



Men, Masculinities & Armed Conflict

**Findings from a four-country study by
the Women's International League for
Peace and Freedom**

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Acknowledgements

The work of many people has made this report possible:

For Afghanistan, this includes: Jamila Afghani and Hareer Hashim, who led the research study; Siad Darwish, who provided technical support and co-authored the country literature review with Jamila and Hareer; and Farooq Yousaf and Dean Peacock, who authored a paper on men's allyship.

For Cameroon, this includes: Sylvie Jacqueline Ndongmo and Guy Feugap from WILPF Cameroon; as well as consultants Michel Ndongo Kitio and Laura Berka Nfomi, who conducted the data collection for the research study; Tanushree Kaushal, author of the country literature review; Lotsmart Fonjong, who authored a background paper on land issues and men's allyship; and Delphine Brun, who provided technical support to the project and authored a background paper on men's vulnerability.

For Colombia, research was led by Veronica Alcalde and Diana Salcedo Lopez for La Liga de Mujeres para la Paz y la Liberacion (LIMPAL), WILPF's section in Colombia, and Alejandro Parra Macias, from Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objektoras de Conciencia ACOOC; and Mia Schöb, who provided technical support to the project, authored the literature review for the study, and with Colleen Putzel-Kavanaugh, authored a background paper on structural drivers of conflict.

For Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this includes: the Annie Matundu Mbambi, Lisette Mavungu, and Paty Siwala of WILPF DRC, and Crispin Kobolongo, who worked with WILPF staff on the country study; Sarah Lablache-Comber and Daphne Genatio, who authored the literature review for the study; and Henny Slegh, who provided technical support to the project.

This report is an output of WILPF International's project on Confronting Militarized Masculinities, led by Dean Peacock, who commissioned this synthesis report, and oversaw its drafting by Alan Greig. Consultation with Madeleine Rees, Ray Acheson, Jenny Aulin, Genevieve Riccoboni, and Maria Butler (all from WILPF International) helped in shaping the outline of the report. Feedback from a Research Advisory Group also informed the report's structure and contents. Advisory Group members included: Jennifer Bruno Rodriguez (MenEngage Global Secretariat); David Duriesmith (University of Sheffield); Lotsmart Fonjong (University of Buea); Mpiwa Mwangiro (Sonke Gender Justice & MenEngage Africa); Henri Myrtilinen (Consultant); Maria Rashid (University College London); Kopano Ratele (University of Stellenbosch); and WILPF participants: Maria Butler, Dean Peacock and Genevieve Riccoboni (International Secretariat); Veronica Alcalde (WILPF Colombia); Guy Feugap (WILPF Cameroon); and Hareer Hashim (WILPF Afghanistan). The media and communications for the Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace Programme of which this paper forms a part, has been carried out by Rebecca Ladbury and Danya Agababian from Ladbury Communications and the design and layout by the team at ChillCreate.

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01

BACKGROUND

Research tells us that socially constructed gender norms which associate masculinity with power, violence and control, play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity.

Many men across the world oppose these rigid, inequitable and violence-endorsing norms, and work in solidarity with women and those beyond the gender binary to resist them, although in many settings far too many people continue to endorse them. But peace processes continue to be dominated by the voices, perspectives and needs of those men who hold power, and who require the continuance of patriarchal systems to retain this power. To achieve a feminist peace, based on principles of equality, justice and demilitarised security, to address the root

causes of violence with a feminist lens that pays attention to power dynamics and that challenges patriarchy and traditional gendered roles, we must strengthen alliances between men and women and other stakeholders around a collective agenda for institutional change and personal transformation.

In July 2020, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the MenEngage Alliance launched a joint initiative, entitled Confronting Militarised Masculinities. The initiative aims to challenge the gendered root causes of violence and armed conflict, and advance feminist peace through a better understanding of the ways in which the "war system", and related war economies, are enmeshed with practices and representations of masculinities.¹ The initiative has largely focused on four countries – Afghanistan,

¹Richani, N (1997). *The Political Economy of Violence: The War-System in Colombia*. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 39(2): 37-81.

Cameroon, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo – and comprised research and analysis, alliance-building both nationally and globally, and joint advocacy under the aegis of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This report summarises the findings of research studies conducted by WILPF staff in each of the four countries,² as well as the insights and conclusions from a set of literature reviews and background papers that were commissioned as part of each country’s research.³

Gender equality can mean several different things, such as gendered representative equality (for example, gender quotas in representation); gendered equal access to voice, gendered civil rights or human rights; gendered equal opportunities, gendered equal outcomes, equality in all gender relations – in work, organisations, families etc, and the transcending of gender (Hearn 2001).

Given the above, Sri Lanka is ranked 109 out of 144 countries listed on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) for 2017, having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981.

However, CEDAW recommendations haven’t been able to be implemented for years, now due to socio-political reasons in Sri Lanka.

The country was one of the first in Asia to grant voting rights to women, and, in 1960, it became the first nation to elect a woman as prime minister. However, Sri Lanka’s national parliament female representation is 5.8%. This is much lower than the average for the high human development group among which Sri Lanka is found (20.6%), and also lower than the average for all developing countries (20.2%).

Pervasive gender stereotyping and its impacts were highlighted as a continuing problem by the Committee reviewing Sri Lanka’s report on its implementation of CEDAW.

The Committee is concerned about the persistence of stereotypes regarding the roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men among the general public and the media. It is concerned that gender role stereotyping perpetuates discrimination against women and girls and is reflected in their disadvantageous and unequal status in many areas, such as employment, decision-making, land ownership, education including sexual and reproductive education, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women, including violence in family relations.

² WILPF Afghanistan (2021). *Militarised Masculinity's impact on Afghan Women's Political Participation in the Peace Process*. Kabul, Afghanistan: Afghan Women Peace and Freedom Organisation. 2. WILPF Cameroon (2022). *Engaging Men and Boys for Peacebuilding in Cameroon: Research Report on Militarised Masculinities*. Yaoundé, Cameroon: WILPF. 3. LIMPAL Colombia (2022). *Confronting Militarised Masculinities: The Institutional and Cultural Militarisation of Masculinities in Colombia – The Most War-Like Country in Latin America*. Bogotá, Colombia: La Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad. 4. WILPF DRC (2022). *The Militarised Masculinities In The Democratic Republic Of Congo: Factors Of Violence And Voices Of Resistance*. Kinshasa, DRC: WILPF.

³ Darwish, S. Hashim, H. & Afghani, J (2022). *Masculinities, War and Violence in Afghanistan*, WILPF.

Yousaf, F. & Peacock, D. (2022). *Making Visible the Afghan Men Who Are Working for Women's Rights and a Gender-Just Society*. WILPF

Brun, D. (2022) *A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West*, Co-published by WILPF, GENCAP and NORCAP

Kaushal, T. (2022) *Militarized masculinities in Cameroon: A Review of Structural Gendered Dynamics*, WILPF.

Fonjong, L (2021). *Friends or foes: Men, Access to Land, Gender Relations and Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF, Geneva.

Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). *Structural Drivers of Militarised Masculinities in Colombia: An Analysis of Corruption, Land Dispossession and US Interventionism in Colombia*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF Geneva.

Schöb, M. (2022) *Militarised Masculinities in Colombia and Approaches to Building Alternative Masculinities in Colombia for a Feminist Peace*, WILPF, Geneva.

Lablache-Combié, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

02

INTRODUCTION

2.1

SERIAL WAR AND THE NORMALISED WAR SYSTEM

2021

PERSISTENT WAR AND ITS COSTS

War remains a constant presence in many people's lives.

The saturated global media coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine has provided a daily reminder of war's horrors and terrors. Off-screen, the death and devastation wrought by armed conflict continue to destroy lives in many parts of the world. Military operations from November 2020 onwards by the Ethiopian government in the Tigray region against the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, have left at least 2.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴ War in Yemen, entering its eighth year, is estimated to have killed 377,000 people as at the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease, with nearly half the country of 30 million people facing severe food insecurity.⁵ The Costs of War research project at Brown University reports that the US government is currently waging war, in the form of self-declared counterinsurgency operations, in 85 countries.⁶

The human cost is enormous. It is estimated that over 929,000 people have been killed in wars fought since

the US launched its "War on Terror" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Several times as many have died due to the reverberating effects of these wars, with some 38 million people displaced from their homes as a result.⁷ Given this destruction of lives and livelihoods, why then does war persist? In his account of trends in and prospects for warfare and humanitarian response in the 21st century, Slim observes that, "War remains extremely resilient as a political strategy that is actively planned or pursued by governments and armed groups."⁸ Such resilience, he suggests, is grounded in the fact that:

"Great Powers and billions of ordinary people still believe in war. They put their faith in its organised violence as a means to deter their enemies, ensure their survival and influence the world in their own best interests."⁹

His accounting is certainly open to question, as he adduces no evidence in support of the claim that "billions of ordinary people still believe in war". But "faith" in the organisation of violence for political purposes and material interests certainly persists.

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/tag/tigray-conflict>

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/9/yemens-war-explained-in-maps-and-charts-interactive>

⁶ <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Slim, H (2022). *Solferino 21: Warfare, Civilians and Humanitarians in the Twenty-First Century*. London, UK: Hurst & Company, p6.

⁹ *Ibid*. p7.

2.1.2

WAR AS CONDITION, NOT EVENT

In attempting to explain this faith, it is helpful, as the studies summarised in this report make clear, to think of war less as an event (with its neat temporality of “before”, “during” and “after”), and more as a condition of life.

The beginnings of Colombia’s contemporary armed conflicts are often traced back to the peasant insurgency that arose in the aftermath of La Violencia, the ten-year civil war (1948–58) between forces of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, fought mainly in the countryside.¹⁰ This itself had historical antecedents; in the 19th century alone, throughout the Colombian territory, there were nine national civil wars and 14 regional wars. Afghanistan has been continually at war since the Soviet invasion in 1978. Writing before the subsequent victory of the Taliban insurgency against the US-backed regime, Daulatzai characterised this as an experience of “serial war”: “the Soviet Occupation (1978–89); the years of violence and upheaval following the Soviet Occupation, which I term the Kabul Wars (1989–95); the Taliban rule (1995–2001); and the ongoing NATO-led invasion and occupation beginning in 2001 (as part of a ‘Global War on Terror’).”¹¹

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced continuous violence and civil conflict for more than two decades. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 caused a massive exodus of Rwandans to the Eastern DRC, and the subsequent incursion of Rwandan armed forces into the DRC started a multi-year conflict known as the Great African War, in which Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Chad, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda have participated.¹² If the origins of the armed conflict in Cameroon are more immediate, erupting in 2016 in response to government repression of peaceful protests in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, its mode of violence recalls colonial era antecedents. The Cameroon Conflict Research Group at the University of Oxford observes that the current conflict “could be viewed as related to the very similar tactics and practices that the French implemented in their violent repression of democratic anti-colonial movements, and passed to Francophone proxies upon independence”.¹³ Even after independence, “France controlled the Cameroon army and police force up to 1965, and continued a campaign of torture, mass extrajudicial killings, and even aerial bombardments against civilian populations as a means of crushing anti-French sentiment.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Schöb, M (2021). *Militarised Masculinities in Colombia and Approaches to Building Alternative Masculinities for a Feminist Peace*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF.

¹¹ Daulatzai, A (2019). *Remaining Undone: Heroin in the Time of Serial War. War and Health: The Medical Consequences of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. C Lutz and A Mazarino. New York, NY: New York University Press: 73–89, p76.

¹² Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

¹³ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). *“We Remain Their Slaves”: Voices from the Cameroon Conflict*. Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, Faculty of Law, p71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

2.1.3

THE NORMALISED AND MASCULINISED “WAR SYSTEM”

This enduring experience of armed conflict renders war both a normal, as in familiar, and normalised, as in expected, even desired, form of political action and mode of social and economic relations.

Writing 25 years ago, Richani characterised the ongoing conflict in Colombia as a “war system”, based on a “precarious balance of forces”¹⁵ between the military, and the political and economic elites behind them, the guerrillas and organised crime, engaged in “clashes between both institutions and ways of living that rest upon, and are supported by, a positive-sum, political economy of scale in which the benefits that accrue to each outweigh the political and economic costs incurred”¹⁶.

The literature review commissioned for the WILPF DRC study echoes this analysis, noting that “armed groups have become embedded in the social structures, and strive for access to power over land and mineral resources in the region”¹⁷. Similar points have been made about

the proliferation of armed groups and “warlordism” in Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion. In a context where the “illegal drugs trade accounts for between 25 per cent and 33 per cent of the Afghan economy’s total worth”¹⁸; it is clear that, “Afghan groups have succumbed to the market-style logic of the treatment of opiates through a process of ‘vertical integration’ that facilitates the acquisition of a dominant position in the drugs production and supply process.”¹⁹

Many of those directly involved in fighting these protracted wars sense, too, the systemic and functional character of conflict. In his ethnographic account of the decade-long armed conflict which convulsed both Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1991 onwards, naming it as the Mano River War with reference to the river between the two countries, Hoffman found that there “were those in the state military for whom a continued war and a continued relationship with the rebels was simply more profitable than peace”²⁰, suggesting a “portrait of war as a violent mode of participating in today’s global economy”²¹. Nor was this a crude economic rationality:

¹⁵ Richani, N (1997). *The Political Economy of Violence: The War-System in Colombia*. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 39(2): 37-81, p38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p39.

¹⁷ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

¹⁸ Robins, P (2021). *The Crescent Three States: Which Way to Go? Transforming the War on Drugs: Warriors, Victims, and Vulnerable Regions*. A Idler and JCG Vergara. London, UK: Hurst & Company: 207-228, p213.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p214.

²⁰ Hoffman, D (2011). *The War Machines: Young men and violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, p38.

²¹ *Ibid.* p122.

“An ongoing war is not an impediment to making business arrangements with one’s enemies, provided these arrangements are done properly. This is not simply a cynical market logic – it is still cast at least partly as a project of postcolonial citizenship, working for the benefit of the nation, and as a project of both personal right and collective advancement. All underwritten by violence.”²²

Recognising this condition of normalised “serial war” shapes how to approach questions about the links between gender, militarism and armed conflict. It is a commonplace to note that wars remain overwhelmingly fought by men. Equally, the leaders who declare war, the bankers who fund war, the manufacturers who make weapons for (and profits from) war and the media makers who create spectacles of (and profits from) war are overwhelmingly men. But if the “war system” is masculinised in so many ways, as a system it must be approached analytically in ways that take account not only of individual actions, but also of institutional interests and ideological agendas. Understanding the links between gender, militarism and armed conflict involves questioning the

interests and agendas served by the masculinising of war, and the ways in which gender is enlisted in war’s normalisation.

Equally, such an approach to understanding the gender dimensions of normalised armed conflict, taking account of its individual, institutional and ideological vectors, suggests a need to work with the concept of gender as itself a complex formation. Decades of feminist activism and scholarship have established the truism that gender is socially constructed. Less often remarked is that such social construction is ongoing, shaped not only by political and economic conditions, but also by the material interests and political purposes of a range of actors and forces, national and transnational. Five years into the US occupation of Afghanistan, Daulatzai took note of simplistic, static accounts of gender in relation to the ongoing conflict there and cautioned that:

“The predominant mode of engaging with the suffering of Afghans, and Afghan women in particular, has been through an understanding of gender which is inflected

primarily by static impressions of Afghan patriarchal culture and/or a particular rendition of Islam while failing to account for how gender has been inflected by violence, war, and occupation and subsequently what work war and its accompanying forces have performed on social institutions, family structure, and individual subjectivities in Afghanistan.”²³

The “war system” is not simply gendered; it structures gender itself. Detailing these interactions and their political, economic and social conditions is a necessary step on the path to feminist peace, to which WILPF’s four country studies seek to contribute.

²² Hoffman, D (2011). p122.

²³ Daulatzai A (2006). *Acknowledging Afghanistan: Notes and Queries on an Occupation*. *Cultural Dynamics* 18(3): 293-311, p299.

2.2

MILITARISED MASCULINITIES: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

The concept of “militarised masculinities” has gained prominence in recent years, in both academia and activism, as an analytical, and increasingly political, tool with which to make sense of the gendered dimensions of militarism and armed conflict and the gendered obstacles to feminist peace.

In Eichler’s straightforward formulation, “Militarised masculinity, at its most basic level, refers to the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action.”²⁴

For Theidon, the concept of militarised masculinities captures the “fusion of certain practices and images of maleness with the use of weapons, the exercise of violence, and the performance of an aggressive and frequently misogynist masculinity”.²⁵ As Eichler makes clear, this fusion is not biologically determined, but instead constructed and maintained by social norms, and the political and economic interests they serve:

*“The association of women with pacifism and of men with militarism remains strong despite changes in the gender makeup of militaries during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At the core of feminist theorising is the insight that these perceived gender differences are socially constructed rather than biologically inherent.”*²⁶

This socially constructed association of men with militarism is mutually reinforcing. Cockburn emphasises that “masculinity shapes war and war shapes masculinity”.²⁷ Patriarchal norms of masculinity, celebrating violence, dominance and aggression are central to warmaking and fuel armed conflict, as feminist scholars and activists have long made clear.²⁸ Cockburn puts it plainly: “...patriarchal gender relations predispose our societies to war. They are a driving force perpetuating war. They are among the causes of war.”²⁹ Hearn stresses that the “military is one of the clearest and most obvious arenas of men’s social power, violence, killing, and potential violence and killing, in their many guises. It is an understatement to say that men, militarism and the military are historically, profoundly and blatantly interconnected.”³⁰ As he continues:

*“Most of both of the spending and the killing is directed by and done by men. Men remain the specialists in violence, armed conflict and killing, whether by organised militaries, terrorism or indeed domestic violence. Men have dominated these individual and collective actions. In war and through militarism individual men, like women and children, may suffer, even be killed, but men’s collective structural power may be undiminished, even reinforced.”*³¹

Yet, as scholars and activists have also long observed, as a social construction, the militarisation of masculinities requires constant work on the part of military institutions and warmaking elites in order to nurture the masculinities that normalise and legitimise armed conflict.³² Eichler notes that:

*“When state and military leaders aim to display strength through the use of military force or hope to recruit male citizens through appeals to their masculine identity, they are relying on and reproducing militarized masculinity. While men are not inherently militaristic, militarized masculinity is central to the perpetuation of violence in international relations.”*³³

²⁴ Eichler, M (2014). *Militarized Masculinities in International Relations*. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 21(1): 81-93, p81.

²⁵ Theidon, K (2009). *Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia*. *Human Rights Quarterly* 31(1): 1-34, p5, cited in Schöb, M (2021). *Militarised Masculinities in Colombia and Approaches to Building Alternative Masculinities for a Feminist Peace*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF, p1.

²⁶ Eichler, M (2014). p82.

²⁷ Cockburn, C (2007). *From Where We Stand: War, Women’s Activism and Feminist Analysis*. London, UK: Zed Books, p249.

²⁸ Enloe, C (2008). *Feminism and war: stopping militarizers, critiquing power*. *Feminism and War: Confronting US imperialism*. RL Riley, CT Mohanty and MB Pratt. London, UK and New York, NY: Zed Books: 258-263. Sjöberg, L (2013). *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

²⁹ Cockburn, C (2012). *Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War: A Feminist Standpoint*. *Making Gender, Making War: violence, military and peacekeeping practices*. A Kronsell and E Svedberg. New York, NY and Abingdon, UK: Routledge: 29-46, p29.

³⁰ Hearn, J (2012). *Men/Masculinities: War/Militarism – Searching (for) the Obvious Connections?* *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*. A Kronsell and E Svedberg. New York, NY and Abingdon, UK: Routledge: 47-63, p47.

³¹ *Ibid.* p50.

³² Goldstein, JS (2001). *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

³³ Eichler, M (2014). p81.

Research in the fields of feminist peace studies, feminist international relations and critical military studies is also increasingly highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of links between masculinities, militarisation and armed conflict. Just as the field of gender studies has long acknowledged the importance of pluralising the term “masculinities” in order to reflect the diversity of gender practice and representation associated with expressions of maleness, so too is it acknowledged that there is no singular “militarised masculinity”.³⁴ As Myrntinen et al caution, such reductive accounts of a singular “militarised masculinity” remain “trapped in discourses that either revolve around essentialist arguments highlighting men’s ‘innate’ propensity to violence, or focus on simplistic uses of frameworks such as hegemonic, military/militarised, or ‘hyper’-masculinities.”³⁵ They urge attention to the complexities of men’s gendered experiences of both militarism and armed conflict, given that:

“the use of physical violence is often not viewed societally as a hallmark of respectable or hegemonic masculinity... being a member of the military or a military-like institution is not necessarily the most accepted or most respected, let alone the most hegemonic, way of being a man, even in conflict-affected situations... the connection between military masculinities and violence is often complex, and

*at times contradictory, rather than a straightforward endorsement of violent masculine behaviour”.*³⁶

In recognition of this complexity, there is growing interest in men’s diverse experiences of militaries and armed conflict, whether in terms of the “thwarted masculinities” of men being unable to fulfil societal expectations of manhood in conflict-affected settings, or the invisibility of men’s vulnerabilities (eg to sexual violence) during wartime. Myrntinen et al also warn of the heteronormative assumptions implicit within much of the discourse on “militarised masculinity”, meaning that, “Sexual and gender minorities (SGM), and their roles, agency, and vulnerabilities in both conflict and post-conflict periods are often wholly absent from gender in peacebuilding discourses and practice.”³⁷ Indeed, as Henry suggests, more complex accounts of gender and militarism have also investigated the militarisation of femininity, in that this:

*“challenge to narrow definitions of military masculinity went some way to challenge any tendency towards simplistic or pathological definitions by demonstrating that military organisations also revere various personal characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, such as sacrifice, compassion, and cooperation”.*³⁸

More recently, there is also a growing acknowledgement that research on militarised masculinities must address processes of racialisation, in terms of both the neo-colonial political and economic relations that shape contemporary armed conflict, and the racialised images of war and military atrocities that remain hegemonic. As Hoffman suggests, representations of, and research on, armed conflicts in the global South are often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, racialised, for, “Whatever one might say or write in an effort to humanise young male militia fighters in Africa, the visual image of black male bodies with weapons carries a demonising baggage that for many viewers may be inescapable.”³⁹ This point is echoed by Lablache-Combier and Genatio in their literature review to accompany WILPF’s study in DRC. As they suggest, any investigation of militarised masculinity must take account of “a wider context where racist tropes about the DRC and about Congolese men as violent influence prevailing narratives”.⁴⁰

These complexities form both the premise and the substance of the findings from the four research studies undertaken by WILPF staff in Afghanistan, Cameroon, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to which this report now turns.

³⁴ Connell, RW.(1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

³⁵ Myrntinen, H, L Khattab and J Naujoks (2017). *Re-thinking hegemonic masculinities in conflict-affected contexts*. *Critical Military Studies* 3(2): 103-119, p104.

³⁶ Myrntinen, H, L Khattab and J Naujoks (2017). p107.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p112.

³⁸ Henry, M (2017). *Problematizing military masculinity, intersectionality and male vulnerability in feminist critical military studies*. *Critical Military Studies* 3(2): 182-199, p188.

³⁹ Hoffman, D (2011). pxx.

⁴⁰ Lablache-Combier, S, Genatio, D & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

03

WAR, CULTURE AND VIOLENT MASCULINITIES

3.1

THEMES OF DOMINATION AND PROTECTION

A common theme emerging from the four country studies, is the significance of “violent masculinities” in motivating men’s involvement in armed conflict, and in normalising armed conflict itself.

Albeit with national specificities, each of the four studies identified the problem of gender norms equating the expression of masculinity with the use of violence, and celebrating the male warrior as a culturally valued embodiment of masculinity. In the DRC, the study conducted by WILPF DRC found that:

“Socially constructed gender norms associate masculinity with power, violence and control, and play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity. Men must be tough and are supposed to be born with natural powers to dominate and protect others, mainly women and children. Stereotypical gender roles prevail in the DRC where men are indeed assumed to be the boss, provider and protector of the family; which,

therefore, gives him a privileged position and power in relation to his wife and children.”⁴¹

Several issues are highlighted here. The emphasis on “natural powers” indicates the influence of binary constructions of gender, which posit an innate difference between men’s “natural” aggression and will to dominate and women’s “natural” passivity and subordination. As a local government official in the East region of Cameroon insisted, “Masculinities are caused by men’s willingness to dominate, a culturally based complex since we all grow up in a mould that shapes them in a certain way.”⁴² In turn, this fosters a framing of gender roles, in which it is men’s responsibility to protect “their” women and children. Within this gender binary framing, it is both natural and normal for men to be involved in armed conflict, both because they are by “nature” more disposed to the use of violence, and because it is their duty to protect the “weak” from those who threaten them.

This framing was very apparent in the research findings from the study conducted by WILPF Afghanistan. While

⁴¹ WILPF DRC (2022). p9.

⁴² WILPF Cameroon (2022). p34.

cautioning the need to avoid simplistic generalisations, the study nevertheless notes the role played by Pashtun honour codes, or pashtunwali, in fuelling both militarism and armed conflict. Although an extremely diverse set of codes and practices, pashtunwali forms boundaries and prescriptions on the moral and ethical behaviour of men and women by proscribing correct ways of being male and female. Central to these prescriptions is the belief that a man's honour is closely linked to the protection of land, family and community. As the study notes:

“Pashtunwali and honour thereby play an important role in the jihadi ideology of the Taliban. As protection of kin and land, as well as revenge, figures centrally into the code of pashtunwali, suicide and martyrdom, if carried out against occupiers, can be a great source of honour, and thereby a source of masculinity.”⁴³

⁴³ WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

3.2

GUNS AS A TOOL AND SIGN OF MASCULINITY

Within this framing, guns become an important marker of masculinity, as both a tool for the exercise of protection and a sign of men's adherence to the male warrior ideal.

As the WILPF Afghanistan study found, “within Pashtun ritual practice, many young men are given guns in rites of passage into manhood, associating the pashtunwali code not only with honour, violence and protection, but also with the bearing of arms”.⁴⁴ Not only this, but the condition of “serial war” discussed earlier has meant that weapons are widely available, “as a result of conflict-related weapons proliferation, and the lack of adequate controls on weapons has contributed to the further militarisation of a country at war and therefore contributed to violence against civilians”.⁴⁵

Interviews with military personnel conducted by WILPF Cameroon for their study make this connection between weapons and masculinity explicit. As one respondent said,

owning a gun “makes us feel more like a man, because it's us who have to secure the nation, it's our responsibility”.⁴⁶ Similarly, the WILPF DRC study found that, “Men in the military emphasise the role of ‘control, respect and honour’ in being a soldier, a patriot who defends his people, who is the boss of the family and superior to his wife.”⁴⁷ The gun as a marker of dominant masculinity is significant, in that the “motivations for joining the military have been explained as the desire for honour and respect through military status and a weapon that gives power and control”.⁴⁸

In Colombia, the study by WILPF Colombia, known by its Spanish acronym LIMPAL, highlights how normalised the use of guns has become as a way to fulfil and communicate the male gender role of protector, reporting that it “is also common to see adults buy weapons with the intention of protecting what ‘is theirs’, be it their private property or even to protect their sisters, mothers, partners and daughters”.⁴⁹ In this way, “gender roles and the hierarchisation put in place through militarisation are also solidified and perceived as ‘true’, where women are

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p52.

⁴⁷ WILPF DRC (2022). p21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p21.

⁴⁹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p33.

placed in the weakest and lowest link in the social hierarchy”.⁵⁰

A broader research literature echoes these findings, including in this paper produced in 2022 by WILPF for the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC):

*“Guns are often linked to notions of ‘manliness’, as well as to activities which are seen as ‘manly’ pursuits such as hunting, warfare or even violent crime. These notions are embedded in expectations of men to be providers, protectors of their communities, and at times violent agents of change. The close real and symbolic links between masculinities and small arms are reproduced in popular culture and are also reinforced by arms manufacturers, almost always owned and run by men.”*⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p33.

⁵¹ Schöb, M and H Myrntinen (2022). *Men and Masculinities in Gender Responsive Small Arms Control. Issue Brief 2: Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC)*. p6.

3.3

MALE SOCIALISATION INTO MILITARISM

The research studies make clear how early this socialisation of boys into masculinised norms of aggression, domination and protection begins, and the ways in which such norms normalise both militarism and armed conflict.

In Colombia, focus groups with community members in conflict-affected areas found reported that “particularly in their childhood, the games they were taught were strongly marked by militaristic guidelines”,⁵² and that “narratives that glorified soldiers were taught at school”.⁵³ In a focus group with students from the University of Cartagena discussing childhood influences, “different characteristics of the militarisation process were identified, such as, for example, the use of war toys” and that:

“in their childhood it was common to see boys dressed as policemen or soldiers, and the group equated this fact with civic-militarist training, since it is through these

elements that the state has been able to approach the civilian population to appeal in favour of militarism, with diverse strategies focused on children as well”.⁵⁴

Perhaps more fundamentally, “it was identified that the family is the base militarising nucleus” in that “within the family system the hierarchies that also exist in militarism are reproduced”.⁵⁵ The young men and women in this focus group:

“identified that the same structures found in the army, where the guiding principle is obedience and discipline, are found in school and in the family, eventually also replicating themselves in general in the civil society, where this figure of authority is no longer the principal of the school or the father of the family, but the soldier or the policeman”.⁵⁶

The studies also reveal the extent to which military organisations are themselves agents of male socialisation. In the DRC, the ex-combatants from both the army and non-state armed groups who were interviewed as part

of the study, had spent most of their lives in a militarised environment, joining “at a very young age and have been involved in several armed conflicts over the past decades”.⁵⁷ Compulsory military service in Colombia continues to inculcate patriarchal norms of male domination and female subordination for between 45,000 and 60,000 young people every year, “which is why many of these young men end up normalising GBV, from the perspective of assuming that the women with whom he interacts are there to satisfy his desires as a man-soldier”.⁵⁸

The condition of serial war discussed earlier, also conditions young people from an early age to accept the everyday presence and practices of soldiers in their communities as

being a normal way of life and normalised mode of social relations. This has “caused entire generations of boys and girls to grow up seeing the army or an armed group as the only referent of authority, masculinity and power”.⁵⁹ This militarist modelling of power and authority can be very literal. Focus groups convened by the LIMPAL study in Colombia reported that:

“Children grew up replicating different characteristics that they saw in the soldiers of their neighbourhoods: their way of walking, the treatment they had among their fellow soldiers, the treatment they had with the people who lived in the neighbourhood they patrolled and their particular gestures, which, to the children, exuded authority and power.”⁶⁰

⁵² LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p28.

⁵³ Ibid. p29.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p31.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p112.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p33.

⁵⁷ WILPF DRC (2022). p14.

⁵⁸ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p7.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p40.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p28.

3.4

COMPLEXITIES OF GENDER: NORMS AND PRACTICE

Influential theories of gender emphasise that gender norms, for example those equating masculinity with domination and aggression, do not simply precede and produce behaviour.⁶¹

Rather, such norms are themselves produced by everyday practices of individuals and institutions; they exist in and through practice, and are not prior to it. The WILPF studies, and related research, reveal a complexity of gender practice that suggests a diversity of masculinities, both behavioural and representational. This, in turn, suggests that the hegemony of militarised norms of masculinity is never total, but always vulnerable to other ways of doing and imagining masculinity, which can be harnessed in work for feminist peace.

In Afghanistan, the honour code of pashtunwali celebrates not only the male protector role, which has been identified as fuelling armed conflict, but equally incorporates an emphasis on hospitality and pays great attention to the

non-violent management of conflicts.⁶² Indeed, Yousef and other scholars note that the narrow conception of pashtunwali as inherently violent is a colonial construction.⁶³ As Johnson makes clear in his detailed account of colonial discourse on “a simplistic Afghan ‘way of war’”, the “idea that, in Pashtun society, there was endemic and deadly feuding was, in fact, the result of specific land arrangements implemented by the British, which led to a particular peak in internal unrest”.⁶⁴

Close-grained research is also revealing the situational nature of gender practice. Chiovenda’s ethnographic interviews with a group of male Pashtun informants in Afghanistan uncovered distinct differences between their public performance of conventionally dominant masculinity, and their private selves. Chiovenda cautions that “we must avoid conflating cultural idioms with each individual’s subjective take on them”,⁶⁵ noting that an “interpretation of intergender relations based on fairness, respect, and, ultimately, love, emerges strongly from the words of these men”.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Butler, J (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

⁶² WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

⁶³ Yousaf, F (2019). Pakistan’s “Tribal” Pashtuns, Their “Violent” Representation, and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement. *SAGE Open* 9(1).

⁶⁴ Johnson, R (2014). *The Afghan Way of War – Culture and Pragmatism: A Critical History*. Hurst & Company: London, UK, p32.

⁶⁵ Chiovenda, A (2018). *Shaping a “Different” Masculinity: Subjectivity, Agency, and Cultural Idioms among Afghan Pashtun Men*. *Reconceiving Muslim Men: Love and Marriage, Family and Care in Precarious Times*. MC Inhorn and N Naguib. New York, NY: Berghahn Books: 63–84, p65.

⁶⁶ Chiovenda, A (2018). p66.

Prevailing “cultural idioms” of masculinity are often more complex than reductive accounts of militarised masculinities suggest. The WILPF studies reveal some of this complexity. In its focus group discussion with religious and traditional leaders (54 men, two women) in Cameroon, the study found that participants regarded the use of violence to settle family/community disputes as unacceptable and illegitimate. Far from violence being a “natural” expression of masculinity to maintain male domination, the community leaders did not believe:

“that the use of violence reinforces the power and the authority of the person exercising it. Instead, for them, the means to be used to maintain peace are: dialogue, weekly meetings to troubleshoot disputes, isolation/banishing of those who commit illegal acts, collaboration with local authorities, prayer and sensitisation.”⁶⁷

In similar vein, the WILPF DRC study, in its interviews with ex-combatants from state and non-state armed groups, found that these men “emphasise discipline, order and justice as characteristics of a good soldier and condemn violence, indiscipline, aggression and abuse of power”.⁶⁸ As the study

reports, “In other words, weaponised versions of masculinities – promoting violence and abuse of power – are not seen as positive, but respondents believe men are vulnerable when pressured into using violence.”⁶⁹

There is a disjunction here between these accounts of an orderly and disciplined masculinity which rejects violence and aggression, in contexts of armed conflict in all four countries which have experienced persistent and pervasive horrific acts of violence. As noted above, respondents in the DRC emphasised that men’s recourse to violence was the result of pressure, linked often to the male protector role discussed earlier. This was made explicit in the Cameroon study:

“While some men decide not to engage in violence, many others feel forced by society to become violent, because of the gender norms constructed about them as powerful and supposed to defend their community or social group in the event of an attack.”⁷⁰

Based on its study in Colombia, LIMPAL articulates this disjunction differently, as a masculine duality, in which “socially accepted masculinity” operates in tandem with unrestrained violence. Framed as exception, this “disorderly” violence is

paradoxically sanctioned by the norm of “orderly” masculinity. As LIMPAL puts it, this dual expression “in which many men linked to various expressions of militarism and militarisation (soldiers, police, guerrillas, paramilitaries, gang members, private security agents, escorts, etc) build a ‘socially accepted’ masculinity” serves to:

*“reproduce various male myths such as the provider father, responsible, sexually active and exemplary, while at the same time operating in an alternate masculinity (hidden in some cases) associated with multiple practices of violence that emerge under various circumstances, which can change according to the armed group to which one belongs and the function or hierarchy that they have there”.*⁷¹

This finding echoes scholarly work on the “paradox of restraint”. Through case studies of authoritarian leadership in Russia, the Philippines and Uganda, Tapscott notes the ways in which such leaders deploy a narrative of the male protector, whose excessive violence is sanctioned, paradoxically, by his authority to exercise restraint and enact a protective, purportedly caring and paternalistic masculinity. In this way, Tapscott:

⁶⁷ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p45.

⁶⁸ WILPF DRC (2022). p23.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p28.

⁷⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p33.

⁷¹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p7.

“recasts the conceptual utility of militarized masculinities, showing that the concept’s inherent tensions between ordered discipline and unaccountable violence produce and project authoritarian power, giving militarized masculinities special potency as a mode of social discipline in these contexts.”⁷²

That militarised masculinities operate as a form of social discipline, and the political and economic interests served by this operation, is an important theme emerging from the WILPF studies, to be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this report.

⁷² Tapscott, R (2020). Militarized masculinity and the paradox of restraint: mechanisms of social control under modern authoritarianism. *International affairs* (London) 96(6): 1565-1584, p1565.

3.5

MILITARISM AND THE HETERONORMATIVE GENDER BINARY

However complex men's expression of diverse masculinities may be, it remains true across all four study countries, that such masculinities are underpinned both by a binary idiom of male domination and female subordination, and very real inequalities in political and economic power faced by women.

As reported by the Cameroon study, "Our research also indicates that men's domination in our communities is considered as normal by women and men",⁷³ linked to the "patriarchal and traditional practices that promote the systematic exclusion of women from decision-making bodies, discrimination against women and girls which has been for decades perpetuated generation after generation".⁷⁴ Similar findings are reported by the other WILPF studies, and supported by other social survey research on gender attitudes.

⁷³ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p35.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p34.

⁷⁵ Sleggh, H, G Barker, B Ruratotoye and T Shand (2012). *Gender Relations, Sexual Violence and the Effects of Conflict on Women and Men in North Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Preliminary Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Cape Town, South Africa and Washington DC: Sonke Gender Justice Network and Promundo-US.

⁷⁶ Gereš, N, B Heilman, SI Hashimi, R Kakar, M Kelberg, L Hakobyan, S El Feki and G Barker (2018). *Reflections on Gender, Patriarchy, and Peace: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US, UN Women and Global Affairs Canada.

⁷⁷ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p38.

The results of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), carried out in North Kivu in the DRC, reveal that support for traditional gender norms, including male dominance, is high among both men and women.⁷⁵ Similar survey research in Afghanistan found that a "great many men, and some women, uphold rigid ideas about gender roles, violence, women's public lives, and masculinity", with "72 per cent of women in the survey agreed that "a married woman should have the same rights to work outside the home as her husband as compared to only 15 per cent of men".⁷⁶

In Colombia, LIMPAL's study highlights the social psychological mechanisms through which this binary idiom of male domination and female subordination becomes "common sense", ie hegemonic, in gender relations. As the study found, "from childhood, aspects of "manhood" begin to be highlighted to ensure that boys are manly and that they distance themselves from, or reject, all kinds of expression of femininity, as this is perceived as inferior and weak".⁷⁷ Key to this rejection of femininity is an insistence that boys and men suppress emotional

expression that indicates vulnerability, which LIMPAL links directly to the inculcation of militarised masculinities:

*“one of the key aspects in the construction of militarised masculinities is the guidelines given to men regarding their emotions: these must be omitted and repressed at all costs. This aspect was recognised in the focus group as fundamental because by not having tools and healthy ways to manage emotions, it is very likely, said the young people, that emotionality is processed through violence and hostility towards other people.”*⁷⁸

Research in Cameroon suggests that this emotional repression at the heart of patriarchal masculinities serves to perpetuate armed conflict, in part by making it harder to talk about the costs of conflict for men. Brun’s 2022 study published by GENCAP, NORCAP and WILPF of the vulnerabilities and needs of adolescent boys and men caught up in the fighting in Cameroon, found that the “social expectation of having to act tough when faced with violence is, according to several informants, an additional barrier preventing men and boys from readily reporting the violations inflicted upon them”.⁷⁹ This emotional repression

is also associated with increased substance use as a coping mechanism, whose numbing effects may also contribute to men's perpetration of violence. As Brun reports:

*“Cameroonian society traditionally imposes rigid expectations upon males, such as showing strength and hiding feelings. Because of the prevailing view that being a ‘real man’ is about being tough and not showing fear or sadness, emotions can remain ‘locked inside’. Using drugs, smoking, and drinking alcohol are, for some adolescent boys and men, the easiest way of numbing the pain and dealing with these unacknowledged emotions.”*⁸⁰

Addressing such emotional suppression has been an important strategy in working with men for feminist peace in the DRC. The Living Peace Institute (LPI) has successfully implemented a community psychosocial support group methodology with ex-combatants. As reported by the DRC study:

“In this programme, they learned to manage stress and traumatic memories by adopting gender-friendly and non-violent coping strategies. They learned to recognise

*their own reactions to stress and trauma and they were encouraged to adopt non-violent and positive behaviour in the face of problems.”*⁸¹

In addition to emotional repression, the WILPF studies also highlight the constriction of gender expression and sexual orientation as a further mechanism for maintaining patriarchal masculinities, and their links to militarism. In Afghanistan, the WILPF study notes the use made of Pashtun honour codes “to formulate a new ethno-nationalism in Afghanistan, one that reified normative ideals of pashtunwali and was defined by national independence and resistance to outside powers”. In turn, this formulation “rendered the Afghan state as an inherently female entity and defined Afghan masculinity as inherently heterosexual, as opposed to a previous more fluid personate understandings of male sexuality”.⁸²

Decades of feminist analysis have drawn out the links between patriarchy and heterosexuality, emphasising that the gender binary of male domination and female subordination is heteronormative; men’s control over women’s sexuality continues to be a primary mechanism for exercising and reproducing such domination. Homosexuality, together

⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ Brun, D (2022). *A more generous embrace: Why addressing the needs of adolescent boys and men is essential to an effective humanitarian response in Cameroon's North West and South West*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Refugee Council, p13.
⁸⁰ Brun, D (2022). p19.
⁸¹ WILPF DRC (2022). p15.
⁸² WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

with non-normative gender identities and expressions, threatens this heteronormative gender binary. The operations of policing and punishing non-normative genders and sexualities have long been central to preserving patriarchal masculinities. It is unsurprising, then, that the military, as a site of intensified expression of such masculinities, has also been a site of intensified anxiety about non-normative genders and sexualities, even in societies where significant progress on LGBTIQ+ rights has been made.⁸³ The WILPF/LIMPAL study in Colombia found that “masculinities are militarised and prioritised at the expense of other diverse gender expressions that are rejected and suppressed”.⁸⁴ Focus group participants “identified that sexual and gender dissidences are marginalised in order to glorify the hyper-masculine and hyper-virile figure of the duty-to-be of man in a militarised

society”, pointing out that this “type of hierarchisation, which, in addition to being tacitly accepted by the culture, is also present in all spheres of social life, invites violence as a method of disciplining diverse bodies under the same norms of cisheterosexual and militarised masculinities”.⁸⁵

Compulsory heterosexuality infuses military institutions and militarist cultures in otherwise very different societies, from sexualised hazing rituals for new recruits, to widespread sexual harassment and abuse faced by female military personnel, to the sexualisation of weapons and armed conflict itself. Findings from the WILPF studies highlight the ways in which the psychology of male sexual entitlement, long associated with the expression and enforcement of patriarchal social relations, is further enabled by weapons

during wartime. The Cameroon study found that “the place given to women by the society is to be at the disposal of men to satisfy their perceived right to have sex which they use to justify the use of GBV in conflict”.⁸⁶ In the DRC, respondents in the WILPF study confirmed that men’s “sexual power is also considered an important strength to compete with other men and to control one’s own woman”,⁸⁷ and noted that armed conflict can both amplify and threaten men’s sense of sexual potency. Relatedly, the WILPF DRC study reports that, “Perceptions of men’s sexuality as a power to compete and control others indeed fuel destructive sexual behaviours that include sexual violence” and that such “violence is often used as a weapon to defend wounded male identities in revenge against other men who have taken their wives, to prove and display male power”.⁸⁸

⁸³ Belkin, A (2013). *The Politics of Paranoia*. *Journal of Homosexuality* 60(2-3): 214-218.

⁸⁴ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p53.

⁸⁷ WILPF DRC (2022). p20.

⁸⁸ WILPF DRC (2022). p21.

3.6

FROM SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TO POLITICAL ECONOMY

Men's use of gender-based violence, and in particular sexual violence, against women and girls during wartime continues to be seen, in much of the policy and grey literature, as emblematic of the psychology of violent masculinities being both heightened and deployed in armed conflict.

As the WILPF DRC study notes, the “instrumentalisation of male socialisation as tough, dominant, aggressive and courageous makes men fit to go to war and adopt the characteristics of militarised masculinities”, and as soldiers, men “have access to uniforms and weapons which give them the power to dominate, to intimidate and are therefore authorised to resort to violence”.⁸⁹ This authorisation signals that “abuses of power and violence committed by men, including rape and sexual violence, among other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), are manifestations of militarised masculinities”.⁹⁰

All four studies refer to the evidence of widespread use of gender-based violence by men during armed conflict. Respondents interviewed for the WILPF study in Cameroon reported that, “Gender-based violence (rape, sexual aggression, physical and psychological violence, forced marriages, denial of opportunities and resources) and sexual exploitation and abuses are seen on a daily basis” and that these incidents “no longer offend many people”.⁹¹ That GBV is both widespread and accepted is attributed both to underlying patriarchal norms which sanction violence as a legitimate expression of masculinity and men's control over women, and to the effects of protracted armed conflict which have normalised the use of violence. In Afghanistan, the WILPF study reports that “GBV is also fed by the more general persistence of violence within society, its inherent role in the resolution of conflict after four decades of war, and its centrality to the construction of masculinity.”⁹²

Persistent and normalised GBV is also instrumentalised for military purposes. The literature review commissioned in support of LIMPAL's study in Colombia, reports that

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p9

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p9

⁹¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p53.

⁹² WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

the “few available surveys show high rates of sexual violence across Colombia, in particular in conflict-affected areas”, emphasising that “gender-based and sexual violence forms part of the codified language of war itself” because of “the gendered meaning it conveys and the power hierarchies it can thereby install and reinforce”.⁹³ The report delineates the multiple uses of GBV as a “weapon of war”, from serving as a “mechanism of social cleansing” to “control and domination” to demonstrating “power over civilians and suspected collaborators of rival groups”; furthermore, “Such practices have a longstanding tradition in Colombia’s war histories.”⁹⁴ The DRC study is similarly clear that, “Sexual violence has been widely and systematically used as a weapon of war in the DRC.”⁹⁵

However, the DRC study also cautions against a reading of “conflict-related sexual violence” as being simply strategic and instrumental. It notes research with combatants in the DRC, which found that sexual violence could more often be interpreted as the result of a breakdown rather than exercise of military command, and was regarded by many male soldiers as the result of a “failed masculinity” rather than fulfilled masculinity.⁹⁶ The emphasis given to “rape as a weapon of

war” in much of the policy literature on addressing the links between GBV, militarism and masculinities has also been critiqued for exceptionalising certain forms and incidents of sexual violence, and neglecting the broader continuum of men’s violence that women, girls and gender and sexual minorities face before, during and after armed conflict.⁹⁷ Its neglect of men’s own experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by other men during war has also been noted, a point returned to later in this report.

Also neglected in much of the policy literature on conflict-related sexual violence, is the broader political economy of gender, violence and war. Focusing on such violence as a militarised expression and normalisation of underlying norms of violent masculinities does not take enough account of the political and economic functions of such violence. Based on her own research on sexual violence during the armed conflict in DRC, Meger emphasises that not only should such violence be understood “as a form of interpersonal violence, driven by individual motivations, that serves to reconstitute masculine identity”; equally, “it operates as a form of political violence, motivated through structural inequalities, and the desire to subvert or contest intercommunal hierarchies” and “as a cog

in the global political economy”,⁹⁸ creating the conditions of communal crisis that facilitate “the exploitation of natural resources and accumulation for those within the respective industries of that resource exploitation”.⁹⁹ In this sense, it is helpful to conceive men’s use of sexual violence during wartime not simply in terms of masculine identity formation or crisis, as is so often the case in discussions of violent or failed masculinities, nor simply as a weapon available for deployment, but also as a form of labour that is put to work for purposes of political control and economic exploitation. As Meger urges:

*“While individual responsibility for these crimes must not be denied, the widespread nature of the SGBV and patterns observed in its function show the collective and instrumental nature it plays in this conflict, used to punish, intimidate and subjugate populations and enforce compliance, or, more often, to forcibly displace civilians living in the area.”*¹⁰⁰

Approaching this violence in terms not just of masculine identity but also of masculinised labour, broadens the scope of response, directing attention to the forces and elites who

⁹³ Schöb, M (2021). p10.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p11.

⁹⁵ WILPF DRC (2022). p7.

⁹⁶ Eriksson Baaz, M and M Stern (2017). *Knowing Masculinities in Armed Conflict?: Reflections from Research in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict.* F Ní Aoláin, N Cahn, DF Haynes and N Valji. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press: 532-545.

⁹⁷ Gray, H (2019). *The “war”/“not-war” divide: Domestic Violence in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative.* *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21(1): 189-206.

⁹⁸ Meger, S (2015). *Toward a Feminist Political Economy of Wartime Sexual Violence: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo.* *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17(3): 416-434. p418.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p427.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p423.

benefit from such violent labour. In Hoffman's ethnography of young men caught up in the armed conflict that engulfed Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2001, their capacity for violence, like their capacity to work in the diamond mines or man roadblocks, is essentially a tradable commodity:

*"Violence itself enters the networks of circulation and exchange. According to capital's logic of surplus production it becomes interchangeable with diamonds and cash, its value translated into political subjectivity and masculine identity. More than simply a tool or a strategy, violence is itself a commodity, circulating through networks of commerce and exchange."*¹⁰¹

More attention needs to be given to the ways in which "capital's logic" militarises and exploits masculinity, not only in relation to the production of violence but also the distribution of vulnerability. Findings from the four WILPF studies that shed further light on both this production and distribution are discussed next.

¹⁰¹ Hoffman, D (2011). p108.

04

WAR, SUFFERING AND VULNERABLE MASCULINITIES

4.1

FORCED RECRUITMENT AND RELUCTANT WARRIORS

One of the striking findings from the WILPF studies, is the extent to which men, far from being driven by the culturally mandated role of male protector and idealised warrior, have been forced to fight.

In Cameroon, the WILPF study notes that in “the context of the crisis in the North–West and South–West regions, many boys are fighting without having any choice but to do so”.¹⁰² In her study of young men’s experience of the conflict in Cameroon, Brun highlights the issue of forced recruitment by non–state armed groups (NSAGs), finding that “Most adolescent boys and young men are coerced by NSAGs to join as fighters... They have no choice but to join, hide or flee their community.”¹⁰³ To avoid recruitment, many young men hide, reducing their social and economic activity to a minimum, or go into exile, and thus face displacement from home and community. Brun reports that:

“In villages where NSAGs are the main threats men relocate to urban areas rather than hiding in the bush. The bush, after all, is where NSAG combatants can be found. Men who are principally afraid of the military find refuge in the forest.”¹⁰⁴

Similarly, the WILPF Cameroon study report emphasises that:

“There is an important number of men and boys, particularly from armed groups and administrative services, who are not happy with their positions. Many civilian men do not want to use force and this is why, for instance, many have left the conflict areas to go to other regions. Hundreds of thousand people – women and men alike – are internally displaced because they have chosen to avoid and escape conflict. They refuse armed violence, choosing instead to hide or to flee.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² WILPF Cameroon (2022). p38.

¹⁰³ Brun, D (2022). p11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p17.

¹⁰⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p38.

As Brun indicates, the “movement of the male population, with some of them hiding and others resorting to exile, has generated an unprecedented situation in Cameroon. Several key informants stressed that in some villages no man under 60 can be found.”¹⁰⁶

The social and psychic effects of forced recruitment were also noted in the Colombia study by LIMPAL. In its focus group with adolescents from conflict-affected communities in Cartagena, participants recalled how “soldiers came to their neighbourhoods to find new recruits to take with them, to carry out a kind of survey for the recruitment they had in mind in that area of the city” and the fears that this generated “of ending up in the army, being arrested without a clear reason or being victimised by some soldier who uses his power to intimidate anyone who disobeys him, become more and more

real for them”.¹⁰⁷ In Afghanistan, families evolved strategies for managing this demand from both state and NSAGs for male recruits; in some cases, this meant sending one son to join the army and another son to join an insurgent group.¹⁰⁸ Examining the range of factors implicated in the recruitment of young people by armed forces, both state and non-state, the WILPF DRC study concluded that the “drivers of violence and the vulnerability of boys – and fewer girls – to joining armed groups are rooted in experiences of humiliation and traumatic stress reactions and not in the idealisation of norms of militarised masculinities”.¹⁰⁹ The extent to which these “experiences of humiliation” are linked to the political economy of war in conjunction with the economic insecurities generated by the neoliberal economic order are discussed next.

¹⁰⁶ Brun, D (2022). p17.

¹⁰⁷ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p29.

¹⁰⁸ Lieven, A (2021). *An Afghan Tragedy: The Pashtuns, the Taliban and the State*. *Survival* 63(3): 7-36.

¹⁰⁹ WILPF DRC (2022). p34.

4.2

ECONOMIC DISTRESS AND THWARTED MASCULINITIES

4.2.1

POVERTY AND MEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ARMED CONFLICT

All four studies emphasise the significant role of economic conditions and inequalities in helping to militarise masculinities.

The literature review commissioned for the Colombia study highlights the country's "socio-economic inequality, high levels of unemployment, and lack of access to education, health services and infrastructure".¹¹⁰ Colombia is among the countries with the most unequal income distribution in the world, affecting "young men and their access to social adulthood in particular: socio-economic exclusion has an emasculating effect on men and boys, and works as a powerful driver into armed violence, crime and socio-cultural practices that recur to weapons and violence for reasserting their masculinity".¹¹¹

Decades of war have devastated the formal Afghan economy, and in the wake of the Taliban takeover and the subsequent freezing of its foreign exchange reserves by the US government, the country is facing a humanitarian catastrophe. Writing in the early years

of the US occupation, Daulatzai noted that even then the provision of humanitarian aid was reshaping the political economy of gender, creating conditions in "which it is much more difficult for men than for women to find paid work".¹¹² As she notes, "Men are not only left unemployed – but they have to live in an environment that is controlled by foreign agents who consider Afghan men to be inherently misogynistic and anachronistic."¹¹³ The literature review commissioned for the DRC study notes that it ranks 175 out of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Report and has the third largest population of poor globally¹¹⁴. In this context, as the DRC literature review found, "Unemployment and poverty prevent men from taking care of their families" and the consequent shame and frustration "may drive some to crime or join armed groups as alternative means of providing food and income".¹¹⁵ When asked by WILPF Cameroon's researchers about the reasons that men do join armed groups, whether state or non-state, in Cameroon, respondents frequently identified poverty as a significant factor. As the study report makes clear:

¹¹⁰ Schöb, M (2021). p6.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p6.

¹¹² Daulatzai, A (2006). p302.

¹¹³ Ibid. p302.

¹¹⁴ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

¹¹⁵ WILPF DRC (2022). p19.

“given the government’s failure to ensure economic opportunities and the high unemployment rates affecting the majority of the population in the conflict regions, the youths, especially boys and young men, have because of this and other contributing factors, found themselves in armed groups to secure livelihoods, security, and jobs.”¹¹⁶

Eighty per cent of the Cameroon population were involved in farming prior to the crisis, many of them in family-run agriculture and the expanding plantation economy. But violence and insecurity have resulted in major population displacements, affecting agricultural yields in the North-West and the abandonment of large parts of fruit, palm and rubber plantations in the South-West. Armed actors loot farms and businesses, kill and confiscate livestock, and impose taxes, making it difficult to maintain livelihood activities. Such economic dislocation has forged pathways between a felt sense of masculine crisis and military mobilisation. As Brun makes clear:

“Socially constructed gender norms, equating manhood with fighting and with being the family’s provider, have also been significant factors in the recruitment of boys and men into militias, especially in a context where properties have been destroyed and unemployment is at its peak. The quest for influence and prestige, which is associated with joining armed groups and especially observed in smaller communities, echoes the militarised norms of masculinity, equating virility with power, violence and control.”¹¹⁷

A very similar finding on the links between economic insecurity, male shame and military involvement emerges clearly from the DRC study. There is a “moral obligation imposed on boys/men to succeed in life, and at all costs, because they must take care of their families”, at the same time as “a socio-economic situation of the country which does not allow men to respond satisfactorily to societal expectations”¹¹⁸ A felt sense of masculinity in crisis is the result:

“Due to the crisis, conflicts and poverty, families face many problems: men have lost their right to their leadership role because they are unemployed and unable to support their families. Their wives work and earn money, and the husbands are unemployed and have lost the respect of their wives, which has led to a serious devaluation of manhood and affected men's self-esteem. Several fighters revealed how unemployment and a sense of worthlessness had driven them to crime and to escape judgement and punishment, they fled into armed groups.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022), p19.

¹¹⁷ Brun, D (2022), p16.

¹¹⁸ WILPF DRC (2022), p41.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p18.

4.2.2

POVERTY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MILITARISATION

In this context, men participate in armed groups out of sheer economic necessity, but also as an attempt to restore lost respect.

The WILPF DRC study pays particular attention to this psychology of shame and the desire for respect:

“Men are not born violent, but they are raised to manifest their masculinity by using violence to survive the various traumas (poverty, impunity and multifaceted exploitation) caused by structural violence. Thus, soldiers have become so by joining the army to recover the respect due to their generally flouted dignity and combatants find themselves in armed groups to express their anger and their revolt; in short, they are disappointed people who engage in violence in reaction to the injustices of society.”¹²⁰

Brun makes a similar point in her study of male vulnerability in the context of armed conflict in Cameroon; the suffering of men is linked to the gendered expectations of them as providers for and protectors of their families:

“The psychological damage that boys and men suffer is not only caused by the crisis and the accompanying effects of displacement. It is also the result of their perceived loss of gendered status and identity as decision-makers, protectors and breadwinners. In a society where it is assumed men will protect and financially provide, boys and men often find themselves incapable of fulfilling expectations and living up to what they understand as being their roles.”¹²¹

A separate analysis of gender and land in Cameroon by Fonjong, commissioned by WILPF for this project, echoes this finding, when he notes that men “have lost their sources of livelihood, and status as heads of household since they can no longer provide health, education, and other basic needs for the family”, which “is psychologically troubling to most rural men... who have long enjoyed this exclusive status by earnings from coffee and cocoa farms”.¹²² The WILPF Cameroon study highlights these psychological aspects of men’s and boys’ experience of the conflict, noting increased levels of emotional distress. Echoing Hoffman’s account of young male combatants in the Liberia/Sierra Leone conflict being “unmoored from

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p19.

¹²² Fonjong, L (2021). *Friends or foes: Men, Access to Land, Gender Relations and Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF.

virtually any certainty about themselves or their world”,¹²³ Brun writes that:

“With no solution to the crisis at hand, adolescent boys and men feel as if they have lost control over their lives and their future. The problems with civil documentation, restricted mobility, targeted violence, limited educational opportunities, and insufficient work and income, have all contributed to a sense of helplessness, as well as high levels of anxiety, stress, frustration, anger and, ultimately, a loss of self-esteem.”¹²⁴

Far from being an expression of fulfilled masculinity, militarisation thrives on such thwarted masculinities, as “men and boys have countless experiences of failure to achieve idealised forms of hyper-masculinity”, such that, “Vulnerability and weakness are masked by attitudes of arrogance and pride that easily evolve into violence and abuse of power.”¹²⁵

This interweaving of the structural violence of poverty and inequality with the psychic pressure of gender norms and expectations, highlights the ways in which the linked political economies of war and gender serve to militarise masculinities. At the same time, it is important to note the differential

positioning of men within the hierarchies generated by these political economies. The aggrieved sense of dishonour and shame expressed by combatants and ex-combatants interviewed for the WILPF studies, related not only to their loss of self-respect with regard to their male provider role, but also the emasculating disrespect they experienced in their dealings with elite men, who have profited significantly from wartime economies. As Myrntinen notes with respect to Afghanistan:

“While the decades of war, displacement and economic hardship have made it difficult for many men to live up to expectations of being a respected provider, protector and decision-maker, other men have thrived in these circumstances, be it as political power brokers or warlords, or members of their retinue.”¹²⁶

Interestingly, two of the WILPF studies interviewed men in positions of political and cultural authority, to assess their understandings and perceptions of militarised masculinities, and their own responsibility and capacity to address these structural conditions of armed conflict. Here too men

expressed a sense of feeling thwarted. In Cameroon, the study reports that local government officials gave “the impression that they are trapped in a policy that they do not personally approve of”, when highlighting central government’s “excessive use of violence”.¹²⁷ The elite men interviewed as part of the DRC study were clear that it is up to “politicians to create the best conditions to enable men to fully assume their societal responsibilities as providers within their respective families, through good remuneration (decent wages), job creation, social security, in short good legislation and regulation of life in society”.¹²⁸ At the same time, the study reports that there was “also a certain capitulation on their part, thinking that they can do nothing to fight against the emergence of violent masculinities or rather against the factors that cause them”.¹²⁹ If an acknowledgement of thwarted masculinities in the face of economic distress is key to understanding the structural conditions in which masculinity can become militarised, so too is it important to recognise the constraints such conditions place on politicians’ own sense of agency to address these same militarised masculinities. The implications of this for collective political action are taken up in the final section of this report.

¹²³ Hoffman, D (2011). p106.

¹²⁴ Brun, D (2022). p19.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p46.

¹²⁶ Myrntinen, H (2018). *Navigating norms and insecurity: Men, masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding in Afghanistan*. Working Paper, London, UK: International Alert, p15.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p57.

¹²⁸ WILPF DRC (2022). p40.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p42.

4.3

CONFLICT TRAUMA AND MALE SHAME

All four studies document the gendered nature of suffering and trauma experienced during armed conflict.

Men's pervasive use of violence against women and girls, including the widespread occurrence of sexual violence, has already been noted. The study by LIMPAL in Colombia notes that it "is currently within the ranking of the ten worst countries in the world to be a woman, with alarming statistics such as the rape of 55 minors per day, or the report of 502 femicides between 2020 and so far in 2021".¹³⁰ Attacks on girls' education are highlighted in the Afghanistan study, and all four studies discuss the gendered effects of the massive population displacements as a result of armed conflict. According to LIMPAL, up to eight million people have been internally displaced by the conflicts in Colombia, together with "forced disappearance of approximately 87,000 people, the murder of 220,000, the murder of 6,402 young civilians under the modality of Extrajudicial Execution, and other actions that could also be considered state crimes".¹³¹

¹³⁰ LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p11.

¹³¹ Ibid. p11.

¹³² CHRDA (2019), p29.

¹³³ Ibid. p30.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p33.

The dislocation of the agricultural economy in many Anglophone communities in Cameroon has had devastating effects on the lives and livelihoods of many rural women, given their involvement in and reliance on subsistence farming. Research by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) in 2019 notes that, "Mass displacements in the Anglophone regions have forced civilians to flee following attacks on villages and high levels of insecurity that prevail in both regions",¹³² and that, "Most IDPs are women and children who abandoned their farms and have limited access to food."¹³³ As the report continues:

*"Women farmers are already vulnerable because they generally have little or no legal access to land title and often rely on their husbands' or sons' help for physically challenging tasks like clearing land. However, the killing and arbitrary arrests of men and boys in these rural communities have left women with little to no assistance or support."*¹³⁴

There is also clear evidence that women and girls have faced particular threats of physical and sexual violence, as

a result of displacement and conflict. The CHRDA research, in the 24 months following the escalation of the crisis, conducted fact-finding missions and interviewed women and girls in relation to gender-based violence and sexual assault, including interviews with detained women and young girls. This research found that more than 75% of women interviewed had experienced physical or sexual violence: “Military and security forces have mistreated female IDPs and sexually exploited female refugees traveling without national identity cards in exchange for letting the women through security checkpoints.”¹³⁵

In noting these gendered impacts on the lives of women and girls, the Cameroon study emphasises the need to recognise the specifically gendered ways in which men and boys may also suffer as a result of the armed conflict. As Brun makes clear:

“Women and children face specific risks, and their needs are, quite rightly, highlighted and addressed by the humanitarian community to the extent that funding and access issues allow. The situation and specific needs

of adolescent boys and men, however, are often less understood. There is a glaring disparity in the information available on the different effects of crises on female and male populations.”¹³⁶

The four studies document, to varying degrees, the gendered vulnerabilities of boys and young men in the course of armed conflict. In Afghanistan, the WILPF study noted that, “While women are the primary targets of GBV, a study by Save the Children (2017) found that boys are the more likely recipients of violence in the family at the hands of the head of household.”¹³⁷ In his ethnography of a select group of male Pashtun informants in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan (between 2009 and 2013), Chiovenda notes the stark difference between men’s freedom in public space compared with women’s relatively restricted mobility. But men’s freedom also exposes them to the depredations of armed groups, whether state or non-state:

“Illegal checkpoints, where insurgents would check car passengers’ identification cards, were common, and it was not unheard of that someone who carried the ‘wrong’

card or other pieces of ‘suspicious’ documentation got pulled out of the car and either kidnapped or killed on the spot.”¹³⁸

This profound insecurity experienced by men caught up in the fighting, whether directly or indirectly, is similarly noted in the studies in Colombia and the DRC. In Cameroon, Brun’s in-depth study documented the ways in which men’s insecurity and vulnerability during armed conflict was linked to their gender; being male, men were presumed to be potential if not actual combatants, and thus legitimate targets for abuse and attack. This traps men in a position of “impossible neutrality”, as Brun terms it. Research suggests that whenever armed attacks occur, young men are suspected of being involved. If they do not provide information about attacks, they are considered complicit. If they share information, they are at risk of retaliation. As Brun emphasises, “Caught in a spiral of fear, men often mitigate their exposure to risk by reducing their economic and social activities to the minimum, limiting their movements particularly after it gets dark and avoiding gatherings.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p33.

¹³⁶ Brun, D (2022). p7.

¹³⁷ WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

¹³⁸ Chiovenda, A (2018). p76.

¹³⁹ Brun, D (2022). p12.

This “impossible neutrality” for men and boys highlights a neglected aspect of militarised masculinities. By being identified as presumptive enemies, and thus legitimate targets for opposing forces, their masculinity is militarised. This is very far from the warrior ideal so often invoked in the use of the concept of “militarised masculinities” to explore and explain the links between men, gender and war. Monitoring data for Cameroon’s South-West region from the Danish Refugee Council, shows that that boys and men form the vast majority of those exposed to protection incidents in 2020, having suffered 93% of beatings, 96% of illegal detentions, 95% of torture, 78% of kidnappings, 92% of extra-judicial executions and 95% of disappearances.¹⁴⁰

There is also some evidence that, in common with armed conflict elsewhere, men and boys have become targets of sexual violence in Cameroon. Brun notes that these “violations remain largely unspoken and hidden”.¹⁴¹ The WILPF Cameroon study cites monitoring data on gender-based violence in the North-West and South-West regions in February 2022, which reveals that 19% of survivors are males. In the DRC, the WILPF study cites an evidence-based study, conducted in

the provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri, revealing that 39.7% women and 23.6% of men have been exposed to sexual violence in their lifetime.¹⁴² The literature review accompanying LIMPAL’s study in Colombia notes that men or male-identified people from gender and sexual minorities have, like women, been the target of “theatric spectacles of violence against civilians” perpetrated by right-wing paramilitary groups in conjunction with state armed forces in counterinsurgency operations, “sowing terror and fear through social cleansing (massacres and selective killings) and reinforcing the heteronormative social order through highly sexualised techniques of violence against women and sexual minorities”.¹⁴³

The evidence of male-on-male sexual violence during armed conflict may be an under-reporting of the sexual violations that boys and men experience, because certain types of violence perpetrated against men, such as forced nudity, sexual humiliation and blunt genital trauma, are often under-reported as GBV. The focus on rape sometimes means that these other forms of violence are often not seen as crossing the threshold of sexual violence. The extent of population

displacement also, research suggests, heightens vulnerability to sexual abuse, exploitation and violence. Separated and unaccompanied children, including boys, are particularly vulnerable in such situations.

The intense shame that men and boys can feel in connection with their victimisation, because of the associations between sexual violence and feminisation and/or homosexuality, deter them from reporting it. Based on the research collated by Brun in Cameroon, it is also clear that boys and men under-report the violations they suffer, because they do not trust the police and judicial services, because of the lack of health, psychosocial and legal services in certain areas, and because they fear for their safety. As Brun notes, “Where state security forces are the perpetrators, denouncing violations is dangerous. It could expose a person to reprisals in an environment in which the justice system rarely holds soldiers to account.”¹⁴⁴ Equally, however, Brun found that a significant obstacle preventing more effective responses to the suffering of men and boys, including their experiences of sexual abuse, exploitation and violence, lies with service providers themselves. There is still an unwillingness or inability on the

¹⁴⁰ Danish Refugee Council (2021). *Protection Monitoring Report, Southwest Cameroon, January to December 2020*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Danish Refugee Council.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p13.

¹⁴² Johnson, K, J Scott, B Rughita, J Asher, M Kisielewski, R Ong and L Lawry (2010). *Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations with Physical and Mental Health in Territories of Democratic Republic of Congo*. JAMA 304(5): 553–562.

¹⁴³ Schöb, M (2021). pp7–8.

¹⁴⁴ Brun, D (2022). p13.

part of humanitarian agencies to recognise the specifically gendered ways in which men and boys may also suffer as a result of armed conflict.

The WILPF study in DRC, also highlights the shame and stigma that men may feel as a result of participating in armed conflict, whether because of the violence they have personally perpetrated or the abuses and atrocities committed by the armed groups with which they are identified. As the report notes, many of the military personnel interviewed “expressed feelings of frustration and shame because they feel humiliated and excluded by civilians who see them as bandits, irresponsible and losers in society. They were looking for respect and reputation, but they found the opposite.”¹⁴⁵ Such stigma and shame create significant obstacles for ex-combatants in transitioning back into civilian

life. The DRC study notes that they “are feared by others because they have committed serious crimes, including killing people” and “are accused of all kinds of problems and criminality that occur in the community”.¹⁴⁶ The psychic damage done is well articulated:

“Many grapple with memories of the past, trying to control themselves despite their fears and sorrows; some also suggest a desire for revenge and returning to armed groups. The stories of former combatants who left the armed groups show regret, fear, frustration for all they lost, because the armed groups did not bring them anything positive.”¹⁴⁷

The implications for work with men for feminist peace are taken up in the last section.

¹⁴⁵ WILPF DRC (2022), p24.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p26.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p26.

05

WAR, MILITARISM AND MOBILISED MASCULINITIES

5.1

THE NORMALISATION OF MILITARISM

5.1.1

EFFECTS OF PROTRACTED CONFLICT

Protracted periods of armed conflict serve to normalise militarism, mobilising masculinities in complex ways as part of this normalisation.

Myrttinen notes that “Afghan society and, with it, gender norms, expectations and roles have been profoundly shaped by four decades of war, displacement and foreign intervention”, emphasising that these “changes have not been unidirectional, uncontested or the same for the whole of Afghan society”.¹⁴⁸ Daulatzai echoes this point on complexity, asking: “What is, for example, ‘gender’ in contemporary Afghanistan considering that women’s and men’s roles have shifted dramatically throughout the past thirty years of unrest and calamity?”¹⁴⁹ As she continues:

“Since experience and life circumstances of both men and women have altered so drastically as a result of consecutive and ongoing wars, repeated droughts, and massive earthquakes, ‘gender’ might have taken on a different range of meaning, and similar things are to be said about ‘Islam’, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’, etc.”¹⁵⁰

The four country studies, based on empirical research, shed some light on how gender is changing as a result of armed conflict, and its deepening entanglements with militarism. The WILPF study in Afghanistan reports that, “Communities and individuals in Afghanistan have been significantly shaped by war and armed violence, and, as a result, so have norms, customs, practices, and institutions that affect ideas about and the societal regulation of masculinity and femininity.”¹⁵¹ In Colombia, LIMPAL found that in communities most affected by long histories of conflict, “entire generations of boys and girls grow up seeing the army or an armed group as the only referent of authority, masculinity and power”, meaning that “guidelines and life projects begin to be forged that are aligned with the presence of soldiers in different regions of the country, where the actions of men are shaped by this figure”.¹⁵²

In many cases, this shaping is likened to both a narrowing and a hardening of forms of masculine expression and behaviour. The qualitative research by LIMPAL highlights the ways in which protracted armed conflict has soldered

¹⁴⁸ Myrttinen, H (2018). p2.

¹⁴⁹ Daulatzai, A (2008). *The Discursive Occupation of Afghanistan*. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35(3): 419–435, p427.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p427.

¹⁵¹ WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

¹⁵² LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p40.

“patriarchy, heteronormativity and militarism” together, “establishing a model impossible for men to achieve, with characteristics that force them to give up feminine, diverse and flexible expressions of their gender”.¹⁵³ As a result:

“The archetype that is established through the patriarchal system is rigid and from that rigidity, men are driven to pursue a must-be about their masculinity that is more similar to that of a soldier under military training than that of a man with the possibility of exploring the expressions that most resemble their complex emotionality.”¹⁵⁴

Much of this hardening and narrowing of masculinity, confining it within a militarist logic of violence, hierarchy and domination, is linked to the traumatic effects of participating in or witnessing the killing and death that comes with war. WILPF’s study in DRC found that “men and boys navigating the landscape of war and conflict as soldiers or combatants, in the military or in an armed group, experienced many issues that contributed to the construction of masculinities militarised in attitudes and use of violence”.¹⁵⁵ As the WILPF

DRC study concludes, “Militarised masculinities are not born like this, but are cultivated in a landscape of abuse and violence.” That this landscape produces trauma is clear from this account of research findings from Ituri province in the DRC:

“Witnessing extreme and brutal violence, attack, killing of people, dissipation of livestock, looting, burning property and forced displacement are collective experiences of young people in Ituri. High tensions between ethnic groups have created an inflammable environment where small problems easily escalate into serious conflict and violence. Different armed groups have drifted to defend their ethnic groups. This explosive and hostile environment has left severe marks on the psychosocial development of boys and girls caused by psychological injuries.”¹⁵⁷

In Afghanistan, a two-year pilot project by the United States Institute of Peace to stimulate in-depth self-reflection among young men on the effects of armed conflict on their masculinities similarly reports that “participants exchanged

personal stories about having grown up in war and witnessed from a very young age different forms of violence, both in the home and outside, and how that has shaped their behaviour toward others”.¹⁵⁸

The DRC study also highlights some of the emotional complexities of normalised militarism and its shaping of masculinities. The involvement of the state’s armed forces in not only the perpetration of atrocities, including widespread sexual violence, but also endemic corruption and economic exploitation of communities in conflict areas, has produced feelings of shame among combatants. Without the emotional “tools” that initiatives such as the Living Peace psychosocial support intervention seek to provide, violence itself can become a coping mechanism for some men, as a way to externalise the shame they are enduring. As the study reports, the “helplessness, injustice and frustration of the military have cultivated negative masculine behaviour and shaped versions of militarised masculinities”, such that, “Many of them have found an alternative arena to engage in violent male behaviours in armed groups.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* p44.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p44.

¹⁵⁵ WILPF DRC (2022), p24.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p30.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p31.

¹⁵⁸ Ahmadi, B and R Stanikzai (2018). *Redefining Masculinity in Afghanistan. Peace Brief 243. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace*, p3.

¹⁵⁹ WILPF DRC (2022), p24.

This shame is compounded by a continuing silence about the devastating impacts of war not only on the lives of women and girls, but also on men and boys. The LIMPAL study speaks eloquently of this silence:

“In this sense, militarised masculinities are also sustained through the silence that surrounds them, since there is not always a real exercise of dialogue and renegotiation about the guidelines for being a man, since they are preconceived decisions that are not open to debate and that must be accepted by the population. This type of masculinities survives because in them there is an internal pact of non-questioning and non-dialogue, just as happens with the acceptance of militarism in Colombian society.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p41.

5.1.2

EFFECTS OF MILITARISATION

In addition to direct and continuing experience of armed conflict, militarism is normalised and violent expressions of masculinity mobilised by a more generalised militarisation of society.

In addition to direct and continuing experience of armed conflict, militarism is normalised and violent expressions of masculinity mobilised by a more generalised militarisation of society. At its most basic, this is evident in a proliferation of armed groups. In Afghanistan, as the WILPF study reports, “decades of conflict have led to men taking up arms in myriad roles... ranging from the former Afghan National Army, to the Taliban and other extremist armed groups, to foreign fighters”.¹⁶¹ Particular concern was expressed about the number of “Local armed groups – individuals who claim to be registered with the national army but are in fact bodyguards of influential politicians and businessmen”, a number which “includes the bodyguards of influential politicians such as parliamentarians, the senators, national businessmen, local commanders and council’s leaders widely known

as the Afghan Local Police (ALP)”.¹⁶² Many respondents in the WILPF study commented on the prevailing sense of insecurity produced by this proliferation of armed groups. Completed before the return of the Taliban to power, the study is obviously unable to analyse how the Taliban’s takeover of state power, and its “legitimate” monopoly of violence, will affect this proliferation of armed insecurity. State weakness, and the distributed nature of violent actors and armed groups, have long been key features of the fighting in DRC. The literature review commissioned for the DRC study notes that there are more than 70 armed groups that are active in the Eastern conflict-affected provinces.¹⁶³

In Colombia, not only did a range of left-wing guerrilla groups grow in number, scale and scope of actions during the 1970s and 1980s, but in response “right-wing paramilitary groups were created for the drug barons’ and large-estate owners’ (often the same persons) ‘self-defence’ against the guerrilla and each other”, and these “paramilitary groups, which later organised under the umbrella organisation Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), had a close relationship with the political and

¹⁶¹ WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

economic elites of the country”.¹⁶⁴ As recent ethnographic research makes clear, this multiplicity of armed forces continues to produce insecurity, even after the landmark peace deal agreed between the Colombian state and one of the largest guerrilla groups, the FARC, in late 2016. Idler points out that “for many marginalised community members, [the peace deal] also ended their informal protection by the FARC from other armed groups: paramilitary successor groups, Venezuelan gangs, Mexican drug cartels, and ELN rebels”.¹⁶⁵

This proliferation of armed forces makes militarisation an everyday, everywhere experience of “normal” life. In the words of the LIMPAL study, “militarisation is a constant and daily presence, even sometimes it is difficult to discern what is militarised and what is not, because its tentacular reach has trapped all spheres of social life”.¹⁶⁶ The WILPF study in Cameroon emphasises that this everyday militarisation has been normalised by institutional action and state policy. The study sets in this context of long-standing tensions between Anglophone and Francophone regions over the centralising authority of the national government, itself linked to a colonial history of coercive governance. As the study notes,

national elites found it “necessary to surround themselves with a substantial military force” in order to “avoid unfulfilled promises and prevent popular uprisings”, and thus:

“Investing in war (military schools, compulsory military service, privileges granted to the military and their families, incentives for carrying weapons and military uniforms, purchase of weapons, multiplication of the number of bodies in the army, etc) instead of investing in peace was the ruler’s position, from the colonialists to the national governments.”¹⁶⁷

As the study found, “militarised masculinities are enshrined and legitimised in institutions, which allow for the use of violence”, evident for example in civil servants trained at the National School of Administration and Magistracy, who undergo mandatory military training; unsurprisingly, “their mode of governance is violent, reflected in the decisions they make”.¹⁶⁸ As the study concludes, “militarised masculinity as Government representatives say, is institutionally structured, and this happens to the point where armed violence is commonly accepted as a means of responding to crises”.¹⁶⁹

Similarly, in Colombia, LIMPAL highlights the “long and deep process of normalisation” which makes it normal to have a certain positive and glorified perception of the militaristic system.¹⁷⁰ The Colombian state has been an active agent in this normalisation, with “civic-military campaigns in childhood, recruitment for military service in adolescence, and paying taxes for war in adulthood, just to cite one example for each of these stages of masculinity development”.¹⁷¹ The specific propaganda mechanisms that are used to normalise militarism, and mobilise masculinities in its support, are discussed in the next section. At this stage, it is important to note the widespread cultural diffusion of masculinised militarism, by both state and non-state formations. As Schöb clarifies with respect to Colombia, this diffusion contributes to:

“the promotion of a military culture that assumes a state of war or chronic violence as a seemingly natural status quo, glorifies weapons and prioritises militarised masculinities that dominate and pretend to protect (invisibilising the fact that weapons and violent masculinities victimise all and constitute a key cause for the perceived need of protection in the first place)”.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ Schöb, M (2021). p7

¹⁶⁵ Idler, A (2019). *Borderland Battles: Violence, Crime, And Governance At The Edges Of Colombia’s War*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. pxxii.

¹⁶⁶ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p46.

¹⁶⁷ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p35.

¹⁶⁸ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p36.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p35.

¹⁷⁰ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p31.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p6.

¹⁷² Schöb, M (2021). p15.

It is also important to note that this militarisation not only normalises armed violence and coercive social relations, but also inculcates a compliance and complicity with militarism, and in this way acts as a disciplinary mechanism to keep political and economic hierarchies in place, modelled on patriarchy. As LIMPAL makes clear:

*“The military culture mainly teaches, in addition to defending oneself, to obey... The hierarchy of bodies becomes possible when those bodies are obedient and, when they are not, they are punished by means of violence. The same thing happens with women's bodies, from feminism it has been analysed, that if they are not obedient or if they talk about the violence that has been inflicted on them, then the punishment is getting worse, from beatings to femicides. This is a reliable representation of how the military system operates outside the context of war, and even outside the context of the army itself.”*¹⁷³

¹⁷³ LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p42.

5.2

THE HERO-SOLDIER AND THE MOBILISATION OF MASCULINITY

5.2.1

SERVING THE NATION

A common theme emerging from interviews with combatants and ex-combatants across the four countries, was the linking of military service with serving the nation, and the implicit and at times explicit functioning of masculinity in forging these links.

As scholars of nationalism have noted, patriotism has long been gendered, with men mobilised to fight in the service of, and often sacrifice for, the feminised national body.¹⁷⁴ As the Cameroon study reports, with reference to its interviews with members of state armed groups (SAGs) and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), “Many SAG and NSAG members fight out of love for their country; one of them said: ‘I joined the conflict because I love my country and being in this position was the only way to take care of it.’”¹⁷⁵ Similarly, the DRC study found that:

“Some servicemen chose the military because they were inspired by family members in the military who were well respected in the community and family and

felt motivated to defend and protect the country. Men – and boys – joined the military to defend and protect their country, to earn the respect and honour of others while wearing a uniform.”¹⁷⁶

The link between militarism and nationalism is, if anything, even clearer, in Colombia. As LIMPAL reports, “the figure of the soldier has also been exalted as symbol of patriotism and identity, to the point of even replacing crucial aspects such as ethnic diversity, landscape or natural wealth in the cultural imaginary”.¹⁷⁷ The literature review accompanying LIMPAL’s study is unequivocal: “Colombia’s complex histories of armed conflict and violence have arguably produced a ‘culture of violence’, which is discursively linked to the national identity and promotes militarised, violent masculinities as the hegemonic model of masculinity.”¹⁷⁸ Even in Afghanistan, whose recent decades of armed conflict are often characterised, by many Anglophone global North commentators at least, using pre-modern idioms of “warlords” and “tribes”, Staniland’s close-grained study of the origins and evolution of key insurgent groups since the mid-1970s found that “Nationalism and

¹⁷⁴ McClintock, A (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge.

¹⁷⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p50.

¹⁷⁶ WILPF DRC (2022). p21.

¹⁷⁷ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). pp10-11.

¹⁷⁸ Schöb, M (2021). piii.

religion were important motives that pushed fighters and commanders into the war in the first place.”¹⁷⁹

Understanding the masculinisation of links between militarism and nationalism requires attention to the contingency, historically and politically, of such links. The view of military forces as serving, even embodying, the nation emerged only at the end of the 18th century. Prior to that, militaries expressed the sovereign’s authority rather than the nation’s identity; in 1701, 54% of military forces serving the English crown were foreign mercenaries.¹⁸⁰ The tying of militarism to nationalism can be traced back to the emergence of insurgent nationalisms in the wake of the French revolution, and the first experiment in national conscription, Napoleon’s “levée en masse”. As Fitzgibbon and Lea note:

*“arguably the most important function of the pre-eminence of state military was associated with nation building. If war was between states and all soldiers were citizens of those states, then military service was a potent force in building a sense of nationhood and identity.”*¹⁸¹

The binding of militarism and nationalism has long been secured by a series of binary gender constructions: masculinised militaries and feminised nations, and the martial male protectors of female (and child) civilians, who occupy the differently gendered spaces of the masculinised “front” and the domesticated (and thereby feminised) “home front”. Rashid notes, in her ethnography of military institutions in Pakistan, and the role of the military in national life, that, “Imaginations of the soldier and model citizen are heavily gendered. Masculine men protect the nation and the women, who are repositories of national honor.”¹⁸² A recent study of the Romanian military’s use of Facebook “shows that the Romanian army contributes to legitimising the main role of men in defending the country by highlighting desirable male characteristics such as control, rationality, physical and emotional strength, loyalty, and the spirit of sacrifice”.¹⁸³

Political contingencies also shape efforts to fuse militarism with nationalism, and the ways in which masculinity is deployed in this project. As Eichler notes, in the Soviet era, military service was both an expression of male citizenship and a rite of passage to male adulthood:

*“Soviet notions of militarised masculinity relied not only on the idea of men’s citizenship duty, but also on notions of heroism and patriotism, and a gender ideology that defined military service as key to the transition from boyhood to manhood.”*¹⁸⁴

But the changing political economy of gender in the post-Soviet era has frayed these ties, posing challenges to conscription in a market economy and exposing tensions between militarised masculinity and capitalist masculinity. Eichler’s study found that, “Many young men see military service as incompatible with a fast-paced market economy and competitive labor market.”¹⁸⁵ The harsh conditions of military service, and more specifically the trauma and suffering of the two wars in Chechnya, further strained the “link between social citizenship and militarised citizenship”, resulting in what Eichler describes as “Russia’s societal crisis of militarised masculinity”, which is “evident not only in widespread draft evasion but also in the experiences of veterans”.¹⁸⁶ Writing in 2011, Eichler highlights the efforts of the Putin administration to both remilitarise and remasculinise Russian society, noting that “the government introduced a

¹⁷⁹ Staniland, P (2014). *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p126.

¹⁸⁰ Thomson, JE (1996). *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p29, cited in Fitzgibbon, W and J Lea (2020). *Privatising Justice: The Security Industry, War and Crime Control*. London, UK: Pluto Press. p9.

¹⁸¹ Fitzgibbon, W and J Lea (2020). p31.

¹⁸² Rashid, M (2020). *Dying to Serve: Militarism, Affect, and the Politics of Sacrifice in the Pakistan Army*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p7

¹⁸³ Novăcescu, E (2021). *The Visual Construction of the Romanian Militarized Masculinity on Romanian Army’s Facebook Pages*. *Journal of Media Research* 14(40): 70-90, p88.

¹⁸⁴ Eichler, M (2011). *Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, p140.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p141.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p141.

state patriotic education program aimed to revive militarised patriotism and increase young men’s compliance with the draft” meaning that “while... draft dodging was widely condoned in post–Soviet Russia, there was a parallel trend toward the remilitarisation of men’s and women’s identities both from above and below”.¹⁸⁷

Over ten years later, one way to interpret Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, would be as a continuation of this project of reviving militarised patriotism. It is also clear that powerful emotions are mobilised in the service of this masculinised binding of militarism and nationalism. Recent scholarship on the anthropology of militarism emphasises this emotional fusing of nationalism and militarism:

*“Since at least the French Revolution, militarism and nationalism have been closely intertwined and, in an age of mass media and security panics, militarised threat constructions are powerful tools for mobilising collective fears, hatreds, and hopes to bind populations.”*¹⁸⁸

Given the findings from the four country studies already discussed, it is unsurprising to note that the figure of the soldier as masculinised protector is readily mobilised in response to these “collective fears, hatreds, and hopes”. Notably, this figure often finds expression within the larger trope of the “national family”, both patriarchal and heteronormative. In this familial nationalism, masculinised militarism is embodied in both the paternalism of the strong father and the heroism of the sacrificial son. As LIMPAL makes clear, with reference to the presidency of Álvaro Uribe, who in its words “unleashed a process of militarisation and degradation of the armed conflict that after ten years plunged the country into one of the worst humanitarian crises in its history”,¹⁸⁹ this appeal to protective paternalism was explicit, in that:

“the popular support that Uribe received through the vote was largely due to the way in which he used his hegemonic white masculinity to promote a nationalist and warmongering discourse, through which on many occasions, he presented himself as the state embodied in

*the figure of a white man, aggressive, infallible, incapable of feeling fear and willing to use war whenever he deemed it necessary”.*¹⁹⁰

As recent research on far-right formations and their paramilitary violence in both North America and Europe makes clear, this mobilisation of the paternalist protector defending the “national family” is also deployed by a range of non-state armed groups, who invoke their “borderguard masculinities” in order to organise vigilante violence against racialised communities.¹⁹¹

In turn, these foregoing examples point to the significance of racialisation in the fusing of nationalism and militarism in the figure of the male soldier-protector; for protecting the nation, implicitly or explicitly, is about preserving its existing hierarchies, in many cases racialised. Through this lens, different significations of masculinised militarism in relation to the project of national protection come into focus. It is well documented that the British Empire protected its economic interests and colonial territories by “outsourcing” many of its

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p139.

¹⁸⁸ Gusterson, H and C Besteman (2019). *Cultures of Militarism*. *Current Anthropology* 60(S19): S3-S14, pS6.

¹⁸⁹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p9.

¹⁹¹ See: Agius, C (2018). *Rescuing the State? Sovereignty, Identity, and the Gendered Re-articulation of the State*. *Revisiting Gendered States: Feminist Imaginings of the State in International Relations*. S Parashar, JA Tickner and J True. New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 69–84. Keskinen, S (2013). *Anti-feminism and white identity politics: Political antagonisms in radical rightwing populist and anti-immigration rhetoric in Finland*. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 3(4): 225–232. Oliviero, K (2009). *Militarized Vulnerabilities: The Minutemen, Exemplary Citizenship And Moral Masculinity*. UCLA: Center for the Study of Women.

military operations to its colonised (and thereby racialised) male subjects. Far from being celebrated as male protectors, colonial regiments were disposable bodies, empire's cannon fodder. It is reported that Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India in 1867 and later British Prime Minister, referred to India as "an English barrack in the Oriental Seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them".¹⁹² In similar vein, the French government's imposition of partial conscription in its colonies in 1912 on the eve of the First World War was legitimised with reference to racist accounts of African men's "natural" suitability for combat as a result of their "less developed" nervous system, and thus increased capacity to bear pain.¹⁹³

By contrast, research on US conscription policy and recruitment campaigns during the Korean and Vietnam wars highlights the white anxiety, among military planners and senior officials, that attended debates about conscripting young black men into combat roles. The need for military manpower was set against deeply ingrained white fears of arming black men, not least at a time of intensified challenges to white supremacy from the civil rights movement, which

grew in strength dramatically during this same period. Thus, official narratives accompanying the conscription of men of colour into the US armed forces at this time framed this recruitment, not in terms of mobilising these men's martial masculinity to protect the (white) nation, but as a mechanism for disciplining these men to be orderly citizens of the (white) nation.¹⁹⁴

The mobilisation of masculinity in the service of fusing militarism and nationalism must be understood, then, in relation to the hierarchies of power being served. This is true also of the second familial-martial figure invoked when the "national family" is threatened: the sacrificial son. As the study by WILPF Afghanistan reports, ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom are important components of pashtunwali, the Pashtun honour codes deployed by the Taliban so effectively in their military campaigns and authoritarian rule: "As protection of kin and land, as well as revenge, figures centrally into the code of pashtunwali, suicide and martyrdom, if carried out against occupiers, can be a great source of honour."¹⁹⁵ The strategic use of sacrifice by military institutions is also noted by the literature review accompanying LIMPAL's

study in Colombia. It notes the research showing the awareness among "rank-and-file soldiers" that their death and injury are a strategic resource for military propaganda, and that they "self-perceive as the disposable of the military institution, the cannon fodder... whose only use to the military after an injury is that they can be portrayed as martyr-heroes for the nation".¹⁹⁶

This military mobilisation of a sacrificial masculinity has been highlighted by other research. Rashid's study of the Pakistani military notes the "two images that the institution of the military uses to construct its soldier figure. One is the brave warrior who takes to war like a sport, while the other is the self-sacrificing heroic man."¹⁹⁷ Significantly, the study focuses on "the self-sacrificing soldier, because it is this image that military discourse and soldier narratives invoke more often."¹⁹⁸ Even more noteworthy, the emotional binding of militarism and nationalism to produce this sacrificial masculinity is more about love than the "collective fears, hatreds, and hopes" referred to above. As Rashid explains, this "emphasis on sacrifice is reflective of how the creation of the desire to serve and die lies at the heart of military training and is

¹⁹² Arrighi G. (2007). *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*. London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, p136, cited in Callinicos, A (2009). *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, p194.

¹⁹³ In a 1911 issue of the French ethnographic journal *La Revue Anthropologique*, Charles Mangin – a lieutenant-colonel in the French Colonial Army, later promoted to general – argued that: "The nervous system of the black man is much less developed than that of the white. All the surgeons have observed how impassive the black is under the knife." Quoted in Echenberg, M (1991). *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, cited by Iduma, E (2022). *The Spoils of a Savage War*. New York Review of Books.

¹⁹⁴ Rutenberg, AJ (2019). *Rough Draft: Cold War Military Manpower Policy and the Origins of Vietnam-Era Draft Resistance*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹⁹⁵ WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

¹⁹⁶ Schöb, M (2021). p1.

¹⁹⁷ Rashid, M (2020). p9

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p97.

achieved through affective regulation involving not hate but the production of love”.¹⁹⁹ Once again, the patriarchal, heteronormative family serves as the master metaphor for the fusing of militarism and nationalism:

*“This deliberate investment in developing ideas of love (camaraderie and esprit de corps) relies heavily on kinship metaphors. The military institution uses these metaphors and the love they invoke on two levels: first, the larger landscape, with the homeland as mother, the nation as family, and the soldiers as sons of the soil; second, within the institution itself, with its units, officers, and soldiers as one family. The unit is referred as the new home, and the army as the new maa baap, a benevolent benefactor that loves you, grooms you, and looks after you with an all-important caveat – the right to then ask you to kill or die for it.”*²⁰⁰

In a very different national context – Sweden – love has also been invoked as an emotional grounding for militarised patriotism, but this time linked to defence of “progressive” national values which are seen to be threatened by (implicitly racialised) outsiders. Research on recent marketing campaigns launched by the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) highlights the mobilisation of “gendered and sexualised subjectivities and symbols” in subtly racialised “narratives of distant and dangerous Others” who threaten and feel threatened by Swedish progressiveness, framed as equality between people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, which needs to be protected by the SAF. Epitomised in the campaign slogan “Sweden, a country to fall in love with/in”, militarism and nationalism are fused through appeals to racialised accounts of gender and sexuality.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p98.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p99.

²⁰¹ Strand, S and K Kehl (2019). “A Country to Fall in Love with/in”: Gender and Sexuality in Swedish Armed Forces’ Marketing Campaigns. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21(2): 295–314.

5.2.2

THE HERO-SOLDIER IN MILITARY PROPAGANDA

This emphasis on the complexity of masculinities (sacrificial as well as protective/aggressive) and emotional attachments (love, as well as hate and fear) in the mobilisation of gender to link nationalism and militarism, resonates with the complex ways in which heroism is invoked in military propaganda.

Heroic virtues of courage, bravery and fearlessness have long been central to the warrior ideal, and their celebration is noted across the four WILPF studies. In Colombia, LIMPAL found that “that the concept of the soldier as a hero continues to be one of the main reasons why men are challenged to join the Public Force”.²⁰²

Once again, this heroism is tethered to the nation, in that “this type of mentality is reaffirmed by the school, where they are taught to glorify the figure of the soldier, since this was, in a nutshell, the promoter of the

founding of the republic and the consolidation of the nation.”²⁰³ Importantly, the study emphasises, “Militarised masculinities, the glorification of the soldier as heroes, are not unique characteristics of times of war, they transcend these scenarios and are installed in the organisations of families, schools and society.”²⁰⁴ Nor is this militarised heroism confined to state militaries. Schöb notes that the AUC, the paramilitary umbrella organisation in Columbia, uses “similar references of male heroes to construct exemplary masculinities”, and that part “of the ideological education of recruits [in the FARC] was forming soldiers with ‘insurgent masculinities’, with the main leaders of the guerrilla movement as the male heroes to imitate”.²⁰⁵

Equally, however, this glorification of the hero-soldier makes use of a range of representations of masculinity. An in-depth study of US military recruitment campaigns, analysing more than 300 print advertisements published from the early 1970s to 2007, as well as television commercials, recruiting websites and media coverage of recruiting, notes that masculinity is still a foundation of the appeals made by the military, but that each branch

²⁰² LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p43.

²⁰³ *Ibid.* p44.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p46.

²⁰⁵ Schöb, M (2021). p12.

deploys various constructions of masculinity that serve its particular personnel needs and culture, with conventional martial masculinity being only one among them.²⁰⁶ Brown emphasises that the army, in particular, has been ready to appeal to men's career aspirations rather than virility at many historical moments, with a focus on military service as a route to economic independence and diverse appeals to blue-collar technical skills, or professional career orientation. Echoing Eichler's discussion of the changing political economy of gender in post-Soviet Russia, the impacts of neoliberalism on the US economy are also evident in military recruitment messaging, in which more technically literate and individualistic masculinities have become predominant in military and civilian realms, accompanying, but not necessarily displacing, older variants that were more collectively achieved and service-orientated.

Military heroism has also been associated with masculinised care. As the literature review accompanying LIMPAL's study makes clear, "Beyond the historical battlefield warrior, the soldier-hero is also given a humanitarian face and militarised heroism is linked to love, care and the family."²⁰⁷ This

association of militarised masculinities with "love, care and the family" meant that "the militarised counterinsurgency strategy under Plan Colombia allowed for the war against guerrilla 'terrorism' to be covered behind an image of the life-saving humanitarian soldier who reunites Colombian families by bringing the lost sons and daughters back".²⁰⁸

Research on the branding of peacekeeping operations, notably in Afghanistan, makes a similar point on the deployment of "caring" militarised masculinities as cover for counterinsurgency campaigns.²⁰⁹

Not only have images of caring masculinities been used to mask the violence of counter-insurgency operations; these same masculinities have been a propaganda weapon in these same operations. Fattal's research on the joint venture between the Program for Humanitarian Attention to the Demobilised (PAHD), an agency in the Colombian Ministry of Defence that is charged with the disarmament and demobilisation of guerrilla fighters, and Lowe/SSP3, a consumer marketing firm, is revealing.²¹⁰ He focuses on the Before Being a Guerrilla/You Are My Child media campaign of 2013, the fourth in a series of five Christmas campaigns that

exploited the holiday's symbolism and its cultural emphasis on family togetherness, and targeted individuals fighting for insurgent groups, imploring them to abandon the armed struggle and return to their families. He notes the centrality of familial-national love in the messaging of this campaign:

*"The corporatized propaganda's appeal to demobilize is a call to return to the domestic space of a mother's love, while also resubjecting oneself to the dominion of the father figure of the militarized state. The mise en scène taps into a longstanding gendered allegory of parents' unconditional love for their children, silently suffering mothers, and disciplinary but ultimately forgiving fathers."*²¹¹

This research also bears out the broader findings from LIMPAL's study, highlighting the intimate links between state militaries, media industries and advertising agencies in constructing the hero-soldier, and associated diverse images of masculinities, for public consumption. This includes the highly successful media campaign *Los heroes en Colombia sí existen!*, televised at peak hours, which "constructs the

²⁰⁶ Brown, MT (2012). *Enlisting Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in U.S. Military Recruiting Advertising During the All-Volunteer Force*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

²⁰⁷ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p14.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p14.

²⁰⁹ Wegner, N (2021). *Helpful heroes and the political utility of militarized masculinities*. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 23(1): 5-26.

²¹⁰ Fattal, AL (2019). *Target Intimacy*. *Current Anthropology* 60(S19): S49-S61.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* pS52.

image of the humane, loving soldier-hero who is admired by civilians – in particular children – who gives his life (the soldier is embodied by a male person normally in these campaigns) for his fellow Colombians”.²¹² LIMPAL also notes the Colombian state’s use of advertising campaigns “to promote a positive reading of the military forces and patriotic symbols” as well as the popularity of military circuses and a range of civic-military campaigns, through which the military targets civilian populations through sports competitions, film festivals and recreational activities. In common with many countries, Colombia’s annual celebration of national independence (on 20 July) is dominated by military parades and infused with militarist imagery.

Such mediated spectacles of heroism militarise masculinities in different ways, figured variously as the protective father, the brave warrior, the loyal citizen or the sacrificial son.

These different figures operate through different emotional registers, from national pride to personal grief. Crucially, as Rashid emphasises, the emotional investments in militarism that spectacles of militarised masculinities seek to mobilise are always unstable, because such spectacles are performances, carefully orchestrated and financially compensated, of “authentic” feeling.²¹³ Fixing such unstable

emotional attachments to militarism has been the explicit purpose of military propaganda, which in recent decades has made more explicit and intensive use of media and cultural industries. As Mirrlees writes, the “ideology of militarism is produced and reproduced by a number of actors and circulated across a variety of sites, but one significant source of it is the cultural industries”.²¹⁴ The rise of “militainment” has been crucial to this endeavour, and most developed in the US, whose Department of Defense (DOD) has a well-funded Special Assistant for Entertainment Media (DODSAEM) to support the cultural industries’ production of military-themed TV shows, Hollywood films, music videos, sports events and digital games.²¹⁵ Strikingly, as Mirrlees notes, “Almost every U.S.-based communications and media company identified in the Forbes Global 2000 2016 list has at some point since 2001, been a DOD contractor.”²¹⁶

Mediated spectacles of masculinised militarism are also changing in an era of digital technologies and social media, as “21st century militainment frequently invites its subjects to immerse themselves within as opposed to passively watch simulations and interactive spectacles of war”.²¹⁷ Interactive gaming, and in particular First Person Shooter (FPS) videogames, have become an important weapon in

this emotional enlistment into militarism, which, given the videogame industry’s problems with sexism and misogyny, can also be understood as a way to also remasculinise the military.²¹⁸ Launched shortly after the US invasion of Afghanistan, America’s Army was the first state production in the videogame popular culture for simulation, training and recruitment, and exemplifies this immersive approach to heroising and masculinising militarism. Elyamany’s detailed study of the 2013 version, America’s Army: Proving Grounds, emphasises its “militarised aesthetics and politics of gameplay” and their “capacity to promote redefined ideals of hegemonic masculinity, on the one hand, and substantiate US universal legitimacy, on the other”.²¹⁹ In the game-world of America’s Army, players are invited to immerse themselves in a test of their militarised masculinity and feel the thrill of victory:

“Rather than being embroiled in a number of contemporary unwinnable conflicts like those in Afghanistan – which have uncertain outcomes and cannot be won – alternative optimistic scenarios that mobilise compliant citizenry, coopt the vigor of the war machine, legitimate moral support for the military, and assure victory in a fantasy future are the inherent dominant portrayals.”²²⁰

²¹² Schöb, M (2021). p14.

²¹³ Rashid, M (2020).

²¹⁴ Mirrlees, T (2018). *The US Empire’s Cultural Industries, at War: Selling and Subverting the Ideology of Militarism. Media, Ideology and Hegemony.* S Çoban. Leiden, Germany and Boston, MA: Brill. p170.

²¹⁵ Stahl, R (2010). *Militainment Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture.* New York, NY: Routledge.

²¹⁶ Mirrlees, T (2018). p171.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* p174.

²¹⁸ O’Donnell, J (2020). *Militant meninism: the militaristic discourse of Gamergate and Men’s Rights Activism. Media, Culture & Society* 42(5): 654–674.

²¹⁹ Elyamany, N (2021). *Militarized aesthetics of hegemonic masculinity in America’s Army: Proving Grounds (2013): a multimodal legitimation analysis. Visual Communication* 0(0): 1–23. p1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* p10.



06

LAND, LABOUR AND EXPLOITED MASCULINITIES



6.1

RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND LABOUR EXPLOITATION

6.1.1

COLONIAL IMPRINTS ON MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

In their recent survey of what they term the “politics of operations” of contemporary capitalism, Mezzadra and Neilson emphasise the continuing relevance of colonial histories of extraction and exploitation.

This they characterise as the “colonial imprint”, manifest in the operations of national and transnational capital:

“Ingrained in practices and techniques of extraction is a kind of colonial imprint that becomes particularly apparent when new fields and quarries are opened in the landscapes and spreadsheets of contemporary capital. The violence of this opening often manifests in controversies surrounding property and land rights.”²²¹

A clear finding from the WILPF studies, discussed in the next section, is the centrality of “controversies surrounding property and land rights” as structural drivers to many of the armed conflicts. Such controversies have deep roots in colonial history, which have ramified in the

post-colonial political economy of many countries. More generally, the “colonial imprint” that marks experience of contemporary capitalism is evident in the “practices and techniques of extraction” in relation to both land and labour, an imprint whose structural effects continue to shape current armed conflicts and gender orders.

This “colonial imprint” is clear in Colombia. As Schöb writes in her literature review for the LIMPAL study:

“like in other Latin American countries, the foundations for today’s multiple direct, structural and cultural violence – deeply patriarchal, racist and classist – were laid during the era of colonisation, reinforced through the diverse systems of slavery and social stratification, and post-independence regimes that constructed the new socio-political and religious order based on exclusion and gendered, raced and classed hierarchies”.²²²

Such histories and hierarchies, and the violence they fuel, continue to shape experiences and expressions of

²²¹ Mezzadra, S and B Neilson (2019). *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p142.

²²² Schöb, M (2021). p5.

masculinity: “Hegemonic masculinities linked to violence and militarisation – Colombia’s “masculinidades bélicas” – are rooted in these historical experiences, hence deeply engrained in the political, economic, institutional, social and cultural structures of the country.”²²³

The violence of colonial extraction and exploitation shadows contemporary conflicts in DRC. In the literature review commissioned to accompany the WILPF DRC study, Lablache-Combier and Genatio emphasise that West-Central Africa, including the contemporary DRC, Gabon, Republic of Congo and Angola, was the area of origin and departure for approximately 40% of the Africans who were kidnapped, forcibly brought to the Americas and enslaved, totalling some 4 million people. As they continue:

“In 1885, following the ‘Scramble for Africa’ where European powers divided up the African continent under their imperial control, the DRC became a personal colony of Belgian King Leopold II. King Leopold extracted immense personal wealth from the Congo with the forced

*labour of the Congolese people. His brutality, described in 1890 as ‘crimes against humanity’, led to the deaths of millions of Congolese people, with estimates ranging from 1 to 15 million people killed.”*²²⁴

As described in Kaushal’s literature review of masculinities and conflict in Cameroon commissioned to accompany the WILPF Cameroon study,²²⁵ Cameroon’s colonial history is more recent, being first colonised by Germany in 1884 at the beginning of the aforementioned ‘Scramble for Africa’. But in common with other colonial projects, the purpose of conquest was to extract value from conquered territory. As Willis et al note:

*“German colonial forces relied heavily on the forced labour of African peoples, which strongly echoed the institution of slavery that had supposedly been abolished... In order to maximise the profits of colonial controlled industrial-sized plantations, German colonisers actively encouraged the capture of persons from parts of Southern Cameroon, and provided arms and financial incentives to elites to expedite the process.”*²²⁶

Afghanistan’s political economy, too, has long been shaped by its experience of imperialism. Johnson notes that “Afghanistan came into being as the territory between the British, Russian and Persian Empires, continuing its historical role as a crossroads between Central and South Asia”, and that “historically it was Afghanistan that was repeatedly overrun and occupied because of the fragmented and weakened nature of its political organisation”.²²⁷

The imprint of colonial political economy, and its contemporary neo-colonial manifestations, on both masculinity and armed conflict takes several forms. The first is immiseration and inequality; colonies were created and organised to extract and exploit land, labour and other “natural” resources. This relation of exploitation produces, and in its way naturalises, profound inequalities, between coloniser and colonised, and between elites and the rest. As Lablache-Combier and Genatio observe, despite the fact that DRC is endowed with exceptional natural resources, it “is one of the poorest countries in the world, with some of the worst social indicators in terms of education and health”.²²⁸ In 2018, it was

²²³ Ibid. p6.

²²⁴ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

²²⁵ Kaushal, T (2021). *Militarised masculinities in Cameroon: A Review of Structural Gendered Dynamics*, WILPF.

²²⁶ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p11.

²²⁷ Johnson, R (2014).

²²⁸ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

estimated that 73% of the Congolese population, equalling 60 million people, lived on less than \$1.90 a day (the international poverty rate).²²⁹

Colombia is among the countries with the most unequal income distribution in the world. Social mobility is largely foreclosed to the already marginalised, and poverty is criminalised. As Schöb notes, this “affects young men and their access to social adulthood in particular”, in that “socio-economic exclusion has an emasculating effect on men and boys, and works as a powerful driver into armed violence, crime and socio-cultural practices that recur to weapons and violence for reasserting their masculinity”.²³⁰ These links between economic distress, thwarted masculinities and armed conflict were explored in more detail in section 5.2.

²²⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview#1>

²³⁰ Schöb, M (2021). p6.

6.1.2

THE “RESOURCE CURSE” AND ARMED CONFLICT

Economies based on histories and contemporary realities of resource extraction have also been identified as being more prone to armed conflict; the so-called “resource curse”.

In Le Billon’s framing, the “resource curse argument suggests that resource dependence creates a context for the emergence of armed conflicts through its negative effects on economic performance and the quality of governing institutions”.²³¹ The literature review for the WILPF DRC study cautions against a too simplistic adoption of this “resource curse” framing as a way to understand the conflict there. It cites research by Autesserre, who argues that attributing the main cause of the conflict to the illegal exploitation of Congolese mineral resources fails to acknowledge the range of grievances and interests driving the military struggles between a multiplicity of armed groups, as well as transnational actors.²³²

On the other hand, empirical research suggests that the “resource curse” argument has merit, especially with regard to extractive industries and illicit drug economies. Since 1958, 15 of the 18 countries where subnational governments received oil revenues experienced an internal armed conflict: Angola, Bolivia, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire), India, Indonesia, Iraq, Malaysia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan and Venezuela.²³³ This is certainly the case in the oil-rich Colombian municipality of Arauca, one of the municipalities worst affected by the armed conflict in the country. As Rodriguez reports, “oil companies and their sub-contractors were targeted by guerrillas since the mid 1980s” and “both the ELN and FARC forced contractors of public works and projects to pay them a percentage of contracts”.²³⁴ The role of the illicit drug economy in funding and fuelling the armed conflict in Colombia is also well acknowledged. As Schöb writes, “During the 1970s and 1980s, growing international demand for marijuana and later cocaine, made narcotics an important conflict resource.”²³⁵ Schöb continues:

²³¹ Le Billon, P (2012). *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits and the Politics of Resources*. London, UK: Hurst & Company, p25.

²³² Autesserre, S (2012). *Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences*. *African Affairs* 111(443): 202-222.

²³³ Rodríguez, JDG (2020). *Oil revenues, public procurement and armed conflict: A case study of a subnational government in Colombia*. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7(2): 686-703.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* p698.

²³⁵ Schöb, M (2021). p7

*“Guerrilla groups grew in number, scale and scope of actions, Colombia’s famous drug cartels formed, and right-wing paramilitary groups were created for the drug barons’ and large-estate owners’ (often the same persons) ‘self-defence’ against the guerrilla and each other. These paramilitary groups, which later organised under the umbrella organisation Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), had a close relationship with the political and economic elites of the country.”*²³⁶

Extractive economies, and in particular the imperative to maintain control over the exorbitant profits and rents that can be extracted, re-organise labour regimes, and relatedly their political economies of gender. This is evident in the proliferation of armed groups that arise in response to the rent-seeking, profit-making imperative. Lablache-Combier and Genatio note the development of more than 70 armed groups that are active in the Eastern provinces of DRC, and that such “armed groups have become embedded in the social structures, and strive for access to power over land and mineral resources in the region”.²³⁷ In Cameroon, the

International Crisis Group notes that by the end of 2018, ten separatist militias with between 2,000 and 4,000 fighters were battling not only government forces, but also pro-government “self-defence” groups as well as criminal gangs in Anglophone areas, which have taken advantage of the conflict to expand their activities.²³⁸

Similarly in Afghanistan, the WILPF study highlights the rise of “warlordism” and associated militias as fuelling the militarisation of masculinities. The phenomenon of regional and local warlords, while complex in its origins and expressions, cannot be understood without reference to the opiate economy. As Gootenberg makes clear, “Resistance warlords and fragmentation of the country led to sprawling dependence on poppy production until the 1989 Soviet withdrawal.”²³⁹ By 1994, Afghanistan had surpassed Burma as the major producer of opiates worldwide, and “Afghanistan’s meteoric rise as a ‘narco-state’ occurred under the Taliban regime (1994–2001).”²⁴⁰ A recent study, published before the return of the Taliban to power, notes that the illegal drugs

trade accounts for 25–33% of the Afghan economy’s total worth, and that in a context of high unemployment, the organisation of male labour for production and protection “work” in the opiate economy is widespread.²⁴¹ As Robins continues, “On pain of a punitive response, farmers are incentivised to sell their opium poppy at the ‘farm gate’” as “a response to the shape of the prevailing rural political economy”.²⁴² Furthermore, “Increasingly, since the early 2000s, Afghan groups have succumbed to the market-style logic of the treatment of opiates through a process of ‘vertical integration’ that facilitates the acquisition of a dominant position in the drugs production and supply process.”²⁴³ The mining sector is also of growing importance; Afghanistan has vast mineral deposits, with estimates putting the worth at US\$1–3trn.²⁴⁴ In a paper published shortly before the collapse of the US-backed administration, Rickard notes that “Illegal mining is widespread and small scale excavation and trafficking of mineral commodities has played a role in organised crime and funding for militant groups during Afghanistan’s conflict.”²⁴⁵

²³⁶ *Ibid.* p7.

²³⁷ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study.* Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

²³⁸ Malley, R (2018). *10 Conflicts to Watch in 2019.* Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2019>

²³⁹ Gootenberg, P (2021). *Building the Global Drug Regime: Origins and Impact, 1909-1990s. Transforming the War on Drugs: Warriors, Victims, and Vulnerable Regions.* A Idler and JCG Vergara. London, UK: Hurst & Company: 53-82. p73.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p73.

²⁴¹ Robins, P (2021). *The Crescent Three States: Which Way to Go? Transforming the War on Drugs: Warriors, Victims, and Vulnerable Regions.* A Idler and JCG Vergara. London, UK: Hurst & Company: 207-228.

²⁴² *Ibid.* p213.

²⁴³ Robins, P (2021). p214.

²⁴⁴ Rickard, S (2020). *Gender, agency and decision making in community engagement: Reflections from Afghanistan’s Mes Aynak Mine.* *The Extractive Industries and Society* 7(2): 435-445.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p435.

6.1.3

EXTRACTIVE ECONOMIES AND MILITARISED LABOUR

Extractive economies fuel armed conflict, not least by thwarting peaceful masculinities, as discussed above.

But beyond the issue of men's individual motivations and economic rationale for joining armed groups, extractive economies structure the organisation and legitimation of violent male labour. Writing of the decade-long armed conflict which convulsed both Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1991 onwards, Hoffman's ethnography delineates the ways in which men, during armed conflict, become entangled in the commodification of violent labour that is militarisation and the "extent to which combatants were unmoored from virtually any certainty about themselves or their world" and therefore "the extent to which all aspects of their lives were made available to forces larger than themselves".²⁴⁶ This "unmooring", as he makes clear, is not unique to the war between Liberia and Sierra Leone; it "is the condition of postcoloniality for many African youth, exacerbated perhaps by wartime dynamics but not limited to them".²⁴⁷ The obverse of this "unmooring" of labour

to be deployed in a militarised political economy, is the deployment of military labour for the securing of capital. Resource extraction and its relations of labour exploitation require the securing of territory and labour to ensure the smooth operations of production and exchange.

This logic of securitisation underpinned Plan Colombia, whose militarisation of Colombian society is just as significant as the illicit drug economies it was officially intended to interdict. Agreed between the US administration and the Pastrana government in 1999, Plan Colombia comprised a combined military and humanitarian aid package for which the US spent approximately US\$9.6bn and the Colombian government US\$1.3bn from 2000 to 2015.²⁴⁸ As Schöb notes, these investments have significantly shaped Colombia society, nearly quadrupling the size of the armed forces, massively increasing the volume and lethality of weapons in the country and are "likely to have shaped the specific constructions of soldier-masculinities in military training".²⁴⁹ At the same time, these investments:

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p106.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p106.

²⁴⁸ Schöb, M (2021).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p9.

“must be understood as part of the larger US interventions in Latin America that are driven by economic and political interests. For example, through economic assistance and military support to its major trading partners in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela), in the early 2000s through the Andean Region Initiative (ARI), the US secures its economic benefits – oil and other extractive industries, as well as commerce, including an important market for weapons and private military contractors (PMCs) – and indirectly steers the politics and military operations in its two parallel and strongly intertwined global wars: on terror and on drugs.”²⁵⁰

Understanding the logic of securitisation that underpins these “intertwined global wars” on terror and on drugs, is important for analysing the ways in which dynamics of militarisation interact with a changing political economy of masculinity. Starting in Afghanistan, the global War on Terror declared by the US administration in late 2001, and the transnational political and economic interests it serves, has affected the armed conflicts in all four study countries. As the WILPF Cameroon report makes clear, the “Cameroon military provides support for US efforts against Boko Haram

and controlling illicit circulation of arms in the region” and, in turn, military funding and training from the US, France and Israel under the aegis of the War on Terror has “captured and entrenched the notion of masculinities in Cameroon in a militarised context, in which violent, organised action is rewarded”.²⁵¹

Feminist scholarship in the field of international relations has, in recent decades, linked this militarising of masculinities to the operations of “manly states” and the hyper-masculine logics of control and coercion that drive them.²⁵² In their reference to the pioneering feminist peace scholarship and activism of Cynthia Enloe, Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb note that “Enloe’s feminist analysis of US foreign policy sheds light on the gendered politics behind such militarising foreign policy”, driven by “a hyper-masculine, militarised self-image of US politics that demands toughness and repudiates any policy-making that could be interpreted as soft, hence feminised”.²⁵³ This has produced “foreign policy responses that pursue geopolitical interests with an iron-fist and lead a ‘tough’ war on drugs, terrorism, demanding the same approach from their Latin American counterparts, even if this exacerbates civil wars and increases human rights abuses”.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p8.

²⁵¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p28.

²⁵² See: Enloe, C (2014). *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. Sjoberg, L (2013). *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

²⁵³ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). *Structural Drivers of Militarised Masculinities in Colombia: An Analysis of Corruption, Land Dispossession and US Interventionism in Colombia*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF, p16.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p16.

6.1.4

IMPERIAL LOGIC OF PACIFICATION AND STABILISATION

But in addition to this “hyper-masculine, militarised self-image” there is an older imperial logic at work in the global War on Terror and War on Drugs: a logic of pacification and stabilisation, often presented as a “civilising mission”.

In this logic, hyper-masculinity is enmeshed in complex ways with gendered and racialised domination. As Darwish et al note in their literature review, commissioned to accompany the WILPF study in Afghanistan, “Women and their oppression have long been a civilisational bargaining chip that allowed Western colonial powers to claim cultural superiority over non-Western countries and thereby justify imperialism.”²⁵⁵ Far from being a “tough” repudiation of “soft” feminised policy-making, the US commenced its War on Terror invoking a caring and protective militarised masculinity, dedicated to “saving” women in the global South. In this way, “hyper-masculine institutions and military masculinities embodied

in international and national military and police forces, became the guarantors of the western imperial project of peace, state and liberal publics, and therefore also the guarantors of women’s freedoms”.²⁵⁶ As Darwish et al continue:

“The continuity of these orientalist tropes is astounding, and they equally served to justify the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which military occupation was legitimised with the ‘liberation’ of supposedly helpless Muslim women from supposedly violent Muslim men... While this is not to distract from the real misogyny of Taliban social and political organisation, the liberatory narrative allowed Western media to present its soldiers as the ‘true protectors’ of Muslim women. Similar to Afghans themselves, non-Afghan soldiers could therefore also construct their military masculinities, through notions of protection, and justifiable male violence. The ‘liberation’ of Muslim women was thereby used to further a highly masculinist foreign policy based on violence, imperialism and military intervention.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Darwish, S, H Hashim and J Afghani (2021). *Literature Review: Masculinities, War, and Violence in Afghanistan*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF, p4.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p5.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p4.

Written on the eve of the collapse of the US-backed administration, Darwish et al caution that it “is because of this paradoxical gender relationality, in which military masculinities are projected as a prerequisite for women’s freedoms and even feminisms, that with the pull-out of US-led forces, women’s rights are once again under siege in Afghanistan”.²⁵⁸ This older imperial tradition of military operations to “stabilise” territories and “pacify” populations for purposes of resource extraction, is also noteworthy for what it reveals, not simply about the economic interests being served, but the privatised, corporate structures undertaking military operations to secure colonial control. Joint stock companies were in the vanguard of European colonialism from its earliest days. The most famous exemplar, the British East India Company, had by the late 1700s an army of around 100,000, which was larger than the British army.²⁵⁹

This imperial tradition of privatised military operations in the service of transnational political and economic interests, has been significantly revived in recent decades. The rise of private military companies (PMCs) in the post-Cold War era has been well documented.²⁶⁰ As Thomson notes, by “mid-

2017, PMCs in Afghanistan outnumbered US troops three to one”.²⁶¹ In Colombia, as Thomson also makes clear:

“there is a symbiotic relationship between PMCs, the US-supported Colombian military-paramilitary nexus, and the transnational economic interests that they benefit. Links between PMCs, the Colombian military, and their paramilitary allies have been found in relation to Occidental Petroleum’s monetary assistance to the Colombian Army’s 18th Brigade, well known to have connections to paramilitary groups.”²⁶²

A detailed discussion of the rise of PMCs is beyond the scope of this paper, but Thomson usefully frames it in relation to the logic of stabilisation discussed above and the “US’s military managerial role in global capital”.²⁶³ This managerial role faces particular challenges in the contemporary era, given that:

“The growth of increasingly transnational and interconnected global markets and the industrialization of major economies, such as China’s, have compounded global stabilization requirements. Transnational demand for mechanisms to ‘open up’ noncompliant zones, to

*impose stability and order, and to repress counter-hegemonic dissent has strengthened alongside this growth.”*²⁶⁴

A growing body of scholarship, much of it within the field of critical military studies, is drawing attention to the impacts of PMCs on trends and dynamics in the militarisation of masculinities, and argues that such formations are serving to “remasculinise” both militarism and the state.²⁶⁵ In contrast to the growing push for women’s entry into state militaries, PMCs, as Higate found, celebrate their hyper-masculine “fratriarchy”.²⁶⁶ He also notes, echoing the imperial logic discussed earlier, that this hyper-masculinity is distinctly racialised, borne out by other research on the racialised division of labour in many PMCs, in which troops from the global South are hired and led by managers/officers from the global North. In a study of Sierra Leonean ex-militias recruited by PMCs to guard US bases in Iraq, Christensen notes the logic of labour exploitation at work:

“Sierra Leonean ex-militias are a marginalised population of militarily skilled young men that became available in

²⁵⁸ Darwish, S, H Hashim and J Afghani (2021). p5.

²⁵⁹ Fitzgibbon, W and J Lea (2020).

²⁶⁰ Thomson, A. (2018). *Outsourced Empire: How Militias, Mercenaries, and Contractors Support US Statecraft*. London, UK: Pluto Press.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* p3.

²⁶² *Ibid.* p135.

²⁶³ Thomson, A (2018). p169.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p166.

²⁶⁵ Stachowitsch, S (2013). *Military Privatization and the Remasculinization of the State: Making the Link Between the Outsourcing of Military Security and Gendered State Transformations*. *International Relations* 27(1): 74-94.

²⁶⁶ Higate, P (2012). *Drinking Vodka from the “Butt-Crack”: Men, Masculinities and Fratriarchy in the Private Militarized Security Company*. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14(4): 450-469.

*the aftermath of the Sierra Leone civil war. As markets for violence and security privatisation arise not just locally and regionally, but also globally, this population has come to constitute an attractive pool of labourers.*²⁶⁷

But beyond the issue of PMCs, Thomson draws attention to what he terms “para-institutional forces” that “operate outside conventional or official chains of command, such as militias, death squads, paramilitary groups, civilian defense forces, insurgents, mercenaries, contractors, PMCs, and other irregular groups”.²⁶⁸ In an era of “outsourced empire”, these para-institutional forces are central to meeting the stabilisation requirements discussed above, in part because of the brutality, impunity and opacity with which they operate. In addition to the hyper-masculinity of “toughness” foregrounded by Enloe, then, it is important to focus attention on the gendered and racialised dimensions of brutality, impunity and opacity. Not only have “para-institutional agents... been central to US imperialism and by extension

to both the processes and architecture that bind the contemporary US-led liberalised global order”,²⁶⁹ but their operations have “served as a way for Washington to ‘distance’ itself from the coercive actions taken on its behalf”.²⁷⁰

Efforts to address militarised masculinities must, themselves, recognise the changing dynamics of armed conflict and armed actors and reject this distancing operation performed by para-institutional and the political and economic interests that they serve. For as Thomson concludes:

“The use of pro-government militias, paramilitary forces, civilian defense forces, mercenaries, and PMCs also has effects on dynamics of violence and conflict in the course of these counterinsurgent or unconventional wars. The impact on human rights violations, types of violence, and patterns of conflict, as well as on ‘which side wins’, and the political and economic order of target states cannot be overstated.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Christensen, MM (2017). *The underbelly of global security: Sierra Leonean ex-militias in Iraq. Private security in Africa: From the global assemblage to the everyday.* P Higate and M Utas. London, UK: Zed Books, p70.

²⁶⁸ Thomson, A (2018). p10.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p9.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p167.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* p165.

6.2

LAND, DISPOSSESSION AND EMASCULATION

6.2.1

LAND DISPOSSESSION AND ARMED CONFLICT

Resource extraction is linked to land dispossession, which continues to be a significant driver of armed conflict.

Since 2016, Cameroon has experienced an armed insurgency in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions against the Francophone national government, fuelled by a range of grievances, but whose roots are in rising economic inequalities, linked to land dispossession and a growing crisis of political legitimacy. In a study conducted by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group, “numerous research participants spoke of rich natural resources being extracted from Anglophone regions, such as timber, rubber, food, gold, and oil”.²⁷² Furthermore, the same study notes that, according to data from Cameroon’s Public Investment Budget for financial year 2017, the two Anglophone regions were “significantly underfunded compared to the South alone, receiving a total of US\$153 million compared to US\$225 million respectively, despite the fact that the two Anglophone regions have a significantly larger population than the

South”.²⁷³ The WILPF study in DRC similarly notes that, “Ethnic conflicts are often linked to claims over land ownership, a complex issue as the claims can originate from colonial times or even earlier.”²⁷⁴ In Colombia also, “Scholars agree that land dispossession is both a cause and a symptom of Colombia’s armed conflicts.”²⁷⁵ As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb note, in their background paper to accompany LIMPAL’s study in Colombia:

“Considering the armed conflicts and criminal violence, exerted by a myriad of state and non-state armed actors that are closely intertwined with large estate holdings and regional politics, which have been ravaging Colombia’s rural areas in particular for most of the past century (and further back), it is not surprising that land is considered as the core issue of conflict and land reform as an elementary part of the solution for positive peacebuilding in the country.”²⁷⁶

Land ownership has long been concentrated in the hands of political and economic elites; over 80% of the land in Colombia is owned by just 14% of landowners, who

²⁷² Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p17.

²⁷³ Ibid. p17.

²⁷⁴ WILPF DRC (2022). p22.

²⁷⁵ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M. Schöb (2022). p10.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p10.

have always found loopholes in legislation that seeks to limit the amount of land that can be administered by one family or company.²⁷⁷ The FARC, ELN and other guerrilla groups formed in the 1960s to challenge this elite control and a rising incidence of land dispossession faced by peasant farmers. The rise of agribusiness, both licit and illicit, as well as the expansion of extractive industries, meant that land dispossession “skyrocketed during the 1980s and 1990s, and found its peak as a result of large-scale paramilitary violence of the early 2000s, before slowly and continuously decreasing since”.²⁷⁸

As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb make clear, “Armed conflict between guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups, and the military can be assumed to be the main cause of land dispossession”, which “disproportionally affects campesinos and people of ethnic minorities; it makes Colombia the country with the second largest number of internally displaced persons worldwide.”²⁷⁹ It is also clear that, “Although the boundaries between state and non-state, politics and business, national and transnational are blurry in this context, an estimated eighth of land dispossessions in Colombia, i.e. about

one million hectares, are attributed to state actors and multinational companies.”²⁸⁰ Equally, as Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb emphasise, the “role of paramilitaries in displacing rural populations from their lands for the benefit of political and business elites (often the same people) has been well researched”.²⁸¹

This convergence of state and corporate interests in driving land dispossession, and consequent armed conflict, is also evident in Cameroon. In a background paper for the WILPF study in Cameroon, Fonjong makes clear that:

“Changing patterns of land access, including widespread land dispossession brought about by a liberalisation of land ownership laws and the sale of large tracts of land to international agribusinesses and extractive industries, has contributed to Cameroon’s rapidly spreading armed conflict.”²⁸²

As Fonjong et al highlight, such land dispossession has long been a means of not only wealth extraction, but also centralising state power.²⁸³ In the early years of the

newly-formed République du Cameroun, the government expropriated land in the Mungo Division, within the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, to create the Organisation Camerounaise de la Banane (OCB) plantations and boost the local economy, partly in a bid to destabilise local support for Anglophone nationalist groups, which used this part of the Mungo as their stronghold. In the late 1980s, as structural adjustment policies took hold, the OCB plantations were sold to French-based Plantations de Haut Penja (PHP), without consultation with local communities.²⁸⁴ Fonjong notes that these experiences of land dispossession and privatisation have become an escalating source of grievance for Anglophone communities and anti-government Anglophone nationalist formations.

With the imposition of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s came “land grabbing by private corporations in connection with the Cameroonian state itself”, as Kaushal notes, with plantation agribusiness and commercial crops such as coffee and cocoa coming to dominate the agricultural production of the Anglophone region.²⁸⁵ This entailed a process of proletarianisation, whereby smallholders and

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p11.

²⁷⁹ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p11.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p12.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.* p12.

²⁸² Fonjong, L (2021).

²⁸³ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). *Land governance and women’s rights in large-scale land acquisitions in Cameroon. Development in Practice* 26(4): 420-430.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). p9.

subsistence farmers became waged plantation workers. As land owned by men in rural areas has come to be taken over for corporate uses, male employment has been largely relegated to wage contracts in production units, leaving them in highly precarious conditions without having access to sustenance crops that they previously grew.

The land dispossession driving armed conflict in Cameroon should be understood in relation to the broader geopolitical economy of international agribusiness and extractive industries, and the corporate interests and military forces associated with them. As Willis et al point out, “tensions in Cameroon can be seen as part of a global class struggle over access to limited resources and opportunities”, in this sense, “Mirroring the unrest that has erupted across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East.”²⁸⁶ Struggles over land rights are raging across the global South. As Fonjong emphasises, “Domestic and multinational investors are taking advantage of the existing weak land institutional and

legal frameworks in most African countries, to grab huge expanses of land, in some cases without compensation, in total disregard of due procedure and customary rights of communities.”²⁸⁷ This “African land rush”, it has been noted, “seems to outpace global trends because of weak governance and the absence of mechanisms for protecting community and individual land rights, leading to a situation where many communities are unable to negotiate and protect their interests, livelihoods, and welfare”.²⁸⁸ There is now a large body of research documenting the “links between land tenure and conflict” and “recent research into protracted crises has illustrated that these disputes are triggered by shifts in the rights and institutions that govern access to and use of land”.²⁸⁹ A range of studies also make clear that land dispossession has “sparked resistance from affected communities, especially women whose triple reproduction, production, and community organisation roles depend very much on land”.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p15.

²⁸⁷ Fonjong, L (2017). *Left out but not backing down: exploring women's voices against large-scale agro-plantations in Cameroon*. *Development in Practice* 27(8): 1114-1125, p1115.

²⁸⁸ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p421.

²⁸⁹ Vlassenroot, K (2007). *Households land use strategies in a protracted crisis context: land tenure, conflict and food security in eastern DRC*. Ghent, Belgium: Conflict Research Group, University of Ghent, p1.

²⁹⁰ Fonjong, L (2017). p1115.

6.2.2

LAND DISPOSSESSION AND MASCULINISED CRISIS

The class contours of the linked crises of large-scale land dispossession and subsequent armed conflict are also shaped by the gender dynamics of relations between land, labour and identity.

Here, too, the “colonial imprint” discussed earlier is consequential, for one of the major impacts of colonial conquest was to gender people’s relation to land and its value in new ways. As Fonjong writes of Cameroon, the “introduction of cash crops and animal grazing during colonisation changed the political economy of households, creating a gender dichotomy where cash crops are ‘male’ and subsistence food crops ‘female’”.²⁹¹ Thus, the colonial conversion of land into a “factor of production” was also explicitly masculinised:

“The new colonial economic system that post-independence Cameroon later inherited did not only help to gradually destabilise pre-colonial harmony between indigenous population, their chiefs and land,

but further created other agents of land accumulation and scarcity. This created new elites and social stratification that affected existing gender relations. The introduction and differentiation of cash and food crops defined along gender lines, and the monetary economic system that soon replaced trade by barter are clear examples.”²⁹²

This masculinisation of land under colonialism is not confined to Cameroon. As Farr observes, settler colonialism in South Africa introduced a “gendered legal system by means of which to recruit Indigenous men into European patriarchy”. Through this means, “African men were redefined as the ‘owners’ of lands that had historically been cared for communally, while land and labour mechanisms for leaving women behind, which were already well-practised in Europe, were imposed.”²⁹³ In Colombia, too, land and the livelihood it affords has long been a marker of male identity. As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb write, a “campesino man who is deprived of his access to land loses his ability to live up to the social expectations towards manhood: he loses his capacity

²⁹¹ Fonjong, L (2021).

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Farr, V (2022). “Wild wayward free gifts”: A gendered view on agroecology and agricultural transitions. *Seed and Knowledge Justice for Agroecology: Critical African perspectives*. R Wynberg: Forthcoming, p6.

to fulfil his provider role as a man”.²⁹⁴ In this sense, land dispossession is frequently experienced, and strategically enacted, as a form of emasculation: “When armed actors kill, maim and displace rural populations from their lands, they thus symbolically emasculate the campesinos and reassert the hegemony of their own militarised, violent masculinities.”²⁹⁵

Fonjong makes a similar point with reference to Cameroon. He is clear that women’s exclusion from land governance decisions, and the fragility of their customary rights to land use as a result of legal reforms in 1974,” which effectively centralised decision-making power over land use and acquisition in the hands of the state, has meant that the gendered harms of this centralised land governance system have been most acutely felt by women. As Fonjong et al write, rural women:

“live and farm on the land, harvest non-timber forest products, water, and fuel wood among other things from the forest. It thus follows that any decision on the land directly or indirectly affects their livelihoods and rights as

*users. In almost all the affected communities surveyed, women were rarely represented formally or informally in land negotiations granting concessions to investors.”*²⁹⁶

But even if it is rural women who have been most harmed by the imposition of centralised state authority over land governance, and the elite impunity with which many large-scale land acquisitions have been conducted, the linking of land to masculinity has meant that land dispossession has often been experienced, and expressed, as a masculinised crisis. Research documents the mobilisations by women to resist land acquisition by large international investors through demonstrations and formal, legal complaints in the face of the threats to their livelihoods. But as the scale and pace of land dispossession accelerated, Fonjong points out that:

“Men were, however, visible in Anglophone resistance against the privatisation of the CDC and its land in 1990s as part of the structural adjustment measures of the IMF/World Bank. Government’s privatisation bid ignited a united Anglophone resistance from chiefs,

*parliamentarians, elites, civil society, in protest; attributing the move to attempted betrayal of Anglophone’s socio-cultural and political heritage by the Francophone-led state.”*²⁹⁷

This privatisation of previously commonly held resources, and the turn to large-scale mechanised agriculture, have helped to generate new class and gender dynamics within Cameroon. Fonjong highlights the emergence of a group of “bourgeois planteurs”, who “put together bank loans, savings, or both, and with the complicity of local chiefs, acquired large expanse of land where they started large-scale modern plantations of oil palm, cocoa, coffee, fruit, and other food crops”.²⁹⁸ These men “were not only indigenous farmers but also urban political and economic elites”.²⁹⁹ But the onset of armed conflict has had devastating consequences for the plantation economy of the Anglophone region. For the plantation workforce, the conflict has meant unemployment and displacement: “Young men who gained employment in state-owned plantations of CDC, Pamol (SWR), or Ndawara Tea Estate and Ndu Tea Estate (NWR) lost these jobs and

²⁹⁴ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p12.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p12.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p428. [?? wrong footnote]

²⁹⁷ Fonjong, L (2021).

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

either become internally displaced or constrained to join the armed groups”, meaning that, “Most of these men have lost their status as providers for their families as they now depend on their wives or other relatives for their livelihoods.”³⁰⁰

Evidence suggests that it is these men who have been most susceptible to joining the insurgency. Referencing the Anglophone secessionist movement known as the Amba, Willis et al point out that “support for the Amba was greater and near unconditional from individuals who were in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and precarious positions”, because “the most disadvantaged among the Anglophone populations have been disproportionately harmed in this dispute” and “those on the ground fighting for the Amba cause appear predominantly to consist of individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds”.³⁰¹

All of the above also means that questions over land rights, especially for those displaced by armed conflict, have become central to peacebuilding processes. The scale of this challenge is enormous. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN

OCHA), the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the DRC has increased to almost 6 million.³⁰² In February 2022, the International Organization for Migration reported that more than 700,000 Afghans had to leave their homes in 2021 as a result of conflict, adding to the 5.5 million people already displaced over past years.³⁰⁴ Research by CHRDA in 2019 in Cameroon notes that, “Mass displacements in the Anglophone regions have forced civilians to flee following attacks on villages and high levels of insecurity that prevail in both regions”³⁰⁴ and that “Most IDPs are women and children who abandoned their farms and have limited access to food.”³⁰⁵

The gendered dynamics of displacement, and implications for peacebuilding, are also evident in Colombia. As of December 2021, the country’s Victims’ Unit (Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas, UARIV) had registered over 9.2 million people as direct victims of the armed conflict, of whom more than 8.2 million have been internally displaced, compared to about one million killed.³⁰⁶ As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb make clear, such displacement and dispossession enacts a:

“highly gendered structural violence that made it difficult for women heads of households to obtain land rights and deferred ownership of land to the men in the family. In scenarios where armed actors – mainly men – often kill or disappear civilian men and displace the rest of the family, this gendered exclusion implies a double victimisation for women staying behind as single heads of households.”³⁰⁷

Legal and policy efforts to address this structural violence are under way, including “processes of reparations under the Justice and Peace Law of 2005, land restitution under the so-called Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011, and slow but nonetheless advancing land reform processes linked to the implementation of the 2016 Peace Accords with the FARC”.³⁰⁸ With these measures, women and legally disadvantaged groups have been granted not only more protection guarantees but also explicit rights to land titles. Corporations have also been ordered to return land or halt operations on land that had been gained through dispossession, including AngloGold, Continental Gold, Bancolombia, Argos, and other companies related to natural

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). pp52-53.

³⁰² <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/democratic-republic-congo-insecurity-and-displacement-dg-echo>

³⁰³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111532>

³⁰⁴ CHRDA (2019). p29.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p30.

³⁰⁶ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022).

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.* pp12-13.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p11.

resource extraction, palm oil and farming. But challenges remain. As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb suggest, “land restitution under the Victims’ Law has been slow and land reform is the least implemented of all pillars of the current peace process” because of the “the key role of land for Colombia’s political economy of conflict, including its transnational dimensions”.³⁰⁹ National elites, and transnational political and economic interests, remain tied to the practices of resource extraction, labour exploitation and land dispossession which have fuelled decades of conflict. Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb conclude starkly:

“But the message is clear: militarism and the power over land are closely related to manifestations of masculinity that are hegemonic, armed and violent; land dispossession stands out as a key structural driver of war, militarisation and corresponding masculinities; and, consequently, the issue must be addressed alongside institutional-cultural and interpersonal approaches to demilitarising masculinities for peace.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M. Schöb (2022). p12.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* p12-13

07

AUTHORITY, IMPUNITY AND ELITE MASCULINITIES

7.1.1

ELITE BROKERAGE AND COLONIAL LEGACIES

Colonial and neo-colonial relations of extraction foster a concentration of power, required to organise and legitimise the exploitation of land and labour and the transfer of wealth upwards (to elites) and outwards (to foreign countries and corporations).

The Cameroon Conflict Research Group, based at the University of Oxford in the UK, emphasises the continuities between the elite “brokerage” of the colonial and post-colonial periods. There are differences in the commodities being extracted, but its 2020 report makes clear that, “What remains disturbingly constant, though, is the structure of exploitation.”³¹¹ As the report notes:

“Access to oil and gas extraction is profitably brokered by elite actors within Cameroon for the greater benefit of international actors – this practice shares a basic

shape with that in which people were taken from Cameroon by local elites for the ultimate benefit of Europeans.”³¹²

In Cameroon as elsewhere, colonial conquest fundamentally altered the moral economy of authority, embodied in the institution of the chieftaincy. “Prior to colonisation, chiefs served as the custodians, guardians of the rural communities and property, and interpreters of native customs”, Fonjong et al make clear.³¹³ In this moral economy, the “chief as leader (not ruler) of his people and their land commands authority, which comes from his high morality, sacred and mystical powers to perform rite, and invoke ancestral judgment and blessings”.³¹⁴ Under colonial rule, the chief, whether directly or indirectly, became an agent of the emerging political economy of wealth extraction and labour exploitation.

The structural effects of such centralisation were profound, and continue to drive and shape the current

³¹¹ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p23.

³¹² Ibid. p12.

³¹³ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p425.

³¹⁴ Fonjong, L (2021).

armed conflict, notably in the form of clientelist politics and elite impunity. Pre-colonial chieftaincy relied on relations of mutuality and accountability between government and governed. As Fonjong observes, “Violation of the sacred oath and trust between the chief and his people and vice-versa often invite[d] heavy consequences and ancestor’s judgment.”³¹⁵ After colonial conquest, chiefs became clients and agents of an external authority, that was fundamentally unaccountable to the people over which it ruled; far from being political subjects, the “people” were essentially factors of production in a political economy of extraction and exploitation. Such clientelist politics and elite impunity continue to be hallmarks of Cameroon’s post-colonial governance.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

7.1.2

PATRONAGE POLITICS AND ORGANISED IMPUNITY

The hegemony of patronage politics, linked closely to the practices of resource extraction and land dispossession discussed in the previous section, has weakened state legitimacy and exacerbated elite impunity, which themselves become grievances for armed conflict.

The WILPF study in DRC makes clear the extent to which a crisis of legitimate governance and state failure has fuelled the conflict. As its report emphasises:

“Unaddressed trauma and suffering in a context of poverty, impunity, injustice and the absence of safe and clear state boundaries are explosive ammunition for violence at all levels of society. The ‘popular justice’ by armed groups and militias to avenge injustice and impunity has thus illustrated how cycles of violence are created and repeated, because of the gaps and even the non-existence of the authority of state in some areas.”³¹⁶

The report notes that, “Frustration and grief, linked to the absence of genuine fair justice and state protection, are thus important factors that push men and boys to join armed groups and to participate in all kinds of deplored violence.”³¹⁷ The impacts of state failure and elite impunity on masculinised resentment are also evident in Afghanistan, where as Myrntinen points out:

“Resolution mechanisms for local-level conflicts have also been heavily affected by the decades of war... often leading to a sense of might triumphing over right as powerful men impose their will upon the less powerful. The sting of such real and perceived injustices will be particularly acute for men whose personal and social sense of manhood and worth is tied to being able to defend their own and their family’s rights.”³¹⁸

In Cameroon, “local village chiefs often played a crucial role in facilitating land grabbing and acting in cooperation with the state and companies”.³¹⁹ Research makes clear, as Kaushal reports, that “this led to a loss of trust in

³¹⁶ WILPF DRC (2022). p4.

³¹⁷ Ibid. p46.

³¹⁸ Myrntinen, H (2018). p46.

local chiefs and disbanding of previous social hierarchies and moral economies of trust”.³²⁰ Newly emergent and increasingly militant Anglophone leadership emerged to fill the void left by the co-optation of traditional leaders by new political parties and foreign multinational corporations, which together shrank the political channels available for voicing dissent and asserting political claims through traditional means. As the report of the WILPF study in Cameroon makes clear, a “pernicious solidarity” has arisen, in which men’s use of violence is normalised by the impunity with which elite actors have carried out land dispossession. Men’s violence is pervasive, and is also used by men in authority, who thus have little incentive to prevent or sanction it and/or actively oppose efforts to do so, and in this way collude with and act in solidarity with those men with less power who also use violence.”³²¹

³¹⁹ Kaushal, T (2020). p7.

³²⁰ Ibid. p7.

³²¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p56.

7.2

CORRUPTION AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CONFLICT

7.2.1

ELITE CORRUPTION AS DRIVER OF ARMED CONFLICT

Framing this patronage politics and elite impunity in terms of corruption, remains politically useful for those concerned with addressing the structural drivers of armed conflict.

As Lablache-Combier and Genatio make clear, an “additional and often under-reported dimension of conflict in the DRC is the relationship between conflict and corruption”.³²² They continue:

“Transparency International ranks the DRC as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Using their Corruptions Perception Index, which ranks countries according to perceived levels of public sector corruption, they rank DRC as 169 out of 180 countries. Public sector corruption generates grievances against the government, including inter-group grievances which research shows is associated with armed conflict.”³²³

Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb note that “‘politics’ is often considered a synonym for corruption in Colombia – and this perception takes into account the political and economic intertwinement of politicians with state and non-state armed actors”.³²⁴ For 2021, Transparency International reports a Corruption Perception Index of 87 for Colombia, ranking 87 out of 180 rated countries worldwide.³²⁵ As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb make clear:

“Corruption stands out as one of the most salient, normalised and cross-cutting issues in Colombia, which permeates mindsets, institutions, and larger structural influences, from schools to state security and justice institutions to international trade... It benefits most those who are already in power and have access to resources, supports hegemonic masculinities and militarisation, and perpetuates vicious cycles of grievances and mistrust towards the state, which in return undermine positive peacebuilding.”³²⁶

Corruption erodes the legitimacy of state institutions, fostering support for insurgent groups. Interviews with

³²² Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

³²³ *Ibid.* p2.

³²⁴ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p20.

³²⁵ <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/colombia>

³²⁶ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M. Schöb (2022). p17.

male allies and activists with WILPF Afghanistan shortly after the collapse of the US-backed administration, attributed the speed of the collapse and the success of the Taliban to the widespread corruption of the US-backed regime.³²⁷ Corruption also fuels the militarisation of society through illegal arms sales. In DRC, “a climate of widespread corruption and impunity” makes “theft and diversion of weapons and ammunition easier”.³²⁸ Research suggests that non-state armed groups rely on ammunition and weapons sold to them by the military and the police.

This is also the case in Colombia, where, “One of the clearest links between corruption and militarism” are “illicit sales or diversion of state-owned weapons, that is, situations where

legal arms, held by the military or police, are illicitly sold, ‘lost’, or diverted in any other way to non-state armed groups”.³²⁹ Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb point out that, as with other Latin American countries with high corruption indices, the Colombian military have been plagued by corruption scandals for decades, as have the police. In her feminist ethnography of ex-combatant reintegration in Colombia, Schöb identified corruption as the single most important reason for ex-combatants and some of their regional reintegration workers to mistrust the state. This included police corruption on the street, as well as ex-combatants’ experiences of military collaborations with non-state armed actors, whereby military forces were used to secure an area in which paramilitary forces then did the “dirty work” of massacres, social cleansing,

or selective killings.³³⁰ Other practices are more publicly visible, such as the now highly publicised “false positives” scandals, in which civilians were disguised as guerrilla members, killed and reported as combat deaths. As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb conclude:

*“Beyond the need for concrete, gender-responsive anti-corruption measures and security sector reform, these insights also point to the crucial role of trust-building measures across Colombian society and in particular in and towards the state apparatus as part of positive, feminist peacebuilding.”*³³¹

³²⁷ Yousaf, F and D Peacock (2022). *Making visible the Afghan men who are working for women’s rights and a gender-just society*. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF.

³²⁸ Lablache-Combiér, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study*. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

³²⁹ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p19.

³³⁰ Schöb, Mia. *Combatants for Peace, Queering Figures, or “Just Some More Colombians”*: Co-Constructions of Ex-Combatants’ Citizen-Subjectivities in Everyday Reintegration Practices. PhD Dissertation (Doctor in Philosophy), The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2021. <https://u.pcloud.link/publink/show?code=XZ4O1PXZ9IOplihW23Y0GR7nhx1sV5EtFfoX>.

³³¹ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p20.

7.2.2

CORRUPTION, MASCULINITY AND MALE SUPREMACY

Efforts to address corruption, and its links with armed conflict, must address its gendered character.

Across the four WILPF studies, the links between corruption, male supremacy and elite masculinities are clear. In Afghanistan, the WILPF study reports that many interviewees especially in Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces, and even in Kabul and Balkh, “believed that corruption is a major barrier to women’s access to decision-making and political contribution”.³³² The corrupt practices of patronage politics by male leaders, not only serve to exclude women from political participation, but also structure hierarchies among men, directing attention at the ways in which elite masculinities are expressed through such practices.

As Lablache-Combier and Genatio emphasise with reference to DRC (formerly Zaire), the legacies of the infamously “despotic, kleptocratic rule” of Joseph Désiré Mobutu, later changed to Mobutu Sese Seko, who, with

the backing of the US and Europe, was president of Zaire from 1965 to 1997, loom large over any discussion of militarised masculinities and protracted conflict in the country. They urge that any “discussion about men and the legitimacy of forms of contemporary masculinity in the DRC must be situated within the context of the model of hegemonic masculinity that was popularised by Mobutu and by the western powers that backed him”.³³³ Portillo and Molano suggest a useful three-part framework for understanding the links between masculinities and corruption, in relation to the maintenance of male privilege, the performance of power and domination, and as a means of fulfilling men’s role as economic provider.³³⁴ As summarised by Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb:

“Strongly simplified, they argue that having more access to and power over resources (financial, networks, structures) and privilege gives men more opportunities to engage in and benefit from corruption in their everyday performances of masculinities at different social, economic, political and cultural levels. This allows them to both strengthen their gendered

³³² WILPF Afghanistan (2021).

³³³ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

³³⁴ Héctor Portillo and Sebastián Molano, “Masculinity, Machismo, and Corruption,” Voice Male. Standing with Women and Men in Chronicling Masculinities Today (blog), 25 June 2017, <https://voicemalemagazine.org/masculinity-machismo-corruption/>

*power positions in society and to secure their roles as providers through additional income. The ways men use corruption are informed by hegemonic ideals of masculinities. In brief, corruption allows those in power to become more powerful, to perpetuate and reinforce gendered hierarchies and to embody and perform hegemonic and often militarised masculinities.*³³⁵

This focus on the links between armed conflict, institutionalised corruption and male hierarchies directs attention at elite men's perspectives on the problems of militarised masculinities and their part in addressing them. As the WILPF DRC study notes, "it was imperative in this research to understand the perspectives of men in positions of power on their roles and responsibilities, including in relation to both promoting and deconstructing militarised masculinities".³³⁶ Interviews with political, traditional and religious leaders, all men, revealed a general lack of understanding of the connections between militarisation, masculinities and the protracted armed conflict in DRC. Such leaders tended to attribute men's involvement in military conflict to individual-level causes, such as a "lack of education, lack of religiosity

and other related factors".³³⁷ As the report continues, "Speaking of militarised masculinity, men in positions of power, although they have raised the negative side of men, still fail to make the connection between the negative side and militarised masculinity." ³³⁸ The study found that the "explanations given by some interviewees perfectly express militarised masculinity, but none seems to make a connection between the negative side of the man they mentioned in the chain of construction of militarised masculinities". ³³⁹

A similar lack of awareness was evident in the WILPF study in Cameroon. As the report notes, "Government officials who participated in our research were not aware of the dangers of militarised masculinities and the impacts of conflicts on men and boys."³⁴⁰

This lack of awareness is not the whole picture, however. At least some of the elite men interviewed did acknowledge the connections between weak and corrupt governance, armed conflict and the militarisation of masculinities. As one politician interviewed in DRC put it clearly:

*"This militarised masculinity exists in society. For example, what we are experiencing in politics: corruption, the desire to take everything alone, to seek to dominate others. This is what is at the root of the frustrations and, therefore, those who feel oppressed use violence to defend themselves. Moreover, the negative side of man being in politics is this desire to have everything; working for the personal interest instead of the interest of all, the poor distribution of the country's wealth: the mistreatment of workers who cause strikes, some go so far as to possess weapons to claim their rights. This leads to civic disobedience among the population in reaction to this mismanagement."*³⁴¹

The DRC report makes clear that, "Congolese politics is reputed to be of enormous violence due to its structuring, its history and functioning, similar to an arena of gladiators where the rules of the strongest reign and are imposed", and that this "explains the penchant taken by politicians to illustrate militarised masculinity comparable to the Congolese political scene".³⁴² In this view, governance reform and efforts to tackle elite corruption, mismanagement and impunity must

³³⁵ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p18.

³³⁶ WILPF DRC (2022). p34.

³³⁷ Ibid. p36.

³³⁸ Ibid. p37.

³³⁹ Ibid. p38.

³⁴⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p48.

³⁴¹ WILPF DRC (2022). p38.

³⁴² Ibid. p37.

be central to the peacebuilding agenda. At least some of those interviewed in the DRC study were aware of the scale of the challenge, noting that:

“public power favours the emergence of these militarised masculinities because of widespread mismanagement, the culture of entrenched and structural corruption, selective justice, the absence of state authority, the abusive exploitation of natural resources, illicit enrichment of state actors, non-equitable distribution of national wealth, reduction of civic space, youth unemployment, deterioration of the education system, tribalism, lack of a policy of welfare, the predominance of patriarchy and the traditional system, to the detriment of the effective application of national legislation on the cultural level, etc.”³⁴³

As the DRC study report concludes, “Tackling the root causes of conflict in all its forms, through a fight against the emergence of militarised masculinities, requires men in positions of power to have a real perception and understanding of this phenomenon.”³⁴⁴

³⁴³ *Ibid.* p41.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p38.



08

WORK WITH MEN FOR FEMINIST PEACE

Findings from the four country studies, also highlight some emerging lessons from existing work with men for feminist peace, and potential directions in which to develop this work further.

8.1

BUILD ON CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS

It is clear that changes in gender relations as a result of the armed conflict are creating opportunities for cross-gender activism for peace and justice.

It is clear that changes in gender relations as a result of the armed conflict are creating opportunities for cross-gender activism for peace and justice. In DRC, the WILPF study observed:

“The young people of Ituri are ready to oppose all the bad examples they face. They want healthy, non-violent relationships between parents; in short, peace between ethnic groups. Tired and frustrated in their isolated space, they want to take advantage of life’s current opportunities to grow. And for this, they are very motivated and eager to create peace with the different ethnic groups. As a result, they ask for psychosocial support in schools, to manage tensions there and manage feelings of anger and pain. They want to help create a youth-friendly environment to break the cycle of violence.”³⁴⁵

³⁴⁵ WILPF DRC (2022). p47.

³⁴⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p47.

³⁴⁷ Fonjong, L (2021).

In interviews with civil society leaders conducted as part of the WILPF study in Cameroon, respondents noted that changes in gender relations are already evident in “daily manifestations of gender equality: that’s men cooking, cleaning, educating daughters, etc”.³⁴⁶ Research on the impacts of the armed conflict, also makes clear that economic dislocation and massive population displacement are disrupting traditional gender relations and hierarchies. As Fonjong notes:

“Women are those often assigned to return to the villages despite insecurity for funerals, or emergencies because they are believed to be ‘harmless’ and less threatening than men. This has given them new roles, stature, and powers they did not have before the war. Together, these forces have created changes in gender roles and possibilities.”³⁴⁷

As Fonjong makes clear, “there are emerging opportunities created by socio-economic dynamics for women’s struggle for land rights to be supported by men, as both see each other not as rivals but partners

in the advancement of their individual households and communities”.³⁴⁸ In Colombia also, the effects of armed conflict are changing attitudes toward conventional and hierarchical gender roles. LIMPAL, in its study, found that:

“it was possible to observe that boys and girls who experience the effects of militarised masculinities in their daily lives have a collective awareness of the changes that must be made, be they structural, systemic or individual, so that they break with the cycle of violence that their families have lived through for decades in their community.”³⁴⁹

Several studies also highlighted broader changes in attitudes toward gender and sexuality, which should also be reflected in efforts to build feminist peace. In her background paper on the humanitarian crisis facing boys and men as a result of the armed conflict in Cameroon, Brun “acknowledges the importance of conducting a gender analysis and developing a response inclusive of all genders” but further acknowledges that the report “is centred along the female/male binary”,

given the lack of information about LGBTIQ+ individuals in the North-West and South-West conflict-affected regions.³⁵⁰ LIMPAL, similarly, urges that:

“A study and analysis of masculinities must include diverse, trans, non-heteronormative experiences that allow a broader glimpse of the effects of militarisation in Colombia. The research must be deepened and, in the next stage of this project, the trans-masculine perspective is going to be included.”³⁵¹

This report acknowledges the urgent need to develop a better understanding of the ways in which non-normative genders and sexualities are implicated in the links between masculinity, militarism and armed conflict; this is work that remains to be done.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p50.

³⁵⁰ Brun, D (2022). p8.

³⁵¹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p51.

8.2

STRENGTHEN MEN'S ALLYSHIP FOR FEMINIST PEACE ACTIVISM

Men's existing and potential role as allies in support of women's continuing peace activism was highlighted by several studies.

In his 2021 Background Paper for the WILPF Cameroon study, Fonjong sheds light on both the history of women's activism and the different ways in which men have supported it:

"Local resistance against land expropriation in Cameroon can be traced as far back as the early European exploration. Women's leadership and agency has been a key dimension of struggles around land. Men's support for women has been little noticed or commented on."³⁵²

As Fonjong notes, "in many instances men, and particularly young men, supported women's struggles to claim their land, even if they did so in the background and in a manner often not remarked upon by researchers".³⁵³ In some cases, there has been a division of "protest labour",

in which men and local chiefs have addressed several concerns to the administration regarding the population's risk of losing local livelihood to the plantations, while women and the youths have physically protested on the land, blocking access into the plantations.

In Afghanistan, prior to the return of the Taliban to power, WILPF had as many as 10,000 active members, out of which nearly 3,000 have at times been men. As Yousaf and Peacock note, "These figures may come as a surprise for those used to monolithic depictions of predictably patriarchal Afghan men."³⁵⁴ Interviews conducted with some of these male allies make clear "these generalisations of the 'stereotypical Afghan man' are wrong and why it is important to highlight efforts to engage men and the individual men's stories and their struggle within a largely patriarchal society".³⁵⁵ These interviews revealed a range of pathways and motivations for men to get involved with women in activism for feminist peace, but all were clear that:

³⁵² Fonjong, L (2021).

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Yousaf, F and D Peacock (2022). p1.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. p2.

“it was their position of privilege, of being a man, that both influenced their work and motivated them to work for gender equality in the country. This privilege for men stems from the patriarchal and conservative nature of Afghan society where men can talk freely about and discuss topics that are deemed culturally and socially controversial, but women are often sanctioned when they do.”³⁵⁶

These male allies have used a range of strategies in support of greater gender equality and feminist peace, from advocating for girls’ access to education, to using religious teachings to promote equality and peace. Hareer Hashim, who now co-ordinates WILPF Afghanistan’s Countering Militarised Masculinities initiative from Norway, where she was evacuated during the US withdrawal and the Taliban takeover, emphasises the importance of reaching out to a range of men to enlist their support:

“I think it is really crucial that you work alongside men that have very different visions and the stereotype that we see in Afghanistan. The men we have been targeting are usually from diverse groups. There are men from the parliament, there are men from legal fields, there are men from the police, there are youth, there are professors, there are teachers, there are students. And there’s just all variations of men that you can think of. The reason we’ve done that is because it’s very strategic in some ways. It’s because we want to showcase that not all men fit the bill of being violent, abusive, and going for militarisation.”³⁵⁷

WILPF DRC has also targeted men who may be more likely to ally themselves with feminist movements, in the hope that this will have impacts on other men as well. One way that WILPF DRC builds alliances, is by organising discussion groups to talk about masculinity and women's rights in collaboration with MenEngage and other civil society organisations.³⁵⁸ The

need for alliance building at organisational level was also emphasised. In Cameroon, civil society leaders interviewed for the WILPF study, urged that “building alliances between organisations working with men and other women's organisations is recommended as a way of confronting negative masculinities in various fields”.³⁵⁹ Indeed, the research process itself fostered such alliance building, as noted in WILPF Cameroon’s report:

“For instance, a result of our project is the increased partnership with local organisations such as Femmes pour la promotion du leadership moral (FEPLEM), Youth for Peace and Hommes engagés pour la promotion du genre et l’égalité entre les sexes (HEPROGES) in the East region; Cameroon for a World Beyond War, Horizon Jeune and CIBAEVA in the West region. This has helped in conducting solidarity dialogues and interviews with the project stakeholders.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p9.

³⁵⁷ Quoted in Yousaf, F and D Peacock (2022). p4.

³⁵⁸ Lablache-Combier, S. Genatio, D. & Peacock, D. *Militarised Masculinities in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Literature Review and Case Study.* Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Geneva.

³⁵⁹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p47.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p56.

8.3

CHALLENGE THE NORMALISATION OF MASCULINISED MILITARISM

Several studies highlighted the need to challenge the many ways in which young people are socialised into a masculinised militarism, especially through work with families and schools.

In Colombia, LIMPAL insists that this effort must “begin by transforming the guidelines for raising boys and girls, since that is where the expectations that society imposes on men and women are shaped”.³⁶¹ As the report continues:

“The family is the first space of all social relationships, whatever the organisation of the family (traditional or not), and therefore, within this organisation the forms of authority, structure, arrangements can be changed; hierarchical and non-hierarchical, and the ways of being a man and a woman.”³⁶²

WILPF Cameroon makes the specific recommendation to, “Review the provisions of the Civil Code, in particular

to modify the definition of the man as the head of the family and instead present both the man and the woman as partners in the family building.” It also urges more attention be given to supporting greater gender equality within families, for example through promoting “role models of men and women leaders whose examples of resolving conflicts without violence speak to the community”.³⁶⁴

Educational institutions are also an important site to challenge the normalisation of masculinised militarism. Focus groups with school students in Colombia recommended that “education would be the best alternative to confront this type of masculinities, starting from an early age with approaches on non-violence and respect for life, as well as, in adolescence, educate on human rights, sexual health, gender and equity”.³⁶⁵ LIMPAL recommends that “the school also has to change its structure and the guidelines of values that it teaches, as this has a direct effect on how being a man and being a woman are conceived”.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p47.

³⁶² Ibid. p47.

³⁶³ WILPF Cameroon (2022), p59.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. p60.

³⁶⁵ LIMPAL Colombia (2022), p49.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. p48.

Similarly, WILPF Cameroon highlights the need for a national peace education programme, starting at the primary level “to challenge the gender and social norms that promote male dominance and violence”.³⁶⁷ WILPF DRC also insists that “parents, teachers and other youth educators should be fully engaged in positive masculinities, psychosocial and peacebuilding programmes”. This emphasis on the importance of psychosocial support programmes in schools is noteworthy.

As the WILPF DRC report insists, “Implementing school-based psychosocial support programmes, with a gender-transformative perspective, should address the multiple and different traumatic experiences of boys and girls exposed to violence at home, at school and in their communities.”³⁶⁹

Efforts to challenge the normalisation of masculinised militarism, can also build on the extensive body of lessons and evidence from gender equality work with both men and boys, which is now well documented.³⁷⁰ As Schöb notes, in her literature review to accompany LIMPAL’s study in Colombia, such work should focus on three themes, namely: men’s co-

responsibility in tackling gender inequality and GBV, making men’s engagement both an ethical and political imperative as well as a practical necessity; resignifying masculinities, demilitarising them and delinking them from the rigid idea of an excess of power/superiority, in part by promoting more equitable parenting roles and men’s increased involvement in household chores, valuing care work and domestic labour; and highlighting the diversity of masculinities, reflecting not only ethnic and racial differences, but also a diversity of gender expressions and sexual orientations.³⁷¹

Schöb’s literature review highlights the work of several organisations in Colombia in this regard, including Bogotá-based Colectivo Hombres y Masculinidades (CHM), which has pursued holistic approaches to transforming masculinities since 1994. Its main methodology is popular education, inter alia through targeted workshops on masculinities (eg for high-school and university students, trade unionists, international organisations’ staff) or long-term engagement with youth collectives, such as the Colectivo Jóvenes Sin Fronteras. CHM also supports public protests against militarisation, as

well as trying to change the “culture” of protest from one of aggression to one of care and solidarity. As Schöb makes clear:

“Through a series of workshops with young demonstrators in Cali and other cities, the CHM aims to transform the masculinidades en primera línea from combat to care-orientated masculinities. This is only one example of how normalised patriarchal and militarised violence in Colombia continues to manifest in masculinities in everyday life, showing the need for sustainable and continuous demilitarisation efforts but also the urgency of deeper changes in the structural conditions that enable this violence.”³⁷²

The work of the Bogotá-based Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objektoras de Conciencia (ACOOOC) is also noteworthy. ACOOOC is working on educational approaches primarily, targeted at youth specifically, including ad hoc theatre, role plays, board games and booklets that raise awareness about masculinities as social constructs, challenge the hegemonic notions of (often militarised and violent masculinities), and

³⁶⁷ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p58.

³⁶⁸ WILPF DRC (2022). p49.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. p49.

³⁷⁰ Edström, J, A Hassink, T Shahrokh and E Stern (2015). *Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality*. EMERGE Evidence Review. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. Greig, A and M Flood (2020). *Work with Men and Boys for Gender Equality: A Review of Field Formation, the Evidence Base and Future Directions*. New York, NY: UN Women.

³⁷¹ Schöb, M (2021).

³⁷² Ibid. p22.

provide access to alternative notions of masculinities in a playful way. ACOOC has also developed important work on conscientious objection, supporting men to resist their conscription into the armed forces, which “stands out as an example of civil society work to promote legal changes and transform institutional practices.”³⁷³ As LIMPAL in its report makes clear:

“the possibility of starting a campaign in 2022 was also suggested, which would be focused on questioning or delegitimising recruitment, but from a masculinity perspective; that is to say, the possibility of starting the construction of a campaign called ‘I don’t want to be a hero’ was raised, which would be focused on weakening the institutional discourse around the figure of the soldier hero. [It would] propose a counter-informative exercise, which many young people would prefer to be sensitive men, caregivers, peacebuilders, conciliators, funny,

*diverse, supportive, instead of heroes, taking into account what this idea of the hero has implied for the country’s culture.”*³⁷⁴

The importance of combining interventions focused on attitudinal and behavioural change with efforts to “transform institutional practices” has been highlighted in a recent UN Women review of gender equality work with men and boys.³⁷⁵ In Colombia, as in the other study countries, most gender equality work with men to date has been focused on individual-level change. As Putzel-Kavanaugh and Schöb emphasise, the “majority of groups/collectives/initiatives working on masculinities in Colombia reportedly focus on therapeutic approaches directed at male aggressors”.³⁷⁶ This work is important. LIMPAL reports on a recommendation “to create attention and listening centres for aggressive men and those who have exercised violence against other people”, to

promote “a real rehabilitation of men in which they can decide to abandon their patriarchal pact with violent masculinity and build other types of healthier expressions”.³⁷⁷ At the same time, as Schöb makes clear:

*“such ground-up institutional, cultural or societal transformations cannot necessarily do away with the structural drivers of war, militarisation and hegemonic masculinities, closely intertwined with the political economy, such as corruption, US military interventionism or land dispossession. Hence the importance of transforming masculinities at the individual, group and larger societal levels in parallel to advocating for larger structural reforms to tackle to root causes of militarisation and violent hegemonic masculinities.”*³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Schöb, M (2021). p25.

³⁷⁴ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p50.

³⁷⁵ Greig, A and M Flood (2020).

³⁷⁶ Putzel-Kavanaugh, C and M Schöb (2022). p20.

³⁷⁷ LIMPAL Colombia (2022). p49.

³⁷⁸ Schöb, M (2021). p25.

8.4

ADDRESS THE STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

Structural reforms are clearly essential, but the scale of the challenge is daunting.

As WILPF's own report on the 20th anniversary of the landmark UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security makes clear:

"There is a double face approach at play within the UNSC where states continue to reaffirm the importance of implementing WPS commitments while also spending tens or hundreds of billions per year on their militaries, producing and exporting arms, resisting ratifying arms control treaties, and taking contradictory actions on denuclearisation."³⁷⁹

The global arms trade is flourishing. Global military spending is currently US\$2trn per year; 87% of this spending is accounted for by the G20 countries.³⁸⁰ A 2022 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute notes the growth in arms sales over the last decade, with those by the Top 100 arms companies 17%

higher in 2020 than in 2015. The United States once again hosted the highest number of companies ranked in the Top 100. Arms sales increased even as the global economy contracted by 3.1% during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. The biggest growth in arms imports among world regions occurred in Europe, a trend that is only likely to continue given recent events in Ukraine. A matter of days after Russia invaded Ukraine,³⁸¹ Saudi Arabia hosted its first-ever World Defense Show, welcoming 65,000 attendees, with some 600 defence and security exhibitors from 42 countries and 80 military delegations from 85 countries, including Russia and Ukraine. It was announced that US\$7.916m in deals were signed during its four days.³⁸²

Findings from the four country studies, make clear a growing focus on the need to challenge this global arms trade. WILPF Cameroon, in its report, calls on government to, "Reduce considerably military expenditure in order to allocate more resources to socio-educational sectors in decentralised communities",³⁸³ and to:

³⁷⁹ Kaptan, S (2020). UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: Perspectives from Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society. Geneva, Switzerland: WILPF. p9.

³⁸⁰ <https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-arms-trade-falls-slightly-imports-europe-east-asia-and-oceania-rise>

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² <https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/gcc/saudi-arabias-debut-world-defense-show-attended-by-65-000-people-nq0mq9im>

³⁸³ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p58.

*“Ensure the full implementation of the Law No 2016/015 of 14 December 2016 on the regime of arms and ammunition in Cameroon, as well as the Arms Trade Treaty. As well, take appropriate measures to adhere to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and add Cameroon’s voice to international advocacy to ban the Lethal Autonomous Weapons System.”*³⁸⁴

LIMPAL in Colombia has also developed advocacy campaigns on the arms trade, and its links with both militarism and government corruption. As Schöb notes, “LIMPAL’s advocacy against military spending and pressure towards Colombia’s ratification of and adherence to the Arms Trade Treaty illustrates how civil society can effectively campaign for compliance with international norms and systemic demilitarisation.”³⁸⁵

Given the role played by land dispossession in fuelling armed conflict, struggles over land rights and land governance have become important in efforts to address the structural dimensions of securing a feminist peace. In Cameroon, as Fonjong makes clear, among the most significant structural

drivers of the conflict is a “powerful industry” of agro-plantation interests, “created and protected by power-plays, lobbying, and high-level networks serving the interests of multinationals and a few chiefs and public officials to the detriment of the masses”.³⁸⁶ Reform of the institutions of land governance, and political authority more generally, is urgently needed, and the great majority of men, like women, have a clear interest in such reform. Fonjong documents some of the work that men in leadership positions have taken, including efforts by some chiefs to use their continuing influence over interpretations of customary law to promote women’s inheritance rights. In addition, judges and lawyers have influence over both customary and statutory land law, meaning that, “Judicial activism is therefore important in the promotion of women’s land rights where there is conflict or confusion between statutes and customs.”³⁸⁷ As Fonjong concludes:

“It depends how far we can learn from or transform the few opportunities offered into possibilities. Building gender-sensitive institutions and gender capacities of chiefs, judges, state-officials, and others so that they can

*enact and enforce gendered land legislations are great steps. Civil societies and mainstream and social media can also be critical in promoting positive actions from few men that can be contagious to an entire society. Yet, the Anglophone conflict or gender bias in land rights are mere symptoms of a greater vice, poverty and injustices in a society asking for a radical revolution in values. And authorities must recognise that only change can contain this revolution.”*³⁸⁸

Underpinning all this work on the structural drivers of armed conflict, must be efforts to both highlight and address the issues of corrupt governance and elite impunity discussed in section 7 of this report. WILPF Cameroon calls for the “reduction of the rampant corruption that prevents young boys (on whom the hopes of many families rest) from accessing decent jobs and instead leads them to try dangerous avenues, including those of armed groups that offer enormous financial rewards”.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p59.

³⁸⁵ Schöb, M (2021). p25.

³⁸⁶ Fonjong, L (2017). p1123.

³⁸⁷ Fonjong, L (2021).

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p61.

WILPF DRC, in its report, emphasises that:

“Respect for the rule of law, and good governance to end impunity, were mentioned by experienced military personnel as crucial factors in protecting the population from violence and related abuses. Access to work, income and health is also key to creating a safe environment to prevent violence. Safe boundaries are basic psychological needs that serve to protect against dangers from abroad as well as from within, as destructive emotions and powers. A well-functioning state protects people from violence through fair justice systems, ensuring proven political stability and equal access to economic development.”³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ WILPF DRC (2022), p47.

8.5

RESPOND TO THE GENDERED HARMS OF ARMED CONFLICT

Prevailing norms of masculinity, equating manhood with showing strength and hiding feelings, have left many men and boys ill equipped to deal with the psychological distress and trauma of participating in or witnessing armed conflict. Reflecting on the conflict in Cameroon, Fonjong puts this clearly:

“Framed differently, men, like women are also vulnerable and affected by armed conflicts and the preconceived narrative that conflicts provide avenues for men to be portrayed as powerful, hegemonic, and even supportive of violence was less tenable. Rather, men, women, public and traditional authorities all appear to be victims and overwhelmed by institutional and physical conflicts.”³⁹¹

Against a backdrop of widespread violence against women, linked to their social subordination, which predated the onset of armed conflict, there is “evidence that

the distress men face in the NSW as a result of their diminished income and social power vis-à-vis women has increased tensions”.³⁹² Research data indicates that the armed conflict in Cameroon has led to an upsurge in men’s violence against women, including psychological and physical abuse. As Brun writes:

“Having lost the economic power that enabled their domination, some men feel as if they have lost their virility. They are frustrated by their lack of economic prospects and their inability to conform to dominant and yet unattainable models of masculinity. Those feelings, combined with the fact that violence is considered socially acceptable in some communities, leads to domestic violence as a way of asserting their authority and domination.”³⁹³

These findings are echoed in the other country studies. As the WILPF DRC report makes clear, with reference to the pioneering work of the LPI,³⁹⁴ in providing psychosocial support and community-based mental health services for ex-combatants:

³⁹¹ Fonjong, L (2021).

³⁹² Brun, D (2022). p20.

³⁹³ Ibid. p20.

³⁹⁴ <http://livingpeaceinstitute.org/eng/>

“Psychosocial support can reduce levels of violence. Service members and ex-combatants who had received psychosocial support in LPI groups are better equipped to deal with strong stress-related emotions and trauma, support non-violent and gender-supportive attitudes, resist notions of militarised masculinities and promote positive masculinity.”³⁹⁵

WILPF DRC also urges attention to the intergenerational transmission of trauma, and the importance of peacebuilding initiatives in schools and communities with young people, to connect and build on the motivations of boys and girls to create peace and end ethnic conflict, as well as community-based psychosocial support for men and families in order to create “stability and peace in the minds of men, their families and communities”.³⁹⁶

All of the above have important implications for humanitarian assistance, emergency response and post-conflict peacebuilding. Significant progress has been made in recent years in both recognising and responding to the range of harms and protection threats faced by women

and girls as a result of armed conflict. Similar progress has yet to be made with respect to men’s and boys’ diverse and complex experiences of armed conflict, as combatants, victims and affected populations. Indeed, the narratives and representations of such experiences used by the media and humanitarian practitioners alike continue to focus on male fighters.

A study of men’s and boys’ experiences of harm and trauma in relation to the armed conflict in Cameroon, explores several reasons for this relative neglect of male vulnerability. The first is an implicitly essentialist view of vulnerability premised on the gender binary, which attaches vulnerability necessarily to the female, as the subordinate term in the binary. As Brun suggests, this “essentialist perception of vulnerability, denying women and girls any kind of agency, also prevents recognition of male marginalisation or vulnerability”.³⁹⁷ The second, paradoxically, is the fact that the much-needed emphasis on responding to gender-based violence against women and girls has sometimes occluded other issues, such as poverty and economic distress; the “focus on gender-based violence, while permitting the provision of much needed help to

survivors, leaves important root causes of this phenomenon unaddressed”.³⁹⁸

This in turn, Brun suggests, is linked to a binary view of the targeting of humanitarian assistance; women need help, men can cope. In a context of chronic underfunding, it is clear that difficult choices need to be made over whom to assist. But, echoing the norms of masculinity that insist on men’s strength and independence, it seems that the “consensus that women and girls are the most vulnerable, however, is linked with the common perception in the aid community that men, while also affected, are best able to look after themselves and manage the complexities of the crisis unaided”.³⁹⁹ Consequently, men may not be prioritised when organisations define who to help first.

This emphasis on the absence of protection mechanisms for men and boys, highlights the links between demilitarisation and addressing the suffering and trauma produced by war. In this sense, demilitarisation depends in part on recognising male vulnerability to such suffering and trauma. It is time, Fonjong urges, to recognise that men are “more allies than

³⁹⁵ WILPF DRC (2022). p4.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. p47.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. p23. [check]

³⁹⁸ Ibid. p23. [check]

³⁹⁹ Brun, D (2022). p24.

adversaries, confronted by the same economic interests and vulnerabilities fueled by public policies that sometimes lack humanism, anticipation, and rigor”.⁴⁰⁰ This recognition requires expanding “our vision of who the people of concern should be”.⁴⁰¹ For, as Brun makes very clear:

*“If vulnerability is defined by both the external threats of a specific environment and by the coping capacity of those experiencing that environment, adolescent boys and men can clearly be described as a vulnerable group. The consequences of neglecting their needs are not just potentially disastrous to them but also, indirectly, to the security, resilience and cohesion of the broader society.”*⁴⁰²

The importance of addressing the mental health and psychosocial support needs of ex-combatants is beginning to be recognised in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. DDR programming worldwide has been critiqued for its lack of attention to the challenges of social and economic reintegration, including support for young men in dealing with the trauma of witnessing and perpetrating atrocities and in disentangling

their own gender identity from the militarised injunction to kill and dominate others.⁴⁰³ There are lessons to be learned and good practice to be shared from innovative efforts to develop more gender transformative approaches to DDR programming.⁴⁰⁴ Such approaches must take account of the complex web of motivations and pressures that lead to men’s involvement in the armed conflict. Developing DDR programmes to support men in disentangling this web, with practical pathways for social and economic reintegration into communities, is necessary. But this in turn depends on changes at the policy level.

Colombia provides an inspiring example of such changes. In 2009, Theidon critiqued DDR programming for its reductive framing of “dismantling the machinery of war”, and by doing so, failing “to adequately consider how to move beyond demobilising combatants to facilitating social reconstruction and coexistence”.⁴⁰⁵ Such failure was evident in the ways in which “the program reinforces a patriarchal ‘family unit,’ with a marked, gendered division of labor”.⁴⁰⁶ Yet, as Schöb makes clear, policy change guiding the operations of the Agencia Colombiana para la Reincorporación y Normalización

(ARN), which is responsible for DDR programming, has been significant:

*“Since 2009, a sophisticated and constantly revised and updated gender strategy guides and also complicates the operational work of street-level reintegration workers across Colombia’s diverse regions. It includes work with men on ‘new masculinities’, basically understood as co-constructing identities and attitudes identified with non-hegemonic masculinities, eg anger control, emotion release or care work. Beyond changing attitudes, the reintegration programme aims to generate ‘cultural transformations for gender equality’, the promotion of a non-sexist culture.”*⁴⁰⁷

As Schöb explains, the practical effects of this change in policy are clear, not only in terms of individual combatants, but also for the families and communities to which they belong, in that:

“Many male ex-combatants translate their alternative access to ‘being good at being a man’ from their families to local politics and community work: they engage in

⁴⁰⁰ Fonjong, L (2021).

⁴⁰¹ Brun, D (2022). p30.

⁴⁰² Ibid. p30.

⁴⁰³ Duriesmith, D and G Holmes (2019). The masculine logic of DDR and SSR in the Rwanda Defence Force. *Security Dialogue* 50(4): 361–379.

⁴⁰⁴ Schöb, M.(2016). *Disarming, Demobilising and Reintegrating Whom? Accounting for Diversity Among Ex-Combatants in Colombian DDR. Peace, Conflict & Development: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (22): 117–178.

⁴⁰⁵ Theidon, K (2009). p3.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. p31.

⁴⁰⁷ Schöb, M (2021). p19.

local-level peacebuilding as leaders of violence reduction or youth recruitment prevention initiatives that teach empathy, an ethics of care, and non-violent conflict resolution through sports or arts.”⁴⁰⁸

All of the above provide both inspiration and specific lessons for how to take forward the work of feminist peacebuilding, by addressing the complex ways in which masculinities are deployed and exploited by the war system and militarist ideologies. Aside from the elite men who finance and manufacture the weapons and the wars, most men, in common with women and LGBTIQ+ communities, have a clear interest in feminist peace. It is with this interest that we must work.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p20.



Men, Masculinities & Armed Conflict

**Findings from a four-country study by
the Women's International League for
Peace and Freedom**