



PROJECT MUSE®

Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone

Megan H. MacKenzie

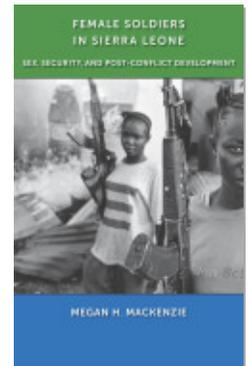
Published by NYU Press

MacKenzie, M. H..

Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development.

New York: NYU Press, 2012.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/17639>

Introduction

Conjugal Order and Insecurity

Post-Conflict

One of the most illustrative signifiers of Sierra Leone's eleven-year civil conflict is an image of a boy, about twelve years old, wearing tattered clothing and a tough expression and holding an AK-47.¹ Variations of this image have been used on countless pamphlets and posters to "raise awareness" about child soldiers, to solicit donations for war-torn African countries, and to advertise the need for research in the areas of peace and post-conflict. This singular image is used to represent "Africa," or some idea of Africa as a land-mass united by troubled civil wars, corruption, and underdevelopment.² The young boy soldier symbolizes uncomplicated perceptions of "the African" subject. He embodies the constant possibility of chaos in Africa and the perceived need for outside intervention. Likewise, the boy signifies the lost innocence of childhood specifically and of "traditional" Africa more generally. As a child, he evokes the sense that, though his innocence has been corrupted, there remains a possibility for it to be returned. This feeds the perception of "the tragedy of Africa" and the notion that despite the destruction and losses, it is possible—and the West's "responsibility"—to restore order and peace to this troubled continent.

This boy has become representative of a wider collection of archetypal identities associated with the continent, including the disenfranchised youth, the impoverished citizen, and the uneducated child. When I traveled to Sierra Leone in October 2005, it was clear that this characterization had masked, and somehow eclipsed, other identities. Of these unexplored identities, female soldiers are perhaps one of the most underrepresented categories of "war-affected" citizens. The "official" story of the conflict, reflected in the literature, media accounts, and international nongovernmental organization (INGO) and nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports, largely omits the participation of female soldiers. Furthermore, mainstream narratives recounting the so-called postwar period and the end of armed conflict are reliably mute on the experiences of women and girls. Narratives tend to focus on violent men being disarmed so that society can "return to normal"

or can return from anarchy to domesticated order. The chaos and lawlessness that characterized the war period is described as gradually being replaced by peace and structure through the help of development agencies and government intervention. Families reunite, children return to school, and men find new jobs to support their loved ones.

These depictions of conflict and peace in Sierra Leone stood in stark contrast to the narratives of the individuals I interviewed in the country. Local social and aid workers, government officials, volunteers, and leaders of women's organizations uncovered alternative versions of the war and of the post-armed conflict period; these consistently featured female soldiers. Female soldiers dislocate predictable and simplistic gendered representations of war: they displace the typical characterization of an "African rebel" as well as perceptions about disempowered and victimized African women. The disparate accounts of women's and girls' participation in the civil conflict in Sierra Leone evoked several questions: Why, if women participated as soldiers, were they largely ignored in mainstream accounts of the conflict? What where were their stories? How might female soldiers' depictions of the war and accounts of the postwar period enhance and alter mainstream accounts of Sierra Leone's civil war? And how might the recognition of female soldiers disrupt the often singular and generalized depictions of conflict in Africa and complicate the use of a young boy with an AK-47 as the symbol of its wars?

In an effort to shed light on these curiosities, it seemed logical to go straight to the source. Through the assistance of several individuals and organizations I was able to conduct interviews with more than seventy-five female soldiers from across the country. The stories, dreams, complaints, and desires recounted by these women challenge prevailing assumptions associated with development, gender and conflict, violent women, and soldiering. A vast gap soon emerged between existing representations of female soldiers and their own accounts of the conflict and their post-armed conflict situations. The female soldiers interviewed made it clear that the depiction of "women and children" as a coherent category of war victims is overly simplistic and ignores the variety of roles women and girls possess during war as well as their agency during this period. Further, their stories problematized the notion of "post-conflict" as a seamless move from war to peace. Finally, these interviews complicate two particular simplistic generalizations about African civil wars, including the presumption that civil wars are initiated by idle young men who commit random violence and contribute to generalized chaos; second, that women and girls

are impacted by, or protected from, war but rarely contribute to, or impact, war themselves.

This book is premised on the belief that stories of war and peace are nothing but gendered myths if they ignore, silence, or exclude women and girls. Without asking about and listening to the experiences of women and girls as well as men and boys during war, we are left with a limited understanding of war, who is involved, what it means to people, and how they are affected in the short and long term. Current understandings of post-conflict, peace, and reintegration in Sierra Leone are equally gendered, due, in part, to an absence of female soldiers' own accounts of the war and the "postwar" period. Without recognizing the roles and experiences of female soldiers in Sierra Leone, post-conflict reconstruction policies are bound to be gender blind at best, and restrictive, moralizing, and disciplining at worst.

Drawing largely from interview material, one of the central aims of this book is to show post-conflict reconstruction as a highly gendered process defined and imposed largely from the outside of so-called war-torn communities. Within much of the literature focused on post-armed conflict states, the processes of post-conflict reconstruction and peace building are presupposed to be benign, inclusive, and progressive. The post-conflict period is often defined as a temporary period after a formal cease-fire characterized by increased peace, possibility, and development. Post-conflict organizations and institutions are seen as neutral actors whose roles are to facilitate the transition from insecurity and conflict to peace and social order. Post-conflict policies are largely shaped by patriarchal norms associated with liberal social order rather than by "local" needs, realities, or particularities. Crowding out space for its critique, this idealized imaginary of the post-conflict phase casts external actors as necessary saviors and obviates questions about the kinds of conflicts and insecurities that might continue after formal cease-fire agreements.

Interviews with female soldiers also inspired the conclusion that key concepts connected with both war and peace, such as order, disorder, security, and insecurity, are gendered and largely assume particular gendered orders. Reconstruction, the return to normal, the restoration of order, and reintegration—the central objectives of most post-conflict policies—are not gender neutral but rather assume and require a particular gendered order. As a result, post-conflict policies have the potential to inscribe and enforce exploitative and patriarchal forms of gendered order post-armed conflict.

Specifically, I argue that notions of conjugal order³ shape understandings of security and insecurity and are at the heart of development and

post-armed conflict reconstruction policies. The concept of conjugal order refers to the laws and social norms that serve to regulate sexuality, (re)construct the family, and send messages about acceptable and legitimate social relationships. There is no singular form of conjugal order; rather, conjugal order can be used as an analytical tool to detect and examine the laws, regulations, and norms that dominate a particular region or context. Conjugal order is informed by the laws associated with marriage and the family, including marital, paternity, adoption, and inheritance laws as well as broader social norms. For most patriarchal societies these norms include the privileging of heterosexual sex, the assumption that sex within marriage is consensual, and customs dictating legitimate and illegitimate children. Conjugal order is inspired by previous work on the regulation of sexuality. What distinguishes this concept from other theoretical analyses of the family and sexuality is that conjugal order is used specifically to understand the links between sexual regulation and broader notions of order and stability. One of the main contentions of this book is that conjugal order shapes perceptions about security and development and that policies aimed at improving security and development impose, institute, and reinforce particular forms of conjugal order.

Periods of insecurity, such as war, are a privileged time for examining how peace, order, and security are defined. Moreover, the phase of transition between war and the so-called postwar period provides a unique opportunity to examine how social order is literally reconstructed through intervening actors, particularly international organizations and NGOs. Female soldiers in Sierra Leone are an exemplary focus because they represent a problem for most iterations of conjugal order: many of these women achieved positions of power unavailable to them outside of conflict, scores were unmarried or involved in unauthorized relationships, most were separated from their parents or family units, and countless had children as a result of rape or as a result of an “illegitimate” relationship. The ways in which the government and local and international actors described, depicted, categorized, and reconstructed these women and girls reveal a great deal about how Western-liberal forms of conjugal order were reconstructed and imposed in Sierra Leone.

In turn, the concept of conjugal order helps unpack not only the gendered nature of development but also the imperial and regulatory nature of development. Policies that assume particular relationships between mothers and fathers, husbands and wives will be shown to be constructing the liberal family model rather than responding to it. Further, the way “legitimate” beneficiaries of development aid are recognized within post-conflict

and development policies serves to construct identities and delineate “normal” relationships and behaviors. Policy makers are neither catering their post-armed conflict responses to “local realities” nor restoring local, “natural” order; rather, most post-conflict development policies impose Western-liberal ideals of conjugal order, which send explicitly moralizing messages to individuals about appropriate identities, behaviors, relationships, and values.

Recasting Post-Conflict Development and Security

Post-conflict development continues to be a major global focus for both policy makers and academics. Further, given the growing conflation of security and development, or the “radicalization of development,” Western nations are increasingly considering international development as directly impacting their own prosperity and security.⁴ As a result, many Western donor governments and Western-based organizations and institutions have taken an active role in overseeing the process of post-armed conflict reconstruction and development. Despite the increased role of international actors in developing nations’ affairs—particularly of INGOs and a plethora of development agencies—there has been insufficient critical investigation of the political and ethical rationalities, the endemic gender biases, and the impacts of these actors on developing nations.

Given the tendency of international organizations and development organizations to create and reuse “models”⁵ for development projects, investigating and critiquing these models—specifically how women are “processed” through and envisioned by them—is essential. In particular, in a highly securitized moment such as the so-called transition from war to peace, the gendered ordering that takes place in the name of “reconstruction” and “rehabilitation” must be explored. Moreover, identifying the ways in which the “post-conflict” transition in Sierra Leone has been gendered might allow us to locate important sites of resistance and possibilities for change.

This book draws from and contributes to scholarship within the fields of security, development, and gender studies. The work of Mark Duffield and his approach to humanitarianism, development, and post-conflict reconstruction have been particularly inspiring.⁶ In *Global Governance and the New Wars*, Duffield coined the phrase “the radicalization of development,” in reference to what he sees as the merging of development and security. Duffield argues that, as a result of the radicalization of development, those in the business of development are no longer simply securing the post-conflict environment; their recent mandates include transforming entire societies

through the inculcation of “liberal peace.”⁷ Duffield explains that the coupling of “liberal” and “peace” has meant that liberal policies and structures are correlated with stability: “Liberal values and institutions have been vested with ameliorative and harmonizing powers.”⁸

One consequence of this forced marriage between “liberal” and “peace” has been that aid not only is aimed at emergency relief but also is concerned with “conflict resolution, reconstructing social networks, strengthening civil and representative institutions, and security sector reform in the context of a functioning market economy.”⁹ In other words, the liberal project of development is about radical societal transformation. This conflation of development and security has pushed aid agencies and NGOs operating development programs from the role of distributors of philanthropic donations to political directors and governors, or, the organizers of society characterized by liberal democracy and liberal political economy. Duffield summarizes this idea: “Aid is no substitute for political action because it is the political action. It is now a tool of international regulation and is embedded in the networks and strategic complexes that make up liberal peace.”¹⁰

This book focuses specifically on the ways in which the radicalization of development has affected ideas about post-armed conflict reconstruction and reintegration. Reconstruction and reintegration tend to be viewed as neutral concepts, which signify a “return to normal” post-armed conflict. There is little research that considers the genealogy of the concept of reintegration and its multiple meanings in post-conflict discourses. The term “reintegration” is rooted within criminology literature; the most basic definition given in criminology is “a process intended to reduce recidivism after a criminal’s release from prison.”¹¹ In this context, two facets of reintegration are described. First, reintegration is seen as a process: “Reintegration (or ‘re-entry’ as it is sometimes called) is both an event and a process. . . . re-entry is also a long-term process, one that actually starts prior to release and continues well afterwards.”¹² The second dynamic of reintegration is associated with “correction,” “rehabilitation,” and “treatment” and is aimed at preparing criminals to be successful citizens.¹³ What is implied by these definitions is that criminals have deviated from societal norms and must be transformed or molded in such a way as to ensure that they can return to and function “normally” in society.

Within literature looking at the disarmament process, reintegration is defined generally as “the process which allows ex-combatants and their families to adapt economically and socially to productive civilian life.”¹⁴ In this sense, reintegration in the “post-conflict” context is conceived in a

similar way to reintegration within criminology. Both assume a desistance of criminal or combat behavior, “reentry” into community or civilian life, and rehabilitation or an adaptation of behavior to discourage recidivism. When reviewing the reintegration policies associated with Sierra Leone’s disarmament process, these similarities become clear. For example, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) declared that reintegration policies were designed to support “*resettlement into normal society*.”¹⁵

There is a growing body of research that examines the gendered power dynamics associated with reintegration, as well as “post-conflict” in general. Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana’s text *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives during and after War*, is a well-known example of a gendered analysis of reintegration programs.¹⁶ This literature has shown that while women typically take on different roles during conflict, this does not necessarily translate into power and authority in their communities post-armed conflict.¹⁷ Mary Caprioli explains that “the national patriarchy begins to reassert itself after the war and expects women to return to ‘the way they were before the war’ or ‘to their subordinate positions.’”¹⁸ McKay similarly concludes, “The [post-conflict] reality usually proves that, regardless of culture and place, women’s roles revert to traditional ones, and nationalistic loyalties are more highly valued than is gender equality.”¹⁹

The Copenhagen school’s approach to security fits well with Duffield’s analysis of the radicalization of development and is referred to throughout the book. According to the Copenhagen school, security is not a fixed concept and cannot be defined in a static manner. Instead, it is argued that security is constructed through the “speech act,” or the act of securitizing actors naming and thereby constructing a security concern. Securitizing actors are defined as individuals, or a group—including government, leaders, or military groups—who perform the speech act.²⁰ Once a matter has been securitized, it is prioritized above “normal politics,” and “extraordinary means” are necessary to address the problem.²¹ As a result of this prioritization, Rita Abrahamsen argues that securitization “has clear political implications.”²² These implications result from the heightened profile and increased attention typically given to securitized issues in terms of policy making, funding, and media attention.

The Copenhagen school’s rendering of securitization as a speech act places the securitizing actor and the audience as the central players in the construction of security. According to this approach, parties who are able to

constitute a security concern typically hold positions of power and possess a “particular legitimacy.”²³ Securitization then becomes a strategic practice aimed at swaying a targeted audience to accept the securitizing actor’s interpretation of a threat. In this way, securitization is an intersubjective process in the sense that it is only when the audience accepts a securitizing actor’s speech act that an issue will become securitized.

My work is indebted to Duffield and the Copenhagen school and other critical scholarship that challenges traditional notions of development and security; however, there remain some essential questions about gender and sexuality in relation to development and security that cannot be analyzed effectively within these approaches. There has been insufficient analysis of the gendered implications of the radicalization of development, or the merging of development and security. The central obstacle or deficiency is that most approaches to security have been overly transfixed with “security flashes,” or issues deemed an immediate public security matter. Realists use the terms “high” politics and “low” politics, while the Copenhagen school uses “normal” politics and “securitized” matters, but the heart of the matter is that none of these approaches consider the significance of the so-called domestic sphere in shaping our understanding of security. Concentrating only on “security flashes” obscures the broader social context within which security matters are shaped and discounts the possibility that “security” always already depends on the construction and reconstruction of normal, domestic, and peaceful politics.

As a feminist scholar, I am particularly interested in how the radicalization of development might result in policies that give primacy to those development issues deemed a public security concern. In contrast, those issues deemed “private” or “domestic” concerns will be deprioritized and obscured by this attention to the “security flashes.” Although gender often remains an afterthought or a side note to so-called harder international relations issues, the literature on gender and war is diverse and growing significantly.²⁴ The dominant understanding of women as victims in war is evident in literature that constructs women as “naturally” peaceful and men as naturally violent and aggressive.

I build on the feminist work that has concluded that “post-conflict,” “peace,” and “rehabilitation” are misnomers for women because they presume the benefits of “going back,” or “restoring to a position or capacity that previously existed,” without sufficiently considering the oppressive or violent nature of the previous power arrangements and institutions.²⁵ Critical research has done much to disrupt dominant conceptions of the post-conflict

moment as a universally positive transition from war to peace; however, there is still much to be done in terms of investigating the gendered nature of post-conflict policies, the biases of international organizations in relation to gendered roles and needs post-armed conflict, the gendered nature of conflict resolution processes, the power arrangements that take place post-armed conflict, and the actors involved in facilitating and instituting power arrangements.

Moreover, while there is certainly evidence that women, children, and the elderly are vulnerable during war, that they are more likely to be uprooted due to conflict and are more likely to experience sexual violence, there is also important research by scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, Charli Carpenter, Elise Barth, Louise Olsson, Inger Skjelsbaek, Karen Hostens, Patricia T. Morris, and Tina Johnson that demands a reconsideration of broad gendered generalizations about victims and perpetrators in war. Rather than focusing on the impact of war *on* women, feminist international relations scholars such as Christine Sylvester, Swati Parashar, Myriam Denov, Laura Sjoberg, and Caron Gentry have recounted the historical contributions of women *to* warfare.²⁶ In particular, there is a burgeoning literature on female soldiers and female militants, with a particular surge in scholarship examining women's participation in terrorist activities after 9/11.²⁷ Despite the increased attention to women's participation in conflict, there remain few academic resources looking at female soldiers in the context of African civil conflicts. Many of the available resources are reports from organizations like the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA),²⁸ United Nations country reports or research documents,²⁹ or research institute reports.³⁰ Among the few resources focusing specifically on female soldiers in Sierra Leone, the majority concentrate on girl soldiers.³¹

Like that of Christine Sylvester, my work draws from both critical feminist and postcolonial literature.³² Postcolonialism here does not refer to the "end" of colonialism; rather, it speaks to the continuations and legacies of colonialism. Dominated by Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, or the production and reproduction of the "Orient" in relation to "the Occident," which has historically described the West as superior,³³ postcolonial studies is particularly concerned with identifying and locating sites of resistance against the ways in which the third world is represented by, and constructed through, hegemonic Western discourses.

This focus on the constructions of the West and "the rest" has inspired those in postcolonial and subaltern studies to reflect on the significance of self-representation. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?"³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak asks if third world women have the agency required to express themselves given their subordinate positions of power. She warns that even when third world women speak, their voices are restricted by the limits and avenues allotted to them; their voices are always mediated and therefore controlled by others: “Between patriarch and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears.”³⁵ However, she urges the postcolonial critic to take account of these silences and find ways to break the dominance of imperial and patriarchal hegemonic ideas. The emphasis on voice, representation, and agency demanded by both feminist and postcolonial theory serves as a linchpin for my own theoretical and methodological approach.

Each chapter in this volume places significant emphasis on the voices of the women and men interviewed in Sierra Leone. These interviews, and the voices they represent, act as disruptions to dominant discourses associated with gendered norms, power, conflict, and development. In taking Spivak’s warning, I neither pretend to offer the interviews as “truth” nor ignore my role in constructing this book and the potential for misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

Reconstructing Conjugal Order

My own theoretical approach centers on the concept of conjugal order and is founded on the assumption that gender is at the center of ideas of security and development. The “order” that is implicit to notions of peace and stability depends on multiple gender constructions. Periods of insecurity, such as war, are a privileged time for examining how peace, order, and security are defined. Most of the literature on war focuses on atrocities, war crimes, foreign policy and strategy, or the public events and activities of war—or the “security flashes.” I argue these events can only be defined and understood through their distinction from orderly, peaceful, and “normal” society. In other words, it is impossible to understand security events without some understanding of order and normality. Of particular significance is “the domestic” to these ideas of order, peace, and “normal.”

As already mentioned, conjugal order refers not only to the institution of marriage but also to the laws and broader social norms associated with marriage and the family, including the privileging of heterosexual sex and the assumption that sex within marriage is consensual. This notion of conjugal order draws on Michel Foucault’s work on sexual regulation; Jacques Donzelot’s thought on the family and philanthropy; Jacqueline Stevens’s work

on the nuclear family, laws, and gender subordination; and Lene Hansen's approach to identity formation. Foucault identifies the deployment of sexuality and the surveillance of sex and the body as one of the most significant technologies of power.³⁶ He demonstrates how the linking of sexuality to sex allows for the artificial grouping of elements such as "health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body" with "anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures."³⁷ This linking indicates how the regulation of sex acts as a sort of linchpin that served to fuel capitalist economic growth, manufacture legitimacy, and "normalize" behavior.

Like other disciplinary mechanisms, those directed at regulating sexuality take both an explicit judicial form and an implicit "normalizing" form. At the center of the history of sexuality and the disciplining of sexuality is the family model. Most of the "economic and political problems" associated with population, including birth rate, age of marriage, legitimate and illegitimate births, sexual relations, fertility or sterility, and the effects of the unmarried could be controlled through the institution of the family unit.³⁸ Foucault—like Jacqueline Stevens—notes the significance of the "husband wife axis" and the "parents children axis" in the deployment of sexuality.³⁹ The "normalization" of these relationships through the creation and surveillance of the family represents one of the most significant yet largely unexamined forms of sexual regulation. As Foucault noted, the "family was the crystallization in the deployment of sexuality: [it] seemed to be the source of sexuality which it actually only reflected and diffracted."⁴⁰ In other words, while the family appears to be a natural formation, it is in fact the product of a highly advanced set of regulatory mechanisms.

Donzelot applies Foucault's work on discipline and sexuality to the liberal state. Donzelot argues that the family is an "anchorage point for private property and its function of reproduction of the ruling ideology."⁴¹ Due to the surveillance and governance opportunities offered through the working-class family model, it is defined by Donzelot as the smallest political organization possible. In turn, not belonging to a family is seen as a social problem and a source of potential instability and threat.

Donzelot's work on philanthropy and the change in attitudes regarding tutelage provides a strong footing from which to rethink the significance of the family and conjugal order as well as the role of development actors in constructing gender. In *The Policing of Families*, Donzelot notes how the family became central to changes in eighteenth-century philanthropy. He argues that open donations were replaced with targeted aid aimed at "saving" citizens from the potential of becoming vagabonds and beggars.⁴² The

nuclear family unit was at the heart of this targeted aid and was seen as a vehicle through which delinquent individuals could be absorbed “while at the same time it becomes an agent for conveying the norms of the state into the private sphere.”⁴³

The transformations within philanthropy Donzelot identifies mirror current trends within international development. Rather than generalized responses to poverty and crisis, development—through measures such as tied aid and targeted aid—has increasingly exhibited specific social and moral objectives, including (re)establishing liberal social order, encouraging the establishment of liberal democratic values, and the stabilization and liberalization of the economy. Recently, “new humanitarianism” has been used to refer to the process whereby generalized, neutral development assistance is replaced with targeted, “politically conscious” aid aimed at societal transformation and governance.⁴⁴ New humanitarianism is presented as a novel approach to development capable of addressing the past failures of development initiatives through these types of targeted initiatives.

Both new humanitarianism and Donzelot’s philanthropy represent a shift from benevolent donations to a process of direct investment in society—with expected return. In both conceptualizations, the return on the investment is said to be guaranteed through the restrictions and regulations placed on the funding. In other words, conditions are placed on the funding to ensure it is used in specific ways and that it will produce specific outcomes. In both cases, the rules, norms, and regulations placed on donations act as forms of social and economic regulation. Gilles Deleuze summarizes the impact of such targeted philanthropy, “The social comes into being with a system . . . in which norms replace the law, regulatory and corrective mechanisms replace the standard.”⁴⁵ Fiona Fox explains the effects of new humanitarianism: “Conditional humanitarian aid is becoming yet another tool available to Western governments to control developing countries.”⁴⁶

Neither Foucault nor Donzelot takes his analysis of the family further and considers gender subordination or the impacts of the way in which notions of the family privilege certain gendered identities and relationships while obscuring or rendering problematic others. Jacqueline Stevens helps push this discussion forward with her analysis of the so-called natural family unit, arguing that paternity and marriage laws serve both to control reproduction and to give power to husbands and fathers. Stevens identifies three ways in which marriage bestows males with significant power and rights over women and children. First, a woman’s nationality or citizenship is partly determined by her husband’s. Second, males have political rights to children produced by

their wives. Third, the name and nationality of children in most societies are bestowed through husbands. Stevens is adamant that the access and power that men gain through women formalize relationships of gender inequality:

Rather than pre-existing sex differences being reflected in and exacerbated by laws, the very definition of matrimony suggests the institution is constitutive of inequity in roles related to reproduction, that marriage is an asymmetrical system assuring men access to mothers (*mater*), creating unrecognized and largely unrequited demands on women.⁴⁷

Stevens is arguing that through the regulation of marriage and birth the state constructs women as natural and prepolitical and men as “heads” of households, or the natural “breadwinners.” She concludes that women are relegated to the private sphere of child rearing and domestic work while men are situated in the political realm as administrators of the family unit.

Stevens also argues that what is considered “natural” is in fact constructed and regulated, in part, through the disciplinary tactics of the state. Stevens adds that the result of normalizing or naturalizing “is to express the necessity of a form of being or practice, to make something seem impervious to human intention and immutable.”⁴⁸ It follows that by rendering the family as a “natural” unit, it is also defined as necessary, unchanging, and outside the realm of political intervention. This logic has helped to produce and justify the distinction between the political (public) and “private” realms. In addition, this logic legitimates noninterventionist approaches to issues deemed “domestic” concerns.⁴⁹

Lene Hansen’s work on identity formation is also helpful here. She has identified two ways in which policies can erase particular gendered identities. She argues that policies not only construct particular identities but also exclude or delegitimize other identities. In a securitized arena, it is often gendered identities that are left out or rendered “illegitimate.” Second, the intersubjective nature of security policies assumes that subjects are able to voice their concerns. Hansen uses the examples of female victims of bride burnings in Pakistan to illustrate her point that not all citizens—particularly those who fall in the category of “illegitimate identity”—can participate in an equal exchange; therefore, they are excluded from the public realm of policy making and politics.

The ordering that Foucault, Donzelot, Stevens, and Hansen refer to in relation to the regulation of sex informs the concept of conjugal order used throughout this book. The book is primarily focused on the international

response to the civil war in Sierra Leone and, in particular, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process that was driven by international donors. As a result, attention is paid to how conjugal order is implied and constructed through international policies and programs.⁵⁰ What distinguishes the concept of conjugal order from other work on sexual regulation and identity formation is that the concept is not simply useful in an analysis of sexual regulation; rather, it can be employed to scrutinize the gendered biases endemic to understandings of development and security. It is important to take note of sexual regulation, but also to look beyond the process of regulating sex to see how ideas about conjugal order inform and dictate our perceptions about order, peace, security, and development more broadly. Many general development “problems” are actually problems associated with conjugal *disorder*, including female-headed households, family planning, orphans, unaccompanied children, and “idle” men. In turn, I make the following conclusion about the reciprocal relationship between conjugal order and notions of security and development: conjugal order is foundational to the meanings of development and security; development policies—particularly those driven by concerns with insecurity—impose and institute a largely Western-liberal conjugal order.

The conflation of security and development priorities associated with the radicalization of development closes off space for reflection on and critique of the gendered nature of development priorities and policies. Sources of insecurity become the focus while order is taken as a given. Development policies serve to reconstruct communities and reintegrate individuals according to a particular Western-liberal notion of “normal” society. Western-liberal notions of conjugal order are at the heart of notions of normality, peace, order, and security. As a result, especially as development becomes securitized, post-conflict development policies act as forms of discipline or regulation. Post-conflict policies discipline individuals by sending explicit messages about “normal” and legitimate behaviors and roles. In addition, these policies serve both to construct acceptable and normalized gendered subjects and to reinforce and construct gendered power dynamics.

Chapter Overview

Most policies aimed at restoring peace and promoting development in Sierra Leone depended on specific notions of conjugal order. Focusing on the reintegration process for female soldiers, each chapter in this book considers the significance of conjugal order to notions of peace, stability, and normality.

Chapter 2 looks at the history of sexual regulation in Sierra Leone and how British colonizers took care to regulate everything from sex with prostitutes to adoption practices. This chapter is not meant as a comprehensive overview of Sierra Leone's history; rather, it should highlight for the reader the socio-political context of gender ordering and sexual regulation in Sierra Leone. Specifically, this chapter provides readers with the historical and political background necessary for understanding current post-conflict policies and power relations. It includes an analysis of historical continuities and discontinuities—particularly in relation to sexual governance, family structures and law, and the status of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 3 presents a critical examination of the way “soldier” and “victim” identities are constructed and reconstructed by “post-conflict” programs in Sierra Leone. It is argued that characterizations of women post-armed conflict are largely based on gender stereotypes and specific iterations of conjugal order. This chapter also considers the reluctance of reintegration agencies to identify females who participated in war as soldiers. In addition to the process of categorization, this chapter considers the gap between representations of females both during and after the conflict and the personal narratives of these women. It is argued that by giving female soldiers titles such as “females associated with the war,” “dependents,” or “camp followers,” dominant discourses depoliticize and “naturalize” women's roles during the conflict.

In much the same way that Uma Kothari talks about “the tyranny of participation,” chapter 4 examines some of the contradictions associated with the concept of empowerment. It considers how various agencies and organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and NGOs have incorporated empowerment into their programs directed toward women. Focusing on reintegration programs for female soldiers as a case study, this chapter investigates the ways in which empowerment is used by development and aid agencies and organizations and the genealogy of this concept within these discourses. The dominance of neoliberal ideals within so-called empowerment initiatives is demonstrated. This supports the contention that empowerment projects—including the reintegration process in Sierra Leone—are informed by liberal understandings of conjugal order and serve to discipline subjects with explicit messages about appropriate gendered social order and legitimate behaviors.

Chapter 5 examines how the ideal of the female war victim has impacted how former female combatants have been “processed” through disarmament and reintegration programs. It is asserted that men and masculinity

are securitized post-armed conflict while women are “desecuritized” and, in effect, de-emphasized in post-armed conflict policy making. Focusing on the absence of individual testimonies and interviews with female soldiers, uniform perceptions of women and girls as victims, “left behind” in a male-dominated war, are questioned. As in the other core chapters of this book, interviews with female soldiers are contrasted to mainstream characterizations of women. The focus in this chapter is on women’s explanations of why they did not participate in the disarmament process. The diverse, complex, rational, and emotional responses to this question stand in stark contrast to the sterilized and oversimplified reports of women and girls being “left behind” or “forgotten” by the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.

In chapter 6, I propose that sexual violence within Sierra Leone and in other conflict settings across the world is a useful tool of war because it disrupts conjugal order. As a result of conjugal order, men are ordained with power, rights, and access to the labor of women. In turn, the act of rape not only impacts the victim but also creates broader disorder because it violates accepted norms and infringes on the “property” assured to men within a particular community. This reiterates the argument that security flashes are created and understood as a result of deeply embedded understandings of conjugal order.

Chapter 7 builds on the analysis of wartime rape offered in chapter 6, with a focus on children born as a result of such rape. Here it is argued that stigmas associated with wartime rape and children born as a result of rape⁵¹ are a result of policies and legal structures that designate the liberal family model as the norm. Through interviews as well as existing literature, the little information that exists about children born of war in Sierra Leone is presented. The exclusion of children born of wartime rape from development and humanitarian agencies’ existing categories of vulnerable children (child soldiers, abandoned children, and street children) is strongly critiqued; it is argued that this exclusion is a strategic choice based on the assumption that sex and the family are not political or security issues.

The final chapter draws together some final conclusions about female soldiers in Sierra Leone and reintegration policies and processes. This chapter also highlights broader insights into the imperial and gendered nature of development policies and “models,” and the significance of the family and the so-called domestic sphere to international politics and security studies. Finally, the chapter encourages feminist scholars to continue to reenvision and reconceptualize security and development.

Feminist Methodology

Focusing on female soldiers in post-armed conflict Sierra Leone as a case study, the aim of this book is to use conjugal order as a conceptual tool to understand the significance of sex and the family to notions of security and development. There are multiple ways of interpreting conjugal order in Sierra Leone. First, there are differences in practices and customs between the various ethnic groups and tribes in the country. Second, there is a noticeable divide between practices in Freetown and what was once known as the “protectorate,” or the rural areas of the country. Third, as a result of British colonial rule, Sierra Leone inherited, and continues to use, many British family laws. Recognizing this complexity, this book concentrates on mapping how outside actors—primarily international organizations and institutions—imposed Western-liberal forms of conjugal order in Sierra Leone following the armed conflict.

Hansen concluded that “to understand language as *political* is to see it as a site for the production and reproduction of particular subjectivities and identities.”⁵² Stevens also described discourse as “the field where the regulatory norms of sex are observed.”⁵³ Similarly, Michelle Lazar and Judith Butler argue that power is performed through language, and gender and gendered power relations are continually performed through discourses.⁵⁴ Lazar claims that “discourse [is] a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out.”⁵⁵ Given the focus on constructions of gender and conjugal order within this book, feminist critical discourse analysis is the most useful methodology. There certainly is no single definition of either discourse or discourse analysis; however, I am sympathetic to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s approach to it. Laclau and Mouffe posit that discourse is constructed through multiple networks, is historically situated, and places severe limits on what can and cannot be articulated.⁵⁶ Laclau and Mouffe are perhaps most noted for their effort to abandon strictly defining discourse in relation to text. Instead, they argue that anything which can represent or convey meaning, including text, economic relationships, institutions, and technology, should be considered part of “discourse.”⁵⁷

Fueled by the notion that deconstructing or altering hegemonic discourses can result in ideological and moral shifts, feminist discourse analysis is aimed at locating discourses that sustain or construct patriarchy—that is, relationships of subordination or suppression for women—in order to locate spaces for resistance. In this book I apply this understanding of discourse analysis to my examination of multiple sources of discourse,

including government reports and laws,⁵⁸ NGO and international development agency policy documents and research reports,⁵⁹ existing research on female soldiers in Sierra Leone, and first-person interviews with social workers, former disarmament officials, activists, government officials, and former female soldiers.

My interviews with former female soldiers are the central focus of much of the book. To provide the reader with a more complete idea of the methodology, it is important to offer details about the interview process and as much information as possible about the women I interviewed and the context within which they were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in Sierra Leone between October and December 2005. During this time I was fortunate enough to be invited to Makeni, a town near the center of Sierra Leone that was a major rebel stronghold for much of the civil war. As such, as armed fighting drew down, Makeni was a natural choice for the establishment of one of the major disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration centers. By the time I arrived in Makeni in 2005, most of the DDR initiatives had long since ended. The impacts of DDR programming could be seen in the numerous Honda motorcycle taxis buzzing around the town; in this region, one of the primary reintegration training initiatives aimed at providing men with driving skills and access to vehicles as a means of making a living.

One major reintegration program that remained in operation in Makeni was a joint program between the Catholic Church and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), designed to assist former female soldiers and women abducted by armed groups to reintegrate into society. Specifically, the project recognized that most women had not gone through a formal DDR process and was targeted at those women who were "left behind" by the "post-conflict" reintegration process in the country. More than 200 women were enrolled in the program, which provided participants with a year of training in fabric dyeing, weaving, tailoring, soap making, or catering. These women came from all factions of the fighting forces in Sierra Leone, including the Revolutionary United Front, the Sierra Leone Army, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, and the Civil Defence Forces (the Kamajors). The program included women of varied ages; however, the majority were between seventeen and thirty years old.

After being introduced to the coordinators of the program, I was given permission to conduct interviews on the campus and encouraged to stay next door at the Catholic seminary. I interviewed fifty women on campus at the training facility. In constructing my interview questions, I had two

priorities. First, it was necessary that my questions did not require the interviewees to delve into personal and potentially traumatic information; second I was required to protect the identity of the interviewees. I was also limited to using a set list of questions for which I had attained ethics approval. The limitation of these questions was that they inhibited more informal discussions and my ability to ask for elaboration from women on certain points. I made every effort to keep the interviews “conversation-like” and informal; however, this was not always possible.

In an effort to make interviewees feel comfortable, safe, and secure, interviews with former soldiers were conducted in pairs in the presence of a social worker. I chose to interview the women in pairs because I felt it diminished the formal atmosphere of a one-on-one interview. Local social workers who had worked with the training program and these women supported this decision and suggested that I allow the women to choose their interview partners; in this way, women were interviewed with someone with whom they felt comfortable. In many cases, having two women together made the interview feel more like a group conversation rather than a strict direct question-and-answer format. It also meant that the interviewee was not “outnumbered” by myself and the social worker; rather, the power dynamics were more evenly balanced by having two interviewees in addition to myself and the social worker.

The social worker present in the interviews acted as my translator. All interviewees spoke in either Krio, Mende, or Temne.⁶⁰ Krio is a lingua franca spoken across the country, particularly in Freetown, the Peninsula, the Banana Islands, and York Island; Mende is spoken in the south central areas, and Temne in the Northern Province. There were both benefits and disadvantages to having a social workers act as translator. In terms of benefits, the women had already shared details of their experience with the social worker, and so they were not “double disclosing” to myself and another stranger (an official translator). Second, the social worker was able to brief me regarding the appropriateness or sensitivity of my questions. This process was certainly not perfect; however, I have every assurance from the social workers that the final translations are accurate.

The second group of interviewees were all located in the eastern suburbs of Freetown. This part of the capital city was ravaged by rebel forces during a 1999 invasion infamously called “Operation No Living Thing.”⁶¹ At the end of the conflict many former soldiers settled in this area, which remains one of the poorest parts of the city. Interestingly, I gained access to the women in this group through a small organization operating on a shoestring budget

and largely driven by one man, Edward Anague. Anague had a piece of land with a couple of very modest buildings, which he used as a center for those affected by the war. Anague saw his center as the place where those who had “slipped through the cracks” could find help. Residents and visitors included amputees, prostitutes, abandoned children, street children, former soldiers, an albino male who had been ostracized from his community, and HIV-positive men, women, and children.

Edward Anague assisted me in conducting the interviews with this cohort of twenty-five former female soldiers. He knew these women through his center and had established a relationship of trust. Most of the interviews were conducted in English or Kriol, with Anague translating the responses into English. One difference between this group of women and the fifty women from Makeni is that these women seemed to be in far more desperate situations. Many of the women were working as prostitutes, some were homeless, and few had any reliable source of income.

There were no other major differences or patterns in the answers from the two groups of women. Both cohorts of female soldiers included women who had served with all major fighting factions; they were from various regions across the country and had participated in the conflict for periods extending from two weeks to ten years. Thus, the total population of former female soldiers interviewed were from diverse backgrounds and gave a broad picture of what life was like for female soldiers during the civil war and in its aftermath.

These interviews provide one of the few representative direct accounts of the roles and experiences of female soldiers in Sierra Leone and represent one of the largest bodies of information from female soldiers in Sierra Leone. Interviews with female soldiers across the global south are relatively rare because they are difficult and/or unsafe to conduct and because there has not been a consistent desire to speak to and learn from these women. The few organizations or researchers that include interviews with female soldiers rarely include high numbers of interviewees.⁶² For example, a major report by the Post-Conflict Reintegration Initiative for Development and Empowerment (PRIDE) on ex-combatant views of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone draws general conclusions about women’s perceptions of the process based only on twenty-one interviews.⁶³

All seventy-five of the interviewees were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two, which means some were child soldiers during the conflict. For a number of reasons, I chose not to separate those women who fought as adults from those who fought as children. First, as I elaborate in chapter 5, the Western definition of a child soldier as someone under the age of eighteen is

not representative of Sierra Leonean understandings of “child” and “adult.” Moreover, during the course of the eleven-year civil war, many individuals were unsure of their exact age and participated in the war from “childhood” into “adulthood”; therefore, distinguishing their experiences as children from their experiences as adults is not possible or useful. Second, it is not my objective to differentiate between women’s and girls’ roles and activities during the war; rather, it is to show the broader gender stereotypes and omissions in mainstream depictions of the war and in “post-conflict” policies.

It is important to be clear from the outset that I am not arguing that the two groups of women interviewed are entirely representative of all female soldiers in Sierra Leone. I also acknowledge that this is not an anthropological project. I did not spend extensive time living within communities or conduct any form of participatory observation. I interviewed seventy-five women and more than twenty-five local experts about the reintegration process in Sierra Leone. In the end, I feel confident in the choices I made and recognize the limitations and benefits associated with those choices.

The approach I took in conducting interviews was particularly sensitive to feminist critiques of, and recommendations for, interview techniques. Adler and Worrall summarize the critical feminist argument that women’s stories, and the way they are told, can provide the most valuable sources of “evidence” of the structures of power within society and women’s and girls’ experiences within those structures:

Violence stories are powerful vehicles conveying information about girls’ views and normative beliefs concerning violence. In telling such stories, girls draw on their personal and emotional experiences, and their wider cultural and social life, to convey feelings of both powerlessness and empowerment . . . Examining how girls *speak* about violence allows us to trace the multiplicity of ways in which it connects with and impacts upon other areas of their (gendered) lives, and enables us to see the ways in which actual and threatened violence structures daily social interactions.⁶⁴

I include as much of my primary research as possible in the following chapters. Where appropriate, I have incorporated larger sections of interview material to allow the reader to “hear” the voices of the female soldiers and other interviewees. In keeping with this approach, I chose not to edit and disaggregate all the longer quotations into precise thematic topics. Rather than splicing and cutting and pasting each section of quotation to serve the purposes of the chapter, some longer quotations have been left in full and

therefore seem less strictly cohesive, including references to multiple themes or weaving together several topics.

In the end, this book represents one of the few analyses of the Sierra Leone conflict that takes gender seriously and places the lives and the stories of women at the forefront. Highlighting women's experiences of Sierra Leone's war and its "post-conflict" reconstruction creates an alternative narrative of these periods and challenges dominant war myths. Shifting the focus to gender and women's experiences of war and peace highlights aspects of the conflict and post-armed conflict period—including wartime rapes, marriage, female perpetrators, training programs for soldiers, "war babies"—that are often either left out or included as minor references in warfare literature. Furthermore, many analyses of the civil war in Sierra Leone—as well as other conflicts—tend to focus exclusively either on the war (as a time of insecurity) or on the post-conflict period (as a time of reconstruction and peace building). This book reveals cracks in this perceived line between "conflict" and "post-conflict" and argues that it is only by listening to, and taking seriously, the experiences of individuals during war and its aftermath that the links between the domestic, "the mundane," the family, sex, and warfare politics can be revealed.