

2021

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Recommended Citation

Gallo-Cruz, Selina and Remsberg, Renée (2021) "Peacebuilding, Liberian Women, and the Invisible Hand of Conflict in the Postwar Era," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, 77-105.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol5/iss2/8

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Peacebuilding, Liberian Women, and the Invisible Hand of Conflict in the Postwar Era

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Liberian women gained international acclaim for their courage and persistence in bringing warring factions into a peace agreement in 2003, after a 14-year-long civil war that devastated the country, with over 250,000 killed, millions displaced, and a population left traumatized and in political and economic ruin. This study explores the challenges that women have faced in the years following the civil war with a focus on whether the international community has supported women's advancements in Liberia. We find that while some efforts to support gender mainstreaming have been helpful, there remain serious political, economic, and social inequalities that threaten both women's peacebuilding and women's general security and social mobility. In this essay we present a feminist framework for sustainable peace to address the visible and invisible arenas in which both physical and structural forms of violence continue in Liberia, threatening the peace on multiple levels. Among the issues commonly addressed—political corruption, the persistence of a culture of violence against women, and outbreaks of violence in local conflicts—we argue that the international community must also address the inequities and conflicts arising around extractive industries to support the best outcomes for women and for peace in Liberia.

When it was announced that the Nobel Peace Prize of 2011 would be awarded to then president of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Liberian women's peace organizer Leymah Gbowee "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peacebuilding work" (Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2011), President Sirleaf went to the fish market in Sinkor to meet Gbowee. Sirleaf greeted her with gratitude, declaring her own presidency indebted to Gbowee's and other women activists' great courage: "If you had not stood up in 2003 before we went to Accra, we were never going to be to where we are now. But because of you, the African leaders saw it and took a position" (Liberian Executive Mansion, 2011).

One week following this grand celebratory moment for Liberian women peacemakers, Ms. Sirleaf hit the campaign trail for a second term in office, which she ultimately won.¹ Sirleaf's elections shattered the highest of glass ceilings—she was the first female elected as head of state in Africa. It was thanks to Gbowee and her peace-waging compatriots' continued dedication to civic organizing following the war's end that Sirleaf had won the first time; their massive voter-registration campaign increased the percentage of women who were registered voters from under 30% to over 50% (Bauer, 2009; Thomas & Adams, 2010).

What the movement achieved was much more than just an end to the war and much more than this historic victory. The movement also gained organizing skills that carried into postwar peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts (Fuest, 2008) and led to expanded leadership by women at every level of political office (Adams, 2008; European Commission, 2006). At the end of her presidential tenure, Sirleaf claimed that many remarkable advancements had been made to benefit women and the national rebuilding effort, among them the growth of girls' education to near that

of boys' in some counties, over \$16 billion in foreign direct investment, and millions in private donations to rebuild vital infrastructure—including schools, clinics, and markets—and for skills-training programs (Oritsejafor & Davis, 2010). Sirleaf also pointed to \$4.6 billion in debt relief and the growth of the national budget from \$80 million in 2006 to over \$672 million in 2012 (Husted, 2020).

There remain, however, obstinate challenges in the ongoing reconstruction efforts, deep-seated tensions that often resurface, and a perpetuation of the structural inequalities that historically fueled the violence that led to civil war. Critics charge that there has been a low level of political will to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations, and with a handful of notorious war criminals enjoying political power, "impunity is particularly problematic in Liberia" (Rouse, 2019). Protesters poured into the streets of the capital in the summer of 2019 in resistance to skyrocketing inflation and rampant economic mismanagement (Maclean & Boley, 2019). Civil society groups blame George Weah, Liberia's current president (and the country's second democratically elected president of the postwar period), for failing to deliver on most of his policy promises, especially those that could have curbed corruption and eased widespread economic insecurity (Rouse, 2020). Over 65% of Liberians live on less than \$2 a day (Dodoo, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has led to a spike in domestic violence and rape. At the urging of women activists, President Weah declared rape a national emergency in September of 2020 (Rodriguez, 2020). Women's leadership in political office has also steadily declined. In the most recent election, female candidates reported violent attacks to keep them from running for office (Koinyeneh, 2021b). In the December 2020 Senate and House of Representatives elections, Leymah Gbowee used social media to plead to those who threatened violence at the polls, "Please, please, please, do not touch the peace of Liberia that we have fought for."

In this study, we explore the plight of Liberian women in post-war peacebuilding and women's mobility after the war. We ask, how has the international community supported women in postwar peace and rebuilding? And, what challenges remain? While scholars and policymakers praise the enhanced visibility of and respect for women's leadership as one serendipitous outcome following a tragic and devastating war (Fuest, 2008; Gallo-Cruz, 2021a; James-Allen et al., 2010; Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Pillay, 2009; Pillay et al., 2010; Theobald, 2012), we seek to better understand in what ways the social regard women gained from bringing the civil war to an end has facilitated a meaningful effort toward building a culture and institutions that support peace as well as mobility and inclusion for women as we also consider the obstacles that remain. These questions call us to work within a framework of "sustainable peace," defined here as including both the absence of war and the freedom from physical violence and from the structural inequalities that threaten safety, security, and well-being. For women, sustainable peace means not only the absence of rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment in the private and public spheres but also the rights to physical, psychological, and emotional safety, employment and the ability to provide for one's needs and the needs of one's family, sexual reproductive self-determination, and the freedom to participate and lead in all the institutions governing society.

To answer these questions, we have drawn on multiple methodologies and sources of data. We began with a broad survey of international organizations that have played a role in postwar rebuilding, through economic, political, programmatic, and analytical support. A general thematic analysis of organizational reports and assessments was employed to identify different orientations to postwar priorities. We wanted to understand how different international actors identify the

sources of conflict and violence in Liberia and to gain a comparative sense of the range of solutions suggested. This reading of international documents helped to illuminate which aid and governance communities prioritized women's needs and the ways different organizations determined how to respond to political corruption, the devastation to the social and economic infrastructure, the entrenched practices of violence against women, ethnic tensions, and land disputes related to extractive industry sites. This meta-level examination revealed some common themes as well as differing assessments of the continuing causes of suffering and the best approaches to rebuilding. It also helped to locate women's positionality, shedding light on women's peacebuilding potential and challenges and women's general social security and mobility in the postwar political economy.

While our inquiry began with a keen interest in the legacy of and continued challenges faced by women peacebuilders in Liberia, our reading in the area of postwar conflicts pointed to the significant role played by extractive industries in ongoing political corruption, wealth inequality, and land disputes. Thus, we conducted seven supplementary in-depth interviews with peacemakers and organizers on this topic.² These included Liberians working with both national and international NGOs as well as a few international organizers working to offer solidarity through UN and government advocacy. To prepare for these interviews, we conducted a focused, thematic analysis of Liberian news coverage in the postwar period, running targeted searches for articles addressing "mining AND corruption" and "mining AND violence" in several national newspapers, including *The News* (Monrovia), *New Democrat*, and *The New Dawn*.

Women and Peacebuilding after the War

Three areas of literature inform our study. First, scholarship on women and peacebuilding increasingly shows that there are many reasons that, not only is it essential for women to be included in the drafting and implementation of peace agreements, so too is women's inclusion in post-war reconstruction efforts a vital ingredient for success.

International declarations to enshrine the importance of women's inclusion in the peace process are long in development.³ Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, has been one of the most significant landmark international resolutions for women and peace in recent decades. 1325 called for increased representation of women in peace and security decision-making, designated rape as a crime of war, and explicitly delineated the importance of gender mainstreaming to every part of the peace process, "the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction" (UN OSAGI, 2021). It also discusses the importance of women's leadership in post-war justice, disarmament and demobilization, and the reintegration of refugees (see also Nakaya, 2003). Several additional resolutions have followed from 1325, and together they have come to constitute a Women's Peace Security agenda, articulating the importance of the particular contributions women make to peace (Adjei, 2019).⁴

Research into postwar societies around the world demonstrates how women's inclusion in peacebuilding and postwar reconciliation programs helps to ensure a lasting and sustainable peace (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018; Anderlini, 2007; Gizelis, 2009; Heyzer, 2004; York, 1996). Although women's involvement remains marginal in the formal negotiation of peace processes, it is growing (Conciliation Resources, 2015; Coomaraswamy, 2015; Krause et al., 2018; UNSC, 2015; UN Women, 2015) and continues to prove essential to effective postwar reconciliation and societal rebuilding (Myrntinen, 2016; Nakaya, 2003).⁵ Women's visible and respected leadership following

war is also found to be necessary to prevent a continuation of or an increase in violence against women (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2013; Jennings, 2014; Saiget, 2016) and to expand women's opportunities for mobility beyond conventional services that can have the unintended effect of institutionalizing women in a "victim" status (Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2006; Karam, 2001; Porter, 2016). Women leaders help to direct the practical distribution of resources and the implementation of justice to galvanize a gender-equitable rebuilding for the long term (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Instituting a quota for women's participation (at least 30% is recommended) benefits the prioritization of women's needs and services for the peace process (Myrntinen, 2016; Nakaya, 2003). Scholars increasingly call on states and international organizations to ensure that women are not just included as additional grassroots voices but also given positions at every level of the process (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018). This should go beyond singular appointments of individual women and should instead be incorporated into a broad-based mobilization effort supporting women's empowerment and upward mobility (Hudson, 2009).

In many cases, violence against women grows stronger in the post-war period, as international eyes turn away and as wartime sexual violence carries over as a behavior more strongly habitualized during the conflict (Jones, 2011). Women are considered ready organizers at the war's end, however, precisely because of their centrally important roles in holding domestic life and thus the heart of the economy together, even as the nature of those roles have shifted over time (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018; York, 1996). They pick up the pieces because that has historically been relegated as "women's work" in their care for families and communities. Oftentimes, too, women have been deeply involved in civil society support networks during a crisis and this experience and orientation lays smooth the paths toward rebuilding society after devastation (Gizelis, 2009; Heyzer, 2004). Finally, women who have been outsiders to political rivalries and violence can often effectively take up the role of trusted, neutral third-party to lead in negotiations, as their willingness to engage all parties allays fears and uncertainty and becomes the social glue so desperately needed in a society damaged by conflict (Anderlini, 2007). It is therefore vital for women's well-being that their international allies both support women in expanding their skillful leadership while helping them to resist the gendered violence that can continue on after the war.

The literature on structural peace provides a second illuminating dimension to our framework. Peace scholars have long recognized that a critical understanding of the structural dimensions of violence is necessary knowledge for building sustainable peace. Galtung's (1969) model of "positive peace," the assertion that peace is fully realized when citizens can realize their actual potential for physical and social safety, security, and well-being, widely resonates as one that delineates the visible from invisible forms of conflict—the visible comprised of direct, physical acts of violence and the invisible containing the structural and cultural forms of violence. The absence of violence is certainly not insignificant, especially in Liberia after a period so horrific as the 14-year civil war. But this constitutes a negative form of peace according to Galtung's formulation and the incomplete nature of negative without positive peace is a concept understood by Liberian Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee's when she insists that "peace is not enough". While, certainly, there have been many meaningful criticisms responding to different implications of Galtung's theory for potentially overlooking the urgency of large-scale forms of violence or in steering the focus of peace research off track from recovering from the atrocities of active war (see, for example, Boulding, 1977; Coady, 2008; Farmer, 2004; Lawler, 1989; but see also Vorobej, 2008), we find Galtung's general framework of structural peace especially apropos to better understanding a post-war peacebuilding effort in Liberia where poverty and other social

power divisions have mapped so directly onto the outbreak of both small-scale and large-scale violence.

To address our pointed interest in the plight of women after the war, feminist revisions and extensions of structural peace theory are particularly relevant. Not only do feminists define security as belonging to individuals as well as states in a way that can account for the link between macro-level political processes and micro-level social experiences (Tickner, 2019), but also feminist theory in peace studies has reflected deeply on the visibility of women in conflicts and peace processes and the relationship between that visibility and women's *de facto* social position and power (Weber, 2006). Where Galtung has failed to offer specific theorization of how this structural model applies to women, Confortini (2006) outlines the gendered dimensions of structural inequalities that characterize every society riven by conflict and every post-conflict society striving for peace. Feminism, she explains, offers four indispensable expansions of the theory of structural peace: an understanding that gender roles and expectations are themselves embodied forms of power; an assertion of the importance of inquiry into the relationship between dichotomous gender variables and the production and reproduction of violence; a focusing of attention to the fundamental role of language in sustaining violence or envisioning peace; and a commitment to unraveling the connection between gendered identities and the perpetuation of violence.

The concept of "landscapes of violence" (Loyd, 2012; Morales & Berejano, 2008) is pertinent to Liberia because violence has been so intimately bound up in the sociohistorical dynamics of place and the social organization of that place, especially for women, and because the peoples struggling to survive in those spaces do so, in part, by navigating entrenched political economies. The feminist approach to deconstructing the ontological positionality of women in spaces of conflict and peacemaking, so that their embeddedness in gendered political economies may be disentangled (cf. McLeod & O'Reilly, 2019; Pierson, 1987) is useful to focusing the analysis of these landscapes for women. Additionally, it is important to note that feminist theory informing structural peace studies is oriented as a prefigurative body of knowledge, like nonviolence, infusing inquiry with questions about processes that can also answer questions about strategy and interventions into women's positionality in conflict and peace (Confortini in Wibben et al., 2019). And, to this point, we hope to offer productive proposals for better supporting women's peace and advancements.

Finally, because a significant arena in which international institutions affect structural inequities in Liberia is in the natural resource sector, we also incorporate insights from feminist political economy on the relationship between these industries and structural peace. Marie Mies (1986) establishes a historical materialist view of women's subjugation in the global political economy in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. For Mies, the "accumulation model" of contemporary world capitalism is inscribed into both colonial legacies (or, in this case, in legacies of economic imperialism) and the layers of inequality that relegate women to the absolute bottom rung of global poverty. It is the "ever expanding growth of commodities, wealth and productive forces" (Mies, 1986: 4) which has come to define both nature and women and other peoples who are colonized and exploited in the global economy. Feminist political economists prove that this process is not a social artifact but continues to manifest in contemporary relations where the modern, global development regime fails to offer real relief. Cohn and Duncanson (2020) argue that this is even more so in post-war societies that have been economically gutted. They contend that neoliberal economic policies themselves threaten long term stability in post-war countries,

describing how these policies prioritize debt spending over building up social infrastructure, and encourage countries to entice foreign direct investment rather than invest in their own people. Together these strategies reinforce pre-war inequalities that, we find, in turn threaten the peace that women peacemakers worked for. We will use this framework as a lens for understanding how the conflicts these women are fighting may in fact be at least partly but also deeply embedded in the inequalities created and reinforced by extractive industries.

Rebuilding in Post-War Liberia

After more than a decade of war, Liberia faced a seemingly insurmountable reconstruction effort. The United Nations Mission in Liberia was established by Security Council Resolution 1509 immediately following the peace agreement in 2003. This mission supported implementation of a ceasefire agreement, provided security forces (at that time one of the largest UN peacekeeping missions), assisted with humanitarian efforts, and initiated the training of a police force and the formation of a restructured new military (UNMIL, 2021). In 2005, attention turned to preparing for democratic elections that would move the country from the National Transitional Government to a government elected by the Liberian people. This process was monitored by US organizations, including the Carter Center and National Democratic Institute, which, after a runoff presidential election, declared both the process and Sirleaf's win as fair (Carter Center, 2005). The new administration had to hit the ground running to get the country going again by rebuilding basic infrastructure and social services and to tackle entrenched political corruption.

Some basic services were put in place right away—limited electrification was extended throughout the capital, and a Package of Health Services program was put in place to provide a minimum of primary care services in all government clinics.⁶ President Sirleaf prioritized the establishment of a functional government to tackle the corruption that had carried over into the transitional government, in which many former warlords and associates still loyal to former President Charles Taylor had already negotiated deals that benefited their own interests; she immediately fired all transitionally appointed employees in the finance ministry (Chêne, 2012). She later dismissed her entire cabinet, declaring the need for a “clean slate” to establish a political-cultural commitment to ethics and to regain the trust of the citizenry in their leaders (BBC, 2010a). An act passed in 2008 created the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission, as allegations of embezzlement of millions of dollars on the part of transitional government officials were piling up. In Sirleaf's second term, accusations of corruption increased, many concerning the new contracts being negotiated with extractive industries, including logging, rubber, iron ore, diamonds, petroleum, and palm oil (Lee-Jones, 2019).⁷

Although Sirleaf pledged to take on the corruption that was historically tied to extractive industry agreements, she was also cognizant of the country's dire straits following the war. For example, the road system connecting and providing access to vital social infrastructures was in complete disrepair, and Liberia relied on help from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and individual countries like Germany and Norway for help with road repair. Sirleaf publicly shared that dealings with China had become a lifeline for rebuilding hospitals and schools as well as roads, and that they came at a cost—Chinese firms had their eye on concession agreements for iron ore, timber, gold, and oil (Hochman, 2010).

To deal with pervasive and long-standing corruption while reopening relations with international extractive industries believed to be the country's best chance at economic recovery, the Liberian government worked with the IMF, World Bank, and US government to implement the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) in 2006. As part of its work to mitigate the country's financial mismanagement and improve regulatory agencies, GEMAP purported to support Liberia by supervising the negotiation of fair concession agreements, upholding those agreements, and enforcing regulations.⁸ Subsequently, in June of 2010, the IMF and World Bank devised a plan to relieve Liberia of a significant debt burden, and in September of that year, Liberia was pardoned for \$1.2 billion in debt by the Paris Club of creditor countries (BBC, 2010b). Sirleaf's administration directed much of their energy toward attracting foreign investors to the country's natural-resource sector (Cohn & Duncanson, 2020; Paczynska, 2016), and hundreds of extraction agreements were approved (Bunte et al., 2017). The administration required foreign investors to provide public goods, such as bridges and roads, in the areas of the country where they were operating, in the hope that this would build up the public infrastructure that was almost completely destroyed during the war (Bunte et al., 2017; Kaplan et al., 2012). However, besides employment quotas and a general enjoinder to rebuild physical infrastructure, no specific provisions were mandated under the law (Kaplan et al., 2012). Local responsibilities were established on a case-by-case basis through concessions agreements between companies and the government. The weakness and lack of implementation of these agreements have led to a considerable number of conflicts throughout the country in the postwar years, as we will discuss in greater depth below.

Women who were active in the peace movement during the war became an integral part of the peacebuilding process after the war in several important ways. Following their leadership in expanding voter registration and turnout, women began to make incremental advancements in political leadership. Women have gained key positions on government review committees; their participation ranges from 33% to 50% and, under the Sirleaf administration, women held 20% of security appointments, though many of those are paramilitary (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2011). In 2018, at the national level, women occupied 15.8% of cabinet positions and 25.4% of deputy and assistant minister positions (Visionary Young Women Leadership, 2018). However, while there were 20 female candidates in the most recent senatorial election, in December of 2020, only one was declared a winner (Koinyeneh, 2021a). In the previous election, across all 73 electoral districts, only 6.2% of the 146 women who ran for legislative seats won (Geterminah, 2017). And, although President Sirleaf appointed many women to top positions—as ministers of finance, foreign affairs, commerce and industry, gender, and development and youth; as superintendents of over a dozen counties; as inspector general of the National Police; and as national ambassadors to several countries (Svensson, 2008)—current President Weah appointed women to only two of the 17 positions in his cabinet (Tulay-Solanke, 2018).

Nevertheless, in the postwar era, women have been praised for their work in trauma healing, in mental health counseling, as journalists, and as educators of citizenship and democratic practice. In our examination of how international organizations prioritize women's post-war efforts, we found increasing and constructive acknowledgement of the overlapping nature of humanitarian and development projects, as the outcomes of work in these two fields are intimately related. Conceptualizations of women's post-war needs and challenges reveal understandings of women as: a) victims of violence; b) victims of sexual violence; c) agents of peacebuilding; d) agents of civic mobilization and e) agents of political reform. Some organizational allies explicitly identified

women's unique needs as f) educational, g) economic and some worked to support women in h) political inclusion and mobility.

The expansion of a Women's NGO Secretariat, which now supports over 100 women's organizations throughout the country; the growth of women's civil society networks like the Women in Peacebuilding Network; the expanded role played by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection; and the efforts of rights organizations with special commitments to women all help to maintain women's visibility in designated social arenas. Among the principal objectives of its Liberian Program, for example, Oxfam International claims to "champion gender justice," seeing gender inequality as one of the greatest barriers to poverty reduction and sustainable development. The UN Women program reports as important projects in postwar repair several led by women—a "Giving Voice to the Voiceless" Liberia Women Democracy Radio program; a Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment program; the Peace Hut Initiative; and the Women-Concern initiative that has influenced local enterprise campaigns—and also notes a sexual violence education program for prisoners as an achievement (UN Women, 2011). The UN Development Programme has invested millions in Liberian postwar projects, with one area of focus being women's civil society and movement building, carried out through work with the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia, Women in Peacebuilding Network, Rural Women Association, and Liberia Feminist Forum, among other local civil society organizations (UNDP, 2019).

Much has been written about this amplification of women's leadership and programming in postwar peacework and the positive effects it has had on women's social status, at least among those women fortunate enough to find professional employment in this sector and those who have directly benefited from these programs (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Prash, 2015; Shin, 2020). Reconciliation and healing have been a massive undertaking. Following the establishment of a Gender Committee for addressing the needs of women following the war, women directed "Palava Peace Huts" throughout the country, one prominent project among a number of truth and healing campaigns (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Pillay et al., 2010). For a time, trauma healing, reconciliation, and the social and psychological carework needed for the successful reintegration of former child soldiers into society was generously funded by the international community, through NGOs and sympathetic state sponsors. Groups like the long-established Lutheran Trauma Healing Program operated in all 15 counties. But a major funding retreat occurred in 2014, in part because of the Ebola outbreak that demanded other kinds of urgent international attention toward Liberia as well as neighboring Guinea and Sierra Leone.⁹ Further, despite the meaningful gains made in trauma work, many women in the country still struggle to gain economic security, while other challenges to political inclusion and freedom from domestic violence and rape are resurfacing.

Net enrollment for primary school, for example, is only at 44% (USAID, 2019a). International governmental and nongovernmental organizations have provided aid to public and private schools, with a ready concern for girls' enrollment, and schools have been identified as key sites for trauma healing and reconciliation in addition to technical and agricultural training (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017; Hillert, 2020). Still, many schools destroyed in the war have not yet been renovated, and many challenges to attendance remain. It is also estimated that 74% of all female workers in Liberia are informal workers, including 41% of those women privileged enough to have obtained university degrees. Women struggle to gain access to credit and financial services, and those who work as vendors regularly face harassment and the confiscation of their goods by corrupt

authorities (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). As one of our respondents pointed out, the Decent Work Act supports unionization in the private sector, where workers are overwhelmingly male. The Civil Service Standing Order, which pertains to public-sector workers, is currently interpreted as not extending the right to unionize, and this is the sector where more women are employed. Still, efforts at gender mainstreaming and supporting women's security and mobility politically, economically, and socially are oftentimes sequestered from those efforts that directly take on what has historically been one of the greatest sources of structural inequality leading to social conflicts and suffering in Liberia.

Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2005, investigated culpability for violations of humanitarian law, including sexual and economic crimes, between 1979 and 2003. By 2009, the Commission submitted its report to the Legislature making recommendations for prosecution of those responsible for atrocities. It concluded that among the root causes of the conflict were not only the warlords that took advantage of tribal boundaries and intentionally escalated ethnic tensions, but also the pre-existing social structural conditions of "poverty, greed, corruption, limited access to education, economic, social, civil and political inequalities; identity conflict; land tenure and distribution; [and] the lack of reliable and appropriate mechanisms for the settlement of disputes"; to this point, the report called on the new state to resolve the gross disparities in power between the settler-descended and indigenous Liberians (USIP, 2006). Additionally, the report specified "unfair discrimination against women and denial of their rightful place in society as equal partners" and "the gradual breakdown of the family and loss of its traditional value system" as gendered forces contributing to violence, with an entire chapter dedicated to "Women and the Conflict" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009).

It cannot be denied that Liberian women have continued to face uniquely gendered needs following the war and that women's equality must be prioritized. For these reasons, the women's movement is pushing for a law that will guarantee women a place at the decision-making table (Sieh 2021), and civil society leaders support ongoing anti-violence work, through reconciliation, conflict resolution, and contract negotiation programs. Local NGOs have facilitated numerous "study circles" to raise consciousness among women about their shared issues and to build strategic skills for addressing them, and they have confronted overwhelmingly male unions about the importance of women's inclusion and leadership. International organizations supporting and facilitating humanitarian and development projects in the country emphasize that women's equality is key to the country's advancements and security. However, where companies acknowledge the need for gender equality publicly, they usually fail to take meaningful steps toward implementation. Further, because gender inequities are so intimately tied to other forms of economic and political stratification, a structural understanding of violence is necessary to enable the country to work toward sustainable peace at every level. A close examination of the role played by extractive industries reveals that, even if all other variables were favorably in place for peace—including women's advancements in political, economic, and social equality—the extractive sector's practices and approach would continue to shape the structural forms of violence that fueled the civil war.

Extractive Industry at the Root of Conflict

For most of Liberia's history, the diversion of government revenue from taxes on the natural-resource sector to a small group of political elites, along with outright bribery, has been the norm (Beevers 2016); that these industries were so intimately a part of the funds used for civil war was

therefore not surprising.¹⁰ Liberian diamonds and arms trading were sanctioned by the UN in 2001. But timber and illegally mined diamonds were still being extracted from the country to fund weapons purchases, prompting an extension of pre-existing travel, arms, and diamonds sanctions and an additional UN embargo against timber exports in 2003, a significant force in bringing the long civil war to an end in that year (Lederer, 2016). At the same time, Firestone continued its legal extraction of rubber, from which Charles Taylor gained \$2.3 million in taxes during the war (Miller & Jones, 2014).¹¹ Not only did these arrangements fuel the conflict monetarily, but some companies were found to be bringing guns into the same ports they were using to extract resources (Global Witness, 2002). By capitalizing on the legitimacy of the “legal” contracts they had agreed to, these companies contributed to the dragging out of the war.

Although agreements were drawn up for every company operating in Liberia after the war, the Liberian government lacks the bargaining power needed to negotiate fair contracts with foreign investors (Boakye et al., 2012; Lujala et al., 2016). Additionally, corruption, political instability, and the history of conflict limit the country’s ability to hold companies accountable. This is especially troubling as over 50% of the land in the country is now under some kind of contract for commercial agriculture and mining (USAID, 2019b) and local news reports of incidents of violence and corruption surrounding extraction sites are ongoing (Giahhyue, 2020; Karmo, 2020; Koinyeneh, 2021b; Quollin, 2021). One example of how extractive industries have harmed the people of Liberia is provided by a 2017 report by a coalition of humanitarian investigators reported on the false promises made by investors in the New Liberty Gold project, the largest gold mine to date in Liberia. The mine’s construction displaced over 300 families who lost their homes, farms, and small artisanal mines, despite the investors’ promises to address “serious concerns” raised over the social and environmental risks. Chemicals leached into the water system near the mine, resulting in fish kills and health problems for nearby residents, while others were displaced altogether, disappointed that the company did not deliver on expected housing and access to clean water (Freudenthal & David, 2017). The company continues to mine in the area and disputes between residents and the company have led to several outbreaks of violence.

Some progress has been made in empowering Liberians to negotiate fairer contracts; these efforts are laudable. For example, Global Witness, the same organization that led the effort to uncover and disrupt Taylor’s use of timber sales to purchase arms for his soldiers, has also worked with Liberian forest-dwelling communities following the war to secure more equitable agreements. Another organization, the Solidarity Center, is one among several international NGOs with an active office in Liberia. Exemplifying the kind of powerful transnational mobilization strategies that are possible, the Solidarity Center has brought US Firestone workers into the country to build direct relationships with Liberian workers at the other end of the rubber commodity chain that connects them. US workers, appalled at the poor working conditions of their Liberian counterparts, helped them to negotiate fairer working contracts, like those US workers have won. In 2018, President Weah signed the Land Rights Act into law. This formalization of customary land ownership put ancestral community land rights on an equal footing with private land ownership to help local communities fend off predatory extraction deals. But deals made before the passage of this law are not open to renegotiation, and ongoing investigations reveal that many of the same problems persist. In their 2019 interviews with members of the Liberia Land Authority and the National Bureau of Concessions, Kepe and Suah (2021) learned that members got involved only at the end of the concession agreement negotiations. Several of our interviewees expressed similar

frustrations—that the national government assumed unfair degrees of power in finalizing the legal aspects of negotiations. Local use and occupation of the land in question was often unknown to those negotiating the deals, and funds promised for concessions were still not seen by locals long after the deals had been made and land was in use by foreign corporations. We also learned of the surreptitious ways negotiators curried favor for their agreements by paying off local leaders and/or presenting local residents with one-time monetary and other gifts, only for the locals to realize later that they hadn't fully understood the costs of permanently relinquishing their homes and farming lands. Concession agreements vary greatly with regard to corporations' demands, and studies repeatedly arrive at the same conclusion about the role played by the government—oversight is limited and often excludes those most directly affected, and unequal power dynamics and corruption taint what might otherwise be a fairer process (Kaplan et al., 2012; Lee-Jones, 2019). And, even after the passage of the Land Rights Act, companies have failed to enact mandates in their licensing agreements, leaving employment and education promises unfulfilled (Beevers, 2020; Siakor & Qaiyim, 2014). While some data indicate the potential benefit of natural-resource concessions subject to more demanding public good provision requirements (Bunte et al., 2017), the lack of compliance prevents the country from making overall progress in measures like GDP per capita and the poverty rate.

Concerns over the country's political stability have prompted many companies to reevaluate whether to continue operations in Liberia at all given the high costs and diminishing profits, and several have already shut their doors (Clarke & Azango, 2017; Dodoo, 2018, 2019). As of 2019, Firestone had laid off nearly 15% of its workforce “due to continued and unsustainable losses resulting from high overhead costs associated with the company's Concession Agreement” (Liberian Observer, 2019).

International authorities have long understood that forced labor and resource exploitation in Liberia—including timber, diamonds, palm oil, gold, rubber, and iron ore, all sold on international markets—were being used to fund violence and civil war of which violence against women was an integral tactic (Cain, 1999). And when Dutch courts convicted former timber baron Guus Kouwenhoven of being an accessory to war crimes in 2017, he was held liable for using his business to aid and abet the destruction of villages, violent attacks on people, murder, torture, and rape (De Vos, 2017). This two-step relationship between extraction and violence against Liberians (including violence against women) is also well-understood within Liberian society where so much of the power to earn the money used by perpetrators of violence (both violent presidents and their warlord opponents) has come directly from the exploitation and sale of sought-after natural resources. Figure 1 depicts one recent example—a drawing that was displayed at the National Museum as part of its “Cartooning for Justice” exhibit of children's artwork. In this particular illustration, the citizen crying about the pain of war easily makes the connection between mineral extraction, stolen profits, and violence. However, among the international humanitarian and development communities working in Liberia, the dots are rarely connected between international companies' actions and the violence women experience on the receiving end.

Figure 1. A drawing from the “Cartooning for Justice” exhibit, National Museum of Liberia, Monrovia, 2019

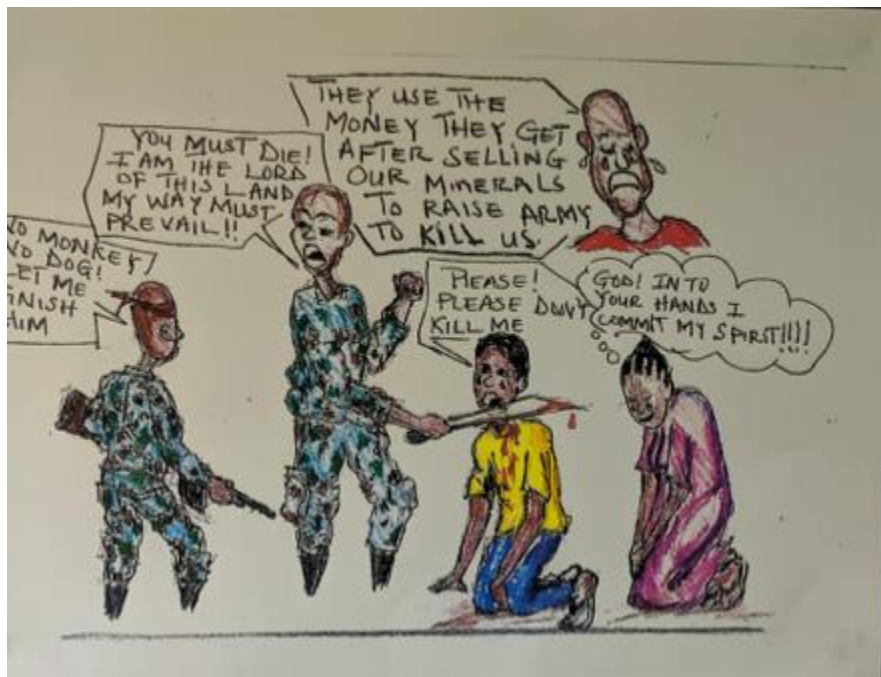


Photo Credit: Front Page Africa

A few select reports have discussed women’s welfare in the context of the need for mainstreaming gender in extraction industries. For example, the World Bank’s Trade and International Integration Team commissioned a policy analysis of African women in the mining sector to identify inequities in employment opportunities and experiences within these typically male-dominated industries. The committee authored a report that described how the nature of extractive industry contracts resulted in losses of land and access to water and other natural resources that disadvantaged women as heads of the domestic economy (Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2015). They note how the opening of a mine typically upends employment for both men and women, who leave agricultural employment to seek work with (foreign) companies. “Mining creates local boom-bust economies in Africa, with permanent effects on women’s labor market participation” (p. 2).¹² Unfortunately, short-sighted efforts at gender mainstreaming could encourage these cycles by concluding that access to employment improves women’s lives and thus foreign industries are providing opportunities for gender mobility (the authors cite, for example, the 2012 World Bank Development Report). In the end, women have experienced many deleterious secondary effects as mining companies take over and forever alter local land and economies. These include increased inequalities between women and men, which exasperate power inequities in households; land degradation that displaces women’s ability to farm and easily access safe water; and, with losses to agricultural self-determination, women who turn to temporary service economy jobs also lose other kinds of economic agency (Aragón & Rud, 2013; UNECA, 2011). Reports also note the abuse of women who are employed in the industry or the rise in violence, sexual and domestic abuse, the drug trade, and gambling that occurs when only men are employed by industries that enter impoverished communities. Some studies consider how to expand women’s inclusion in different steps of the mining processing chain where powerful links on the chain are dominated by men or where the

qualities of work required would be taboo for women to participate in (Fritz et al., 2018). Development industry leaders sometimes praise token women employees as exemplary of successful gender mainstreaming, while overlooking the deeper structural relationship between extraction and violence that characterizes the political economy of so many countries where these operations are located, including Liberia. Below, we elaborate on the importance of a structural understanding of violence as articulated in Galtung's Framework. Here, the structural form of violence, often invisible to formal international development and humanitarian programs, includes the loss of economic self-determination experienced by women and men living in areas that become open to foreign extractive enterprises through means both primary (taking of land, water, and resources formerly used by locals for agriculture and subsistence) and secondary (degradation of land, water, and resources and loss of agency in transition to service economies). These structures are among those necessary to the conditions for lasting peace.

Others acknowledge the deeper structural inequalities women face in the countries and areas in which their companies operate but present their investments in addressing those inequities as charitable opportunities rather than work that falls under their companies' ethical imperatives. In a study commissioned by the World Bank's Oil, Gas and Mining Policy Division, "Mining for Equity" (Eftimie et al., 2009), 31 different development goals ranging from economic empowerment and education to public health and democratic engagement are presented along with potential voluntary steps mining companies can take to invest in the local communities. None of these suggestions involves a formal or active commitment made by the oil, gas, and mining industries, however. Women's formal organizations that engage in negotiations with extractive industries continue to report on communities' marginalization and suffering in the face of false promises. The Community Development Management Committee in Nimba County, for example, has worked with a local NGO, the Committee for Peace and Development Advocacy, to call on the government to deliver on the 20% promised for communities directly affected by mining operations, citing that these areas still lack health facilities, schools, and roads and continue to suffer from unemployment (Menkor, 2021).

A Structural Approach to Peacebuilding and Empowerment

In a 2018 *New York Times* editorial, Liberian Nobel Laureate and women's peace activist Leymah Gbowee declared, "Peace is not enough." She went on to explain:

Peace is more than the absence of gunfire. Decisions made in the political realm affect directly whether our community is healthy, safe and at peace. If a country's agricultural budget is cut, female farmers will suffer. If education budgets are cut, fewer girls will go to school.

Her sentiments resonate with a feminist and structural peace theory perspective. The cessation of war-time violence brought a significant kind and level of peace to Liberia after so much suffering, but this constitutes a negative form of peace, that could be (and advocates argue should be) conceptualized as a foundational first step to a fuller and sustainable form of positive peace. Figure 2 depicts Galtung's framework of visible and invisible, negative and positive peace. Positive peace ensures the economic security and cultural integrity that Galtung argues every society is capable of extending to each of its members, and in so doing, dissolves the unequal distribution of resources and power that is seated at the heart of conflicts and violence. A feminist approach to this framework for structural peace emphasizes that women's visibility in conflict resolution and peace

processes and post-war rebuilding must reflect the degree to which women's rights can be advanced, socially, politically, and economically (Confortini, 2006; Weber, 2006).

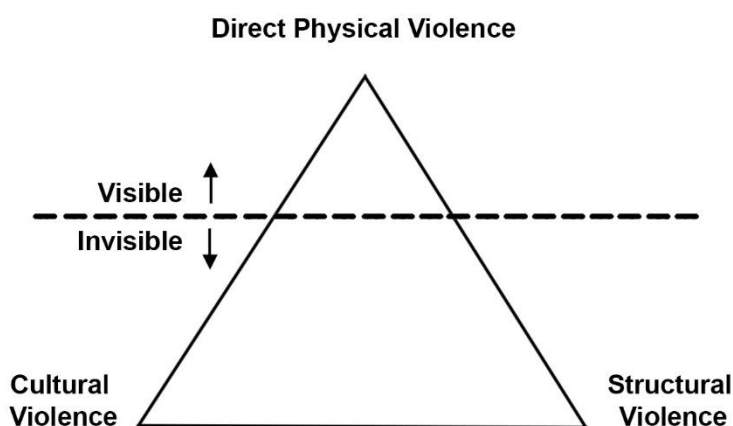


Fig. 2. Galtung's Framework of Visible and Invisible Violence

From this perspective, the humanitarian work focused on direct forms of violence provides both focused and invaluable support for healing and reconciliation in postwar Liberia—all of our respondents and dozens of reports attested to the positive impacts of this much-needed work. And scholarship acknowledges this work as essential to peacebuilding after war. Kirthi Jayakumar (2019) has argued for an expansion of Galtung's framework to account for the layers of unresolved healing and trauma that sometimes go unseen when solely addressing the economic dimensions of structural violence. A sustainable structural approach adds that attention to structural inequities that perpetuate power disparities and fuel conflicts and suffering is also needed. Some observers attribute the responsibility for violence in the Liberian civil war solely to the individuals who were party to direct physical aggression. This perpetuates an incomplete and skewed understanding of local "cultures of violence" and even of "ethnic tensions," one that overlooks the historical and geopolitical legacies of colonialism and economic imperialism that continue to affect politics in African countries (cf. Hironaka, 2005). Peace scholars have increasingly noted the effects of the "resource curse" on post war societies. Lujala, Rustad and colleagues (2012) make the case that resource-rich post-conflict countries have even greater potential for achieving lasting peace because their abundant resources could be used for alleviating poverty, compensating victims, creating new jobs and ensuring job security through substantial economic investment. Sadly, they document how resource-rich post-conflict countries are instead even more likely to relapse into war. In Liberia, the resurgence of seemingly isolated incidences of violence throughout the country in recent years should be examined from a structural and systemic framework, one that asks how continued political corruption, land and employment conflicts, and violence against women are commonly anchored in deeper social-structural issues. We also should ask what powerful actors and/or political arrangements benefit from and play a part in perpetuating these social structural weaknesses.

In the face of disregard for this structural and political-economic dimension of inequality and conflict, there are local and international advocates who work to make visible the enduring relationship between extraction and violence, which only becomes more dangerous as the scale of extraction, and with it the scale of people's suffering, increases. They do so through consciousness-raising campaigns and developing alternative economic opportunities. Transparency International's Women, Land and Corruption initiative, for example, in partnership with This Is My Backyard, an independent monitoring agency, seeks to make visible the land corruption and degradation surrounding the "rush for rocks, gold, and palm oil" in rural Liberia (Hodgett, 2018). Other ventures include charitable approaches to fighting the corruption of the extraction trade, like that of MiaDonna, a company that sells lab-grown diamonds and donates funds through its Greener Diamond Foundation to repair the damages caused by the conflict diamond trade in Liberia as well as in Togo and Sierra Leone. Still, these efforts remain siloed from the dominant approach of development and humanitarian solutions, which tend to overlook or downplay the institutionalized relationship between extraction and conflict. Because of the industries' exploitative orientations to business and the power of international financial institutions in managing and profiting from investments, they proffer forms of gender inclusion that are incremental or secondary, without taking on the deeper structural effects experienced by women, especially those living in the regions where extractive projects are located. Even the combined efforts of supporting women's leadership in anti-violence work, prioritizing women's political mobility, and developing new economic opportunities for women will fall short of achieving structural security and equality in Liberia if the inequities of extractive politics are not addressed. Figure 3 adapts Galtung's framework to depict the concept that "peace is not enough" if programmatic blind spots continue to allow other forms of suffering to seed new forms of violence. In Liberia, the extractive industry plays a central and significant role in the economy and has been directly linked to power inequities and conflicts. The strength of this relationship in the country demands that we include addressing these structural harms in a holistic approach to peace, as we work to end both physical and structural forms of violence rooted in and exasperated by structural vulnerabilities.¹³

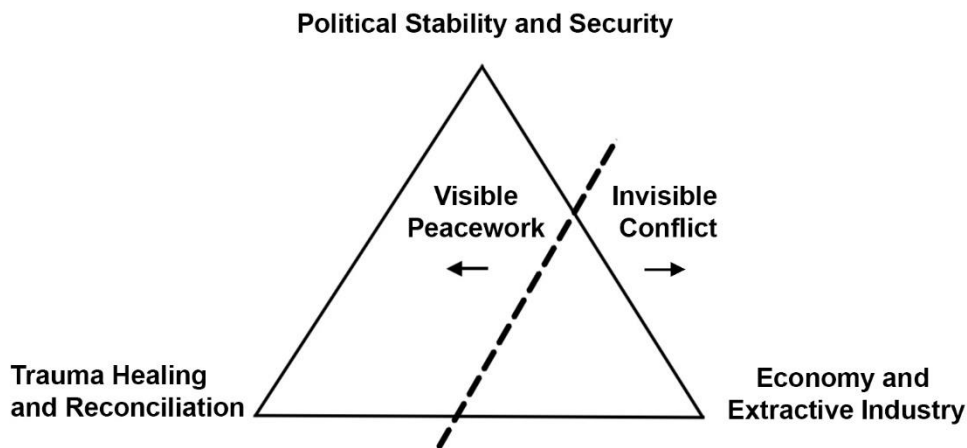


Fig. 3. Visible and Invisible Violence in Liberia

Women cannot work effectively for peace and equality within a system that is intrinsically reliant on exploitation, displacement, and corruption (McLeod & O'Reilly, 2019; Pierson, 1987). Liberia's relationship with extractive industries, which continue to favor profits over local sustainable economies, creates both visible and invisible problems for women, as they are more vulnerable to the risks posed by foreign direct investment (FDI) in the natural-resource sector (Eftimie et al., 2009; Shilue & Fagon, 2014).¹⁴ Economic benefits, such as employment opportunities, tend to be short-lived and tenuous to international management and markets as they also tend to bypass women, limiting their access to and denying them control over the new income brought into their families and communities. Additionally, the deleterious consequences of FDI, such as environmental degradation, disproportionately impact women's livelihoods. Women are responsible for growing food and gathering water; land displacement and pollution can make these tasks more difficult and dangerous. Following public criticism, the government has attempted to address these risks by inviting communities into negotiations with corporations, but women are seldom included (Makor & Miamen, 2017). According to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, approximately 100,000 Liberians have attempted to take control of their own economic opportunities by engaging in artisanal and small-scale mining operations (ASM). While ASM is a way for Liberians to generate income, it can lead to additional environmental degradation and health risks, both of which disproportionately affect women (Eftimie et al., 2012).

Cohn and Duncanson (2020) argue against neoliberal economic policies that push a reliance on international extractive industries that threaten the fragile stability in postwar countries. These policies, they explain, prioritize spending on debt payments over building up social infrastructure and encourage countries to entice FDI rather than invest in their own people, thereby reinforcing prewar inequalities. In Liberia, this has already begun to deteriorate the peace that women activists worked for (Paczynska, 2016). Cohn and Duncanson attribute responsibility for this quagmire to the agenda of international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which pressures countries to focus on increasing FDI inflows and GDP as signs of progress, rather than measuring success by the number of people lifted out of poverty.¹⁵

However, a framework for structural peace allows for an understanding that national economic growth does not necessarily lead to societal recovery from conflict. Instead of reducing poverty, the pathway of development through extraction pursued in Liberia acts as an "invisible hand" guiding the country toward new conflicts diffused throughout the countryside. President Weah has recently promised the Liberian people that he will deliver a successful development plan in his remaining three years in office (Weah, 2021). Yet, his plan thus far consists of more concession agreements with extractive industries.¹⁶

In the era of gender mainstreaming brought on by the Women, Peace and Security agenda, women are celebrated for their efforts in addressing direct, physical forms of violence. The humanitarian community has increasingly invested in women's leadership in addressing cultural sources of tension and violence. Even the development community increasingly recognizes this area of women's peacework as important to economic recovery, without acknowledging the mode of development employed in Liberia as intimately related to the foundation from which conflicts and violence develop. This work is vital to supporting women's security and advancement and it should continue with greater investment and support from the international community. But, to summarize

our findings for peace and women's studies scholars and for the international women's peace, and security community, the special focus given to women-focused programs cannot be segregated from the equally fundamental work of addressing the roots of economic conflict. Placing women into positions of leadership at every level is imperative. Enabling women to lead their country through a fair and just economic recovery is essential. Both must happen to achieve peace and security for women in post-war Liberia.

While our discussion highlights the fact that structural inequities are not synonymous with outright acts of physical violence, they do have a direct relationship to that violence in both short-term and long-term capacities. Concession agreements have proven to provide minimal social support and instead constitute compromises on Liberia's behalf, given its extremely vulnerable economic position in a global political economy where extractive industries hold disproportionate power over post-war countries' dire need for economic rebuilding. Although global industries and their supporting economic institutions may present such concession agreements as the best possible outcome for these countries' exigencies, these arrangements do not build reciprocal exchanges between producing and consuming economies, a fact that has led UN General Secretary António Guterres to declare these industries responsible for a litany of social ills and conflicts in the countries that supply their resources and to call for a radical reeling in of their power (Guterres, 2021). Here we identify these industries as key players in the Liberian "landscapes of violence" (à la Loyd, 2012, and Morales & Bejarano, 2009). If their role in perpetuating vulnerabilities in the Liberian political economy is not challenged and transformed, we see little hope for a meaningful development that lifts Liberia out of poverty and ongoing conflicts and tensions.

We close our discussion by offering a selection of possible responses to this dynamic that could prove helpful to women peacebuilders and their allies. Cohn and Duncanson (2020) make several important suggestions—challenging IMF restrictions that preclude spending on crucial social services; transforming tax laws to close loopholes in the area of cross-border flows; instituting more progressive income taxes overall; and introducing and committing to a new economic model that values environmental sustainability. We add to these some recommendations for strategic organizing. Those who wish to offer aid and solidarity to the Liberian women's peace movement may raise consciousness and mobilize resistance along the value chain of extractive industries that have disadvantaged already suffering Liberians. Maria Mies (1986) proposes that to overcome the unequal dynamics of the present global sexual division of labor, and to create an alternative global economy, women must organize across the borders of producing and consuming countries. Likewise, in his book *Blood and Earth*, a groundbreaking exposé of the relationship between extractive industries, modern-day slavery, and ecological destruction, Kevin Bales (2016) outlines an eleven-step supply chain along which a variety of companies and individuals operate, buy and sell goods, and ultimately share responsibility for the human and environmental impacts of the entire chain. Bales presents this multi-link network as a promising social space for resistance where transnational actors can publicize the ongoing inequities that are feeding into a new context for future conflicts.

It is vital to realize the difference between incremental reforms of a structure of economic transactions that may include women and an effective transformation of the economy that can empower women and men to achieve sustainable security and lasting peace. Ultimately, suggestions like those from the World Bank—commissioned gender study mentioned above to simply recruit more women to work in the process of extraction will not bring about system-wide

structural change. Other models that envision long-term sustainable solutions for Liberia should be developed. This should include those that invest in sustainable agriculture and, in the face of climate crisis and ongoing poverty, a circular economy that can promise greater health and security for the Liberian people beyond the global extraction/consumption market. To support a women's peace movement in Liberia, we must also support the building of a strong foundation for their peacework—we cannot, and Liberians cannot, afford for us to continue to overlook the sources of conflict and violence, especially those that are fueled by the development of its political economy.

Endnotes

¹ Despite her popularity leading to her first presidential election—she had come to be known affectionately as the “Iron Lady” and “Ma Ellen,” and was admired for her long-term experience in finance and governance, as a Harvard-educated, former World Bank senior loan officer and assistant administrator to the United Nations Development Programme—she would soon run against 15 other candidates in the second election following Liberia’s 14-year-long civil war.

² Respondents were initially contacted by email based on their participation in notable organizations working on post-war peacebuilding in Liberia. These interviews supplemented our organizational and discourse analysis with insider information and perspectives on current challenges. The interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms and, during the long struggle with Covid-19, we were only able to collect seven interviews. Certainly, with direct access to the field and in a different time and under different circumstances, more interviews would illuminate additional aspects of the processes we addressed here.

³ Some scholars look back to the Hague Peace Conference that established the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace in 1915 or point to the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women’s Report on Equality, Development, and Peace, which marked another important milestone in codification. The 1995 Beijing Conference was a turning event for establishing women’s rights as human rights on a global scale. It helped to formulate an explicit commitment to including women in post-conflict development projects and to identify women as a key area of focus for the resolution of armed conflicts and post-war reconstruction (Nhengu, 2019).

⁴ These include UNSCR 1820, UNSCR 1888, UNSCR 1889, UNSCR 1960, and UNSCR 2016 (UNSC, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, and 2013).

⁵ Krause, Krause and Bränfors (2018) conducted a broad statistical analysis of the gendered composition and outcomes of 130 peace agreements between 1990 and 2014. Of these, they found the quality of peace agreements signed by women (30 in total) included more provisions aimed at political reform and to be more effective in implementing these provisions. A study of 61 peace agreements signed between 2008 and 2012 found that only two of them included women signatories (Conciliation Resources, 2015). A study of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 found that only 9% of the negotiators were women (UN Women, 2015).

⁶ Although this new health package was a much-needed social service, the magnitude of rebuilding in the health sector cannot be overstated—242 out of 293 public health facilities had been destroyed. There was also an exodus of health-care workers, leaving 30 doctors and nurses identified at the war’s end to serve the entire country (Kruk, 2010). The international community contributed much to regenerating the health-care system, providing over 80% of health-care financing in 2007 and 2008 (Liberia Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2008).

⁷ In one such case, a grand jury indicted several high-ranking government officials along with the London Sable Mining Company on charges of bribery and corruption related to extractive agreements in 2016 (Giahvue, 2016).

⁸ Training journalists was also a crucial step in improving the transparency needed to take on corruption, as a free and professionally trained press could add to the checks on government and industry. Although members of the national journalists’ organization, the Press Union of Liberia, breathed a sigh of relief in the long-awaited reprieve from press repression following the war, many had to cope with their stations and equipment having been looted by combatants. Some support was offered by international NGOs. As newspapers gained in freedom and capacity,

journalists quickly took corrupt officials in the transitional government to task for embezzlement and other blatant ethics breaches (Lee-Jones et al., 2019).

⁹ Ebola hit Liberia hard in 2014 and it became the epicenter of the international health crisis. Lack of public infrastructure, such as a national health-care system, made it difficult for the country to contain the disease. This crisis, coupled with the drop in commodity prices from a few years earlier, led to a large funding retreat on the part of foreign investors. Over the next few years, companies would continue to downscale their production in the country, and FDI inflows would drop drastically. Liberia wasn't declared Ebola free until 2016, which coincided with the end of the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

¹⁰ Foreign extraction of natural resources has been a significant force driving the Liberian economy since the 1920s and also explains the country's historic debt and corruption among leaders. Between 1960 and 1980, mining iron ore alone made up around 60% of the country's exports and 25% of its GDP (Wilson et al., 2017).

¹¹ These payments were made directly to Taylor because the company recognized him as the legitimate governing authority of Liberia.

¹² Kotsadam and Tolonen (2015) find in their sample of African employment trends following mining ventures, for example, 90,000 women gained service sector employment after mining industries came to the area initially, but in the long run, 280,000 women eventually left the labor market.

¹³ A power theory analysis adds another dimension to Galtung's concepts of positive and negative peace. In *Power: A Radical View*, Steven Lukes (1986) discusses latent and overt kinds of conflict that pertain to the ways conflicts with extractive industries could be reduced to simple issues of whether or not they provide enough employment opportunities for those living in areas surrounding extractive projects. This reductionist view misses the bigger structural picture of the inordinate amount of power wielded by these industries overall when, arguably, Liberians could wield greater power as their country possesses the sought-after resources. Though, sustainable peace and a reciprocal relationship between Liberia and its global investors might also necessitate challenging the kind of "power-over" conceptualizations Lukes and others employ in practice and working for a more egalitarian "power-to" achieve lasting peace (on this point, see Gallo-Cruz 2021b).

¹⁴ ArcelorMittal, to take one notable example, is the world's leading steel and mining company, operating in 60 countries. In 2019 they accumulated revenues of \$70.6 billion as workers who had come to depend on employment were made redundant leading to conflicts in mining areas (ArcelorMittal, 2020).

¹⁵ Maria Mies' work is also pertinent here. She has eloquently articulated the ways in which an "accumulation model" of contemporary global capitalism is inscribed into both colonial legacies and the layers of inequality that relegate women to the absolute bottom rung of global poverty. It is the "ever expanding growth of commodities, wealth and productive forces" (Mies, 1986, p. 4) that defines both nature and women and other groups of people who are colonized and exploited in the "eyes" of the global economy.

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Acknowledgments: The authors offer thanks for the many incisive comments and helpful suggestions made by our editor Ron Pagnucco, our reviewer Bob Press, our colleagues in Brandeis University's Women's Studies Research Program, Donna Dodson, Kate Larson, Victoria Papa, Kate Price, and Robin Robinson as well as our fellow panel participants in the 2021 annual Sociologists for Women in Society Winter Meeting and the 2021 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women meeting. We are grateful to the College of the Holy Cross for research support and for the insights and dedication of our activist and organizer respondents.