that was destroying the country and its people. Being seen as victims, the women of Liberia decided that they just couldn't stand by anymore and hoped it would stop on its own so they got together and decided to end the war.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Even though much priority will be given to ensuring that accurate and validating data or information to be provided, but the possibility exists that there will still be risks, ethical limitations involved which is inevitable. The availability of current relevant text that will give adequate information was virtually unavailable because there are not enough materials on the topic being researched. Furthermore, the unforeseen circumstances that covid-19 brings in as much that I couldn't travel back home to collect data but rather I had to use research assistants to collect my data instead, administrative bureaucracy where people are afraid to give you information on grounds that they are not clothed with that authority to let out certain information and if they do, they will be fired. This has also done a lot in hindering the perfect collection of necessary data for this work. Taking into consideration the following:

Value: evaluation of the case study is intervening and providing theory that will give the market women a voice in society and increase knowledge of their struggle.

Validity: reliable and accepted data was used by looking at principles and methods to produce reliable and valid information

This research was careful in selecting respondents so that it does not stigmatize or

make people feel vulnerable. Individuals were targeted because they are rich or socially powerful but based on what they can remember while in the struggle. To not be favored as potentially beneficial to the research or not to risk this research. Anonymization techniques were used to discover potential contributors (Market women) and protect their privacy by improving personalized information to ensure sensitive information are extracted before releasing data to avoid the problem when sharing with the public or other parties for the protection of those market women. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, the names of participants were replaced with false names. Through the help of the research assistants, all of the participants intended for this research were available for interviews and Focus group discussion. Beginning the progress of the data collection with the participants, every interview and conversation started by me explaining what the study hope to achieve via WhatsApp, messenger or other social media outlets, which was not a problem as they were all willing to participate in the study. Ethical concern was very sensitive to this study, but because experiences of the women of Liberia in peace-building have always been interviewed and archived many times before, the participants were not concerned about or interested in the ethical-considerations of his/her identities.

1.6 Chapter Outline

This research is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 has explored the main focus of this study, it also gives the detailed contextualization of the research problem, justification and limitations of the study. Just by giving justification and explanation about the limitations were tackled, which prove insightful of my comprehension of the study, as well as my understanding of how to combine field and methodological challenges to lay the bases of objectives to derive key findings by critically assessing the role of the market women in the architecture of ending war and starting a peacebuilding process. Chapter 2 explains the methodology used for this study. It also gives the position of the researcher as per the focus of the research and ethical issues were discussed. Chapter 3 gives the key conceptual perspectives backing this research, focusing on the central ideas of the women's role in ending the war and initiating peacebuilding, especially in Liberia. Chapter 4 discusses an extensive investigation of the peace's activism and initiatives of the market-women all through the conflict in Liberia was the most significant component of this study. Thus, looking at the quest of the market-women for peacebuilding approaches, and experiences of the market-women. It further discusses the establishment of the organizations of women as well as their voyage during their quest for serenity in Liberia. It sought to look at how proactive the market women were in displaying their roles and contributions to peace processes in Liberia, it further elaborates how the involvement of the market women in the peace process was built based on the market-women's experiences about the war. Chapter 5 explains the narratives of the market women. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the summative insights of the research based on the topic of women's involvement into peacebuilding in Liberia. It further discusses the lessons learnt from the experiences of Liberian women and developed procedures for policy aspects about the women's movements and set a pace for future research.

Chapter 2. Methodological Issues

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is to make sure the voices of the market women who shaped and struggled for sustainable peace and democracy in Liberia, are heard. Taking into consideration their efforts and reasons why they opted to end the civil unrest, the study examines the context of this unusual story. In this chapter, my role as a researcher is clarified, and the research methodology is explained.

2.2 Methods of data collection, generation and analysis

This research used qualitative methods based on the memories and experiences of market women, focusing on the era around the ending of the civil crisis. The aim is to give a better understanding of the importance of their role in the eventual outcomes of peace. This paper will look at their recollections of the period between 1989 and 2003, investigating how market women remember their struggles to end the war. Relying on in-depth interviews via skype, WhatsApp and other social media, the researcher spoke with 25 market women, 2 officials of the Liberian Market Association, and 3 retired market women who were all part of the struggle. And this was supplemented with notes and observation and review of published and unpublished documents. Five of Liberia's 15 markets was visited to collect data for this research through the help of research assistants. This research had to use and translate local dialect and Pidgin English skills as well the use of research assistants.

Participants were located through snowballing because this study was limited to a very small subgroup of the population. Therefore, an initial group of respondents were randomly selected which provided an avenue for respondents to help in the identification of others who belonged to the targeted population. They were interviewed based on the referral made by the first group of respondents who come from various backgrounds and various experiences about the study under review. And I was able to also do some intersubjective validation of the data by speaking with market women, not just in the capital city but also outside the capital city Monrovia, both in the view of market women and at the headquarters of the Liberian market association office there.

This research used an exploratory method to discover new ideas from or findings from those women who never got the chance to speak out. This 'grounded' theorizing was made possible through the interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with those within the field.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents based on their experiences and knowledge of the peace building process. Since the research seeks to explore both primary and secondary data, primary data includes in-depth interviews with key individuals, Focus Group Discussions with market women, all to collect first-hand sources that have not been accessed or researched before, along with secondary data from previous literature of both published and unpublished data. These were facilitated by contacts in the field (research assistance possible).

2.3 Research as Giving Voice to the Voiceless

This paper started with what I saw as the need to put the experiences of market women into words and help them identify themselves in the wider story of Liberia emerging from war. And I wanted to show how resilient they were, who went through a lot of societal turning points and were able to restore the freedom we now enjoy as Liberian women. Even at the conceptualization level, I wanted market women to be involved and be heard. In this study, their voices that have been almost entirely missing, will be heard. This is the redemptive quality of this study on the experiences of market women, facing dominant narratives that tend to distort or push aside their contributions to peace. Since I feel they must be allowed to tell their stories, the emphasis in this chapter is on market women who ended the war almost two decades ago. Of course, their struggle came after so many people had already lost their lives. However, their stories are about breaking with tradition and challenging the status quo in order to seek peace. During this voyage of discovery, pain and sometimes wondering what it is all about, the voices of the women have been like a catharsis for them, going through all these experiences, and at the end talking and exhaling.

By just starting to talk with them, and by asking them questions, I hoped to add some value to their struggles, their indignation, the pain, and the trauma that they felt when they felt their voices were being suppressed. As individuals they were not able to match the audiences of more influential and educated elites who tended to be from a particular class. To use their own knowledge, when that knowledge comes in their own dialects, and from their perspectives, they are talking also about the influence of economic systems on their own socio-economic status. Whilst the educated elite of women tend to be the ones who have taken the credit, in terms of framing the struggle of ending the war, and are the ones who are mainly validated in academic studies and the media, when it comes to either talking about women's power to end the war. Yet I believe market women's voices are just as important because of their low status, and because they have no editors, publishers and other educated people from outside Liberian society, lining up to hear their stories. So I decided to work on this myself.

For instance, there are many times that market women commented they are still "considered second class citizens." And so, market women are "not assumed to have power, or voice or a brain or the ability to articulate anything or be listened to" (Nyasha 2016: 10). And yet simply because someone is semi-illiterate or has only very basic education, this does not mean they should not take up space, or should not have power. They can think for themselves, and they can decide for themselves (Nyasha, 2016).

2.4 Ethics and Positionality

"Traditionally across the social sciences, positionality has been framed as a limiting factor that limits the researcher's ability to undertake ethnography or to participate in research" (Brydon-Miller, 2004: 8). However, framing myself as a researcher, a so-called elite woman and an indigenous woman born by a market woman, am I elite, am I one of the market women's networks? This quite complex positionality involves being seen as elite, on the one hand,

because of my educational background and father's profession. Yet both my grandmothers' connections give me points of commonality with the market women whose voices I seek to bring forward in this study. And I am going to be arguing that a researcher can challenge and be challenged by their own positionality and unequal power relations with research 'subjects'. These can be seen as limiting factors, but also as ways of knowing about social life through one's own social networks and connecting with wider debates around 'voice' and peacebuilding in the scholarly literature.

Through an action research epistemology, positionality is framed as a dimension of the researcher's identity that they can enact upon ideally for positive change. So, my role as a researcher is key in this participatory research, as is my willingness to learn rather than to perceive myself as an expert who is extracting knowledge from participants (Kotaman et al, 2013).

The key theme in this research in terms of positionality is the binary of privilege and disadvantage. I am coming from a position of relative privilege having never experienced being silenced myself. However, this has allowed me in the research process to aim for positive social change and choosing this research was crucial to this aim. Framing privilege in this way through positionality gives a positive response to what Mary Brydon-Miller (2004), called the "terrifying truth of whether to act or not." This terrifying truth is that a fear of one's privilege can reduce a person to inaction because of a fear of how they are going to come across or be mislabeled.

There is a link between positionality and power because clearly what kind of position you are in is going to influence the power that you have and do not have. It is important that my positionality may have changed over time and was static throughout the research process. This is even more so because the study was conducted remotely, due to COVID-19 conditions. Experience from my own life, having been taken care of as a child by my grandmother, has created these perspectives and shaped who I am and influenced the research topic I have selected, arising from my life so far. By my social context, my subjective position in this research is that I was educated by a market woman, and this affords me every privilege in society. This means that I am largely free from discrimination. They say, "Knowledge is power" whether real or perceived, this interest in market women's voices, around the peace process, stems from my education and later professional interest in advocacy for maltreated groups in society.

There is no such thing as an objective researcher. Individuality is subjectivity and subjectivity is deeply connected to the social and political structures in our lives that shape our behaviour and experience. (Payne, 1996: 30, 22) This discussion of my social context and positionality is not only to expose my biases but also to hint that I come from a position of relative privilege when compared with many market women. However, my aim for positive social change is crucial to building a warm and welcoming society of inclusion and collaboration regardless of status. But helping to achieve wonderful things by facing fears to make remarkable things happen by being able to share confidently one's own unique story. In so doing, a mode of triangulation of methods was employed.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the methodology that has been approved for this study. Recognizing qualitative method of research as the best-suited methodology for the nature of this study, the chapter offered an understanding of the sources of data collection; research design; sampling method; sampling the population of the study, size, and how data was obtained, interpreted and analyzed to meet the study's objectives. In this manner, the chapter used both primary and secondary sources in collecting data for the research's details and identified the market women as targeted participants. Purposive sampling method was used to collect data through interviews (semi-structured) and Focus-Group-Discussions were used to analyze and interpret the data collected based on the market women's roles in the peace-building process in Liberia. Thus, looking at their impact in the post-conflict processes. Additionally, this chapter sought to explain the methodology used by the research. It also gives the position of the researcher as per the focus of the research and ethical issues were discussed, including the limitations of the research. Deliberating on the aspect of limitations was inevitable in the research. It was due to the organizing and analysis of this research that builds and adds meaning to the social phenomenon using both primary and secondary data which make limitations unavoidable.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framing of the Research

“Until Lions have their own historian, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter” (Yoruba parable, Achebe 1994).

3.1 Introduction

This research is mainly focused on these theoretical concepts: gender, voice, and peacebuilding. The theoretical framework will elaborate more on how gender is perceived and used in this research. How the politics of knowledge and the notion of translation are understood, also in combination with the concept of peacebuilding. Furthermore, the concept of peacebuilding is elaborated on and how it is framed in this research is explained in relation to the context.

3.2 Peacebuilding in West Africa and Liberia

Peacebuilding may be outlined differently by various bodies. International institutions and government organizations usually look at peacebuilding concerning “action-based methods of peace-making and structural rebuilding of infrastructures are emphasized in post-crisis” (De la Rey et al, 2006).

According to the United Nations, peace building is defined as “Involving the inclusion of creating conditions for society to promote peace via aid and development, reconciliation, human rights education, and the rebuilding of the neighborhood” (Porter, 2010). Looking at the above definitions, the priorities of peacebuilding are focused mostly on structural rebuilding and give concentration on the people, processes, and relations. Still, the concept of gender should be integrated into a mainstream idea of peacebuilding (De la Rey et al, 2006).

Peacebuilding is distinct disparate from peacemaking. Peacemaking is all about the processes for example mediation, negotiations, as well as the development of peace agreements that end the civil war (De la Rey et al, 2006). Whereas peacebuilding is viewed as a long process. It is appropriately shaped and justified by a specific crisis with all the religious, economic historical, cultural, territorial factors and political, therefore peacebuilding is multilayered (Porter, 2010).

The informal and formal peace-building practices could make a distinction between them. The Formal peacebuilding procedures are done based mainly on the national and political levels, while informal peacebuilding procedures are mainly done by the grassroots’ movement in the country/community. Mostly, women are said to be active in the informal peacebuilding procedures yet, they are almost entirely missing from public and political peacebuilding activities (Porter, 2010).

Women’s peacebuilding activities are mainly contextually and culturally based. It is usually situated at the regional and community levels. These informal peacebuilding movements are often overlooked by governmental and international organizations (Porter,

2010). Therefore, both informal and formal peace building processes must be taken into consideration by outlining peacebuilding and understanding the idea of peacebuilding. Perhaps by this means women may be incorporated in the context of peacebuilding.

3.3 Women and Peace Processes in Liberia

Motherhood and feminism are seen as peaceful and as an antithesis of violence. This peacefulness is connected to the practices of motherhood: Foster growth through protection, nurturing and training is a potential for peace (Skelsbaek, 2001).

Gender can be linked to peace building within this context. When it comes to their role in peace building processes, Women are often viewed in different ways. “Feminism and gender can be viewed through two approaches” (Skelsbaek, 2001:5). The essentialist approach is the first approach that underlines the fact that gender identities are regulated and are unchangeable through nature. For this approach, women are viewed as pure caretakers that are associated with motherhood. Feminism and Motherhood are regarded as peaceable and as the exact opposite of violence. This tranquility is tied to the traditions of maternity; Nurture growth through nurturing, training, and protection is a possibility for peace (Skelsbaek, 2001).

The social constructivism approach is the second approach, which means that the “social world” is continuously transforming, and that gender’s locus is defined by the interplay between people (Skelsbaek, 2001:3). The latter approach indicates that the significance of feminism and gender perspective is constantly related. The last approach is being used for this study.

Women must not only be seen as actors that are needed for inclusion in the peace processes, because they seem to be peaceful. They should also be seen as key actors who are a significant part of the populace and need to be involved in the peacebuilding processes because it results in making them more receptive to the following priorities of all concerned citizens, women, and men (Skelsbaek, 2001).

“If women are seen as important for peace building processes, because of their motherhood, this could result in the feminization of peace and masculinity of war. In this way, women are put in a certain framework and are stopped from expanding their roles into the public world, which is important for the peace building processes” (Skelsbaek, 2001: 6).

Women are not just capable of making peace, because of their motherhood and role as caretakers in society. They could also be seen as change agents, by simply looking at their social strategies and their abilities, and not only as of the victims of conflict or spontaneously peaceful.

“Women are a heterogeneous group of social actors, who on the one hand are determined to take on certain positions and roles in conflicts, but on the other hand deliberately choose to fulfil certain roles based on their strategies and goals” (Bouta et al, 2002: 29). (“Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution ...”)

3.4 Dominant Narratives of the end of the war

In this section, the dominant narratives are contextualized to further provide perspectives on the women of Liberia experiences and approach to the peacebuilding processes, this section gives an account of the film “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”; a discourse by the Noble Peace-Prize Laureate “Leymah Gbowee”. And captured a full synopsis of a famous activist for peace called “Mother Mary Brownell” narrative titled “Women Rising for Peace in Liberia” These dominant narratives were captured in this study to show how the women in leadership took ownership of the peacebuilding processes and agency. They explain what led to the evolution of women’s pressure groups strategizing for peace in Liberia. Their explanations are very much intertwined.

“I worked with other women where our focus was ‘an end to the conflict and peace for our people’. My first engagement with the women involved working with displaced women and children who lived in deplorable conditions in displacement centers, where we cared for them by providing food and trauma counselling from 1990 to 1994. Burdened by the increasingly dire conflict state; the fact of our children being killed and forcefully recruited as soldiers; our women being raped, murdered, and majority becoming the breadwinners of their families; and our men being killed and forced into hiding; I conceived the idea of a pressure group as the best form of tackling the conflict and its consequences on our people and society. I shared this idea with the women I had been working with and we decided to send out mobilization messages to meet at the city hall. On the day of the meeting, the hall was packed with women from all works and backgrounds of life in Liberia. It was through this gathering that I eventually invited the women to my house, and we later in February 1994 formed the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI)...” (Mary Brownell, 2015)

The above excerpt from Mary Brownell narrative from her book titled, ‘Women Rising for Peace in Liberia’, clearly shows how an elite woman like Mary Brownell is taking ownership of the idea by saying that she shared it with others as if the market women are just her audience. These claims to leadership are what these elite women portrayed by putting themselves in the foreground and keep putting the market women in the background. So this study is trying to recover the market women position from the background into the foreground and give them leadership roles.

“Leymah articulates - ‘I went into the hall and told the women to lock arms for we are putting this venue under siege and must ensure that no food or water is served and no factions, mediators and negotiators live the hall until a peace agreement is reached and signed. Accused of impeding justice by blockading the hall, the security forces came to arrest me and threatened to make it easy for them to strip naked. And as I pulled off my scarf, they immediately retreated.’ What followed two weeks after on August 18, 2003, was the pronouncement and the signing of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and the appointment of Gyude Bryant to chair the Transitional Government of Liberia...” (Leymah Gbowee 2013).

Outlining the dominant debates in this study was important to show that most elite women often take ownership of the entire ideas of the peacebuilding processes even though the market women were proactively involved. They are always presenting themselves as the

true heroine, the ones with all the ideas and support neglecting the fact that without the market women the peacebuilding process would not have been achieved.

3.5 Conclusion

Generally, chapter 3 was mainly concerned with conceptual basis of post conflict peacebuilding theory as it relates to women. The basis for concepts used in the context of this study is to build up arguments that promote understanding and are effective. In so doing, this chapter has reviewed various approaches and strategies used by Liberian women from all levels in society, including elites and grassroots women, in the pursuit for sustainable peace and serenity, following the disturbances caused by war. The ultimate sacrifices made for achieving peace in Liberia, need to be placed in this context, and the chapter sought to examine relationships between the concepts so that we can cross-examine the significance and status of market women in peacebuilding in the next chapter. By contextualizing the difficulties faced by the market women of Liberia in particular, in their roles as agents of peace, this chapter has referred to relevant scholarly writing that we use with voices from the field.

Chapter 4 The context: Market Women and Peacebuilding

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the market women as architects, and further explore their roles in the peacebuilding process of Liberia, by directly illustrating their involvements as narrated during the focus-group interviews and discussions that took place during the entire month of August 2021 in Liberia.

The inclusion of women in peacebuilding is implied theoretically to this framework. It should be seen as important for a long-lasting peace once the conflict is over. Including women in the peacebuilding processes is still present in ongoing discussions and is also acknowledged by the United Nations as a significant part of their peacebuilding strategies (UN1325, 2002). In Liberia, the market women played an important role in the peace negotiations, based on that, writing a chronicle about the Liberian market-women was selected. Both the Liberian government and United Nations tried to implement gender-sensitive reforms and gender-mainstream strategies and to add women to the peace building processes and try to respond to their requests. It is possible to say that women should be included in the peacebuilding processes, and hope that in this way lasting peace will be possible that will meet the needs of both women and men, as is inherent in the positive peace conceptual framework. Peacebuilding ensures not only a peace deal but is additionally a lengthy process of social transformation, which should take place at all levels of Liberian society (Porter, 2010). The focus of this research is both on market women's distinctive contribution to the peace process, and ending war, and on what has been done (or not) for these same market women in Liberia after the signing of the peace accords. The question is to know whether what they struggled for – peace – has translated into fundamental modifications of the living conditions of the market women of Liberia. Have they enjoyed a 'peace dividend' since the war they helped to bring to an end?

It is based upon this framework that this chapter analyses the narratives on the roles, experiences, and approaches of market-women, and their quest for peace in Liberia. The chapter also gives a detailed description of their movements, their organizational contributions, and their journeys as peacebuilders in Liberia. These efforts are shown to have made a significant contribution to peacebuilding and to democratic elections that started the process of the wholesale reconstruction of Liberia. The chapter explains how the rise of the market women and their venturing into peacebuilding in Liberia happened, and the reasons they found themselves at the forefront, and some of their heroic stories as told by the women themselves. This chapter describes and speaks to the strategic, and practical benefits that women enjoyed as peace-makers. By evaluating their strategic interests as market women from a broader perspective, linking their diverse networks and women's groupings in Liberia to the peace movement. Similarly, this chapter examines the activities and demands of market women's networks in relation to the distinctive results of the post-war settlement.

4.2 The context of war: impacts on women and girls

During the conflict, what women and girls experienced was often associated with their cultural positions. Whereas most communities suffered the effects of war, poor females (women & girls) were particularly afflicted by their vulnerability in terms of gender (sexuality) and their low social-standing in the hierarchy of society (UN1325, 2002). Before the war, cultures of violence against women and children and discrimination were already prevalent in a lot of contexts, and remain present today. During the civil crisis, a culture of sexual violence became more intense and was associated with civil warfare (UN1325, 2002). This does not mean that men and boys cannot be victims of war, since both men and women often shared their suffering in times of violent conflict, but women often suffer more sexual violence and gendered attacks than men (Rehn et al, 2002).

‘During the war, we experienced and saw a lot of barbaric things that made us take on to the streets demanding peace. Just imagine rebels who see a pregnant woman and be guessing whether it is a girl or a boy in her tummy. To find out the sex of that child, they would open the stomach of that pregnant woman, cut the umbilical strings just to take the child out leaving the mother to die. This was an everyday thing that we grew tired of seeing such barbaric acts, so we became desperate for peace’ (Liberian Market Association official, women, interview, August 2021).

In Liberia, women were mostly seen as victims of all the conflicts. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence became familiar with the artillery of war such as unwanted pregnancy, rape, “forced abortions, sexual slavery”, trafficking, as well as the spreading of “sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS” intentionally, were all experienced by women, during the conflict (Anderlini, 2010). The losses of their husbands and family members was also a burden that women had to bear. And besides, their roles as caretakers increased and they were burdened during conflicts with extra responsibilities, due to the killing of children and absence of many men (Anderlini, 2010). Nevertheless, women should not only be viewed as victims in conflict, but also as active participants and agents (UN1325, 2002). In other words, they could also play a brutal role and can become fighters or assist fighters to stay alive. While it is true that some women chose to become combatants, there were also lots of women and girls who were forcibly abducted and forced to fight with armed factions or become ‘wives’ of rebels (UN1325, 2002: 2).

Because so many men were killed while fighting or disappeared, men were no longer able to provide for or care for their families’ needs, so that women began acquiring new responsibilities, and also a new status in some cases, gaining more skills, and taking on more power with their new responsibilities as well. During the war, some women whose husbands and sons were missing, carried out responsibilities usually associated with men in the household or wider environments (Anderlini, 2010). During the war in Liberia, women, including market women, became heads of communities and households, developed leadership abilities, and were part of the process of decision-making in the communities and households in the absence of menfolk (Rehn et al, 2002). “Through these new responsibilities and skills, they challenge existing gender roles, but often are not able to change them fundamentally” (Rehn et al, 2002). According to the United Nations, it is important that these

capabilities are further enhanced after the conflict, and that the traditional gender roles do change eventually (UN1325, 2002).

4.3 Market women's role in Liberia's civil crisis

The conflict in Liberia was divided into two parts, the initial phase started in 1989 up until 1997, nearly 200.000 people were murdered and a lot more than a million persons fled in the refuge for their lives in displacement camps in neighbouring countries around Liberia. The next war started in 1999 up until 2003, nearly 150.000 to 300.000 persons were murdered, and more were displaced internally, due to the violence and brutalities (Fuest, 2008).

During the second stage of the crisis, the market women were visibly seen in their social movements, demanding peace (see Images 1 and 2). The market women of Liberia have witnessed and have experienced a lot of brutalities and were severely hurt by the war in so many ways. A key reason for the market women to take a stand was the sexual harassment used as a weapon against the females in Liberia (Alaga, 2011).

'I lost my oldest son during the war in the process of looking for a haven. I don't know whether my son is alive or dead. We the women were not supported or treated fairly during the war. We were seen or taken as sex slaves to those generals and their soldiers. We lost our children to hunger and sicknesses. We were treated like nothing. Any soldier could just grab our daughters as wives, they dare not refuse because of the guns. We came together to cry for peace because we were tired of the disadvantage' (Liberian Marketing Association official, woman, interview, August 2021).

The same way as men, the women in Liberia were victims because they were arrested, abducted to fight, tortured, displaced, mutilated, and malnourished. They also carried the burden of the disappearance of their husbands and sons, and they were left to be household heads and take care of their children during awful times. Moreover, owing to the use of sexual harassment as a weapon of war, women were seen as prey for gang rape, rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. This resulted in a high rate of STD infections, including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and exclusion from society. These challenges were intensified in the course of violent conflict as well as continuing after the war.

The second role women had during the civil war was as perpetrators. They fought together with the men, serving as commandos in warring factions and militias (Alaga, 2011). The fighting roles they took on were sometimes considered as exclusively for men, yet 30-40 percent of all combatants were women and girl fighters, around 25,000 to 30,000 girls and women in total (Theobald, 2014). As part of armed forces, women did not just carry weapons but also aided the armed forces by cooking, carrying goods, farming as wives, or as sex slaves and spies (Theobald, 2014). Many women agreed to fight and took up arms to defend their family and themselves from violence and sexual exploitation, as a strategy for survival and even to gain material worth. Others, especially girls, were more often kidnapped or forced to join in the fighting. The difference between victimhood and agency is thus very slight in this scenario of women partaking as soldiers (Theobald, 2014).

‘What we saw in us, was the ‘power of togetherness’ wearing our white T-shirts’ was something we became known for. We cannot describe such experience and benefaction’ (Liberian Market Association official, woman, interview, August 2021).

The war and related crises also strengthened and improved skills and organization among women, including market women who went on to play the role of agents of change. The market women in particular, as well as women in general, and their organizations were engaged in numerous peace activities at the local community level. They were central in pressing for peace (Alaga, 2011).

Of all the Liberian women’s initiatives, there were three most powerful women’s movements, namely; “Liberian Women’s Initiative (LWI)”, “Mano River Union Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET)”, and the “Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)” (Fuest, 2008: 4). All three movements conducted their work at the grass-roots level in addition to on a larger scale, at the national and regional level. The “Liberian Women’s Initiative” was established in 1994 and it was most effective during the initial phases of the civil war. The “Mano River Women Peace Network” was founded in 2000 with the backing of ECOWAS and consisted of women from “Sierra Leone, Guinea and other West African” countries as well as Liberia from across different (Theobald, 2014, cited in Shulika, 2018: 23). While “MAWOPNET” and “LWI” carry on with their activities, in 2001, another women’s movement surfaced, the “West Africa Network for Peace which initiated the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)”. “WIPNET” aimed to lift women from their condition of anonymity and bring them to the forefront of peacebuilding initiatives, enabling them to play a pivotal role in parallel with Liberian men (Theobald, 2014:52). These groups were worked successively for conflict prevention, disarmament, demobilization, and peace, working together to reinforce their strength. In addition to participation in the peacebuilding process and their ability to make decisions regarding issues of security and peace, these women’s movements were also advocating for democratic forms of politics (Theobald, 2014).

4.4 Background: the Mass action for Peace Campaign

During the early 1990s, the women of Liberia had already started activities associated with peace, but then these activities were fragmented, uncoordinated, and did not make any massive changes (Alaga, 2011). But in 2003, the dynamic changed because the women were very tired of the war, and decided to take on a more systematic and coordinated form of action, with their goals explicitly and clearly defined (Alaga, 2011). This evolved into a broader women’s peace activism project, known as the ‘Mass action for Peace Campaign’. This turned out to be an inclusive group of Liberian women, coming from every level and sector of the population, from the elite to the poorest, from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds, and rural as well as urban women. This new movement was more inclusive of all Liberian women because of their shared experiences collectively throughout the war. Their major objective was a peace deal, between the warring factions (represented entirely by men). They demanded also to be included in the peace talks in accordance with UN Resolution 1325 (Alaga, 2011).

On the first of April 2003, the market women decided to stage their first protest at a

strategic area called Fish Market in the capital Monrovia. Their symbols were white t-shirts and headscarves and every morning they assembled in a strategic place in the capital of Liberia, Monrovia (Theobald, 2014). Over 2500 women from diverse backgrounds were seen participating in the movement for peace in Monrovia (Theobald, 2014). Finally, the armed parties were ready to meet and peace talks were organized in Ghana by ECOWAS. The women were initially not invited, but fund-raising activities enabled a delegation to travel to Accra in Ghana.

There they gained numerical strengths from the Liberian women in refugee camps in Ghana and they organized sit-ins at the venues of the peace talks (Theobald, 2014). They were also informally engaging with different parties, which was vital for moving the peace talks forward (Alaga, 2011). When in July 2003 the peace talks reached an impasse, the women organized a sit-in in the halls of the peace negotiation, building in a way that nobody could leave the peace negotiations and demanded a commitment to advance the peace negotiations (Alaga, 2011). The men listened to the women and two weeks later a peace agreement was signed, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the civil war in Liberia (Alaga, 2011).

After the signing of the peace agreements, LWI (Liberian Women Initiative) and WIPNET (women in peacebuilding network of the West Africa Network for peacebuilding) organized a two-day consultative meeting on the CPA in September 2003 (Gbowee, 2009). In this meeting, they provided the women with a shared understanding of the contents of the CPA. The meeting was attended by 80 women and together they set benchmarks and timelines to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement (Gbowee, 2009). The women from the movement were not only demanding peace negotiations, but they also wanted to be included in the peace building processes, by referring to the UN resolution 1325 (Alaga, 2011).

‘These experiences were quite amazing and highly significant to the growth of the Liberian women’s pursuit for peacebuilding. And our task was not to give up to our struggles for peace till the guns were silent’ (Liberian Market Association official, women, interview, August 2021).

The Liberian women had several demands and ideas about their participation in peace building processes. Due to the conflict in Liberia the women experienced remarkable emancipation from their pre-war positions, the conflict brought out the leadership abilities of the women, who were participating in the movements (Fuest, 2008). They tried to use the war for removing gender restrictions permanently (Gbowee, 2009). The women did not want to back down from formal peace building processes, and through certain demands, they want to accomplish women’s participation in the peace-building processes, and more gender-sensitive peacebuilding processes to enhance the capabilities of the women in Liberia (Fuest, 2008).

Directly after the peace agreement, the women’s movements wanted to assist the Liberian government, the UN peace-keeping mission and ECOWAS, who also provided peace-keeping missions to Liberia, with the implementation of the peace building processes (Gbowee, 2009). They find it very important that these institutions work together with civil

society to implement the new policies and reforms. According to the women, the engagement of local actors is important, because it results in resources of local knowledge and expertise (Fuest, 2008). Furthermore, community-based organizations (CBO's) drive community harmonization, which is important for the social cohesion within a community and thus important for conflict prevention, which is one of the main characteristics of peace building processes (ECOWAS, 2005). Peace building processes are thus present on a national, regional, and communal level, so peace building exists out of formal and informal processes, and both are important parts of peace building.

Chapter 5: Market Women's Narratives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws accounts on the role of grassroots market women in Liberia. This chapter is the central idea of the research. It is also considered as the bedrock of the study because it takes into account the narratives of the market-women which influence and implement the results of the study under discussion.

5.2 Market women's perspectives in Koloqwa

This research took into consideration the fact that sometimes people lie and exaggerate when talking about their lives. It also points out that when narrating a story or experience, people often get confused and forget which makes their stories sound enormously incorrect. Yet, they may also be revealing the truth. It was not only based upon their past but their involvements and how they interpreted those experiences (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 261). These quotations, in some cases, are in English but mostly in Koloqwa, a language spoken by the locals of Liberia and which have been transcribed in full and then summarized in English below each quote, in this chapter. This is to create a balance in the study between voices and the task of translating, and to convey the 'flavour' of their speech.

With the help of my research assistant, I was able to identify each of their stories told as a dynamic representation based on their experiences. This was determined by their specific role in the peacebuilding process. Looking at how each aspect of their stories overlapped, the study concentrated mainly on the lines of commonality that connected their individual experience. (Messias et al, 2004: 47-48)

Based on the focus of this research, where the market women are framed as narrators of their own experiences and realities, I informally spoke with some market women who told me of how their stories should be taken seriously and be treated with importance because of their role in the peacebuilding process. In other words, their experiences should be given a meaning because these 'stories cannot speak by themselves, and they are not open as proves or should be used as self-evidence based on the notes taken from the fieldworks' (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 261-264).

5.3.1 Themes of Sacrifice and Suffering

In support of the construction of the study, the interviewees gladly accepted to narrate their stories:

'We kay we sef for this country, we fast, we pray ereyday we kan eat, we kan drink, from morning to night we under dey rain and dey sun, we kan even take bath. we crying for peace for our country and chiren. We na develop sore in our stomach bcus of the hunger but we na enjoy natin ya' (Fieldwork, August 2021).

This can be translated as follows: showing dissatisfaction, an elderly woman believed to be in her 60s narrated how they killed themselves for the country. She further explained how they could hardly eat, drink, or even take a bath. Every day, come rain or shine, they were seen crying for peace for the country and their children until some of them developed ulcers, but when peace came, they were forgotten, nobody cared about them anymore. They have not enjoyed anything since peace returned to Liberia.

‘We dey market women say we mon na sit down there the rebel to com kay us and our chiren so we com outside talkin to dey rebel dem to lee the arms. Soona dey lisen to us to lee dey fightin bisney, peace com na to Liberia, we na getting natin ya’ (Fieldwork, August 2021).

This market woman took the floor, narrating how they decided to act, and to protest rather than allow the rebels to continue to kill them and their children. She also said we came on the streets risking our lives by talking to the rebels to drop their arms and the rebels listened to us and put down their arms. Since peace came to Liberia, she agreed with the previous market woman, that the ordinary women of Liberia are not getting anything in return for their struggles.

‘Wen dey killing wor goin on in Liberia, we dey women cam together to be the mouthpiece for peace bcus sum of us wor tiyah being or seeing women rape, our chiren fightin, our husbands kay, so we wor feeling the sam pin, our grup wor to protect oda women’ (Fieldwork, August 2021).

In this quotation, the woman explains that women who had the same ideology decided to come together to speak out about peace because some of them got tired of being raped and seeing other women raped, their children taken as child soldiers and their husbands being killed. Some who felt the same pain thought it wise to stand out and protect other women. What comes over in all three quotations here is how the women talk about their courage, and how little they were rewarded for this courage and solidarity after the war ended.

5.3.2 Forgiveness and Care

‘Me, I wor ownna group wor torking to our husbands, brothers and sons dem fightin in our difren dialects to put dey guns down. We wor carryin food to dem jus to convin dem to stop fightin. We wor carin difren thin dem, like: white chickens kola nuts, to tell dem we tiyah with dey war and we wan dem to come lee dey arm and com home. We wor giving palm leaf to welcome dem home’ (Fieldwork, August 2021).

For a rough translation: during the focus group discussion, another woman said she was part of the group responsible for talking to the warring fraction in their various vernacular to put their arms down. She noted that they did not only talk but they also took food to persuade the fighters and show them that they were tired of the war. They also took white chickens to symbolized peace, kola nuts as signs that they were willing to negotiate with them. And they also extended palm branches to welcome them home.

The accounts from the various focus group discussions (August 2021) summarize the women's efforts in navigating the space created by the war thus influencing the peace arena. The culture of building consensus such as organizing meetings, attending negotiations for peace was established by the Liberian market women while under scrutiny.

According to them, tens of thousands of grassroots women in every area of the fifteen counties in Liberia came together and became part of the struggle. They supported the cause to say 'No to War and Yes to peace.' As Liberian women, one of their many tactics to obtain peace was for them to be listened to. They asserted too many efforts in attending rallies, peace talks, and conferences. Mobilizing and purchasing tickets to travel whenever there were peace talks whether they were invited or not. Interestingly, they even spoke of how they were supported by both women and men alike. They also pointed out that the usage of all media outlets was one of their strategies. They talked about how they were begging and demanding the warlords to sign the peace agreements.

5.3.3 Organising and strategy

'We started our movements and rallies as ways to thrive for peace with a slogan, "Enough is enough." We saw our children, husbands, relatives being slaughtered to death. We the women too were suffering and struggling as refugees and internally displaced persons. Despite our instincts to protect our family. We saw that our families and lives were in danger. It was no longer a matter of survival or family protection because of the manner and form the war took. We had to come together and see how to advocate against the war to end it. We grew brave in reaching out to the warring factions, the religious leaders, and international bodies demanding that we have had enough so we wanted the war to end (Liberian Market Association official, women, interview, August 2021).

Speaking in English rather than Koloqwa, this quote suggests that market women's strategy showed the roles of these Women's Movements in restoring Peace to Liberia. It shows how those organizations mobilized and engaged in the peace-building processes. Liberian women have always been strong, they wanted to make sure that peace reigned in Liberia. Looking at a devastating conflict that has left the country's infrastructures ruined and its population decimated, women of Liberia decided to come together, sit down and plot on how peace could be returned to Liberia. Women from all diverse backgrounds saw that it was about time that they work side by side with the men to see how best they could put an end to the fighting to move the country forward. They knew that they could make a difference. The women of Liberia were place-holders and they are boldest of all the people trying to end the war. They had so much invested because it was their daughters being raped, their sons being abducted as child soldiers their husbands being killed on the battlefield so they care deeply about ending the civil-war. They learned how to think as women despite the culture of indoctrination over the years in Liberia. For them to think as women because they were involved in something new, they had to unlearn and then learn to be agents of change and

peacemakers. However, their collective efforts made them achieve significantly because peace and stability were restored steadily.

‘Considering our immense support-base, some of the women were sent to Ghana to gather other Liberian women residing in the refugee camp to be part of the peace negotiations. We were seen holding placards and chanting at the venue of the meeting hall. Finally, we were only allowed to enter the hall if we would keep quiet and serve as observers and not decision-makers. The warlords expected us to be quiet, but we kept making demands until they started referring to us, whenever they wanted to ask of our opinions on the decisions and deliberations of the meeting’ (Liberian Market Association official, women, interview, August 2021).

The market women mobilized and sought support to buy travel tickets for them to be in attendance at the peace-talks in Ghana while women who had the financial means to purchase their tickets also went plus the other women who were in the refugee camps in Ghana were also in attendance even-though nobody invited them.

In addition, the Liberia women were constantly at seen vigils chanting with their banners and placards bearing various peace messages. Their messages reverberated as they trooped at the peace hall where warring factions were seated, "We want peace, not war; we are your mothers and sisters; stop the fighting, the rape of our girls, the killing of our children, sisters, brothers and husbands and let peace reign." That was a challenge to each one of them, including women from diverse backgrounds for them to work harder to support all other women's groups that were interested in ending the war and organizing themselves to speak to the warlords, was one of their many struggles.

5.5 Conclusion

Narratives from the experiences of the market women convey that sacrifice is comparatively socio-politically stable well-being and the ability to make independent decisions to better advocate and pursue peace.

Rožič (2016, cited in Shulika 2018: 122) states that the phenomenon of self-sacrifice is often triggered by crises and has different implications for each situation. In so doing, the capacity of sacrifices asserted by the market women has highlighted the potential and characteristics of women in general. Women's assumption owes much in light of the shift in their roles as victims, agents of change and peacemakers by developing the capacity to endure the suffering of conflict and also committing to ending the war. Alluding to the fact that the women took more active roles in peacebuilding during the victimization phase of the conflict and its disasters, especially through initiatives and groups in which they organized themselves. In this regard, their commitment to end the war have also incorporated the strategy of peaceful demonstrations from their perspectives. This forms the basis for their emergence and also give room to their growth as women working for peace and challenging the undermining of their rights.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This research sought to explore the market women's role in the peacebuilding process of Liberia. Thus, portraying them as architects and agents of change. These market women were actively involved and were very supportive throughout the entire process of collecting data in the field. They were seen happily engaging the research assistant to tell their story. One of the main aims of this study was an attempt to contribute to the many kinds of literature as a way to increase the market women voices to clearly understand the importance of their role with regards to the context of peacebuilding, development as well as the processes of reconstruction and rebuilding. It conveys preceding chapters on the summary of conclusions and findings for this study, also taking into consideration their contributions and the many challenges that the women were confronted with while playing the roles of agents of change, architects of the peacebuilding process or peacebuilders. This research arose from the idea of understanding that women's roles in peacebuilding, is unquestionably a topic for research. This, incredibly long period remained unexplored and undeveloped in the studies of peace and conflict. This study sought to look at the directions of new trends that are emerging in the operations of peace practices. Thus, by particularly focusing and analyzing peace and conflict interventions. It also evolved to catch the original perspectives that sought to identify, understand, and incorporate the market women's roles and contributions to the outcomes and narratives of the peacebuilding process. Specifically, this study prominently developed a shift to the women's roles therein during peacebuilding. Currently, it has become a debate that is dominated by both conflict and post-conflict-related. Intrinsically, this research observed increasing attention to the peace-building discourse surrounding philosophical investigations regarding their connection, particularly in affecting policy results. To give a particular context of exploring Liberia as a case study to build upon the idea of how instrumental women and their organizations have empowered the peacebuilding process in Liberia.

This research framing the market women as agents of change must be included within the peace processes because generally, they are agents of peace due to their motherhood, similar to a feminist method. They should also be seen as specific actors that make-up a significant part of the general population instead of integrating both men and women all together in the peacebuilding activities. In this way, it is needed also for sustaining peacebuilding activities and generally peace. It is widely acknowledged that women need to be inclusive in peacebuilding need to be inclusive because they are often affected by war and by the implications of the peace accord.

In all stages, women's inclusion in the peace processes is critical for equal rights and social justice. Additionally, it is generally acknowledged by many authors that the incorporation of every social grouping promotes diversity, which is essential for creating a stable and inclusive democracy.

Various topics could come forth just by the inclusion of women throughout the negotiations for reconciliation and peace. Including women in the post-conflict peacebuilding processes as well as negotiations increases legitimacy democratically by dealing with all

concerned citizens thus creating viable peacebuilding processes (Porter, 2010).

There is a consensus within the narrative that it is essential to involve women in the peacebuilding processes to attain a viable and long-lasting reconciliation. Violent and armed factions are necessary to put an end to the civil war, although they often don't have any solution, the inclusion of women's organizations may focus on priorities and results needed for peacebuilding and rooting out can also lead to holding the warring factions accountable (Rehn et al, 2002).

Women are said to have always been the ones who are busy with minor peacebuilding projects at all grassroots and local levels even before, throughout and after the war, some are often unintended, the challenge is to take those peacebuilding projects to open or public spaces and have them included in formal peacebuilding context (Anderlini, 2010).

For women, they know exactly what is required of a country and what is necessary on a grassroots or community level which combines local expertise with peacebuilding processes from the international community to the government, can give outcomes peacefully and more sustainably (Gbowee, 2009).

But the black Americans who resettled in Liberia took power and often exploited native African Liberians in what looked like a segregated society that led to the continuous struggles of discrimination between the Americo-Liberians and indigenous people where the Americo-Liberians regarded themselves as being more sophisticated and civilized than the indigenous people which developed a massive rift and turned out to be a violent confrontation that defined the challenges faced during the colonial eras of 1822-1843. The women's role in Liberia's war can be differentiated into three positions: victims, perpetrators, and agents of change (Alaga, 2011).

Consequently, the effect of war on women is not necessarily negative, but it could also lead to empowering women more, even though, the challenge to maintain the empowerment after the conflict has been ceased (Anderlini, 2010). The international community, mostly the United Nations are mindful of the effect of war on women during a conflict and advocate for the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and peacebuilding process. The resolution of 1325 was amended by the United Nations in 2000 that talks about the need to include women in the peacebuilding processes to achieve sustainable peace (UN1325, 2002). "This resolution is for many women the beginning of creating awareness for the importance of the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes" (Rehn et al, 2002:8). Furthermore, "this resolution is also the beginning of trying to gender mainstream all UN peacekeeping missions in conflict countries and the implementing, with help of the UN, of gender-sensitive reforms in that country" (Rehn et al, 2002:8).

The biggest question of this study is, who gets to speak for who, which sought to emphasize mainly on the narratives of the market women that ended the war, that is redemption because decades ago, a lot more could have happened were so many people lost their lives. But they broke the tradition and challenged the status quo to seek peace. This was a voyage of discovery, pain, insightful, enlightening because it tells the redemptive experience of the market women that cannot allow counter-narrative to distort or push aside their narratives but to give the Liberian market-women a chance or an opportunity to at least tell

their stories about how resilient they were, going through a lot of societal checkpoints of being perceived as weaker vessels but were able to restore the freedom we now enjoyed.

This study calls for women to be more fully included in peace negotiations based on three fundamental principles: (i) the participation of women at every level of the peace process, (ii) the necessary protection of women from gender-based brutality and violence and (iii) the avoidance of violence of any kind against women, especially poor women (Popovic, 2009). To further improve the skills the market women gained during the war, and after the war, the important thing is to include them in the narratives and across peacebuilding processes, so that the needs of the market women can be included in planning for recovery. Just by including the voices of market women in the narrative of peace-building processes, their skills and capabilities can start to be acknowledged, and they should be able to start to further improve their living standards. It is imperative that inclusivity towards market women would not only mean that these women remain active on the grassroots level and in informal peace-building processes. They must also be included in the formal history of the peace negotiations and peace-building processes, and eventually must be part of efforts to gain greater gender equality and social inclusion for both women and men in the post-war settlement (Anderlini 2010).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: MAP OF LIBERIA

Liberia

National and County Capitals



Photo Credit: World Geography/CL Salter, 2007.