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Claremont McKenna College

**“Insignificant Exceptions”: Confronting Sexism in Armed Conflict through  
Gender-aware Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration**

submitted to  
Professor Jennifer Taw

by  
Payson Ruhl

for  
Senior Thesis  
Fall 2018 and Spring 2019  
April 29, 2019



## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the intersection between sex, gender, and armed conflict through an analysis of the female combatant experience. It combines anecdotal evidence and quantitative data from various armed conflicts within the past 50 years to reveal how sexism and gendered conceptions of war influence all aspects of the experience of women and girl combatants. Recognizing sexism as a major player in the recruitment, wartime treatment, demobilization, and reintegration of women and girl combatants, it identifies disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs as intervention points where gender-aware planning and implementation can improve outcomes for female combatants in the transition to peace.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to devote this page to expressing my gratitude to all who made this thesis possible.

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## Introduction

*Warfare is, nevertheless, the one human activity from which women, with the most insignificant exceptions, have always and everywhere stood apart ... If warfare is as old as history and as universal as mankind, we must now enter the supremely important limitation that it is an entirely masculine activity.*<sup>1</sup>

The author of this quote, the late John Keegan, was “widely considered to be the pre-eminent military historian of his era.”<sup>2</sup> He held a lecturing position at the Royal Military Academy in England for 25 years, was awarded a visiting fellowship by Princeton University, and authored 20 books on warfare.<sup>3</sup> Keegan’s quote exemplifies how dominant voices in the field of war and conflict studies espouse gender-based expectations about war that create and maintain difficult situations for female combatants during and after conflict. Sexism and gendered conceptions about the relationship between women and girls and political violence imbues nearly all elements of a female combatant’s experiences, from the onset of armed conflict, through the duration of the conflict, and into peacetime. Sexism creates the conditions under which women and girls are recruited into non-state armed groups (NSAGs), determines the roles they hold while in non-state armed groups, is responsible for the sexual violence they endure during war, explains their virtual absence in peace negotiations, contributes to their exclusion from disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs (DDR), presents challenges for

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<sup>1</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 76.

<sup>2</sup> David Binder, “John Keegan, Historian Who Put a Face on War, Dies at 78,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/03/books/sir-john-keegan-historian-who-put-a-face-on-war-dies-at-78.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



them while in DDR programs, and in part, determines their outcomes in the peace process.

Keegan's "insignificant exceptions" include the uncountable number of women and girls that have taken up arms or supported those who have taken up arms in conflicts around the world. They are Las Soldaderas, the female soldiers of the Mexican Revolution whose contributions led to greater gender equality in Mexico. They are YPJ, the all-female battalion of YPG that played a crucial role in rescuing and protecting thousands of Yazidis trapped on Mount Sinjar in 2014 and liberating Kobanî in 2015.<sup>4</sup> They are the women and girls who not only deal with bullets and bombs but also rampant sexism and abuse.

This paper describes in detail how sexism influences the experience of female combatants in non-state armed groups. The first half of the paper examines how sexism affects female combatants in non-state armed groups during wartime. It presents feminist theories on the relationship between women, girls, and political violence, analyzes the patterns of women and girl's recruitment and participation into non-state armed groups, and describes the experiences of female combatants in armed groups. The second half of the paper describes how sexism pervades the peace process and disadvantages female combatants relative to their male counterparts. It outlines the concept of DDR, describes the difficulties faced by female combatants during the DDR process, and presents suggestions for creating gender-aware DDR programs.

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<sup>4</sup> The Kurdish Project, "YPJ: Women's Protection Units," The Kurdish Project, n.d., <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-women/ypj/>; Marilyn La Jeunesse, "The Real History of Las Soldaderas, the Women Who Made the Mexican Revolution Possible," *Teen Vogue*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-real-history-of-las-soldaderas>.

## Chapter I: Women, Girls, and Conflict: Dominant Feminist Theories

There are two camps of feminist theories that attempt to explain women's participation (or lack thereof) in political violence. The theories in each camp are informed by widely-held, gendered perceptions of women and violence, unified into a theory, and then used to reinforce such perceptions. These perceptions and assumptions in turn affect how female participants in political violence, namely female combatants, are treated by their male counterparts, their local communities, and the international community.

Egalitarian and emancipatory theories posit that in order for women to be liberated within peacetime society, they must fight equally with their male counterparts on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup> Judith Hicks Stiehm, a western feminist that within this camp, advocates for women's assumption of the role of protector and rejection of the role as the helpless or protected.<sup>6</sup> Liberal western feminists believe that women can only gain equal rights with men if they fulfill civic duties equal to men, namely the duty to serve in armed forces. The theory, therefore, serves as both a normative judgment on why women should engage in political violence and a positive statement explaining why women who have taken up arms have made that choice. In opposition to such theories is the argument that, as peace activist April Carter writes, because the military is a macho enterprise with a tradition of "despis[ing] effeminacy (e.g. by using the word "ladies" and "girls" as slurs to motivate soldiers in training) and because "women in war traditionally serve as victims

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<sup>5</sup> Darius M. Rejali, "After Feminist Analyses of Bosnian Violence," in *The Women and War Reader*, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer E. Turpin (New York; London: New York University Press, 1998), 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

and appendages to men,” true liberation for all women and girls cannot be accomplished through promoting gender equality on the battlefield.<sup>7</sup> Carter concedes that individual female combatants might enjoy marginal gains during wartime, such as the ability to exercise leadership over a unit, but these opportunities are almost always offset by the abuse female combatants suffer at the hands of both the enemy and their fellow soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

The second dominant feminist theory of women (and girls) and war is feminist pacifist theory. This theory asserts that women have a natural tendency toward peace and away from violence and militarism because of their biological and sociocultural roles in “creating and nurturing life.”<sup>9</sup> Women should, therefore, participate in peacebuilding and not in political violence. Feminist pacifist theory underpinned women’s anti-war movements throughout the 20th century and continues to underlie the work of women’s groups opposing militarism in the 21st century. One such group is Code Pink: Women for Peace whose mission “to end U.S. wars and militarism, support peace and human rights initiatives, and redirect our tax dollars into healthcare, education, green jobs and other life-affirming programs” clearly embodies feminist pacifist theory.<sup>10</sup> This theory, too, is not without opposition. First, the biological determinism in which feminist pacifist theory is based fails to account for the influence of culture and upbringing on an individual’s propensity for violence.<sup>11</sup> Second, the theory over-applies certain features of motherhood, such as the desire to protect one’s children, to women’s attitudes toward political violence.<sup>12</sup> Just because a woman wants to protect her own children does not mean she

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<sup>7</sup> Consider, for example, the pervasive sexism in the United States military; *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; CODEPINK, “What Is Codepink,” Codepink, 2017, <https://www.codepink.org/about>.

<sup>11</sup> Rejali, “After Feminist Analyses of Bosnian Violence,” 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

necessarily wants to protect the world's children by advocating world peace. Third, as explained by feminist scholars including Jean Bethke Elshtain, feminist pacifist theory fails to consider the constraints that influence women's decision-making during war. In a world fraught with near-constant conflict, women might at times be required to participate in political violence to fulfill their roles as citizens even if, as feminist pacifist theory argues, violence is incompatible with their maternal instincts and peaceful nature.<sup>13</sup>

The normative elements of feminist pacifist theory give way to narratives that attempt to explain why women who choose to engage in political violence do so. Operating on the biologically deterministic assumption that women are peaceful, nurturing, maternal creatures, these narratives characterize female participants in political violence as "failed" members of society and "failed" women.<sup>14</sup> Sjoberg and Gentry elucidate three of the dominant narratives around violent women: the "mother," "monster," and "whore" narratives. According to the first narrative, violent women are moved to violence by "a need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men." They are the embodiment of "motherhood gone awry."<sup>15</sup> Per the second narrative, a violent woman is "insane, in denial of [her] femininity, [and] no longer woman or human."<sup>16</sup> A narrative particularly damaging to the understanding of women's agency in war, the "monster" narrative rejects any notion that women engaged in violence are rational or assume culpability for their choices. Lastly, the "whore"

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> BBMH, Introduction, paragraph 5

<sup>15</sup> Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking About Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2015), introduction, paragraph 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

narrative blames women's violence on "the evils of female sexuality at its most intense or its most vulnerable." Violent women are described as having an "extreme and brutal sexuality," being depraved and "wrought from the inability to please men," or used as "men's sexual pawns and possessions."<sup>17</sup>

While both theories have their merits, they also contribute to an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of women's choices and experiences during war. Egalitarian theories recognize that the choice of some women to participate in political violence is a result of rational behavior motivated by ideology, in particular, a desire for liberation, and not hypersexuality or "motherhood gone awry" as narratives informed by feminist pacifist theory would suggest. Yet, these theories largely ignore the sexism and abuse female participants in political violence must face. On the other hand, feminist pacifist theory acknowledges the crucial role women play in peacebuilding but classifies women who are engaged in violence as failed women. As discussed previously, both theories fuel assumptions about the role of women and girls during war. They affect noncombatants' understanding of female combatants' decision-making processes, experiences, and challenges in a way that has significant consequences for female combatants as they disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate into their communities.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter II: Recruitment of Women and Girls in Non-state Armed Groups

### Identifying the Female Combatant

In the literature on conflict, many different terms, some more biased than others, are used to describe women and girls in armed groups. For the purpose of this analysis, the term “female combatant” refers to any individual who is biologically female and is a member of a non-state armed group.<sup>18</sup> As defined by scholar Dyan Mazurana, a non-state armed group is an “organized non-state [group] that has taken up arms to challenge the state or another non-state armed group over control—or the state’s or another non-state armed groups’ attempt to hold a monopoly of control—of political, economic, natural, territorial, and/or human resources.”<sup>19</sup>

Women and girls in non-state armed groups do not have to be involved in combat activities to be considered “female combatants.” Most women and girls in non-state armed groups who hold support roles as spies, porters, cooks, messengers, sex slaves, mine-clearers, administrators or other non-combat roles, or are dependents of members of non-state armed groups, are also considered “combatants” per this definition. Whereas other analyses in the field make the distinction between female fighters and women associated with non-state armed groups (WAAGs), this analysis does not. The reason is that even women and girls in non-state armed groups who never engage in direct combat

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<sup>18</sup> Trans-women face another array of challenges and experiences during wartime, so it is not appropriate to group them with the experiences of cisgender women and girls in wartime without devoting sufficient analysis to their unique experiences and the role of intersectionality on those experiences.

<sup>19</sup> Dyan Mazurana, “Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups,” in *Women and Wars*, ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 147.

are often treated by their communities as belligerents, a label that has significant implications for reintegration.<sup>20</sup>

The term “female combatant” refers to female combatants of all ages because the data on female combatants are typically not disaggregated by age. When necessary (and when possible), the terms “woman combatant” or “girl combatant” will be used to distinguish between female combatants over the age of 18 and those under the age of 18, respectively.

Lastly, “combatants” are considered “ex-combatants” once they have made the decision to demobilize. “Ex-combatants” or “former combatants” include those who have spontaneously demobilized or reintegrated, those who are preparing to enter a DDR program, those entered in a DDR program, and those who have completed a DDR program. When used in this analysis, the term also applies to anyone who currently holds civilian status but was once a combatant. Importantly, the use of the term “ex-combatant” in this context does not imply that all individuals who were once combatants can never reclaim civilian status. Instead of serving to designate someone as a combatant permanently, the term is used to acknowledge an individual’s past participation in a non-state armed group and recognize the unique experiences they might have had or continue to have because of this personal history.

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<sup>20</sup> Katrin Planta, “The ‘X’ Factor: Reintegrating Female Combatants,” PeaceWomen, October 12, 2010, <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/89998>.

## Historical Participation of Female Combatants

Within the past fifty years, female combatants have been involved in armed conflicts in at least 59 countries: 21 in Africa, in the Americas, 13 in Asia, 8 in Europe, and 8 in the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> In many of these conflicts, female combatants make up significant proportions of the non-state armed groups involved. Female combatants made up nearly 20 percent of the Maoist insurgent fighting force (CPN-M) in Nepal, 25 percent of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, approximately 30 percent of the revolutionary forces in Nicaragua, Eritrea, and Sri Lanka, and up to 50 percent of some militias in the Lebanese Civil War.<sup>22</sup> One scholar pair, Reed Wood and Jakana Thomas, found that women constituted between zero percent and 20-plus percent of the 211” rebel organizations” they analyzed.<sup>23</sup> The researchers found that women were members of non-state armed groups on every continent except for Australia and

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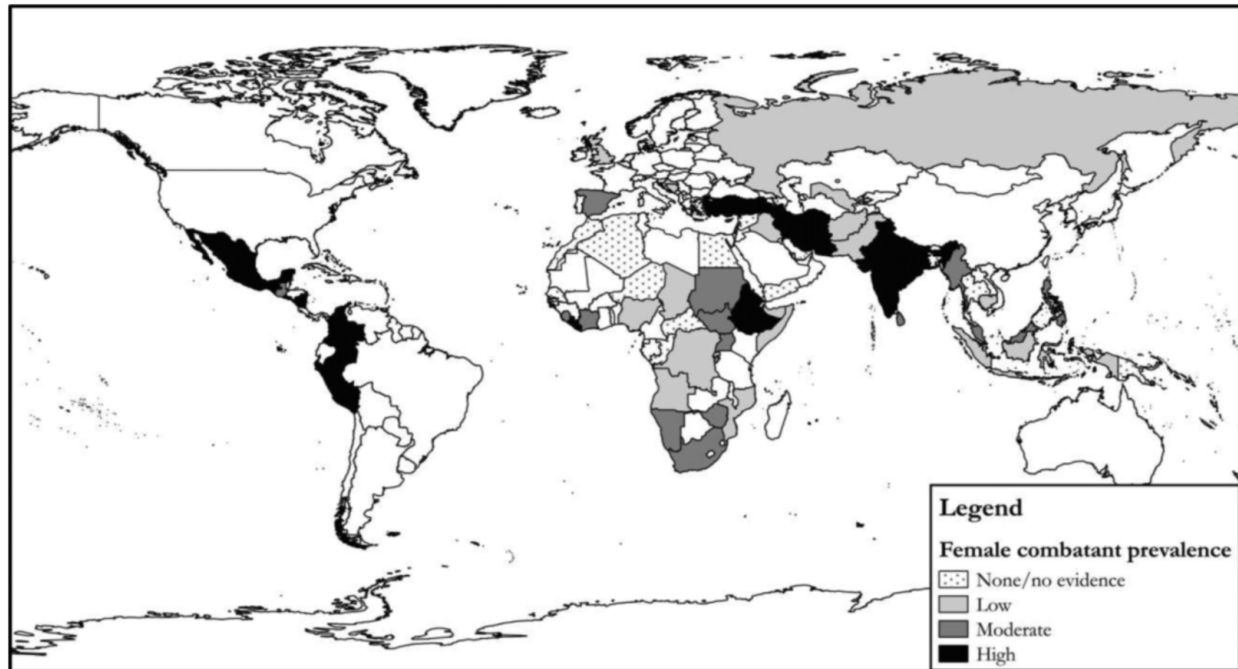
<sup>21</sup> See Appendix A for the complete list of countries. Dyan Mazurana, “Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups,” 149.

<sup>22</sup> Bishnu Raj Upreti and Sharmila Shivakoti, “The Struggle of Female Ex-Combatants in Nepal,” *Peace Review* 30, no. 1 (February 12, 2018), 72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1419937>; Charlotte Lindsey, “Women Facing War” (International Committee of the Red Cross, October 2001), 23 [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0798\\_women\\_facing\\_war.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0798_women_facing_war.pdf); Wenche Hauge, “Group Identity—a Neglected Asset: Determinants of Social and Political Participation among Female Ex-Fighters in Guatemala: Analysis,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 3 (September 2, 2008), 297, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800802323316> from Maxine Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua,” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177922>; Amrit Wilson, *The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1991); D Rajasingham-Senanayake, *Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict*, 2001; Anuradha K. Rajivan and Ruwanthi Senarathne, “Women in Armed Conflicts: Inclusion and Exclusion” (United Nations Development Programme, 2011 2010), 4 [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/human\\_development/RBAP-APHDR-TBP\\_2010\\_11.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/human_development/RBAP-APHDR-TBP_2010_11.pdf); Lynn Bennett and Ian Bannon, “Social Change in Conflict-Affected Areas of Nepal,” Social Development Notes (Washington, DC: The World Bank, January 2004); Jennifer Philippa Eggert, “Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, November 5, 2018, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1529353>.

<sup>23</sup> The authors analyzed 211 rebel organizations operating between 1979 and 2009; Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women’s Participation in Violent Rebellion,” *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 37–38.



Antarctica and that female combatants were most prevalent in conflicts in Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Liberia, Mexico, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Turkey.



Source: Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline,” 39.

Another researcher, Alexis Henshaw, analyzed female participation in a random sample of 72 non-state armed groups active for at least two consecutive years from 1990 to 2008.<sup>24</sup> She found that female combatants were present in 60 percent of the non-state armed groups she analyzed.

### **Current Participation of Female Combatants**

Precise data on where and to what extent women are currently active in non-state armed groups is difficult if not impossible to find due to the secretive nature of these

<sup>24</sup> Alexis Leanna Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1007729>.

groups while they are active. To generate approximations of these numbers, scholars must aggregate data from journalistic accounts, academic studies, first-hand accounts, and field studies and reports.<sup>25</sup> Current estimates of female participation in non-state armed groups reveal women and girls typically constitute an estimated one-tenth to one-third of each group.<sup>26</sup> Assuming that levels of female participation have remained relatively stable over the past few decades, this seems like a reasonable estimate.

Even without exact numbers for non-state armed groups, it can be written with certainty that the average proportion of women and girls in non-state armed groups is considerably larger than that of national armies in which female soldiers constitute only about three percent of soldiers worldwide.<sup>27</sup> There are some exceptions to this trend. For instance, one-quarter of Iraqi and Kuwaiti fighters in the First Gulf War were female, and as of mid-2018, 16 percent of enlisted servicemembers and 18 percent of officers in the United States Army are women.<sup>28</sup>

### **Female-Only Units**

Although in most cases, female combatants make up significantly smaller proportions of non-state armed groups than male combatants, some armed groups of the past and present have had female-only units. The Women's Artillery Commandos (WAC) was a female unit within the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) group during the Liberian Civil War.<sup>29</sup> The aforementioned YPJ, an acronym which when translated means "Women's

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43-44; Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," 37.

<sup>26</sup> Rajivan and Senarathne. "Women in Armed Conflicts: Inclusion and Exclusion," 4 from Tsjeard Bouta, Georg Frerks, and Ian Bannon, *Gender, Conflict, and Development* (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2005), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart: Crimes Against Women in Times of Conflict* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2004), 45.

<sup>28</sup> George M. Reynolds and Amanda Shendruk, "Demographics of the U.S. Military," Council on Foreign Relations, April 24, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military>.

<sup>29</sup> Irma Specht and Crisis Response and Reconstruction, "Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia" (International Labour Office Geneva, June 1, 2006), 23, [https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS\\_116435/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS_116435/lang--en/index.htm).

Protection Units,” is a YPG brigade comprised of only female combatants.<sup>30</sup>

## Factors Behind Female Participation

Recall that some elements of feminist pacifist theory deny that women and girls who take up arms do so as a result of rational behavior to pursue ideological aims. In the field of conflict studies, there is a sticky narrative that insists women choose to join armed groups for personal reasons while men choose to join armed groups for political and ideological reasons.<sup>31</sup> However, most scholars who specialize in female political violence and thus are intimately familiar with women and girl’s reasons for joining armed groups say that both male and female combatants are motivated to join armed groups by a mixture of political, ideological and personal (that is to say, everything other than political or ideological) reasons.<sup>32</sup> These personal reasons can be further broken down

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<sup>30</sup> The Kurdish Project, “YPJ: Women’s Protection Units.”

<sup>31</sup> Eggert, “Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations,” 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. from Miranda H. Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict*, Contemporary Security Studies (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 145; Anat Berko and Edna Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (May 24, 2007): 511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701329550>; Laurent Gayer, “‘Princesses’ Among the ‘Lions’: The Militant Careers of Sikh Female Fighters,” *Sikh Formations* 8, no. 1 (April 2, 2012): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2012.671031>; Cindy D. Ness, “Introduction,” in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 5-6; Lindsey A. O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (December 2, 2009): 684 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903369084>; Swati Parashar, *Women and Militant Wars: The Politics of Injury*, 1st ed., War, Politics, and Experience (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 128; Parvati, “Women in the People’s War in Nepal,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 50 (December 2005): 5235, <https://www-jstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/stable/4417513>; Mallarika Sinha Roy, “Rethinking Female Militancy in Postcolonial Bengal,” *Feminist Review*, no. 101 (2012): 126, <https://www-jstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/stable/41495236>; Tazreena Sajjad, “Women Guerillas: Marching Toward True Freedom?,” *Agenda* 18, no. 59 (January 1, 2004): 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2004.9674507>; Seema Shekhawat, “Engendering Armed Militancy in Kashmir: Women as Perpetrators of Violence,” in *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, ed. Yvan Guichaoua (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 133, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230348318\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230348318_7); Katharina Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda’s Women,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (March 22, 2007): 399, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701258585>.

into strategic and survival-based reasons as well as social reasons. The table below presents an array of common motivations for joining non-state armed groups organized into three flexible categories. Some motivations might fit into more than one category.

**Table 1: Common Motivations for Joining Non-state Armed Groups**

<b>Political &amp; Ideological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Egalitarianism</li> <li>● Religiosity</li> <li>● Nationalism</li> <li>● Liberation</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic &amp; Survival-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Financial stability</li> <li>● Personal safety (especially protection from sexual and domestic violence)</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revenge</li> <li>● Personal networks</li> <li>● Community values</li> </ul>

While as mentioned before, both men and women are motivated by many of the same factors, there are certain factors that female combatants cite more often than male combatants as being the primary motivating factor behind their decision to join an armed group. As scholar Jennifer Phillipa Eggert notes, the “two most frequently cited gender-specific reasons are (1) personal experience or fear of sexual violence and (2) participation as a strategy to escape a predestined life with few prospects for equality and self-determination.”<sup>33</sup> The existence of gender-specific reasons for joining armed groups

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<sup>33</sup> Eggert, “Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations,” 5.

demonstrates that sexism manifested as sexual violence and as sex-based oppression creates conditions that influence female recruitment into non-state armed groups.

### **Ideological Motivations**

Studies suggest that there is a correlation between female participation in a non-state armed group and the non-state armed group's ideology. This finding is contrary to what feminist pacifists would say and in agreement with what feminist egalitarians would say.<sup>34</sup> The aforementioned Wood and Thomas study found that women are more likely to join non-state armed groups that espouse ideology that “challenge(s) traditional social hierarchies,” such as leftist and Marxist-oriented ideologies. They are less likely to join non-state armed groups that espouse ideology that “protect(s) or re-establish(es) these hierarchies,” such as Islamism.<sup>35</sup> The researchers also found data to suggest that religiosity and female participation in non-state armed groups is negatively correlated and found that groups that espouse nationalistic ideologies are no more likely or less likely to attract female participation.<sup>36</sup> In her analysis, Alexis Henshaw found “a lack of support for the idea that women are more likely to join non-state armed groups that support greater rights for women” but found evidence of higher female participation in non-state armed groups with a redistributive philosophy (e.g. Marxist groups).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline,” 31; Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008,” 63.

<sup>35</sup> Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion” 34; Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion,” 41.

<sup>36</sup> Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion,” 42-43.

<sup>37</sup> Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, Routledge Studies in Gender and Global Politics (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 92-93.

Interviews across conflicts and geographies corroborate the findings of the two scholars. Today, women are seen fighting on behalf of ideology in Chechnya, Iraq, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey, among others.<sup>38</sup> In Nepal, interviews with ex-combatants in the Maoist insurgency (CPN-M) reveal that women and girls were drawn to the group's egalitarian messaging. CPN-M ex-combatant Sabitra Magar said that she joined the group at the age of 15 because she was "attracted by the slogan of the Maoist about the liberation of minorities and women."<sup>39</sup> Another CPN-M combatant, Ramita Bhandari, said she joined the group to "end discrimination in society." Female combatants in Colombia and El Salvador joined armed groups out of a desire to impact society.<sup>40</sup> Maria Eugenia Vazquez Perdomo, an ex-combatant with M-19 in Colombia, said she joined the group for social justice reasons.<sup>41</sup> Ex-combatants of the revolutionary forces in El Salvador said they joined because of the desire for "contact with a social climate that encouraged involvement and provided a sense of immediate opportunity to impact society for the better."<sup>42</sup>

Women and girls also fight for national liberation and freedom from government oppression. Researchers Speckhard and Akhmedova found among female Chechen fighters "strong evidence of self-recruitment and strong willingness to martyr oneself on

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<sup>38</sup> Dyan Mazurana, "Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," 149.

<sup>39</sup> Upreti and Shivakoti, "The Struggle of Female Ex-Combatants in Nepal," 81.

<sup>40</sup> Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations," 11.

<sup>41</sup> María Estrada-Fuentes, "Affective Labors: Love, Care, Solidarity in the Social Reintegration of Female Ex-Combatants in Colombia," *Lateral* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2016), n.p., <https://doi.org/10.25158/L5.2.10>.

<sup>42</sup> Camille Pampell Conaway and Salomé Martínez, *Adding Value: Women's Contributions to Reintegration and Reconstruction in El Salvador* (Washington, DC; Cambridge, MA: Women Waging Peace Policy Commission, Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004), 11-12  
<https://atria.nl/epublications/2004/AddingValueWomensContributions.pdf> from Norma Vázquez, Cristina Ibáñez, and Clara Murguialday Martínez, *Mujeres-montaña : vivencias de guerrilleras y colaboradoras del FMLN [Mountain-Women: Experiences of Female Guerrillas and Collaborators]* (Madrid: Horas y Horas, 1996), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb399591924>.

behalf of one's country and independence of one's country and independence from Russia."<sup>43</sup> Fanni Katora, who joined a non-state armed group in Democratic Republic of Congo when she was 13 years old, said that "[her] goal was to change the regime and bring liberation for the Congo."<sup>44</sup> Scholars who examined female participation in the Lebanese Civil War found that one of the two most common motivations for joining the war effort was political: "to combat the injustice [the combatants] felt the war created."<sup>45</sup>

While evidence from quantitative analyses and anecdotal accounts reveal that politics and ideology are motivating factors behind women and girls' decisions to join armed groups, politics and ideology do not always explain female participation in non-state armed groups even when they appear to do so. Marxist groups in Colombia have relatively high female participation: women are estimated to constitute between 20 to 30 percent of the fighting force in the FARC, for instance.<sup>46</sup> Though it might seem that women join the FARC primarily because of the egalitarian ideology it espouses, personal stories from *Farianas* (female guerrilla fighters), as well as academic research on female defectors from Colombian rebel groups, reveal that political and ideological motivations are typically not a woman or girl's primary reason for joining these Marxist groups.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gentry and Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 130.

<sup>44</sup> Allison Shelley, "'We Are Fighters, Too:' Women of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Washington Post*, March 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/amp-stories/the-female-soldiers-of-congo-wars/?noredirect=on>.

<sup>45</sup> Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations," 18.

<sup>46</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Francy Carranza Franco, "Organizing Women For Combat: The Experience of the FARC in the Colombian War," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17, no. 4 (October 2017): 770, <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12238>.

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Trisko Darden, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekely, *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars* (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb1htcb> from Yorleny Duque, "La Violencia Me Hizo Guerrillera [Violence Made Me a Guerrilla]," *Mujer Fariana* [Fariana Woman], March 18, 2017, <http://www.mujerfariana.org/vision/798-la-violencia-me-hizo-guerrillera.html>; "La Crónica de Lizeth, Escrita Por Ella Misma [The Chronicle of Lizeth, Written Herself]," *Mujer Fariana*

One study found that only 28 percent of female defectors from non-state armed groups in Colombia from 2002 to 2004 joined the groups based on political or ideological motivations.<sup>48</sup> It is clear then that the ideology of a non-state armed group influences female participation in the group but also that ideology is not the only reason (or even the primary reason) women and girls join armed groups.

### **Strategic and Survival-based Motivations**

While both men and women join non-state armed groups to ensure their safety, survival, and well-being in the insecure environment that is a conflict zone, wartime insecurity is exacerbated for women and girls by the hegemonic masculinity—defined as “norms and institutions that seek to maintain men’s authority over women”—that creates the sexist structures of peacetime which prove destructive to women in wartime.<sup>49</sup> In certain societies, women and girls are constrained by sexist norms that prevent them from working, or if they are allowed to work, from earning the same pay as men.<sup>50</sup> These women and girls rely on male guardians such as husbands, brothers, and fathers to

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[Fariana Woman], November 11, 2013, <http://www.mujerfariana.org/vision/94-la-cronica-de-lizeth-escritapor-ella-misma.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely, *Insurgent Women*, 64 from Luz María Londoño F. and Yoana Fernanda Nieto V., *Mujeres No Contadas: Procesos de Desmovilización y Retorno a la Vida Civil de Mujeres Excombatientes en Colombia, 1990-2003 [Uncounted Women: Processes of Demobilization and Return to Civilian Life of Ex-Combat Women in Colombia, 1990-2003]*, La Carreta Social (Medellín: La Carreta, 2006), 114–16.

<sup>49</sup> Miranda Alison, “Wartime Sexual Violence: Women’s Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity,” *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 01 (January 2007): 75–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210507007310> from John Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” in Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>50</sup> Stéphanie Thomson, “18 Countries Where Women Need Their Husband’s Permission to Work,” World Economic Forum, November 10, 2015, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/11/18-countries-where-women-need-their-husbands-permission-to-get-a-job/>; World Economic Forum, “The Global Gender Gap Report 2018,” Insight Report (Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2018), [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf).



provide for their basic needs. When their male guardians flee, are killed, or join non-state armed groups during wartime, the women and girls who depend on them are left financially insecure.

Interviews with female ex-combatants from various armed groups and geographies demonstrate the role of financial need in shaping a woman or girl's decision to join a non-state armed group. In Colombia, both Diana and Alejandra, ex-combatants of the FARC and ELN respectively, joined their groups because they were promised financial assistance and education upon joining.<sup>51</sup> Neither the FARC nor the ELN delivered on their promises, but by the time the women realized the promises were empty promises, they were prohibited from leaving the groups. A young female ex-combatant interviewed in Liberia recalls losing everything to the civil war and having no other choice but to join a non-state armed group. She explains: [the combatants] burned the house, everything was gone, nothing was there anymore. My parents are dead nobody to take care of us anymore. So I had to provide for my younger ones. So I decided at that time, because the only way to help yourself, or to get food for your family is to be a soldier. So I was having no choice."<sup>52</sup> Another female ex-combatant from Democratic Republic of Congo, Julienne Nsimire, said she joined a Mai-Mai militia because she could not find work.<sup>53</sup>

Aside from financial considerations, men and women also join non-state armed groups for protection from violence, but the type of violence that drives women to join

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<sup>51</sup> María Estrada-Fuentes, "Affective Labors," n.p. [electronic journal].

<sup>52</sup> Specht and Crisis Response and Reconstruction, "Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia," 35.

<sup>53</sup> Shelley, "'We Are Fighters, Too:'"

non-state armed groups is different from that which motivates men. Women and girls are typically driven to participate in armed groups as a means through which to escape and protect themselves against sexual and gender-based violence, especially domestic violence and sexual violence.<sup>54</sup> In Colombia, relief from domestic violence (including child abuse) is a common factor in motivating women and girls to join non-state armed groups. One pair of researchers that analyzed demobilization patterns within Colombian armed groups estimates that “half of all demobilized women in their study experienced abuse at home.”<sup>55</sup> Another study found that “women [were] twice as likely as men to identify problems in the home as a factor in their decision to join a non-state armed group.”<sup>56</sup> Anecdotally, Jessica, a female ex-combatant with the FARC explained: “My parents are divorced, and my mother has another husband. I left home because I had problems with him. He tried to take advantage of me. My mother didn't believe me when I told her about it.”<sup>57</sup> In an interview in Democratic Republic of Congo, female ex-combatant Janine Bisimwa said she “left an abusive spouse to join one of the Mai-Mai groups that brought conflict to her village.” Janine “wasn't concerned by their ideology or politics.” She believed the “violence that [she] went through with [her] husband was

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<sup>54</sup> Gentry and Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 130.

<sup>55</sup> Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely, *Insurgent Women*, 65 from Saridalia Giraldo, “Demobilized Women Combatants: Lessons from Colombia” (February 3, 2012), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/08z6h9qk#author>; Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, “‘Like Going to a Fiesta’ – the Role of Female Fighters in Colombia’s FARC-EP,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (January 26, 2009): 609–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310802462547>; Human Rights Watch (Organization) and Sebastian Brett, eds., *You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/index.htm>; Londoño F. and Nieto V., *Mujeres No Contadas*.

<sup>56</sup> Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely, *Insurgent Women*, 65 from Londoño F. and Nieto V., *Mujeres No Contadas*, 116.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/10.htm>

much harder,” saying that “even if [she] was beaten but eating [while in the non-state armed group], [she] went to sleep well fed.”<sup>58</sup>

As mentioned previously, protection from sexual violence is one of two “most frequently cited gender-specific reasons” women and girls join non-state armed groups.<sup>59</sup> While the prevalence of wartime rape varies by conflict, both state and non-state forces in armed conflict use rape as a strategic tool for accomplishing military and political objectives, “reasserting heteromascularity” among fighters, and bonding fighters.<sup>60</sup> One tactic women and girls in conflict zones use to defend themselves against wartime rape is to “marry” or otherwise align themselves with a male combatant.<sup>61</sup> While it might seem counterintuitive to join an armed group for protection against the violence perpetrated by armed groups, “bush marriages” as these informal arrangements are sometimes called, afford women and girls “a degree of protection from sexual harassment.”<sup>62</sup> While “married,” they are not subject to gang rape or rape by multiple men over the course of the conflict. However, they are typically still raped by the male combatants they “marry.”<sup>63</sup>

Notably, some men and boys cite protection against sexual violence as reasons for joining non-state armed groups. The difference between their motivations and the motivations of women and girls is that, for the most part, instead of joining the groups to

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<sup>58</sup> Shelley, “We Are Fighters, Too”

<sup>59</sup> Eggert, “Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations,” 5.

<sup>60</sup> Dorothy Q. Thomas and Regan E. Ralph, “Rape in War: Challenging the Tradition of Impunity,” *SAIS Review*, 1994, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/women/docs/rapeinwar.htm>; Alison, “Wartime Sexual Violence,” 77.

<sup>61</sup> Specht and Crisis Response and Reconstruction, “Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia,” 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Denov and MacLure, “Engaging the Voices of Girls in the Aftermath of Sierra Leone’s Conflict,” 77.

protect themselves against sexual violence, men and boys join armed groups to protect their female family members from sexual violence.<sup>64</sup>

### **Social Motivations**

Revenge, community values, and personal networks are additional motivating factors for men and women who choose to join non-state armed groups. Motivated by the desire to retaliate against wrongs done against them, some female Chechen fighters took up arms as a way to avenge the murders of their family members.<sup>65</sup> Sima Karki fought with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Nepal out of a desire to get revenge against the Maoists:

Maoists came to our home and asked for food and shelter. My mother and father were compelled to provide food at midnight. The next day the army came and tortured to my parents. I was 14 years [old] when I saw them torture my innocent parents. I was angry with the army's behavior and joined the insurgency to take revenge against the army's brutality.<sup>66</sup>

Anecdotal evidence reveals that some women and girl combatants take up arms to avenge sexual violence perpetrated against themselves or their loved ones. According to the female commander of the Widow's Battalion of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia, most women and girls joined the group to exact revenge on the Indonesian

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<sup>64</sup> Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc., 2004), 95, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/---ifp\\_crisis/documents/publication/wcms\\_116562.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---ifp_crisis/documents/publication/wcms_116562.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Khapta Akhmedova and Anne Speckhard, "Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists" in "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?," ed. Yoram Schweitzer (Tel Aviv, Israel: Jaffe Center Publication, 2006), 9, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237362743\\_Black\\_Widows\\_The\\_Chechen\\_Female\\_Suicide\\_Terrorists](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237362743_Black_Widows_The_Chechen_Female_Suicide_Terrorists).

<sup>66</sup> Upreti and Shivakoti, "The Struggle of Female Ex-Combatants in Nepal," 81.

military whose soldiers had raped them.<sup>67</sup> A female ex-combatant with the FARC-EP joined the group after being raped by a relative: “When I was twelve, a cousin raped me. I was so mad, I wanted vengeance. I wanted to hurt everyone who had hurt me.”<sup>68</sup> In Liberia, a female ex-combatant with the LURD recalled:

[The combatants] went from door to door to search for civilians. We could hear them in the street. When they came to our house they kicked the door. We were hiding ourselves under the bed. They killed my parents and they raped me. When I came to myself in the hospital I knew within myself I had to fight these men who were doing this to us. The raping had to be stopped, also for all the other women.<sup>69</sup>

Some women and girls who were raped during wartime joined armed groups not out of revenge, but out of necessity after being rejected by their community. Judith Amani, a female ex-combatant in Democratic Republic of Congo, had to join a Mai-Mai militia after she was raped by soldiers (in the group she eventually joined) and then rejected by her village.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to seeking revenge, men and women alike are motivated to join armed groups through contact and encouragement from personal networks. Both women and men gained access to Lebanese militias in the Lebanese Civil War through their personal networks, namely through a male relative that was already involved in the fighting. Many

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<sup>67</sup> Dyan Mazurana, “Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups,” 150.

<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch (Organization) and Brett, *You’ll Learn Not to Cry*, [https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/10.htm#\\_Toc34](https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/10.htm#_Toc34).

<sup>69</sup> Specht and Crisis Response and Reconstruction, “Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia,” 33.

<sup>70</sup> Shelley, “‘We Are Fighters, Too’: Women of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

female combatants in Liberia became involved in non-state armed groups through their combatant boyfriends.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from data and anecdotes that a woman or girl's decision to join a non-state armed group is a result of careful calculation and rational decision-making. Female combatants are not "insane" or "in denial of their femininity" as the "monster" narrative argues. Rather, they are astutely navigating their insecure environments to ensure relative safety and security for themselves and, for women and girls who join armed groups for protection against sexual violence, are actually hyper-aware of their femininity and the way it is exploited in wartime. Additionally, the fact that men and women share several of the same reasons for joining armed groups demonstrates that both are stakeholders in conflict and have some similar wartime experiences.

### **Voluntary Participation**

While the recruitment pathways listed above are classified as "voluntary participation" in non-state armed groups, many women and girls make the decision to join a non-state armed group under severely constrained circumstances that often stem from sexist institutions or norms. Consider Janine Bisimwa, who chose to join a Mai-Mai militia to escape abuse from her husband, or Judith Amani, who joined a Mai-Mai militia when her village rejected her after she was raped by combatants. Consider also the female ex-combatant in Liberia who lost her parents and her house to the war and chose to join a non-state armed group to survive. In these cases, female combatants' participation in non-state armed groups would be more accurately described as "not-forced participation" or "not abduction" instead of "voluntary participation."

### **Forced Participation**

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<sup>71</sup> Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations," 11; Specht and Crisis Response and Reconstruction, "Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia," 39.

Forced participation, commonly referred to as abduction, into non-state armed groups is a reality for many individuals in regions affected by conflict regardless of their biological sex.<sup>72</sup> While it is difficult to determine precisely how many individuals are forcibly recruited into armed groups worldwide, child soldier recruitment statistics can provide some insight into the matter. A 2017 Secretary-General report on children and armed conflict found that 56 non-state armed groups were currently recruit child soldiers.<sup>73</sup> The data likely underrepresents the actual presence of child soldiers in non-state armed groups as certain factors, such as limited access to armed group recordkeeping, can inhibit accurate data collection.”<sup>74</sup>

Anecdotes and quantitative analyses also provide insight into how many females, in particular, are forcibly recruited into non-state armed groups. Scholar Alexis Henshaw found that, out of the 43 non-state armed groups in her sample in which women were present (Henshaw does not distinguish between women and girls in her analysis), 28 percent of the non-state armed groups used forced participation tactics and 72 percent did not.<sup>75</sup> This data suggests that abduction into armed groups is relatively infrequent. However, Henshaw noted that Sub-Saharan Africa was underrepresented in her sample. This might have skewed the numbers lower given that there is evidence that forced recruitment of children is more frequent there than in other regions.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Child Soldiers International, “5 Child Soldier Myths,” Child Soldiers International, 2016, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/news/5-child-soldier-myths> from United Nations, General Assembly and United Nations, Security Council, *Children and armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General*, A/72/865-S/2018/465 (16 May 2018), available from <https://undocs.org/A/72/865%E2%80%93S/2018/465>.

<sup>74</sup> Child Soldiers International, “5 Child Soldier Myths.”

<sup>75</sup> Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> Child Soldiers International, “OPAC Status,” Child Soldiers International, 2016, <https://childsoldiersworldindex.org/opac-status>.

Tactics used by non-state armed groups to abduct civilians include intimidation (individuals are often recruited into groups that have just killed their families and destroyed their communities), physical and sexual assault, and drugging. Armed groups also employ tactics to prevent forcibly recruited combatants from reintegrating into their civilian communities even if they escape the armed group. These include destroying personal possessions and clothing, and for women and girls, rape, as sexual violence often severs the relationship between women and girls and their communities.<sup>77</sup>

Forced participation looks different for men and boys than it does for women and girls because of sexist conceptions of the appropriate roles for women (i.e. that they should be confined to domestic roles). In Ishmael Beah's account of his experience as a child soldier in Sierra Leone, he recalls that upon abduction "[a]ll women and girls were asked to report to the kitchen; men and boys to the ammunition depot, where the soldiers watched their movies and smoked marijuana."<sup>78</sup> Forced participation also looks different for women than it does for girls. Girls are more often abducted into non-state armed groups than women "in part due to their younger age and mental and physical development, which often enables the insurgents to more easily influence their thinking and behavior."<sup>79</sup> When non-state armed groups kidnap females as "rewards" for

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<sup>77</sup> Shelley, "'We Are Fighters, Too': Women of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo"; Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York, NY: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007), 109; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, 27 from Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya, "'Favours' to Give and 'Consenting' Victims," in *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*, Meredith Turshen (London, UK: Zed Books, 1998) and Meredith Turshen, Clotilde Twagiramariya, and Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, "Hundreds of Victims Silently Grieving," in *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*, Meredith Turshen (London, UK: Zed Books, 1998).

<sup>78</sup> Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, 26 from Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, 108.

<sup>79</sup> Dyan Mazurana, "Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," 147.



commanders, they most often select girls over women because of their “hoped-for virginity” and the lower likelihood of them having sexually transmitted illnesses.<sup>80</sup>

No matter the exact numbers or relative frequency of forced participation for female combatants, forced participation is a reality that has implications for the experiences of female combatants in non-state armed groups and their reintegration into society.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter III: The Female Combatant Experience

### Roles of Female Combatants

The majority of women and girls in non-state armed groups hold non-combat, support roles. They work as cooks, spies, childcare attendants, scouts, medics, messengers, translators, and porters; they wash and tailor clothes; and they clean and transport weapons.<sup>81</sup> Henshaw's study, mentioned in chapter 2, found that women held combat roles in 31.9 percent of the non-state armed groups she analyzed and held non-combat roles in 58.3 percent of groups analyzed.<sup>82</sup> In the Lebanese militias of the Lebanese Civil War, the percentage of female combatants in combat roles ranged from 0 to 15 percent, but the percentage of female combatants in non-combat roles rose to 50 percent.<sup>83</sup> The roles chosen for women in non-state armed groups are domestic and life-affirming, which reveals how the gender norms of peacetime society penetrate the social and occupational hierarchies of armed groups. For instance, the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) relegated women to support roles because they believed

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<sup>81</sup> Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations," 8; Rajivan and Senarathne, "Women in Armed Conflicts: Inclusion and Exclusion," 2; Lindsey, "Women Facing War," 24; Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," 49;

Kristin Williams, "Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty," *GlobalPost Public Radio International*, June 28, 2015, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-06-28/women-armed-groups-are-more-just-exotic-novelty>; Shelley, "'We Are Fighters, Too.'"; Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," 43; *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>83</sup> Eggert, "Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations," 8. Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," 45.

women's visibility in the groups would "make the group appear less *machista* and intimidating."<sup>84</sup>

Several support roles held by women and girls in non-state armed groups, such as spies and smugglers, are implicitly dependent upon their sexuality. In the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) in India, women fulfilled roles as "honey traps" to help kidnap and assassinate members of rival groups.<sup>85</sup> Nyere Benjamine Neema, who was a spy in a Mai-Mai militia in Democratic Republic of Congo describes her job: "[She would] dress smartly and go into the villages to share a drink with people from the other non-state armed group," and then deliver relevant information back to the commanders in her own armed group.

First-hand accounts from both fighters and eyewitnesses reveal that female combatants also engage in direct combat or combat-related activities. Scholar Megan MacKenzie interviewed over 40 female ex-combatants with the LRA in Sierra Leone. Over three-quarters of the women she interviewed reported that they had performed combat duties during their time in the armed group.<sup>86</sup> These included "leading lethal attacks," "screening and killing pro-rebel civilians," "poison[ing]/inject[ing] captured war prisoners with either lethal injection or acid," "[training with] [the AFRC] bush camp [on] how to shoot a gun," "killing and maiming pro-government forces and civilians," "gun trafficking," "killing," "planning and carrying out attacks on public places,"

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<sup>84</sup> Mazurana, *Women, Girls, and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups*, 166 from Rachel Anne Schmidt, "No Girls Allowed? Recruitment and Gender in Colombian Armed Groups" (Carleton University, 2007), 5-7, <https://curve.carleton.ca/>.

<sup>85</sup> Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," 50.

<sup>86</sup> Megan MacKenzie, "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (May 18, 2009): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900061>.

“[doing] execution on commanders of my age group,” “fighting,” “[murdering] children,” and “[being a] weapon cleaner.”<sup>87</sup> Karina, a female ex-combatant with the FARC, explained that “inside the FARC, people are taught that gender does not constitute a difference, that things men are capable of doing can also be done by women ... If a man was sent to combat, so was a woman.”<sup>88</sup> However, because of the prevailing sexist conceptions of women as lesser than men, women are often assigned more dangerous combat roles than their male counterparts. These include clearing minefields, acting as human shields, and being suicide bombers.<sup>89</sup> An ICRC study found that women are the “preferred choice” for suicide and infiltration missions because they are “less suspicious,” less likely to be subject to body searches in more conservative societies, and are able to disguise bombs under their clothing as pregnant stomachs.<sup>90</sup> Female suicide bombers are active in both religious and secular groups.<sup>91</sup>

## **Sexual Violence**

Women’s sexuality is also exploited by armed groups in more violent and damaging ways. In a report on crimes against women during conflict, Amnesty International wrote that “armies extol, encourage, and enforce male bonding and expressions of virility so that soldiers trust each other, are less ready to display weakness in front of their peers, and become more willing to take the risks that make them a good

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Maureen Orth, “She Was Colombia’s Most-Feared Female Revolutionary. Can She Help It Find Peace?,” *Vanity Fair*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/08/colombia-civil-war-farc-female-revolutionary?verso=true>.

<sup>89</sup> Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 45.

<sup>90</sup> Charlotte Lindsey, “Women Facing War,” 24-25.

<sup>91</sup> Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women’s Participation in Violent Rebellion,” 42.

fighting unit.”<sup>92</sup> Women and girls in non-state armed groups are often the victims of these “expressions of virility,” suffering sexual violence and harassment perpetrated by their male counterparts.<sup>93</sup>

Women and girls are subject to sexual violence from the moment they join non-state armed groups (and as mentioned in chapter 2, even while they are civilians).<sup>94</sup> Many former combatants have said that sexual violence, including rape and harassment, were part of their non-state armed group’s initiation process.<sup>95</sup> In Zambia, women who joined liberation groups endured abuse and interrogation at the initiation phase. Nancy Saungweme, a former fighter in Zimbabwe remembers that “[her comrades and she] underwent interrogation before [they] were allowed to go to the main camp ... [she] was beaten; [her] buttocks hurt. Sometimes [she] wished [she] were dead ...”<sup>96</sup>

Once they are members of the non-state armed group, women and girls continue to endure sexual violence from within their ranks.<sup>97</sup> Sex slavery has been reported in non-state armed groups across conflicts and geographies including in the Sub-Saharan rebel movements of the 20th century, especially in Angola, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda; in Islamist groups in North Africa; and in armed groups in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>98</sup> In an interview, a Ugandan girl soldier recounts the time she was

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<sup>92</sup> Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen, eds., *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* (London ; New York, NY: Zed Books, 2001), 66.

<sup>94</sup> Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, *The Aftermath*, 66; Gentry and Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, 130.

<sup>95</sup> Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, *The Aftermath*, 48.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>97</sup> Ana Cutter Patel, Pablo De Greiff, and Lars Waldorf, eds., *Disarming the Past: Transitional Justice and Ex-Combatants* (New York: Social Science Research Council; Columbia University Press, 2010), 163.

<sup>98</sup> Charlotte Lindsey, “Women Facing War,” 25; Leanna Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel” from *Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac, and Zoran Vukovic*, Case No. IT-96-23-T& IT-96-23/1-T (February 22, 2001), [www.icty.org/x/cases/kunarac/tjug/en/kun-tj010222e.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/kunarac/tjug/en/kun-tj010222e.pdf); International Women’s Human Rights Law Clinic, “International Women’s Human Rights Law Clinic, “Algeria: Human Rights of

selected as a “wife” for a male combatant: “The rebel commander ordered the soldiers to come and choose among the girls to become their ‘wives.’ We were all lined up, and a man ... came to me and raped me over and over again. I had to remain with ... [him] every night for the two years I was in captivity.”<sup>99</sup> During the Angolan revolution of 1961, girl soldiers had to serve as sex slaves for the commanders and other men in their unit. Before battle, they had to “dance, entertain, and sexually excite the men” to get them ready to fight.<sup>100</sup> The punishment for failing to carry out these responsibilities was to be “tied to trees and beaten with sticks or killed.”<sup>101</sup>

Sexual violence against women and girls in non-state armed groups have lasting social and physical consequences for female ex-combatants during and after reintegration. As mentioned in chapter 2, some women and girls who are raped during conflict are rejected by their communities.<sup>102</sup> If they are married, their civilian husbands divorce them; if they are unmarried, they are declared unmarriageable.<sup>103</sup> In societies in which a woman or girl’s livelihood is dependent upon her having a husband, being

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Women, 3/11/97,” University of Pennsylvania, African Studies Center, February 26, 1997, [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent\\_Action/apic\\_31197.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/apic_31197.html).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>100</sup> Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 48-49.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Shelley, “We Are Fighters, Too.”

<sup>103</sup> United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, “Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict: United Nations Response,” Women2000, April 1998, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2apr98.htm>; Nicola Jones et al., “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Life-Long and Intergenerational Impacts of Sexual Violence in Conflict” (London, UK: ODI, June 2014), 3, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8990.pdf> from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International, “‘Now, the world is without me’: an investigation of sexual violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International, 2010); Albrecht Schnabel and Anara Tabyshalieva, eds., *Defying Victimhood: Women and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (New York, NY: United Nations University Press, 2012).

divorced or unmarriageable can force her into poverty for the rest of her life.<sup>104</sup> Women and girls who are raped might also suffer lasting physical effects such as chronic pain, fistula, and infertility, as well as have an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted illnesses, some of which, like HIV, are incurable and can also lead to infertility.<sup>105</sup> Infertility is a devastating consequence on its own, but its effects are exacerbated from women and girls in societies in which their value and prospects for success are linked to their ability to bear children.<sup>106</sup> Lastly, women who become pregnant from rape must face the added challenge of reintegrating with a child, often without support from the father.<sup>107</sup>

As mentioned in chapter 2, it is common for civilian women and girls to marry male combatants as a way to protect themselves against rape by combatants in non-state armed groups. Women and girl combatants use the same tactic to protect themselves from rape by their fellow male combatants. Quotes from former girl soldiers in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a non-state armed group in which 60 percent of girls served as “wives,” contextualize these arrangements.<sup>108</sup> One girl said, “I was married in

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<sup>104</sup> Jones et al., “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Life-Long and Intergenerational Impacts of Sexual Violence in Conflict,” 3 from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International, ““Now, the world is without me””.

<sup>105</sup> Vitaly A. Kushnir and William Lewis, “Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome and Infertility: Emerging Problems in the Era of Highly Active Antiretrovirals,” *Fertility and Sterility* 96, no. 3 (September 2011): 546–53, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2011.05.094>; Nicola Jones et al., “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War,” 2 from Amber Peterman and Kiersten Johnson, “Incontinence and Trauma: Sexual Violence, Female Genital Cutting and Proxy Measures of Gynecological Fistula,” *Social Science & Medicine* 68, no. 5 (March 2009): 971–79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.12.006>; Virginie Supervie, Yasmin Halima, and Sally Blower, “Assessing the Impact of Mass Rape on the Incidence of HIV in Conflict-Affected Countries,” *AIDS* 24, no. 18 (November 2010): 2841–47, <https://doi.org/10.1097/QAD.0b013e32833fed78>.

<sup>106</sup> Jones et al., “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Life-Long and Intergenerational Impacts of Sexual Violence in Conflict,” 2 from A. Peterman and K. Johnson, “Incontinence and trauma: sexual violence, female genital cutting and proxy measures of gynecological fistula.”

<sup>107</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, 100.

<sup>108</sup> Augustine S. J. Park, ““Other Inhumane Acts’: Forced Marriage, Girl Soldiers and the Special Court for Sierra Leone,” *Social & Legal Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 316,

the bush...it was more advisable to have a husband than to be single. Women and girls were seeking [the attention of] men—especially strong ones for protection from sexual harassment.”<sup>109</sup> Another girl said, “when one of the commanders proposed love to you, sometimes you had to accept even if you really were not willing to cooperate. This was preferable to being gang-raped.”<sup>110</sup> One girl recalled,

the girls were serving as wives were treated better, and according to the rank and status of their husbands ... At the beginning, I was raped daily.... I was every man's wife. But later, one of them, an officer, had a special interest in me. He then protected me against others and never allowed others to use me. He continued to [rape me] alone and less frequently.<sup>111</sup>

It is not uncommon for “bush marriages” to dissolve after demobilization when male combatants, especially high-ranking ones, leave their “wives” in search of more “respectable” women after the war.<sup>112</sup> Elisabeth, a girl soldier in Sierra Leone, recalls being rejected by her “husband” at the start of demobilization: “The last time when I asked him if that’s the way to treat me, he only told me that now the war is over; we only got married while the war lasted—now that the war has ended the marriage should be ended too.”<sup>113</sup> When these “bush marriages” end, women and girls are left without a

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663906066611> from Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls?: Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War* (Montréal, Canada: Rights & Democracy International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), 92, [https://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story\\_id/000478.pdf](https://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000478.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> Denov and MacLure, “Engaging the Voices of Girls in the Aftermath of Sierra Leone’s Conflict,” 77.

<sup>110</sup> Denov and Gervais, “Negotiating (In)Security,” 897.

<sup>111</sup> Denov and MacLure, “Engaging the Voices of Girls in the Aftermath of Sierra Leone’s Conflict,” 77.

<sup>112</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, 100-103 from Kelly David, “The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Liberia, 1994–1997: The Processes and Lessons Learned” (UNICEF-Liberia and the U.S. National Committee for UNICEF, 1998), 98.

<sup>113</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, 100.



“husband” to help support their children, and as mentioned before, without a male guardian to secure their livelihoods.<sup>114</sup>

### **Men and Boys as Victims of Sexual Violence**

Boys and men are also victimized by sexual violence in conflict-affected settings. Protection against sexual violence is also a legitimate motivating factor for men and boys who decide to join armed groups.<sup>115</sup> Though sexual violence has devastating consequences for both males and females, certain consequences of sexual violence, such as pregnancy, sexual dysfunction, and gynecological problems leading to infertility, are faced exclusively by women and girls.<sup>116</sup>

### **Inattention to Reproductive Health and Denial of Maternity**

Despite the nearly constant exploitation of female sexuality in non-state armed groups, female reproductive health is widely ignored in them. Women typically receive minimal healthcare while in non-state armed groups. If they give birth, they are often left to do so on their own with no care provided to themselves or to their babies, which can result in poor infant health.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, one doctor at a hospital in Sierra Leone found that 20 to 50 percent of babies born to female combatants that were brought to the hospital were dying because of malnourishment or illness.<sup>118</sup>

As Ana Cutter Patel writes in her book *Disarming the Past*, some non-state armed groups deny maternity to their female combatants by imposing consequences on those who become pregnant, strictly regulating pregnancies, mandating the use of

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<sup>114</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, 100-103 from Kelly David, “The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Liberia, 1994–1997: The Processes and Lessons Learned” (UNICEF-Liberia and the U.S. National Committee for UNICEF, 1998), 98.

<sup>115</sup> Sarah Chynoweth, ““We Keep It In Our Heart”: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October 2017), 7, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60864>.

<sup>116</sup> JD Chapman, “A Longitudinal Study of Sexuality and Gynecologic Health in Abused Women” 89, no. 5 (May 1989): 619.

<sup>117</sup> Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 45.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

contraception, and performing forced abortions.<sup>119</sup> In the CPN-M, female combatants risk removal from their positions if they became pregnant.<sup>120</sup> In the ELN, a female combatant wishing to become pregnant must get authorization from leadership to do so and the group will only support pregnant female combatants (that is, care for the women during pregnancy and move the child to safety after birth) if they have been in a relationship for at least three years.<sup>121</sup> In some instances, ELN leadership will allow a female combatant to return home to deliver the baby then return to the group after six months, or in some cases, leave the group permanently.<sup>122</sup> The FARC, on the other hand, forces its rank-and-file female combatants to use contraception and to abort pregnancies.<sup>123</sup> Andrea, a female combatant in the FARC recalls her experience with forced abortion at age 11: “The worst thing [about membership in the FARC] is that you can't have a baby. Two years ago, in 2000, I got pregnant. They gave me an abortion, but they didn't tell me in advance that they were going to do it. They told me they were checking on it. I wanted to have the baby.”<sup>124</sup>

## Female Leadership

Though women and girls in non-state armed groups are subjected to violence, oppression, and brutality, some female combatants enjoy marginal gains during wartime that their civilian counterparts do not. One benefit female combatants enjoy in non-state

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<sup>119</sup> Patel, De Greiff, and Waldorf, *Disarming the Past*, 163.

<sup>120</sup> Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen, *The Aftermath*, 119.

<sup>121</sup> Estrada-Fuentes, “Affective Labors,” n.p.; Human Rights Watch (Organization) and Brett, *You'll Learn Not to Cry*, section 7. girls.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> In the FARC, only females occupying high ranks can have children. Estrada-Fuentes, “Affective Labors,” n.p.; Human Rights Watch (Organization) and Brett, *You'll Learn Not to Cry*, section 7. girls.

<sup>124</sup> Human Rights Watch (Organization) and Brett, *You'll Learn Not to Cry*, section 7. girls.

armed groups is the opportunity to hold positions of leadership. In her study on women's participation in armed rebel groups, Henshaw found that the rate of women's participation in leadership roles varied greatly by region. Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia had the lowest rates of female participation in leadership roles and Europe and South America had rates between 66 percent and 100 percent. Of the five non-state armed groups she examined in South America—the ELN and FARC in Colombia, UNRG in Guatemala, and MRTA and SEND in Peru—all included women in leadership roles.<sup>125</sup> However, even women in leadership in non-state armed groups are not immune to the destructive effects of sexism because a female commander's sexuality influences the level of respect she is given by her male counterparts. As Andrea, an ex-Sandinista fighter explained, “[the male soldiers] have to respect you as a sister, a *compañera*. You cannot go to bed with any of them. If you do so ... they do not respect you afterwards.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*, 60; *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>126</sup> Lorentzen and Turpin, *The Women and War Reader*, 160.

## Chapter IV: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

### What is Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration?

A key component of the peace process, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is the controlled process through which combatants transition out of their non-state armed groups and into civilian society by way of physically leaving their non-state armed groups, surrendering their weapons, and rejoining their communities. DDR programs are typically administered and funded at first by third-party actors to a conflict, such as UN agencies and commissions, foreign governments, individual community members, local NGOs, international NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, regional communities (e.g. Central African Economic and Monetary Community), and international financial institutions like the World Bank.<sup>127</sup> After the initial implementation, DDR planners work to “build national capacity” in the host nation so that local and national governments can continue the peace process in the long term. They accomplish this through the creation of an in-country working group known as the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) comprised of actors party to the conflict, including the national government, and third-party actors such as representatives from the UN.<sup>128</sup> Guidelines for DDR programs are drawn from international legal frameworks on human rights and

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<sup>127</sup> Office of Rule Of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “DDR Operational Funding Overview” (Office of Rule Of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2018), 9, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/.../ddr\\_operational\\_funding\\_overview\\_2017-18\\_2018-19\\_2018](https://peacekeeping.un.org/.../ddr_operational_funding_overview_2017-18_2018-19_2018).

<sup>128</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 24; W. Andy Knight, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: An Overview,” *African Security* 1, no. 1 (August 5, 2008): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19362200802285757>.

refugee rights, as well as from the laws of the host nation. The mandates are left vague so planners from the administering agency and representatives from the local community can design a DDR program tailored to each unique conflict.<sup>129</sup>

As the name suggests, DDR programs include three components: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Some definitions of DDR include a subcomponent—reinsertion—that occurs concurrently with demobilization and before reintegration. The UN definitions of each component, published in 2005 by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, are the following:

1. “Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management [programs].”<sup>130</sup>
2. “Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other non-state armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary [centers] to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> See Appendix B for an example of a mandate for a DDR initiative within a UN resolution. United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 17-19.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 25 from United Nations, General Assembly, *Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations: note by the Secretary-General, A/C.5/59/3* (24 May 2005), 1-2, available from <https://undocs.org/A/C.5/59/31>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

3. “Reinsertion is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. While reintegration is a long-term, continuous social and economic process of development, reinsertion is a short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs and can last up to one year.”<sup>132</sup>
4. “Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance.”<sup>133</sup>

### **A Brief History of DDR**

DDR has existed as long as violent conflict has existed. One of the earliest examples of DDR occurred during the Roman-Etruscan wars when “tens of thousands of soldiers were voluntarily disarmed and returned to their villages.”<sup>134</sup> Contemporary DDR programs have been in place since at least 1989 when the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) became the first peacekeeping mission with a mandate to support a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Muggah, “Next-Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *World Politics Review*, June 17, 2014, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13862/next-generation-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

DDR process.<sup>135</sup> Since then, there have been at least 60 DDR initiatives worldwide.<sup>136</sup>

Most recently, during the years 2017-2018, the DDR team associated with the UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) was involved in DDR initiatives in 3 capacities and 15 locations (see below).

- In peacekeeping operations: Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), Haiti (MINUSTAH and MINUJUSTH), Mali (MINUSMA), Darfur (UNAMID), and South Sudan (UNMISS)
- In special political missions: Burundi, Colombia, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen
- In non-mission locations: Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Republic of the Congo.<sup>137</sup>

### **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 2005 Integrated DDR Standards**

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 (A/RES/1325), which called for increased gender sensitivity in all UN missions devoted to peace and security.<sup>138</sup> In it, the UNSC “encourage[d] all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their

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<sup>135</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, “DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective” (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, October 2010), 16-17, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr\\_retrospective102010.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr_retrospective102010.pdf).

<sup>136</sup> Muggah, “Next-Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.”

<sup>137</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration,” United Nations Peacekeeping, 2018, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

<sup>138</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1325 (2000)*, S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000), 1-4, available from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000)).

dependents.”<sup>139</sup> In 2006, in response to A/RES/1325 and other UN documents on DDR, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration created the integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) framework to expand and improve DDR programs and give consideration to the needs of special groups, including women and girls.<sup>140</sup> The most recent Operational Guide to IDDRS, published in 2014, references A/RES/1325 on several occasions and pays special attention to the needs of women and girls and the challenges they face during DDR in the areas of assessment, eligibility, information and sensitization, verification, cantonment site design, basic needs provisioning, benefits distribution, job training, resettlement (especially regarding land disputes), and psychosocial treatment. The Operational Guide also calls for more women to be included in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of DDR programs.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 1-2; United Nations, Department of Public Information, *United Nations Launches New Standards for Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, DC/3059, 18 December 2006, [www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11018.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11018.doc.htm). <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/dc3059.doc.htm>

<sup>141</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 27, 29, 46, 199, 208-215



## Chapter V: Women, Girls, and DDR

Despite its creators' efforts to make DDR more accessible to female combatants, as scholar Dyan Mazurana writes, "the theory of IDDRS is a far cry from the practice of DDR programs in the recent past and today."<sup>142</sup> Statistics on female combatant's participation are generally lacking, in itself an indication of the lack of focus placed on including women and girls in the peace process, but a few numbers from within the past 30 years demonstrate the underrepresentation of women and girls in DDR. In Angola, the DDR program for combatants in the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) that ran in the early 1990s identified only 60 women out of an estimated 30,000 total fighters for entry into the program.<sup>143</sup> Several reports by media and human rights agencies revealed that a much larger number of female combatants were involved with UNITA.<sup>144</sup> In a 2006 report of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan wrote that early DDR programs in Sierra Leone and Liberia failed to include female combatants, supporters, and dependents and that programs in Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi denied female porters, cooks, and sex slaves entry into the programs.<sup>145</sup> In early DDR programs in Colombia (2004-2008), only 9 percent of combatants enrolled were women or girls. This number is striking given that between 20 to 30 percent of combatants in just one of the groups, the FARC, are female.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 202.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, *Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: report of the Secretary-General*, A/60/705 (2 March 2006), 3, available from <https://undocs.org/A/60/705>.

<sup>146</sup> Sanín and Carranza Franco, "Organizing Women for Combat," 1; Therese Carlbrand, "A Gender Perspective of Colombia's DDR Process" (London School of Economics, 2018), n.p., [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325902307\\_A\\_Gender\\_Perspective\\_of\\_Colombia's\\_DDR\\_Process/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325902307_A_Gender_Perspective_of_Colombia's_DDR_Process/download); Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social [National Council for Social and Economic Policy], "Política Nacional de Reintegración Social y Económica Para Personas y Grupos Armados Ilegales

## Exclusion of Women and Girls from DDR Programs

The exclusion of women and girls in the DDR process begins at the peace negotiations phase. During peace talks, negotiators decide who the conflict-specific DDR program will recognize as a combatant and set the requirements for entry into the program.<sup>147</sup> Women are rarely involved in such discussions.<sup>148</sup> The absence of women in peace talks is evident in how the eligibility requirements of most DDR programs prioritize male fighters who hold combat roles in their non-state armed groups over women, girls, and even boys who hold supporting roles.<sup>149</sup> As mentioned before, most female combatants operate in support roles, so DDR programs that underemphasize the need to demobilize combatants in support roles will exclude women and girls in higher numbers.<sup>150</sup>

One way in which women and girls are excluded from DDR programs is through discriminatory eligibility requirements. DDR programs typically rely on weapons collection and weapons procedure tests to identify individuals eligible for entry into the

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[National Policy for the Social and Economic Reintegration for People and Illegal Armed Groups]” (Bogotá, December 1, 2008), 15, <http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/la-reintegracion/centro-de-documentacion/Documentos/Documento%20Conpes%203554%201%20Pol%C3%ADtica%20nacional%20de%20reintegraci%C3%B3n%20social%20y%20econ%C3%B3mica%20para%20personas%20y%20grupos%20armados%20ilegales.pdf>.

<sup>147</sup> Dyan and Linda, “Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” 202

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Eggert, “Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations,” 8; Rajivan and Senarathne, “Women in Armed Conflicts: Inclusion and Exclusion,” 2; Charlotte Lindsey, Charlotte Lindsey, “Women Facing War” (International Committee of the Red Cross, October 2001), 24, [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0798\\_women\\_facing\\_war.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0798_women_facing_war.pdf); Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women’s Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008,” 49.

Kristin Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty,” *GlobalPost Public Radio International*, June 28, 2015, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-06-28/women-armed-groups-are-more-just-exotic-novelty>; Shelley, “‘We Are Fighters, Too:’ Women of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart*, 45.

program.<sup>151</sup> Pre-IDDRS guidelines stipulated that all combatants had to surrender their weapons and demonstrate proficiency in the use of the weapons in order to be eligible for DDR programs.<sup>152</sup> Because most female combatants do not have their own weapons or arm themselves from a “communal source” of weapons, the “one person, one gun” rule had the effect of excluding female combatants in support roles from entry into DDR programs.<sup>153</sup> In Sierra Leone, 46 percent of combatants who chose not to enroll in the 1999-2004 DDR program “cited not having a weapon as the basis for their lack of participation.”<sup>154</sup> The IDDRS approach to DDR strikes the “one person, one gun” rule and allows group disarmament (one gun per group of combatants). However, it is still common for DDR officials to disallow group disarmament policies and operate according to the “one person, one gun” rule. Moreover, even if post-IDDRS DDR programs allow for group disarmament, DDR staff often fail to communicate the policy change to combatants who continue to act on the presumption that the “one gun, one person” requirement is still in place.<sup>155</sup> For women and girls without weapons, this means demobilizing and reintegrating without the help of a DDR program.

Even DDR programs whose eligibility criteria are inclusive of women and girls might inadvertently exclude women and girls by using ineffective pathways through which to communicate with female combatants in non-state armed groups. Some DDR

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<sup>151</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. from Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone,” 20.

<sup>154</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205 from Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone,” 20.

<sup>155</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205 from Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone,” 18.

programs educate combatants on the DDR program through informational videos.<sup>156</sup> In certain societies, women and girls are not allowed to watch videos in public, so they miss out on getting necessary information through this medium.<sup>157</sup> In many DDR programs, commanders act as conduits between DDR personnel and rank-and-file combatants. DDR program coordinators rely on commanders to communicate relevant logistical information about the program to the combatants and to gather information on the size and composition of the armed group. Reliance on commanders creates information asymmetry that disadvantages female combatants. Without the necessary oversight, commanders can fudge troop counts and exclude women from the lists they give to DDR personnel with the names of combatants eligible for DDR, instead opting to include their own family members and close friends.<sup>158</sup> They can also provide women and girls with false information about the DDR process to discourage them from enrolling. Reports from former girl combatants in the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) during DDR in Sierra Leone reveal that commanders deceived or forced female combatants into surrendering their weapons to commanders before arriving at the assembly centers. Since “one-person, one-gun” was still in place at the time, weapon-less combatants could not prove their combatant status and were denied entry into the program.<sup>159</sup> In other cases, commanders stripped women and girl combatants of their guns and gave them to male combatants so *they* could enter the DDR programs.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 206.

<sup>157</sup> United Nations, "Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards," 199.

<sup>158</sup> Kristin Williams, "Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty"; Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205.

<sup>159</sup> Mazurana and Carlson, "From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone," 20.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

Even if the policies and protocol for admitting combatants into DDR programs are inclusive of women and girls, sexism can still block female combatants from gaining entry into the programs. When DDR personnel themselves hold mistaken beliefs about the presence of women and girls in armed groups, they might deny them entry even if they are able to prove their combatant status.<sup>161</sup> During the civil war in Sierra Leone, then-Deputy Minister of Defense and National Coordinator of the CDF, Samuel Hinga Norman, publicly stated that women were not part of the CDF. DDR personnel in charge of the program in Sierra Leone believed this lie, and when asked by researchers why women and girls in the CDF were not represented in the DDR program, the officials responded that “they saw hundreds of women and girls come in claiming they were CDFs, but [they] knew those forces only contained men, so [they] took their weapons and turned them all away.”<sup>162</sup> DDR personnel in the same program also turned away women and girls because, as they claimed, the purpose of the program was to demobilize core fighting forces.<sup>163</sup> “Wives” and other “minority” members of the group were to be excluded from the program, including women and girls who were abducted into the group.<sup>164</sup>

### **Challenges during Cantonment**

If women and girls are granted entry into DDR programs, they face another set of obstacles during cantonment. Once they have left their non-state armed groups,

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<sup>161</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205.

<sup>162</sup> Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)," 205-6.

<sup>163</sup> The irony here, of course, is that had the women and girls in the armed group not performed the vital tasks essential to sustaining the groups, there would be no core fighting force.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

combatants gather in cantonment sites, encampments, assembly centers, or barracks while they receive assistance.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps because of a lack of female representation among DDR planners, the needs of women, predominantly those relating to hygiene and personal safety, are not anticipated or addressed in cantonment centers. Women and girls sometimes leave cantonment sites after only a few days because of unsafe housing arrangements and inadequate provisioning of hygiene and healthcare supplies, particularly female hygiene items.<sup>166</sup> One study on an interim care center for child combatants in Sierra Leone reported that 45 percent of them “did not receive proper sanitation materials, including soap, shampoo, and feminine hygiene products.”<sup>167</sup> In El Salvador, Rina Garay, an NGO worker involved with the DDR program for ex-combatants from the FMLN reported that “there was simply no real awareness of women’s most basic needs—not even the provision of feminine hygiene products, for example.”<sup>168</sup> While both of these reports predate the creation of the IDDRS guidelines, if cantonment provisioning is as slow on the uptake as gender-aware eligibility requirements, it is fair to assume current DDR programs are similarly lacking in this area.

A study of female ex-combatants in the RUF revealed that several women and girls left cantonment sites after being deemed eligible for DDR due to housing

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<sup>165</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, *Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations: note by the Secretary-General*, 1-2.

<sup>166</sup> Dyan and Linda, “Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” 206 from Dyan Mazurana, “Women in Armed Opposition Groups Speak on War, Protection and Obligations under International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law” (Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Call and the Program for the Study of International Organization(s), August 2004); Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone;” United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, “Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards: Glossary: Terms and Definitions” (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, August 1, 2006), [unddr.org/uploads/documents/IDDRS%201.20%20Glossary.pdf](http://unddr.org/uploads/documents/IDDRS%201.20%20Glossary.pdf).

<sup>167</sup> Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone,” 21.

<sup>168</sup> Conaway and Martínez, *Adding Value*, 13.

arrangements that made them feel unsafe because of the presence of too many men combined with too little protection. One female ex-combatant, Agnes E., left her cantonment center after three days because “there were too many people crowded in, too many men with nothing to do. The security was bad.”<sup>169</sup> Child combatant Christiana R. recalls leaving an adult cantonment center because of the sleeping arrangements, saying, “as a woman, I could not stay there.”<sup>170</sup> Moreover, because women and girls demobilize alongside male combatants from their non-state armed groups, it is likely that during their time in cantonment centers, they will continue to live alongside their rapists and other men and boys who exploited them.

### **Challenges Upon Reinsertion and Reintegration**

As mentioned earlier, financial insecurity is one reason women and girls (and men and boys) join non-state armed groups. DDR programs typically provide financial assistance to ex-combatants with the assumption that “without this safety net, fighters are more likely to return to armed struggle or take up criminal activities.”<sup>171</sup> Despite warnings to the contrary by scholars and the IDDRS guidelines themselves, DDR programs typically provide financial assistance to ex-combatants through cash payments because cash is liquid and allows for more flexibility of use.<sup>172</sup> Cash payments prove discriminatory for women and girl combatants because the amount of cash given often

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<sup>169</sup> Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone,” 20.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>172</sup> Claire Mccloughlin, “Cash Payments in DDR Programmes” (GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, June 2011), <https://gsdrc.org/publications/cash-payments-in-ddr-programmes/>; United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 154.

correlates with rank in the non-state armed group.<sup>173</sup> Because women are less likely to hold high rank than men, they receive smaller sums. In addition, several female ex-combatants have reported that male commanders or husbands have stolen their cash assistance.<sup>174</sup>

Job training initiatives in DDR programs are also discriminatory. Though some women and girls hold non-traditional roles in their armed groups, such as medics, weapons cleaners, and unit commanders, DDR job training for female combatants is typically only available for traditional female jobs like sewing and cooking.<sup>175</sup> As one researcher explains, “society would have [female combatants] learning how to sew or be domestic helpers, rather than being carpenters, masons, bricklayers or computer repairers.”<sup>176</sup> Not only is this insulting to the women and girls who are overqualified for the jobs for which DDR programs provide training but also female combatants frustrated by the lack of job options available to them are more likely to remobilize or become involved in organized crime.<sup>177</sup>

Once female combatants have gone through the demobilization and reinsertion phases of DDR, they must begin the long-lasting process of reintegrating into their civilian communities, which can be a time of great insecurity.<sup>178</sup> There are several wartime and post-conflict factors that determine how open a community will be to

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<sup>173</sup> McLoughlin, “Cash Payments in DDR Programmes.”

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “Former Female Fighters Strive for a Better Life,” *The New Humanitarian*, September 29, 2010, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/90613/sri-lanka-former-female-fighters-strive-better-life>.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Jacqueline O’Neill, “Are Women the Key to Peace in Colombia?,” *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/20/are-women-the-key-to-peace-in-colombia-farc-talks/>.

<sup>178</sup> Original: “ya nos [indistinct] en una realidad mas dura, mas insegura, de más dificultades, de discriminación” from Betancur Gloria, *04\_GloriaBetancur.mp3*, MP3, Audios Red Mujerex (Colombia, 2013), <http://revistala13.com/publicacion-n14/audios.html>.



receiving female ex-combatants. These factors include its willingness to accept combatants who have broken societal norms or committed taboos, the unemployment and poverty levels in the community, and the government's attitudes towards female combatants in general.<sup>179</sup> Many of these societal norms, taboos, and attitudes are informed by sexist conceptions of the relationship between women and war.<sup>180</sup> As Dyan Mazurana and Linda Eckerbom Cole explain:

[Reintegration] is an especially challenging time for women and girls known to have been in armed groups because their violations of traditional forms of female respectability, so often tied up with patriarchal constructions of chastity and virtue, will put them at odds with how traditional forms of femininity are often re-entrenched in the post-conflict. Their families may stigmatize and ostracize them, particularly at first, when they do not meet expected gender norms and behaviors.<sup>181</sup>

Harking back to chapter 1 and the feminist theories of female participation in political violence, receiving communities might perceive returning female combatants according to the “mothers, monsters, and whore” narratives or derivatives thereof. Evidence for gendered perceptions of female violence is clear in the way female combatants are described by others. Civilians in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sri Lanka, and Peru have described female combatants as “monsters” and “barbarians” and claimed they

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<sup>179</sup> Dyan and Linda, “Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” 206 from Andy Brooks, “The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces: Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone” (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2005), [https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/WCARO\\_SL\\_Pub\\_LesLearntChildSoldiers.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/WCARO_SL_Pub_LesLearntChildSoldiers.pdf); Hobson, “Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict”; McKay et al., *Girls Formerly Associated with Fighting Forces and Their Children: Returned and Neglected*; Schroeder, “A Window of Opportunity in Democratic Republic of Congo: Incorporating a Gender Perspective in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process.”

<sup>180</sup> Research conducted by McKay and Mazurana reveal that girls are forced to perform behaviors in violation of taboos to a greater extent than boys; see McKay and Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls?: Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*, 36.

<sup>181</sup> Mazurana Dyan and Cole Linda, “Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” in *Women and Wars: Contested Histories Uncertain Futures*, ed. Cohn Carol (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 197.

were “more cold-blooded and cruel than male fighters.”<sup>182</sup> These claims are unlikely to be based wholly in reality and much more likely to be based in societal conceptions of femininity and masculinity.<sup>183</sup> As Chris Coulter writes, “fighting is conceived to be included in the moral universe of men in ways that it is not for women, and fighting women are frequently considered by their very existence to be transgressing accepted female [behavior].”<sup>184</sup>

### **Holding Female Combatants Accountable**

As with any individual involved in armed conflict, female combatants who commit war crimes should be tried for their crimes and prosecuted if they are found guilty. However, decision-makers within the judicial system must take into careful consideration the biases present in eyewitness accounts of female perpetrators of violence when evaluating each case.

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<sup>182</sup> Chris Coulter, “Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?,” *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 63 from Olivia Bennett, Jo Bexley, and Kitty Warnock, eds., *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: Women Speak out about Conflict*, Oral Testimony (London: Panos Publications, 1995); Elliott P. Skinner, “Child Soldiers in Africa: A Disaster for the Future,” *International Journal on World Peace* 16, no. 2 (June 1999): 7–22.

<sup>183</sup> Coulter, “Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?,” 63 from Elise F. Barth, “Peace As Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies -- A Comparative Study from Africa,” Report for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Oslo, Norway: International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), August 2002), <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7293>; Vanessa Farr, “Gendering Demilitarization as a Peacebuilding Tool” (Bonn International Center for Conversion, June 2002), [https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx\\_bicctools/paper20.pdf](https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/paper20.pdf).

<sup>184</sup> Coulter, “Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?,” 63.

## Chapter VI: Toward More Gender-aware DDR

Because of the discriminatory and gender-unaware practices of most DDR programs in existence today, many women and girls will not reintegrate through DDR programs, either foregoing them from the beginning or dropping out along the way. Instead, they will choose to spontaneously reintegrate.<sup>185</sup> Women and girls who spontaneously reintegrate will not receive the material, physical, psychosocial, legal, and financial support that DDR programs offer.<sup>186</sup> These women are more likely to end up impoverished and alienated from their communities.

As is clear from the previous chapter, most if not all of the challenges women and girls face during the DDR process are related to how sexism and gender-based expectations have shaped their wartime experiences and will shape their post-war lives. Solutions to these challenges must be congruous with their origins; in other words, gender-aware DDR can be accomplished by 1) realizing and acknowledging the pervasive role that sex and gender play in a female combatant's experiences, and 2) crafting solutions that account for this. Indeed, there is evidence that gender-aware practices in DDR actually contribute to the inclusion of more women and girls. For instance, when the DDR program in Liberia changed its eligibility criteria to allow entry to female combatants, the program expanded to include 20,000 female beneficiaries.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Laurén Ettinger, "One Man, One Gun, No More: Exploring Women's Experiences in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration" (George Mason University, 2016), 67, [mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/10806/Ettinger\\_thesis\\_2016.pdf?...1...y](https://mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/10806/Ettinger_thesis_2016.pdf?...1...y) from McKay and Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls?: Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*, 36.

<sup>186</sup> Bouta, Frerks, and Bannon, *Gender, Conflict, and Development*, 18.

<sup>187</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, *Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: report of the Secretary-General*, A/60/705 (2 March 2006), 3, available from <https://undocs.org/A/60/705>.

Within the past decade, scholars have published studies and reports on how to adjust traditional DDR practices to ensure the needs of women and girls are met. These guidelines span all phases of DDR from the pre-implementation phase through the reintegration phase. The framework for gender-aware DDR is so extensive that it could be the topic of a thesis in and of itself (some analyses of gender-aware DDR are dozens of pages in length). Below are a few suggestions from the existing literature, including IDDRS guidelines, as well as the author’s original ideas. The suggestions are organized into categories to more clearly demonstrate how they address the sex- and gender-related aspects of a female combatant’s experience:

1. Gendered perceptions of conflict, violence, and violent actors
2. Victimization, personal safety, security, and well-being
3. Gender roles, gender norms, and differential treatment by gender
4. Biological differences between the sexes

### **Pre-implementation Phase**

Gendered Perceptions of Conflict, Violence, and Violent Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve gender experts and women’s civil society groups in peace negotiations and DDR planning to ensure negotiating parties have sufficient understanding of how gender will affect DDR<sup>188</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Could be done by inviting these individuals and groups to be mediators themselves or to share their ideas with negotiators in a symposium format<sup>189</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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<sup>188</sup> Louise Dietrich and Thomas Winderl, “How-To Guide: Gender-Responsive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration,” United Nations Development Programme, 2012, 17, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/geneva/docs/How-to-Guide-Gender-Responsive-DDR.pdf>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 19.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a provision in DDR program mandates for unannounced visits and frequent evaluations by DDR planners to ensure DDR personnel are complying with gender-sensitive requirements (e.g. not turning away women or girls at the door just because they do not have a weapon to turn in)</li> <li>• Encourage national commissions on DDR (NCDDRS) to collaborate with government ministries that work with women’s rights<sup>190</sup></li> <li>• Encourage NCDDRS to hire women into DDR planning, implementation, and evaluation roles<sup>191</sup></li> </ul>
Victimization, Personal Safety, Security, and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that female-only transportation is available for all female combatants wishing to enroll in DDR programs</li> <li>• Develop initiatives to locate spontaneously reintegrated women and girls and communicate to them the benefits of entering a DDR program<sup>192</sup></li> <li>• Mandate the release of abducted women and girls in peace agreements<sup>193</sup></li> </ul>
Gender Norms, Gender Roles, and Differential Treatment by Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide DDR planners with education on the cultural norms and gender roles present in the host society</li> <li>• Issue gender-sensitive questionnaires to be distributed within the non-state armed groups to develop a socioeconomic profile of the combatants (for use in the reintegration phase)<sup>194</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Separate data by gender and age</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Invite women to hold positions in DDR program management and evaluation<sup>195</sup></li> <li>• Provide information on the DDR program to female combatants in a medium they are culturally allowed to consume<sup>196</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>190</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 210.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Vanessa A. Farr, “Gender-Aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): A Checklist” (UNIFEM, February 10, 2008), [www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Themes/unifem-ddrgenderchecklist.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Themes/unifem-ddrgenderchecklist.pdf), 4.

<sup>193</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 208.

<sup>194</sup> Vanessa A. Farr, “Gender-Aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): A Checklist,” 5.

<sup>195</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 208.

<sup>196</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 199.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish communication channels between trusted female DDR staff and female combatants (especially female commanders)...<sup>197</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ... to get an accurate representation of the number of women and girls in the non-state armed group(s) to be demobilized as well as their roles in the group(s)</li> <li>○ ... to communicate the eligibility requirements and logistic details of the DDR program (e.g. no need for each combatant to have a weapon)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Biological Differences Between the Sexes	

### Disarmament and Demobilization Phases

Gendered Perceptions of Conflict, Violence, and Violent Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not require that each woman or girl turn in a weapon to be eligible for DDR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Instead use the IDDRS flowchart (as adapted to each unique DDR program) to determine what phase of DDR a female combatant is eligible for<sup>198</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Victimization, Personal Safety, Security, and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create separate facilities for male and female ex-combatants (bathrooms, bunks, etc.)<sup>199</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create separate, coed facilities for families if desired by ex-combatants</li> <li>○ Ensure female-only facilities are fenced off, well-lit and staffed by guards 24/7<sup>200</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure high representation of women in cantonment center staff, including counselors and healthcare providers<sup>201</sup></li> <li>• Offer STI testing, treatment, and counseling (preferably in facilities separated by sex)<sup>202</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>197</sup> Farr, “Gender-Aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): A Checklist,” 4; Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>198</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>199</sup> Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>200</sup> Bouta, “Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Building Blocs for Dutch Policy;” Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>201</sup> Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>202</sup> Farr, “Gender-Aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): A Checklist,” 8.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct private interviews by female interviewers with female ex-combatants to learn more about their experiences and needs<sup>203</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ If possible, collect testimonies from female ex-combatants about their experiences with sexual violence for future use in the local justice system should they choose to pursue a case<sup>204</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure female ex-combatants have safe transportation to their communities after they exit the cantonment center<sup>205</sup></li> </ul>
Gender Norms, Gender Roles, and Differential Treatment by Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow women and girls to enroll in the program independently of their male partner<sup>206</sup></li> <li>• Offer equal opportunities for female ex-combatants to be retained in state security forces if they wish<sup>207</sup></li> <li>• Offer childcare services so that women and girls can attend trainings and briefings</li> <li>• Keep mothers and children (or entire families) together throughout the DDR process<sup>208</sup></li> <li>• Train women in jobs that match their skill level and experience, including non-traditional roles such as doctors, lawyers, police officers, election organizers, and political candidates<sup>209</sup></li> </ul>
Biological Differences Between the Sexes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision sufficient hygiene supplies (shampoo, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, toothbrushes), especially feminine hygiene supplies (10 days' supply for each female ex-combatant per month)</li> <li>• Provide private spaces for nursing mothers to feed their children</li> <li>• Provide sexual health education and family planning services (including male and female condoms) to all participants<sup>210</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>204</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 211.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>208</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 212.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. from “Former Female Fighters Strive for a Better Life,” *The New Humanitarian*, September 29, 2010, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/90613/sri-lanka-former-female-fighters-strive-better-life>; Jacqueline O’Neill, “Are Women the Key to Peace in Colombia?,” *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/20/are-women-the-key-to-peace-in-colombia-farc-talks/>.

<sup>210</sup> Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty”; United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 211.

## Reintegration Phase

Gendered Perceptions of Conflict, Violence, and Violent Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite civil society groups to engage local informal and formal female leaders in working with the community to ensure female ex-combatants are successfully reintegrated<sup>211</sup></li> <li>• Educate women and girls on opportunities in their communities to exercise activism</li> </ul>
Victimization, Personal Safety, Security, and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish “gender-responsive” public safety programs in communities with high proportions of ex-combatants<sup>212</sup></li> <li>• Collaborate with the community to design initiatives to protect women and girls from sexual and domestic violence in their receiving communities<sup>213</sup></li> </ul>
Gender Norms, Gender Roles, and Differential Treatment by Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide women and girls with non-cash financial assistance such as food vouchers or medical benefits<sup>214</sup></li> <li>• Consider how financial reintegration assistance can best be combined with women’s typical avenues for money management (e.g. rotational loan and credit schemes)<sup>215</sup></li> </ul>
Biological Differences Between the Sexes	

As with any human-run initiative, incentives are needed to ensure gender-sensitive DDR is carried out. These can include quotas for the number of women involved in peace negotiations and DDR planning, conditional funding based on the involvement of women, gender experts, and civil society groups, unannounced evaluations of the program to ensure DDR personnel are complying with gender-aware guidelines, and the use of earmarking to ensure enough of the program budget is

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Dietrich and Winderl, “How-To Guide: Gender-Responsive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration,” 19.

<sup>213</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 212.

<sup>214</sup> Williams, “Women in Armed Groups Are More than Just an Exotic Novelty.”

<sup>215</sup> United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” 212.



allocated for addressing the needs of women and girl participants, such as the provisioning of feminine hygiene supplies.<sup>216</sup> However, just incentivizing gender-aware measures through quotas, funding, and unannounced evaluations is not enough. DDR planners and their partners in the community must develop an intimate understanding of the subtle and overt ways in which sexism shapes a female combatant's experience. With this knowledge, they will better be able to anticipate the needs of female combatants and provide flexible solutions to address those needs.

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<sup>216</sup> Louise Dietrich and Thomas Winderl, "How-To Guide: Gender-Responsive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration," 17.

## Conclusion

Sexism is a self-perpetuating phenomenon that makes itself home in insecure warzone environments. Sexism creates the conditions that compel women and girls to join armed movements, and sexism fuels nasty narratives that describe the same women and girls as deprived, inhuman, and irrational. Sexism manifests itself in pervasive sexual violence during wartime and underlies the gendered expectations by which communities justify rejecting sexually-victimized women and girls. Sexism designates women as builders of peace, then sabotages the peace process to their detriment.

In many cases, wartime marks a *de facto* suspension of peacetime norms during which traditional social hierarchies become more malleable. Societies can capitalize on this suspension of norms by promoting equality and opportunity for women and girls in the peace process. Introducing gender awareness into the peace process by designing DDR programs that anticipate and address the needs, experiences, and challenges faced by women and girls, is just one way institutions can begin to disrupt the perpetuation of sexism during war. Above all, the best way to support positive outcomes for women and girls in post-conflict environments is to make space for women in the local, national, and international institutions that usher in peace after conflict. Ideally, women and men should be equally represented in peace negotiations, among DDR planners and staffers, within the war criminal justice system, and in civil society groups. Ensuring the equal representation of women in post-conflict environments is a necessary step in the ever-relevant process of post-conflict reconstruction.

## Appendices

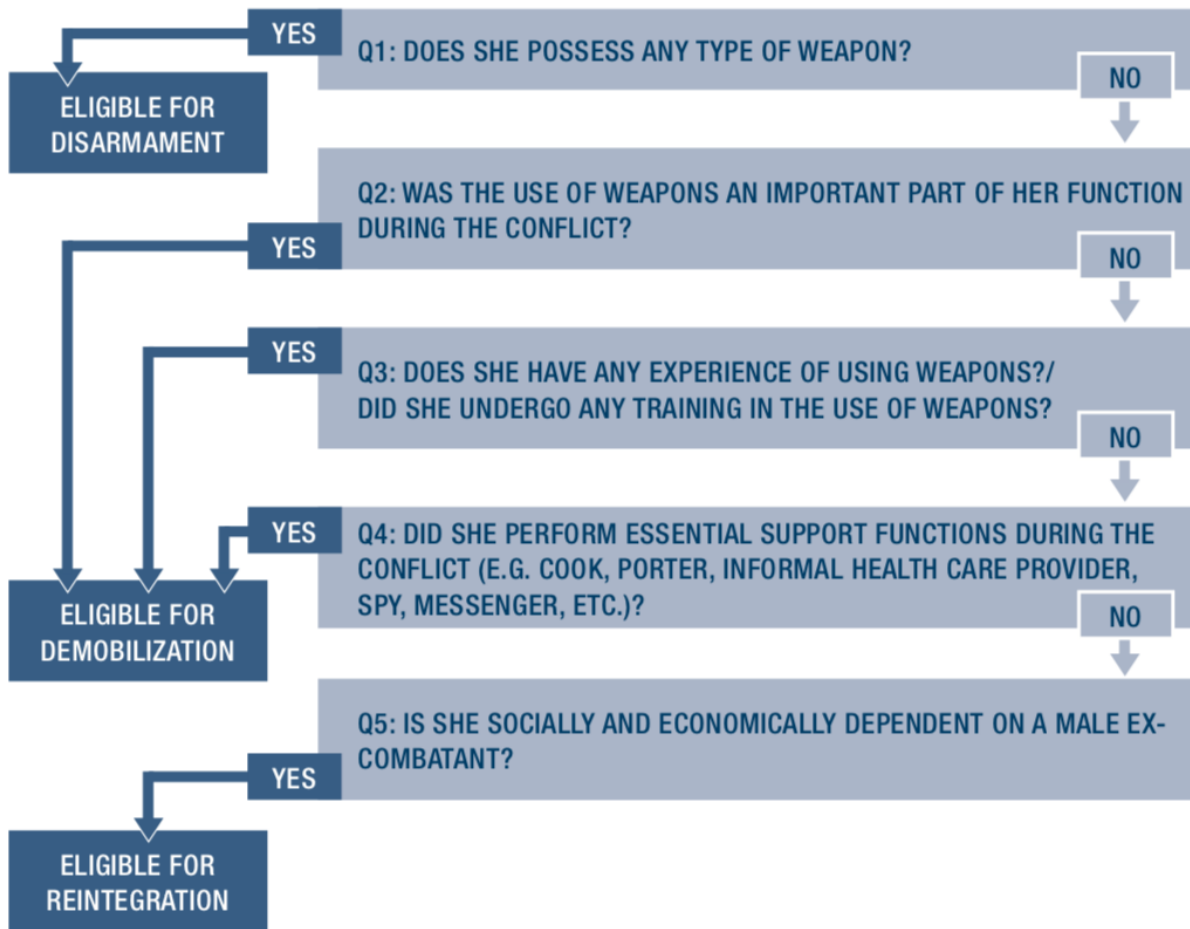
### Appendix A:

Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Middle East
Algeria	Colombia	Afghanistan	France	Iran
Angola	El Salvador	Cambodia	Northern Ireland	Iraq
Burundi	Guatemala	India	Macedonia	Israel
CAR	Haiti	Indonesia	Montenegro	Jordan
Chad	Honduras	Myanmar	Russia	Lebanon
Côte d'Ivoire	Mexico	Nepal	Serbia	Syria
DRC	Nicaragua	Pakistan	Spain	Turkey
Eritrea	Peru	Papua New Guinea	Former Yugoslavia	Yemen
Ethiopia		Philippines		
Liberia		Sri Lanka		
Libya		Thailand		
Mauritania		East Timor		
Morocco		Uzbekistan		
Mozambique				
Rwanda				
Sierra Leone				
Somalia				
South Africa				

Sudan				
Uganda				
Zimbabwe				

*Source: Dyan and Linda, "Women and Girls and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," Table 7.1., pg. 149.*

**Appendix B:**



*Source: United Nations, “Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards,” Figure 5.10.2: Female eligibility criteria for DDR, pg. 207.*

## Appendix C:

[Highlight added]

### **Resolution 1925 (2010)**

**Adopted by the Security Council at its 6324th meeting, on 28 May 2010**

*The Security Council,*

*Recalling* its previous resolutions and the statements of its President concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

*Reaffirming* its commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

*Acknowledging* the progress made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, considering the challenges it has had to overcome during the past 15 years,

*Stressing* the primary responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for ensuring security in its territory and protecting its civilians with respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, *stressing* the urgency of implementing comprehensive security sector reform and of achieving as appropriate the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) of Congolese armed groups, and the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration (DDRRR) of foreign armed groups for the long-term stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *considering* the need to create the security conditions for ensuring sustainable economic development, and *stressing* the importance of the contribution made by international partners in these fields,

*Stressing* the significant security challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the Kivus and Orientale Province, posed by the continued presence of armed groups, the ongoing need to establish effective State authority, the possible resurgence of conflicts as internally displaced persons and refugees return and the continued illegal exploitation of natural resources, and *determined* to avoid a security vacuum that could trigger renewed instability in the country,

*Encouraging* the countries of the Great Lakes region to maintain a high level of commitment to jointly promote peace and stability in the region, including through existing regional mechanisms, and to intensify their efforts on regional economic development,

*Stressing* that the Goma and Nairobi processes as well as the 23 March 2009 Agreements have contributed to stabilize the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and *urging* all parties to fully abide by these agreements,

*Source: United Nations, Security Council, Resolution 1925 (2010), S/RES/1925 (18 May 2010), available from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1925\(2010\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1925(2010)).*

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