

ANALYSIS



Canada

Men, Masculinities & the Prospects for Feminist Peace in Cameroon

ALAN GREIG

Author

Alan Greig

Alan Greig (PhD) is a gender specialist with more than 20 years experience working on issues of masculinity, violence and oppression in countries of the Global South and North. Through research and support to program design, implementation and evaluation, his work addresses the connections between gender injustice and other forms of oppression, interpersonal and institutional violence, as well as personal and social change. Dr Greig has published widely on these issues, authoring a range of curricula and toolkits for use in professional development. He is an experienced gender trainer and facilitator of strategic planning and project design processes for a range of international and national organizations. As a co-founder of the New York-based Challenging Male Supremacy project, he is committed to a vision of social justice with gender equality at its heart.

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This report also draws on a literature review authored by Tanushree Kaushal, a background paper on land issues and men's allyship prepared by Lotsmart Fonjong, and the report of a research study by Delphine Brun on the vulnerability of men and boys in the context of the armed conflict in Cameroon. All the above reports were reviewed by Dean Peacock of WILPF International. This synthesis report was commissioned by Dean Peacock and authored by Alan Greig.

This report is an output of WILPF International's project on *Confronting Militarised Masculinities: Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace*, led by Dean Peacock.¹ In partnership with the MenEngage Alliance, this project 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. The initiative has largely focused on four countries – Afghanistan, 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.

The work of the *Countering Militarised Masculinities, Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace* project has been guided by input from Madeleine Rees, Ray Acheson, Jenny Aulin, Genevieve Riccoboni and Maria Butler (all from WILPF International), as well as a Research Advisory Group, whose members included: Jennifer Bruno Rodriguez (MenEngage Global Secretariat); David Duriesmith (University of Sheffield, UK); Lotsmart Fonjong (University of Cincinnati, USA); Mpiwa Mwangiro (Sonke Gender Justice & MenEngage Africa); Henri Myrntinen (Consultant); Maria Rashid (University College London, UK); Kopano Ratele (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa); and WILPF participants: Maria Butler, Dean Peacock and Genevieve Ricoboni (International Secretariat); Veronica Alcalde (WILPF Colombia); Guy Feugap (WILPF Cameroon); and Hareer Hashim (WILPF Afghanistan).

¹ See <https://www.wilpf.org/mobilising-men-for-feminist-peace/discover/>

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01

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions (NWSW) of Cameroon have been wracked by armed conflict between a range of anti-government groups and Cameroon's army.

The conflict began as a set of demands raised by lawyers, teachers and trade union members against the appointment of Francophone judges and teachers in the Anglophone regions, and peaceful protests against the broader imposition of centralised authority over common law/customary law frameworks. But it has escalated rapidly into militarised conflict. A 2019 report by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa is unequivocal:

*The Anglophone population in the Republic of Cameroon is experiencing a human rights catastrophe in the South West and North West regions of the country, home to most English-speaking Cameroonians. While there have been disputes and conflicts in these regions for decades, there has been a sharp escalation of serious violence, crime, and human rights violations since the crisis began in late 2016.*²

But the unfolding crisis in Cameroon remains poorly understood and largely neglected. As a 2020 research study by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group, based in the Faculty of Law at the University of Oxford in the UK, makes clear, "Despite repeated reports of massacres, and recurrent images shown of children and parents in shared graves, the international response has been conspicuously limited."³

This neglect is even more acute when it comes to understanding the gendered dimensions of the armed conflict, in terms of both its immediate and deeper-rooted causes and the range of its impacts. Since its establishment in 2014, WILPF Cameroon has been exploring different ways to effectively implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the context of Cameroon. Recognising that progress on this agenda cannot be made without a clearer understanding of the gender dimensions of the current armed conflict, WILPF Cameroon, together with the MenEngage Alliance country network in Cameroon and local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in three target regions of the country, namely the East, West and North-West, developed a research study to examine the causes, components and consequences of militarised masculinities in the current armed conflict.

² CHRDA (2019). *Cameroon's Unfolding Catastrophe: Evidence of Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity*. Quebec, Canada: Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. p6

³ 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. p4

The study set out to answer two key questions:

- What are the causes and manifestations of militarised masculinities in Cameroon?
- What strategies are being used to counter militarised masculinities and instead mobilise men for feminist peace?

From July to December 2021, data collection was carried out in three regions, the East, West and North–West, with a total of 201 individuals, 103 women and 98 men, drawn from CSOs; community leaders, including traditional leaders and religious leaders; administrative authorities; state armed groups (SAGs); and non–state armed groups (NSAGs). Specifically, data was collected from:

- A desk review of existing reports regarding masculinities–related issues in Cameroon
- Representatives from 44 CSOs
- 15 FGDs with a total of 174 participants
79 men and 95 women
- 56 interviews with community leaders
28 traditional leaders and 28 religious leaders

- 18 interviews with administrative authorities
(14 men and 4 women)
- 12 interviews with SAGs (11 men and 1 woman)
and 9 men from NSAGs
- 8 solidarity dialogues with a total of
198 participants (103 men and 95 women)
- 2 training workshops for data collectors
and a validation workshop

The data collection was prepared and analysed by a team of two consultants, Michel Ndongo Kitio and Laura Berka Nfomi, with support from Dean Peacock of WILPF International, and by Delphine Brun, the inter–agency gender adviser on humanitarian action (GenCap). The final report of this study was authored by Guy Feugap, Sylvie Ndongmo, Michel Ndongo Kitio and Laura Berka Nfomi. ⁴In addition, WILPF Cameroon commissioned two additional pieces of research to augment this primary research: a desk review by Tanushree Kaushal summarising existing literature on the political economy of militarised masculinities, ⁵ and a study by Lotsmart Fonjong on the extent to which men in three social groups (traditional leaders, the judiciary and local communities) have supported or resisted women’s rights and gender equality. ⁶

Separately, but relatedly, Delphine Brun undertook a research study providing much–needed information on how adolescent boys and men are coping with the economic and psychological strains resulting from the armed dispute and how their struggles affect girls and women, as well as the society at large. ⁷

The findings of this report are based on a literature review, on key informant interviews, and on focus group discussions with adolescent boys and men. The literature review focused on humanitarian reports and on thematic studies on gender and protection in the NWSW. It also included the review of 135 project proposals developed for the NWSW as part of the Humanitarian Response Plan 2021.

Phone interviews were conducted with 26 key informants from 18 organisations, including UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society groups. Interviews were semi–structured and focused on the situation of adolescent boys and men and the perceptions of the humanitarian community regarding their needs and how these are addressed. Key informants were identified based on their direct experience coordinating or providing humanitarian

⁴ WILPF Cameroon (2022). *Engaging Men And Boys For Peacebuilding In Cameroon*. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). *Contextually Engendering Conflict Analysis: The Case of Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon*. Gender Centre Working Paper 11. Geneva, Switzerland: Gender Centre, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

⁶ Fonjong, L (2022). *Friends or Foes: Men, Access to Land, Gender Relations and Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon*. Background paper for WILPF–MenEngage Initiative to Counter Militarised Masculinities and Mobilise Men for Feminist Peace. Geneva, Switzerland: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

⁷ 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: WILPF, GenCap and NorCap, July 2022.

assistance and protection on the ground, while ensuring that they represented a variety of sectors. Additionally, two focus group discussions were conducted in Bamenda and in Yaoundé with displaced adolescent boys and men from the two regions. In a note at the beginning of her research report, 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 NWSW.⁸

This report, too, is similarly centred on the female/male gender binary, reflecting the limitations of the gender analyses used in both the available research literature and current humanitarian response, which are structured around the female/male gender binary, rarely taking into account the needs and rights of people with non-normative sexualities and gender identities.

By the same token, 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 in Cameroon; this is work that remains to be done.

This synthesis report brings together the findings, insights and recommendations from the research studies and literature review discussed above, to present an overview of the gendered dimensions and determinants of the current armed conflict, as well as outlining directions for work on mobilising men in support of a feminist peace. In doing so, the report seeks to explore the complexities of these gender dimensions and determinants, in order to understand better the ways in which issues of masculinities are connected not only to men’s attitudes towards and behaviours in armed conflict, but also the political and economic forces fuelling and shaping such conflict.

The tendency of much scholarly research on masculinities issues, as well as gender equality programming with men and boys, to default to a focus on individual-level attitudes and behaviours, and an emphasis on an ill-defined concept of “culture” to account for these attitudes and behaviours, continues to be the subject of debate and critique.⁹ A 2018 study by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) of male engagement programming for gender equity and women’s empowerment, concluded that, “most male engagement programming focuses at the individual level – with some work also being done at the community

level – without addressing the broader structures of patriarchy within which individuals and relationships operate.”¹⁰

The need to examine more fully these “broader structures” is particularly pressing when it comes to the challenge of mobilising men for feminist peace because, as the case of Cameroon makes clear, the connections between patriarchal masculinities and armed conflict are deeply entangled with structural forces and factors. This report brings together the findings from a range of studies to illuminate these entanglements, highlighting the ways in which issues of masculinities are implicated in the structural drivers of armed conflict in Cameroon.

These include long-standing grievances over centralised governance and political legitimacy, as well as over the economic inequalities produced by land dispossession and an economy based on resource extraction for the benefit of national elites and transnational corporations. The fact that these grievances, and responses to them, have been both masculinised and militarised, is itself linked to Cameroon’s history of colonial violence, and the labour exploitation and resource extraction that such violence secured.

⁸ Brun, D (2022). p8

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ ICRW (2018). *Gender Equity and Male Engagement: It Only Works When Everyone Plays*. Washington DC: International Center for Research on Women. p92

The prospects for feminist peace depend on a clear-sighted view of the gender dimensions of these economic and political forces fuelling armed conflict and militarism more generally, as well as their manifestations in cultural expectations of manhood and the behaviours of men and boys themselves. In Cameroon, as elsewhere, such a view makes clear that men and boys are caught up in armed conflict in many and varied ways, not simply as fighters but also as targets and victims.

A vision of feminist peace must make room for this complexity of gendered experience of conflict, in order to mobilise men in solidarity with women to address the underlying causes of militarised violence and masculinised militarism.

These underlying causes, and what they suggest in terms of working with men and boys to advance the cause of feminist peace in Cameroon, are the subject of this report.

02

CONTEXTS

Building a feminist peace, in Cameroon as elsewhere, depends on developing a shared understanding of the nature, causes and impacts of armed conflict that is attentive to its gendered complexities and specificities.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, these gendered complexities are themselves always enmeshed with other relations and structures of power, such as economic exploitation. Yet, accounts of the conflict in Cameroon, to the extent that it has received any attention at all, have tended to rely on a reductive binary framing, portraying it as a conflict between two linguistically defined, and culturally distinct, groups of people: Anglophone vs Francophone. This framing has gained momentum over the course of the conflict, whose oppositional logic has led more radical groups and voices on the anti-government side to argue for complete independence, invoking the rationale of distinct peoples to further their demands. This binary framing of distinct linguistic groups with divergent interests has also suited government messaging, which has sought to portray opposition groups as wholly illegitimate.¹¹

¹¹ Kaushal, T (2020).

¹² Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p4

¹³ Ibid. p4

The 2020 research paper by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group lays bare the reductiveness of this binary framing. As it emphasises, “Contrary to first impressions, this is not simply a cultural conflict between the francophone state and minority anglophone peoples.”¹²

Instead, “the Cameroon conflict is about socioeconomic marginalisation, unequal access to resources and opportunities, and gross levels of power imbalance” which “involves a much wider set of stakeholders who have markedly differential levels of power.”¹³

As a recent analysis of the post-colonial political settlement makes clear, these power imbalances are themselves rooted in the history of political manoeuvring by both Francophone and Anglophone elites, giving rise to:

*more than fifty years of frustration by many Anglophone Cameroonians who accused the Francophone-dominated government of undermining the bi-cultural character of the country that resulted from the union between the British Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon on October 1st, 1961.*¹⁴

¹⁴ Takougang, J and L Fonjong (forthcoming). A Historical Reappraisal of the Fomuban Constitutional Conference and Its Contribution to the 2016 Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon. (under review)

This political history, and the economic inequalities it has produced, are also distinctly gendered, as the Literature Review for the WILPF Cameroon research study makes clear:

*As we study the conflict in Cameroon, we see how the past is reinvented and reused in the present by different interest groups as a mode of self-identity creation vis-à-vis the other. This goes to show how the present is interspersed with the past and interpretations of the past, a history that is typically re-told from the standpoint of male actors and male voices.*¹⁵

Uncovering the gendered complexities of the armed conflict in Cameroon is a necessary step in making progress toward a lasting feminist peace. This in turn must begin with understanding the contexts that have shaped such complexities, discussed below.

¹⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). p4

2.1

THE “COLONIAL IMPRINT” OF EXTRACTION AND EXPLOITATION

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.¹⁶

“Controversies surrounding property and land rights” continue to be of central importance to the armed conflict in Cameroon. At this stage, it is important to note that such controversies have deep roots in colonial history, which have ramified in the country’s post-colonial political economy. The “colonial imprint” that marks Cameroon’s 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 the current armed conflict.

First colonised by Germany in 1884, the territory of contemporary Cameroon was then divided between the French and British colonial forces in 1916. The French-administered territory in Cameroon achieved independence and became the Republic of Cameroon (République du Cameroun) on 1 January 1960. The British-administered territories, known as Northern and Southern Cameroons respectively, were governed as part of the British colony of Nigeria until 1954, when Southern Cameroons was recognised as a separate entity within Nigeria.

Prompted by the independence granted to the formerly French-administered territory, the UN organised a plebiscite in 1961, which gave the former British colonies two options – union with the newly independent Federal Republic of Nigeria, or union with the newly formed Republic of Cameroon. The option of independence for Northern and Southern Cameroons was rejected by the British and was not presented as an alternative. On 11 February 1961, Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria and Southern Cameroons voted to join the Republic of Cameroon.

¹⁶ Mezzadra, S and B Neilson (2019). *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. p142

2.1

This transition from colonial territories to a post-colonial centralised state is marked by a continuity of extractive relations and operations. The purpose of colonial 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.*¹⁷

The coerced re-organisation of relations between land and labour for the purposes of wealth extraction, begun in the colonial era, continues to this day, not least in the large-scale land acquisitions by foreign corporations, whose links to the armed conflict are discussed in the next section.

This continuity, Willis et al. make clear, “should move us to reflect on the parallels between the historic structures of

slavery and the modern-day structures of trade, both of which were founded on hierarchical and exploitative economic relationships.”¹⁸ Such relationships are evident in the international control of Cameroon’s natural resources.¹⁹

The political economy of Cameroon remains deeply entangled with former colonial powers. After China, France remains Cameroon’s second largest trading partner. The French-controlled Central African franc (CFA) is the national currency; not only is the CFA directly pegged to the euro, but it is guaranteed by the French Treasury, and about half of the foreign earnings of all CFA states’ earnings is lodged directly with the French Treasury. Post-Brexit UK governments have sought to “make new trade arrangements with Cameroon to ensure there is minimal disruption when Britain leaves the term of the Free Trade Economic Partnership Agreement the country has with the EU.”²⁰

The UK government has also been closely involved in brokering the involvement of London-based oil and gas firm, New Age, in the development of the Etinde gas fields just off the Anglophone South-West coast of Cameroon. This development continues to be a flashpoint for the ongoing armed conflict, with anti-government forces claiming it

amounts to “the theft of anglophone resources by Britain and the Biya administration.”²¹

As for Germany, it has provided the single largest sum of bilateral government development co-operation funding in the world to Cameroon (€100 million from 2017 to 2019). Macroeconomic trends have intensified Cameroon’s entanglement with transnational corporate interests and the neo-colonial extractive practices of foreign governments. Infrastructural investment in support of this extractive economy, led China to become Cameroon’s single largest creditor. As Willis et al. point out:

*China has become the largest provider of road construction in the country, and has been involved in large-scale projects, such as the financing construction of a new port in the fishing town of Kribi, which most experts agree will be the biggest deep-water port in the region.*²²

Structural adjustment policies imposed by the lending requirements of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have not only significantly reduced public spending, but led to the privatisation of a range of state-owned enterprises and facilitated a series of large-scale land acquisitions by foreign conglomerates.

¹⁷ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p11

¹⁸ Ibid. p23

¹⁹ This control includes operations by British companies such as New Age, BowLeven and Victoria Oil & Gas; the

Anglo-French company, Perenco; the Chinese Addax Petroleum Cameroon Company (invested through state-owned means); and US funders such as Sculptor Capital/Och-Ziff have significant ownership of oil and gas interests. See Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020).

²⁰ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p62

²¹ Ibid. p63

²² Ibid. p76

2.1

As Fonjong et al. make clear, such land dispossession has long been a means of not only wealth extraction, but also centralising state power.²³

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.²⁴

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: “Nationalists [...] see large-scale agro-investments as a form of re-colonisation and foreign control.”²⁵

The gender dynamics of land dispossession and privatisation, and their links to the armed conflict in Cameroon over the last six years, will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

To understand these links, however, it is important to note two further contexts, which operate both as conditions for and effects of the social relations of extraction and exploitation discussed above, namely the concentration of power and the organisation of force in the service of that power.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016).

²⁵ 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

2.2

CONCENTRATION OF POWER

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.”²⁶ 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.*²⁷

Colonial conquest fundamentally altered the moral economy of authority, embodied in the institution of the chieftaincy.

²⁶ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p23

²⁷ Ibid. p12

²⁸ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p425

“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.²⁸ 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.”²⁹

Under colonial rule, the chief, whether directly or indirectly, became an agent of the emerging political economy of wealth extraction and labour exploitation.

There were differences in colonial practice, whose legacies have affected the grievances of Anglophone communities in the current armed conflict. As Kaushal points out:

*British law and administration were largely practiced to give greater room to native chiefs in performing executive and judicial roles. While the French also employed chiefs in their administration, their exercise of power through the chiefs was more direct and visible, which threatened the chief’s position as a trustworthy native authority among the locals.*³⁰

²⁹ Fonjong, L (2022).

³⁰ Kaushal, T (2020). p5

2.2

These differences “gave greater authority and legitimacy to chiefs in the British Cameroons vis-à-vis the French Cameroun”,³¹ fuelling Anglophone resentment when this “traditional” authority was undermined by successive administrations of the post-colonial state and its efforts to centralise power. The structural effects of such centralisation were profound, and continue to drive and shape the current 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.”³² 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. This logic of centralisation, initiated by colonial rule, also shaped the constitutional formation of the post-colonial state and subsequent struggles over its political settlement. The Gaullist-style constitution of

the République du Cameroun, with a strong executive and weak legislature, became the basis of negotiations over the constitutional arrangements of the new state, which following the 1961 plebiscite conjoined the République du Cameroun with the Anglophone territory, formerly known as Southern Cameroons. Under the new constitutional arrangements, the union of these territories was inaugurated as the Federal Republic of Cameroon, under whose federal structure the former Southern Cameroons became West Cameroon, with Buea as its administrative capital. The former Republic of Cameroon became East Cameroon, with Yaoundé as both its capital and the capital of the new federation.

While this federal structure established distinct legislative, executive and judicial institutions for its constituent federated states, based on their colonial heritage, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon granted the president wide-ranging centralised authority.

As a forthcoming paper by Takougang and Fonjong makes clear, based on a detailed analysis of these constitutional negotiations, “the fact that no decision on revenue allocation was part of the constitutional discourse meant that the economy of West Cameroon was highly dependent on the federal government.”³³

This centralising tendency was accelerated by the discovery of oil and other natural resources in West Cameroon, and the desire of federal authorities to control the profits from their extraction without interference by (Anglophone) authorities in Buea. In 1966, then-president Ahidjo imposed single party rule with the creation of the Cameroon National Union (CNU) as the only lawful political party, in the process banning three political parties in West Cameroon. In 1972, he moved to abolish the federal constitution itself, and replace the Federal Republic with a unitary state, to be called the United Republic of Cameroon. This was ratified by an overwhelming majority in a referendum that year, and under the new constitution, West Cameroon was divided into two provinces (North-West and South-West), which are the setting for the current conflict. In this new unitary state, the president was granted enhanced powers. More symbolically, the star representing the Anglophone minority was removed from the national flag.³⁴ As Kaushal confirms:

*Anglophone secessionist movements rose soon after the abolition of federalism in 1972. However, they attained prominence and wider popularity in the 1990s, which was a period during which they came to represent a wide range of grievances of the Anglophone population of Cameroon.*³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.* p5

³² Fonjong, L (2022).

³³ Takougang, J and L Fonjong (forthcoming). *A Historical Reappraisal of the Fouban Constitutional Conference and Its Contribution to the 2016 Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon.* (under review)

³⁴ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020).

³⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). p6

2.3

ORGANISATION OF FORCE

The research that does exist on the violence and suffering experienced since the onset of armed conflict in Cameroon, is unequivocal: “the evidence in this report supports a conclusion that crimes against humanity have been perpetrated.”³⁶

This report by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa concludes that the “Anglophone population in the Republic of Cameroon is experiencing a human rights catastrophe in the South West and North West regions of the country”, highlighting that, “Human rights groups and international organizations have reported deteriorating political, humanitarian, and security conditions as a result of extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, severe deprivations of liberty, and mass displacements of civilian populations.”³⁷

The continuities with the colonial era are, once again, noteworthy. Colonial conquest, by definition, was coercive. French repression of anti-colonial movements involved “mass arbitrary detentions, torture, and extra-judicial killings of civilians suspected as being collaborators.”³⁸

³⁶ CHRDA (2019), p12

³⁷ Ibid, p6

³⁸ Ibid, p71

Even after independence, “France controlled the Cameroon army and police force up to 1965, and continued a campaign of torture, mass extra-judicial killings, and even aerial bombardments against civilian populations as a means of crushing anti-French sentiment.”³⁹

The organisation and deployment of force to maintain centralised authority has continued into the post-colonial present, and is directly tied to the political economy of extraction and exploitation and its politics of clientelism and impunity. This organisation of military force should also be understood in relation to the broader geopolitics of military intervention in support of neo-colonial governance and its corporate interests.

As the WILPF Cameroon study 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.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid, p71

⁴⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022), p21

2.3

In 2015 alone, just before the anti-government protests, whose brutal repression fuelled the outbreak of armed conflict, the Obama administration provided at least US\$111 million in security and military aid, followed by an additional \$19 million in counter-terrorism training and equipment.

In the same year, 300 US military personnel, alongside high-tech equipment, such as predator drones, were deployed in the northern regions of Cameroon.⁴¹

External military funding by France, Israel, the UK and USA for elite units within the Cameroon armed forces, providing them with higher wages, and better facilities and equipment compared with other units, has helped to legitimise the use of coercive force to repress anti-government protests.

Such elite units have been implicated in some of the worst human rights violations, and are also directly deployed in the protection of oil and gas industry interests from protestors.⁴²

The WILPF Cameroon study report emphasises that: This fits within a wider approach by international actors, that promotes particular forms of manhood which valorise militarism, neo-liberalism, an extractive approach to land, over

ideas and practices about manhood and citizenship that are grounded in collectivism, care for the land, or that promote egalitarianism and support women's rights in Cameroon.⁴³

The US-led global War on Terror has also served as a legitimising framework for the organised military repression of political dissent in Cameroon. The initial protests in 2016 that sparked the current conflict were peaceful and conducted by groups of professionals such as lawyers and teachers. The WILPF Cameroon study report notes that these peaceful protests "were met with state repression, and were followed by the imprisonment of moderate, non-violent activists."⁴⁴

As reported by the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, growing violence in the two Anglophone regions in response to this repression of peaceful protests, quickly exceeded the capacity of police and gendarmes to manage the deteriorating security situation. In September 2017, the government declared a state of emergency and implemented martial law in the North-West and South-West (Anglophone) regions, likening the protestors to "terrorists."⁴⁵

The characteristic impunity of colonial violence persists.

"There has been impunity for state actions, and hostile, often aggressive, responses to domestic civil society organizations and human rights defenders."⁴⁶

So, too, is this impunity grounded in the geopolitical economy of extraction and exploitation. The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa insists that, "International pressure, outspoken and clear, is needed to end human rights abuses, to create credible and effective avenues to hold those responsible to account, and to encourage the Cameroonian government to work toward peace."⁴⁷ Such pressure, to date, has been largely unforthcoming.

As Willis et al. point out, a "more cynical view might attribute the failure of some international actors to call out the full wrongs of Cameroon state as economically motivated, in order to maintain access to Cameroon's bounteous natural resources."⁴⁸ Efforts to deflect attention from human rights abuses perpetrated during the conflict have often sought either to minimise the level and impacts of state violence, or to equate the actions of government and anti-government forces as being equally culpable of human rights violations.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020).

⁴³ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p21

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p21

⁴⁵ CHRDA (2019). p26

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p12

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p12

⁴⁸ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p34

2.3

Atrocities perpetrated by anti-government paramilitary groups, collectively referred to as the “Amba movement” with reference to their secessionist vision of an Anglophone nation of Ambazonia, are increasingly well documented. But independent research by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group cautions against a false equivalence, noting that the Amba movement is both poorly equipped and trained.

There is an asymmetry also in the propaganda “war” that accompanies the fighting, as “the state has the means to publicise certain versions of events and resources to make these accounts the legitimate ones.”⁴⁹

Not only is the conflict asymmetrical; “the violence of the Amba movement can be seen to have emerged in response to violence of the state, escalating from protests with peace branches, to catapults with stones, to eventual armed resistance.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p42

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p42

2.4

TOWARD A FEMINIST PEACE?

Given these asymmetries, and the structural conditions of geopolitical economy, concentrated power and elite impunity, which have fuelled the armed conflict, what are the prospects for and pathways to a feminist peace?

The first step must be to develop a clearer understanding of the ways in which gender relations, hierarchies and narratives are entangled with the structural conditions discussed above, as well as with the organisation and deployment of military force on all sides of the conflict.

So, too, there is a need to understand the “life” of the conflict as, among other things, a gendered life, and the uses and meanings of gender in the evolution from peaceful protest to “eventual armed resistance”, as well as the processes by which civilians have gradually become increasingly militarised.

These are complex processes, with multiple actors and associated dynamics. At the end of 2018, the International Crisis Group (ICG) documented that 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 chaos to expand their activities.⁵¹

The ICG also notes the role of diasporic Anglophone actors, including the interim government of Ambazonia (the putative name of the self-proclaimed Anglophone State) and the Ambazonia Governing Council, who seek to direct their forces from outside the country.

The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa warns that, “Local armed defence groups and certain members of the diaspora have fanned the flames of intolerance and hatred, creating a real barrier to resolution of the conflict by moderates who are attempting to resolve the crisis.”⁵²

The Anglophone diaspora in Africa, North America and Europe has also played a key propaganda role in the conflict, in crafting alternative narratives on the conflict to challenge government accounts. One of the first and main media platforms established by anti-government forces, the Southern Cameroon Broadcasting Corporation (SCBC), is based in South Africa.

⁵¹ Malley, R (2018). *10 Conflicts to Watch in 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2019>

⁵² CHRDA (2019). p8

2.4

The role of the internet in this discursive conflict is key:

*The internet has provided the wider field through which a wide spectrum of Anglophone interests and demands have been voiced and large communities have been reached. The array of webpages dedicated to the Anglophone cause is an indicator of the diversity of demands and objectives which underlie what is framed as a singular Anglophone movement.*⁵³

Progress toward a feminist peace must involve acknowledging this “diversity of demands.” As Kaushal emphasises, there are a “vast range of grievances that are economic, political and social in nature [which] have thus far gone relatively unaddressed by the Cameroonian state.”⁵⁴

Significantly, with respect to feminist peace, these include women’s demands and grievances, which are increasingly prominent in:

several social media campaigns, which go far beyond striving to bring attention to the violence women face during the conflict – towards including issues such as children’s access to schools and education, women’s

*inclusion in peace processes, making dialogue processes more inclusive of distinct parties and interest groups and safety for vulnerable groups in public spaces.*⁵⁵

Identifying the roles that men can play in working with women toward the goals of feminist peace is an urgent priority, but this requires a better understanding of the diverse and complex ways in which the heterogeneous category of “men” experience and relate to the armed conflict and its structural drivers and internal dynamics.

The purpose of the WILPF Cameroon study was to contribute to such an understanding, and its findings are discussed next.

⁵³ Kaushal, T (2020). p7

⁵⁴ Ibid. p8

⁵⁵ Ibid. p8

03

FINDINGS

3.1

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AND ANGLOPHONE GRIEVANCE

In common with many countries in the Global South, Cameroon opened up its economy to export-led economic growth in the 1980s.

Many of the most profitable sectors, including coffee and cocoa production for export and large reserves of light crude oil, are located in the Anglophone regions. The colonial legacy of resource extraction and economic exploitation were evident in these developments. Even though oil remains one of the largest and most profitable of the country's exports, and despite Cameroon having a nationalised oil company, the market is currently dominated by Anglo-French and Chinese interests. "This means that while the Cameroon government has a large stake in the country's oil sector, the vast majority of control of the sector lies in the hands of foreign corporations."⁵⁶

Not only this, but in the mid-1980s, the Cameroon economy experienced a serious economic crisis, resulting from several interacting factors, one of which was the decline of global commodity prices, which brought down the value of Cameroon's exports.

This fall in commodity prices in the mid-1980s prompted an economic recession and a greater reliance on foreign capital, including loans from the IMF, which were granted based on structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which led to the further opening up of the Cameroon economy to foreign investment by multinational corporations.

The increasing presence of foreign investors in agriculturally productive regions of Cameroon, and notably in the Anglophone regions, has had dramatic impacts on patterns of land ownership and the exploitation of both land and labour. As Fonjong makes clear:

*Changing patterns of land access, including widespread land dispossession brought about by a liberalization 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.*⁵⁷

The land dispossession driving armed conflict in Cameroon should be understood in relation to the broader geopolitical economy of international agribusiness and

⁵⁶ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p83

⁵⁷ Fonjong, L (2022).

3.1

extractive industries, and the corporate interests and military forces associated with them. 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.”⁵⁸

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.”⁵⁹

As researchers have found, such large-scale land acquisitions by agribusiness and extractive industries:

are export-orientated and increase the speed at which markets for land rights develop in Southern economies. It makes previously held communally land inaccessible and unavailable to peasants, and thus further impoverishes rural farming communities, particularly women, with the loss of

*livelihood, firewood, water, and medicinal plants as common resources are privatised.*⁶⁰

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.”⁶¹

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.”⁶² The pathways between land dispossession and armed conflict are shaped by both class and gender dynamics. 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.”⁶³ 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 areas.⁶⁴ This entailed a process of proletarianisation, whereby smallholders and 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. At the same time, the privatisation of previously commonly held resources and the turn to large-scale mechanised agriculture has helped to generate new class 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.”⁶⁵ These men “were not only indigenous farmers but also urban political and economic elites.”⁶⁶ As discussed further below, the onset of armed conflict has had devastating consequences for the plantation economy of the Anglophone region, whose effects are contoured by class.

⁵⁸ Fonjong, L (2017). p1115

⁵⁹ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p421

⁶⁰ Ibid. p422

⁶¹ 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

⁶² Fonjong, L (2017). p1115

⁶³ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p15

⁶⁴ Kaushal, T (2020). p9

⁶⁵ Fonjong, L (2022).

⁶⁶ Fonjong, L (2022).

3.2

LAND DISPOSSESSION AND MASCULINISED CRISIS

There is some evidence, discussed further below, to suggest that it is men most affected by land dispossession, who have been most susceptible to recruitment into armed anti-government groups.

Willis et 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.”⁶⁷

For the “bourgeois planteurs”, the situation is different; they face the loss of their investments as well as extortion and violence from armed groups:

The bourgeois farmers, most of whom had opened plantations in these areas as alternate sources of income, cannot access the farms.

*They are viewed by some of the armed groups as ‘black legs’ a term used to describe anyone cooperating with government or as likely hostages because they can easily pay ransom. Several plantations have been abandoned, others confiscated, while some bourgeois must negotiate with huge sums of money to access farms closer to safe areas.*⁶⁸

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, as elsewhere in the colonised world, 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, the “introduction of cash crops and animal grazing during colonization changed the political economy of households, creating a gender dichotomy where cash crops are ‘male’ and subsistence food crops ‘female’.”⁶⁹

Thus, the colonial conversion of land into a “factor of production” was also explicitly masculinised:

⁶⁷ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p52-53

⁶⁸ Fonjong, L (2022).

⁶⁹ Fonjong, L (2022).

3.2

*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.*⁷⁰

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.” Though 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.”⁷¹ That land dispossession could be experienced as a masculinised crisis, is the product of not only the “colonial imprint” of gendering land as property and source of exchange value, but also the gendered aspects and impacts of the post-colonial state’s centralising of authority.

Building on the earlier discussion of concentration of power, land governance became a key strategy in the centralising of increasingly unaccountable authority. In 1974, the recently established unitary state, based on the new constitution promulgated in 1972, passed a series of land ordinances, which transformed land governance and formally ended the legal pluralism in operation since the beginning of the colonial era. Henceforth, all land was classified into state, private and national lands. State and private lands were those officially registered in the name of the state and private and/or corporate persons; the remainder was defined as “national” land, to be administered by local Land Consultative Boards, on which were represented state and traditional authorities. Some 40 years after this land reform, research found that less than 15 of Cameroonians possessed land certificates.⁷² Of the three forms of land classification, “national” land remains by far the most common, and where most large-scale land acquisitions take place. Research on the operation of Land Consultative Boards, mandated to manage this “national” land, reveals the extent to which they have become vehicles for elite enrichment and land dispossession driven by corporate interests. As Fonjong et al. note, “Local chiefs may be custodians in the

co-management of national land with the state, but it is the state that is legally recognised when such land is considered ‘empty and/or underutilised’.”⁷³ This means that:

*Government plays a key role in the attribution of land to foreign and local investors in Cameroon. It has the final decision in the choice of investors, the quantity of land they acquire, and their activities. By law, only the president can grant concessions for land above 50 hectares, while the Minister in Charge of Lands (MINDAFF) can authorise less.*⁷⁴

This centralising of decision-making power over land governance became a particular source of tension within Anglophone communities. Not only was large-scale land dispossession to expand the agribusiness plantation economy for the production of coffee and cocoa, which serve as key raw materials in global supply chains, especially pronounced; the legacy of British indirect rule, which granted local chiefs greater leeway in decision-making, meant that the imposition of centralised authority over land governance was keenly resented. The ways in which this centralisation co-opted local chiefs has also created tension within such communities.

⁷⁰ Fonjong, L (2022).

⁷¹ 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

⁷² Fonjong, L, I. Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016).

⁷³ Ibid. p423

⁷⁴ Ibid. p423

3.2

As Fonjong et al. make clear, the “truth is that the rights of some of the chiefs that were sidelined were actually usurped by other influential chiefs and politicians for personal gains.”⁷⁵ The gendered harms of this centralised land governance system have been most acutely felt by women, given that 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.*⁷⁶

Under customary law, women did not have rights to own or inherit land, as unregistered land was held and managed by chiefs and men for their villages and families, respectively. In practice, women enjoyed a range of “usufruct” rights, derived from male relatives, as wives, daughters or sisters, granting women access to resources such as the crops that they cultivated on land and the right to use and sell these. The 1974 land reform destabilised these land use arrangements. On the one hand, it ended men’s customary security of land tenure

on which women depended for their land use rights. At the same time, women were for the most part excluded from the decision-making process of the Land Consultative Boards, whose community membership continues to be confined to chiefs and notables, who are overwhelmingly male; while there are some female chiefs in the Francophone regions, they are extremely rare in the Anglophone areas. Although the land reform did open up the possibility of women’s legal ownership of land, Kaushal reports that “new modes and methods came to be employed which denied women access to new forms of property” meaning that these “further threatened rights and access that women previously enjoyed such as the ownership of crops grown on a piece of land directly owned by a man.”⁷⁷ Land registration remains a cumbersome and often expensive process and, as Fonjong et al. note, “many rural women remain ignorant of their land rights and sometimes stay away from land matters out of respect for traditional beliefs which equate land to masculinity.”⁷⁸ In the decision-making over land acquisition, “Women generally lose out in these deals: without land, compensation, jobs, or access to the commons.”⁷⁹ 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 privatization of the CDC and its land in 1990s as part of the structural adjustment measures of the IMF/World Bank. Government’s privatization 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.*⁸⁰

Given men’s domination of political and economic power, disputes over land dispossession were both inherently masculinised and politicised and, in due course, militarised, a process linked to the related crisis of governance.

⁷⁵ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p426

⁷⁶ Ibid. p428

⁷⁷ Kaushal, T (2020). p6

⁷⁸ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p425

⁷⁹ Ibid. p428

⁸⁰ Fonjong, L (2022).

3.3

GOVERNANCE CRISIS AND MALE AUTHORITY

As already noted, “local village chiefs often played a crucial role in facilitating land grabbing and acting in cooperation with the state and companies.”⁸¹

But the implications of this involvement went far beyond specific cases of land acquisition. Research makes clear, as Kaushal reports, that “this led to a loss of trust in local chiefs and disbanding of previous social hierarchies and moral economies of trust.”⁸² The undermining of rural communities’ moral economy and structures of political authority in the North-West and South-West regions is also linked to the advent of multi-party politics, officially announced on 19 December 1990. Within the next seven years, the number of political parties multiplied from one to 149.⁸³ As multiple parties emerged, each of them began to contest for local influence and legitimacy, not least through enlisting the support of local chiefs. Kaushal makes clear that:

The introduction of a multi-party system started to change the nature of politics in the villages.

⁸¹ Kaushal, T (2020). p7

⁸² Ibid. p7

⁸³ Socpa, A (2016). On “autochthon” and “allochthon” divide: Ethnic stereotypes and social conflict in Cameroon. *African Study Monographs* 37(1): 17-28.

*[...] The chiefs in this region were caught between their subjects, most of whom were opposed to the president and his government, and the government, which was responsible for paying their salaries and exerted pressure upon them.*⁸⁴

In this way, “chiefs were faced with the tension of profiting from their access to statist political power or retaining trust and authority among their followers.”⁸⁵ This tension:

*has been particularly evident in cases of land grabs, in which local chiefs have often had to lend support to the state and companies to facilitate land grabbing. This has resulted in a loss of trust in their chieftom and people have started to turn to different sources in order to have their grievances redressed and a sense of justice restored.*⁸⁶

The multi-party system, in turn, provided these grievances with a party political vehicle. One of these parties was the Social Democratic Front (SDF), which was largely composed of Anglophone members and leadership.

⁸⁴ Kaushal, T (2020). p7

⁸⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). p7

⁸⁶ Ibid. p10

3.3

Kaushal notes that several associations and interest groups from the Anglophone community also emerged during this period, enabling long-standing grievances linked to exclusions from wider economic growth and political influence to be voiced by the Anglophone communities.

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. This governance crisis has been exacerbated by the centralisation of power discussed above, which has made local administrative authorities dependent on the federal government. In this way, not only have governance failures helped to fuel the current conflict, but they have also undermined efforts to resolve the crisis.

In the words of the WILPF Cameroon study report:

It seems that local leaders have contradictory impulses, responding to the pressure to engage with military tactics and violent response to conflict, even though they are

*well aware that it does not work. These authorities know what can be done in their localities to reduce violence, but they do not have the power to act, as they are obliged to implement the policy laid down at national level by the central government, even if the policy is clearly wrong.*⁸⁷

One key to peacebuilding efforts, WILPF Cameroon concludes from its research study, is to challenge this long-standing centralisation of power. As the report recommends:

*An effectively implemented decentralisation would serve to address this type of problem and greatly reduce militarised masculinities in the regions, if regional authorities had the necessary power to act in their administrative constituencies. Government and CSOs should develop peacebuilding strategies from local to national level, by including the people in the community in strategy planning and development.*⁸⁸

⁸⁷ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p11

⁸⁸ Ibid. p11

3.4

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MILITARY MOBILISATION

The armed conflict in Cameroon has its roots partly in rising economic inequalities, linked to land dispossession, and a growing crisis of political legitimacy, as discussed above.

The “colonial imprint” of extractive relations is still being felt today. 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.”⁸⁹

Furthermore, the same study notes that, according to data from Cameroon’s Public Investment Budget for the financial year 2017, the two Anglophone regions were “significantly underfunded compared to the South alone, receiving a total of \$153 million compared to \$225 million respectively, despite the fact that the two anglophone regions have a significantly larger population than the South.”⁹⁰

This is not simply the case of Francophone regions benefiting at the expense of Anglophone areas; the South region, being the home region of the current president, has

benefited disproportionately from budget allocations and key ministerial appointments.⁹¹

As the Cameroon Conflict Research Group makes clear in its 2020 report:

*Access to resources and opportunities are limited in Cameroon, with wealth largely concentrated in the hands of a political elite, which has left large sections of the wider society behind. A marked way this inequality plays out in Cameroon is along the francophone-anglophone divide, where anglophone status is an added source of disadvantage that prevents access to employment and resources.*⁹²

If this political economy of inequality, extraction and exploitation provides the ground for the conflict, the more immediate trigger for its militarisation lies in the government’s violent repression of initially peaceful protests. But such repression too must be understood as both condition and consequence of this same political economy, whose extractive relations rely on and reinforce the concentration of power, elite brokerage and political impunity.

⁸⁹ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p17

⁹⁰ Ibid. p17

⁹¹ Personal communication by Lotsmart Fonjong.

⁹² Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p15

3.4

As already noted, the repressive apparatus of state violence in Cameroon not only has colonial antecedents, but is directly linked to, as in funded by, the ongoing War on Terror.

In describing anti-government protestors as “terrorists”, the Cameroon state sought both material support and rhetorical sanction for its repressive measures to be prosecuted with the same impunity with which the US state and its allies have waged the War on Terror.

The militarisation of anti-government protests is also the result of deteriorating economic and political conditions produced by the conflict. A clear finding from Brun’s recent research study on the experiences of adolescent boys and adult men in the armed conflict is that, “Poverty, unemployment, economic hardship and a lack of educational opportunities, which greatly affect young men between 18 and 25 years of age, make men and adolescent boys highly susceptible to involvement in violent actions.”⁹³

For the plantation workforce, which expanded significantly with the rise of agribusiness from the 1990s onwards, the armed conflict has meant unemployment and displacement:

*Young men who gained employment in state-owned plantations of CDC, Pamol in (SWR), or Ndawara Tea Estate and Ndu Tea Estate (NWR) lost these jobs and either become internally displaced or constrained to join the armed groups. 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.*⁹⁴

When asked about the reasons that men do join armed groups, respondents in the WILPF Cameroon research study frequently identified poverty as a significant factor. As the study report makes clear:

*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.*⁹⁵

Brun’s research findings on the motivations for men’s involvement in the fighting echo this:

*Some do it for money, others fall for promises of educational opportunities and security. The youngest, because of their relative lack of maturity, may also be more susceptible to being attracted to promises of material gains, such as cars.*⁹⁶

In this sense, Brun makes clear, while “[g]rievances among the anglophone community, and in particular the most socio-economically disadvantaged, may have initially fuelled the crisis”, it is now the case that “involvement in armed violence has progressively become an adaptive measure.”⁹⁷

There is now a growing body of evidence that documents the extent of economic devastation wrought by the armed conflict. Eighty per cent of the population were involved in farming prior to the crisis, many of them in family-run agriculture and the expanding plantation economy linked to the land dispossession discussed above. 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.

⁹³ Brun, D (2022). p16

⁹⁴ Fonjong, L (2022).

⁹⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p15

⁹⁶ Brun, D (2022). p16

⁹⁷ Ibid. p16

3.4

Armed actors loot farms and businesses, kill and confiscate livestock, and impose taxes, making it difficult to maintain livelihood activities that have little margin for extra expenses. Economic dislocation in urban centres in the North-West and South-West regions has also been devastating. Men with salaried jobs, such as civil servants, have abandoned their positions and fled the cities because of prevailing insecurity.

As Brun reports:

*Private teachers also have been unable to work because many schools are no longer operating. Men, predominant in the wholesale trade of both regions, have seen their commercial activities slow down and be put at risk. Those who were working in transport, connecting regional capitals to remote areas, have also lost income because of the security situation and the restricted movement of people and goods. The male-dominated activity of driving moto taxis has been curtailed, as bikes have been seized.*⁹⁸

In its 2022 report, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that, “What started as a socio-political crisis in the North-West and

South-West regions became a complex humanitarian emergency leading to 2 million people estimated to be in need in 2022.”⁹⁹

The impacts of economic dislocation on women’s lives and livelihoods have been profound. According to the most recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 56% of those displaced within the South-West and North-West regions are women and girls.¹⁰⁰

The gendering of land ownership, cash crop production and wage earning, however, means that 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 direct involvement of boys and men in the violence, 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 elements and especially observed in smaller communities, echoes the militarized

*norms of masculinity, equating virility with power, violence and control.*¹⁰¹

In this context, men participate in armed groups out of sheer economic necessity, but also as an attempt to restore lost respect. Brun makes a similar point in her discussion 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.*¹⁰²

A separate analysis by Fonjong 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

⁹⁸ Brun, D (2022). p14

⁹⁹ OCHA (2022). Humanitarian Response Plan: Cameroon. Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2022. New York, NY:

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

¹⁰⁰ <https://dtm.iom.int/cameroon>

¹⁰¹ Brun, D (2022). p16

¹⁰² Ibid. p19

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provide health, education, and other basic needs for the family”, which “is psychologically troubling to most rural men [...] who have for long enjoyed this exclusive status by earnings from coffee and cocoa farms.”¹⁰³

As Brun adds:

*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.*¹⁰⁴

Far from being an expression of fulfilled masculinity, militarisation thrives on such thwarted masculinities. A focus group discussion with members of non-state armed groups, conducted as part of the WILPF Cameroon study, reinforced this point. Participants noted that “conflict alters roles in the family”, and that as a result of men dying and fleeing from the conflict, women have now assumed decision-making roles

in the family that were previously the preserve of men. While these changes open up possibilities for further progressive change toward gender equality (see section 4.2), they can also leave some men feeling emasculated and provoke further male violence. As the WILPF Cameroon study report notes, this “comes when traditional gender roles such as decision-making, breadwinning are taken by women in different households. When this happens some men feel weak and insulted, and there is a perceived need to exercise violence to prove their manhood.”¹⁰⁵

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. But if the militarisation of thwarted masculinities has both economic and psychic dimensions, it is useful to frame these militarised norms of masculinity not simply in terms of individual motivations to fight, but more broadly as legitimations of violent labour mobilised by circuits of production and exchange. Writing about the decade-long armed conflict that convulsed Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1991 onwards, naming it as the Mano River War with reference to the river between

the two countries, Hoffman notes how, “Violence itself enters the networks of circulation and exchange.”¹⁰⁶

As Hoffman suggests:

*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.*¹⁰⁷

His deep 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; the extent to which all aspects of their lives were made available to forces larger than themselves; the creative potential (as well as devastation) that this deterritorialization of life itself unleashed.*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁰⁴ Brun, D (2022). p19

¹⁰⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p46

¹⁰⁶ Hoffman, D (2011). *The War Machines: Young men and violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press. p108

¹⁰⁷ Hoffman, D.(2011). p108

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p106

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This “unmooring”, as he makes clear, is not unique to the Mano River War; it “is the condition of postcoloniality for many African youth, exacerbated perhaps by wartime dynamics but not limited to them.”¹⁰⁹

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 Cameroon research study, 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.

Significantly, the WILPF Cameroon study found that even men in ostensible positions of authority, such as in local government in the North-West and South-West regions, felt disempowered by the current situation. The study found 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 use of violence to repress dissent.¹¹⁰

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.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p106

¹¹⁰ *WILPF Cameroon (2022)*. p33

3.5

VIOLENT MASCULINITIES AND MEN'S MOTIVATIONS TO FIGHT

Research studies also suggest that the militarisation of masculinities that has helped to fuel and sustain the armed conflict is linked to long-standing gender norms and practices that associate masculinity with violence and domination.

As the previous sections make clear, these norms and practices are themselves shaped by colonial legacies of land dispossession and the centralisation of power.

The WILPF Cameroon research study reports that:

*The survey findings indicate that respondents thought the factors enabling men's violence and use of conflict included alcohol and drug use, cultural prejudices, poverty and illiteracy, lack of dialogue as response to crises, bad company, men's superiority complex and desire for domination.*¹¹¹

The study also found that men's "desire for domination" remains normalised. The report notes that "[o]ur research also indicates that men's domination in our communities is

considered as normal by women and men",¹¹² 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 has been perpetuated, generation after generation",¹¹³ According to a sub-divisional officer interviewed in the East region, "Masculinities are caused by men's willingness to dominate, a culturally based complex since we all grow up in a mould that shapes us in a certain way."¹¹⁴

This binary framing of gender relations, which expects men to be dominant and women to be subordinate, affects all areas of life. Men continue to dominate decision-making roles not only in the family, but also in local and central government as well as the private sector. The WILPF Cameroon study found that "it is clear that women are under-represented in decision-making roles."¹¹⁵

As a woman said in one of the focus groups organised by the study, "We are neglected when we make proposals in community meetings. And even when relevant proposals come from us, they are not respected, maybe because we are poor."¹¹⁶ Men's domination is also evident in their

¹¹¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022), p27

¹¹² Ibid. p28

¹¹³ Ibid. p27

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p28

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p38

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p38

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widespread use of violence against women and girls. Men's sexual violence against women and girls, and sometimes against other men, has been widely reported during the current armed conflict. In interviews with soldiers carried out by WILPF Cameroon, some of them blamed this violence on the fact that they are separated from their spouses for long periods of time.¹¹⁷

But this attempt to deflect their own responsibility for their use of violence, only further highlights 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 WILPF 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."¹¹⁸ This is far from unique to Cameroon. 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. Paradoxically, such violence only deepens the binary framing of women as dependent on men, in that it becomes 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 tying of masculinity to both violence and protection is evident, too, in the significance of guns as a marker of masculinity.

In common with research findings from other conflict-affected societies, in Cameroon the possession and use of guns have become an important way for men to "act like a man." 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."¹¹⁹ It is also clear that in conditions of extreme insecurity, guns have

become a tool for men to protect themselves and claim some authority.

In the WILPF Cameroon study, interviews with men involved in the armed conflict found that such men were aware:

*that they live in barracks or their vicinity, and if they are engaged in a conflict, as is the case in the North-West, South-West and the Far North regions, their daily life is exposed to danger with open confrontations. In other words, alongside the sense of power that guns grant them, and in part because of it, their life is full of frustrations, trauma and death.*¹²⁰

Given this, the report notes, the men told us that "owning a gun adds to their physical strength and prestige that the society acknowledges that they have, grants them a feeling of being more manly, while ensuring the security of the country, and makes them feel empowered with authority."¹²¹

A common theme emerging from interviews by WILPF Cameroon with combatants and ex-combatants, was the linking of military service with serving the nation, and the implicit and at

¹¹⁷ The WILPF Cameroon study report (page 43) includes the following data and discussion: "In Cameroon 43.2% of women in union are confronted by domestic violence. 39.8% and 14.5% respectively face emotional and sexual violence. Nationally, 20.1% of women were reported to have been forced to have sex for their first sexual relationship. Overall, 56.4% of women in union experienced at least one of these forms of violence. The lack of legal criminalisation of domestic violence and marital rape is a major gap in the protection of women's rights. Gender-based violence has increased since the beginning of the crisis. A consultation in the South-West shows

that 85% of respondents think that women and girls face violence, whether rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, denial of resources or opportunity, psychological abuse, physical violence or early marriage. Young women, aged 15 to 35, are most at risk. In the Far North region, from February 2018 to June 2019, 97% of cases of GBV were reported by women, of which about 12% were sexual violence. In 84% of cases, the perpetrator is the intimate partner. Sexual violence by armed groups or other men is a reality that is sometimes faced by boys and men."

¹¹⁸ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p48

¹¹⁹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p47

¹²⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p11

¹²¹ Ibid. p47

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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.¹²²

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.’”¹²³

Interestingly, one of the soldiers who was interviewed for the WILPF Cameroon study, also highlighted the importance of military training in desensitising men to the use of guns. As he said, “Because we were brainwashed and they removed the idea of being civilised, moreover, we had two strengths: the physical strength and the weapon that we possess.” The significance of the institutional dimensions of these links between masculinity, violence and guns was noted by other respondents in the WILPF Cameroon research. As the study

found, “militarized masculinities are enshrined and legitimized 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.”¹²⁴ As the study concludes, “militarized 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.”¹²⁵

This accepted logic of militarised responses to political dissent and social conflict has also produced its own cycle of violent escalation, which has a gendered dimension.

As WILPF Cameroon notes in its study report, what led to the arming of the independence movement emerging from the initial anti-government protests in 2016, is the fact that force has prevailed to the detriment of a peaceful method of resolving the crisis.

One ex-combatant interviewed by the WILPF research team

made clear that militarised repression had provoked a militarised response:

*If some of them keep up their arms and continue to kill, it is because they feel that the government underestimates their struggle and their ability to stand firm. This attitude makes them angry and causes them to react violently. It is not about the desire to kill innocent people, but to show their opponent that they are not anybody.*¹²⁶

One civil society leader emphasised the colonial imprint on this militarisation of masculinity, and the fact that “the country’s leaders, since colonisation, have always had a strong inclination to mislead the people. In order to avoid unfulfilled promises and prevent popular uprisings, it was necessary to surround themselves with a substantial military force.”¹²⁷ This interviewee contrasted the heavy investment in war (eg military schools, compulsory military service, privileges granted to the military and their families, incentives for carrying weapons and military uniforms, purchase of weapons, increased number of people in the army, etc) with the lack of investment in peace. In his view, this has always been “the ruler’s position, from the colonialists to the national governments. This situation has evolved and worsened to the

¹²² McClintock, A (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge.

¹²³ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p45

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p29

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p28

¹²⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p46

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p29

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point that the shrinking of the civic and political space and repression at all costs are part of the governance pattern.”¹²⁸

This emphasis on historical legacies also highlights the issue of intergenerational transmission of trauma and violence.

WILPF Cameroon, as a result of its research, notes that inequitable and violence-endorsing ideas about manhood are slow to change. In part, this is because conflict and violence disrupt opportunities to help children heal from the violence, including through the provision of psychosocial support or education more generally. **See section 4.4** for a closer look at the suffering and trauma produced by the armed conflict, and its links with masculinities. In its research on the links between masculinities, violence and militarisation, the WILPF Cameroon study did highlight some complexities, which may open up pathways for change. Notwithstanding the research findings on entrenched norms of violent masculinities, the study also revealed a range of views on what might be termed the “moral economy” of men’s violence. In its focus group discussion with religious and traditional leaders (54 men, 2 women), WILPF Cameroon 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 sensitization.*¹²⁹

The WILPF Cameroon study found that only very few community leaders strongly agreed that it is ever legitimate to use violence as a means to seek peace. Yet, this insistence on an orderly and disciplined masculinity that rejects violence and aggression, is clearly at odds with realities on the ground since 2017, where horrific acts of violence, overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, have been widespread. As the WILPF Cameroon study report concludes:

*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.*¹³⁰

¹²⁸*Ibid.* p29

¹²⁹*Ibid.* p39

¹³⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p26

3.6

FORCED RECRUITMENT AND MEN'S VULNERABILITY

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

The WILPF Cameroon 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."¹³¹

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. The 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

¹³¹ Ibid. p32

¹³² Ibid. p32

*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.*¹³²

As Brun indicates, the "movement of the male population, with some of them hiding and others resorting to exile, has generated an unprecedented situation. Several key informants stressed that in some villages no man under 60 can be found."¹³³

There is a need, then, to recognise many men's reluctance to fight. Brun makes clear that this reluctance brings its own risks for men:

*This pressure, particularly significant in rural areas, is primarily applied to males. Refusing to take part in the armed dispute comes with its own risk: They can be perceived as being spies and have no choice but to join, hide or flee their community.*¹³⁴

At the same time, because of their gender and age, young men in conflict-affected areas of the North-West and South-West regions are deemed by government forces

¹³³ Brun, D (2022). p17

¹³⁴ Ibid. p11

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to be combatants, and presumed to belong to anti-government armed groups. Since members of armed factions are predominantly males, women are not perceived as potential combatants. By being identified as presumptive enemies, and thus legitimate targets for opposing forces, these young men's masculinity is, in effect, 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. The assumption that young men are actual or potential combatants, irrespective of their views on or support for anti-government actions, makes them targets for attack. This assumption, combined with the fact that men tend to hold goods and money more than women, exposes them to various threats, including verbal intimidation, bribery, extortion, physical assault, arbitrary arrest and detention, especially during military raids in both rural and urban settings. The available evidence, as Brun makes clear, suggests that, "Men and young men remain the primary victims of recorded protection incidents, representing between 85 per cent and 95 per cent of those exposed to torture or inhuman

treatment, theft, extortion, arbitrary or unlawful arrest and/or detention."¹³⁵ Monitoring data for the South-West region from the Danish Refugee Council, cited by Brun, 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.¹³⁶

Protection monitoring by INTERSOS and UNHCR in the North-West and South-West regions for the same period, also cited by Brun, reveals significant differences in gendered vulnerability to different types of violations. While all victims of forced recruitment were males, men and boys constituted 70% of the victims of illegal detention, 62% of those arbitrarily arrested, 54% of those facing injuries and mutilations or inhuman treatment, 26% of those confronted with threats to life and personal security, 25% of those killed and 1% of those affected by sexual and gender-based violence.¹³⁷

In an environment of increasing insecurity, curfews, lockdowns and roadblocks, men and boys are far more likely to be

stopped at military checkpoints. Many people in Cameroon lack official identity documents, and displacement as well as the crisis-related disorganisation of administrative systems have made the loss or lack of civil documentation the source of significant risk. As Brun notes, the fear of crossing checkpoints without proper documentation and being harassed by the security authorities discourages many people, particularly men and boys, from moving around freely. Nor is it easy to secure the proper papers; young men and adolescent boys are particularly worried about approaching the authorities for fear of being illegally arrested and detained as suspected members of anti-government forces. As Brun makes clear:

*The fear of having to pay bribes, of facing consequence for the lack of an identity document, or of being harassed, physically assaulted, tortured or killed, has direct consequences on the ability of boys and men to seek work and maintain normal social relationships. To avoid attracting attention, men tend to avoid checkpoints, and that makes commuting to earn an income and play the socially expected role of family provider often impossible, further isolating them and reducing their ability to cope.*¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Brun, D (2022). p10

¹³⁶ Danish Refugee Council (2021). Protection Monitoring Report, Southwest Cameroon, January to December 2020. Copenhagen, Denmark: Danish Refugee Council.

¹³⁷ INTERSOS and UNHCR (2021). Protection factsheet, North West and South West Cameroon, 2020. Rome, Italy: INTERSOS and UNHCR.

¹³⁸ Brun, D (2022). p12

3.6

One of the clearest findings from this body of research, is the extent to which men and boys are trapped in a position of “impossible neutrality”, as Brun phrases it. 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

To escape this “impossible neutrality”, many choose international exile. The Cameroon Conflict Research Group reports that since 2016, more than 1,000 Cameroonians have reportedly fled for the USA to seek asylum from the conflict. Most are Anglophone villagers fleeing political instability in their home regions, who fear return due to possible retaliatory violence from either anti-government forces or the military.

Many of these asylum seekers are now stranded in Mexico, due to a change in Mexican asylum policies.¹⁴⁰

Research by the International Organization for Migration, cited by Brun, on voluntary returns of Cameroonians to their country, indicates that such international migration is primarily done by men, with about 90% of male migrants unaccompanied.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* p11

¹⁴⁰ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020).

3.7

GENDERED SUFFERING AND GENDERED VIOLENCE

In highlighting these different aspects of men's vulnerability to violence, suffering and death, the WILPF study seeks to clarify the gendered specificities of armed conflict and its impacts.

The dislocation of the agricultural economy in many Anglophone communities 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 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."¹⁴¹ 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.*¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ CHRDA (2019). p29

¹⁴² CHRDA (2019). p33

The report details the suffering that has ensued:

*Most IDPs are suffering from malaria after sleeping rough with no protection. Girls and young women have no access to sanitary pads or basic hygiene products and are forced to use whatever is available in their surroundings, resulting in serious infections.*¹⁴³

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 Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa 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."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ CHRDA (2019). p29-30

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p33

3.7

Respondents interviewed for the WILPF study in Cameroon reported that “[g]ender 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.”¹⁴⁵

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. The WILPF study notes that women are fleeing to urban centres to escape this violence, but face difficult living conditions there; in some cases, they have even less protection from violence than in their communities of origin. In noting these gendered impacts on the lives of women and girls, Brun emphasises the need to recognise the specifically gendered ways in which men and boys may also suffer as a result of the armed conflict:

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.*¹⁴⁶

As Brun found in her study of young men’s experiences of the conflict in Cameroon, the specificity of male suffering is linked, in part, to their presumptive targeting as combatants irrespective of their involvement in the conflict; the militarisation of masculinities discussed above. The suffering of men is also 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.*¹⁴⁷

A separate analysis by Fonjong 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 for long enjoyed this exclusive status by earnings from coffee and cocoa farms.”¹⁴⁸

Educational disruption has also impacted the lives of boys and young men. As Willis et al. emphasise, “[t]he topic of education has been central to this conflict”, given that:

*After lawyers began their peaceful protests against the appointment of French-speaking judges to the anglophone civil law courts, teachers were soon to follow, protesting a similar encroachment into the education sector. And ever since the state responded to those protests with severe force, schools have been a literal battleground.*¹⁴⁹

Since late 2016, anti-government forces have demanded the closure of schools, threatening or burning down establishments that remained open.

¹⁴⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p30

¹⁴⁶ Brun, D (2022). p7

¹⁴⁷ Brun, D (2022). p19

¹⁴⁸ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁴⁹ Willis, R, J Angove, C Mbinkar and J McAuley (2020). p29

3.7

As a result, some 80% of education facilities in the Anglophone regions are no longer operating, a situation exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Brun notes that difficulties in “accessing education, together with heavy financial challenges, have led to negative coping mechanisms, including increased child labour and exploitation”, and that “as adolescent boys take small jobs, they are at increased risk of adopting negative coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods, such as theft and banditry.”¹⁵⁰

A particular finding from Brun’s study relates to the psychological aspects of men’s and boys’ experience of the conflict. Several organisations interviewed for the research reported increased levels of psychological distress among the males, occasionally leading to mental health disorders and addictions. Echoing Hoffman’s account of young male combatants in the Liberia/Sierra Leone conflict being “unmoored from virtually any certainty about themselves or their world”,¹⁵¹ 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.*¹⁵²

Members of non-state armed groups interviewed for the WILPF Cameroon study echoed this research finding on men’s psychological distress. As one said, “I have been in the bush with no life of my own and we are targeted.” Another commented: “Men are psychologically impacted by conflict, and they can become so violent.”¹⁵³

Prevailing norms of masculinity, equating manhood with showing strength and hiding feelings, have left many men and boys ill equipped to deal with this psychological distress. This emotional repression at the heart of patriarchal masculinities can serve to perpetuate armed conflict, in part by making it harder to talk about the costs of armed conflict for men. Brun’s study 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.”¹⁵⁴

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.*¹⁵⁵

In turn, this can lead to socially disturbing behaviours, with consequences for families and the community as a whole. There is some evidence that rates of depression and attempted suicide are on the rise for men. Against a backdrop of widespread violence against women, linked to their social subordination, which pre-dated the onset of armed conflict, there is “evidence that the distress men face in the NWSW as a result of their diminished income and social power vis-à-vis women has increased tensions.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Brun, D (2022). p15

¹⁵¹ Hoffman, D (2011). p106

¹⁵² Brun, D (2022). p19

¹⁵³ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p33

¹⁵⁴ Brun, D (2022). p12

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p19

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p20

3.7

Research data indicates that the armed conflict 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.*¹⁵⁷

There is also some evidence that, in common with armed conflict elsewhere, men and boys can become targets of sexual violence. Brun notes that these "violations remain largely unspoken and hidden."¹⁵⁸

Monitoring data on gender-based violence in the North-West and South-West regions in February 2022 reveals that 19% of survivors are males. This, indeed, 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. Because of the focus on rape, 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.

This problem remains largely unacknowledged, let alone addressed. In common with many other countries, prosecuting perpetrators in Cameroon, is difficult because its penal code does not recognise the crime of rape against men. Instead, lawyers must use the term "forced homosexuality" as an element in legal proceedings, with all of the attendant stigma in a country in which homosexuality is criminalised.

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, deters them from reporting it.

Based on the research collated by Brun, 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.

Equally, however, Brun's research suggests 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 part of humanitarian agencies to recognise the specifically gendered ways in which men and boys may also suffer as a result of the armed conflict. This aspect of the humanitarian response is discussed next.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p20

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p12

3.8

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND THE GENDER BINARY

The related fields of humanitarian assistance, emergency response and post-conflict peacebuilding have made significant progress 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.

As Hoffman suggests, these accounts as deployed in and about conflicts in the global South are often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, racialised, for "Whatever one might say or write in an effort to humanize young male militia fighters in Africa, the visual image of black male bodies with weapons carries a demonizing baggage that for many viewers may be inescapable."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Hoffman, D (2011)

¹⁶⁰ Brun, D (2022). p24

Bringing more complexity to understanding the gendered specificities of armed conflict and its harms is an urgent priority. Yet, the 18 organisations interviewed for Brun's study of young men's experiences of armed conflict in Cameroon unanimously agreed that, compared to women and girls, the humanitarian community does not give the necessary attention and assistance to adolescent boys and men. The study's review of strategic planning documents, humanitarian sectors' reports and project proposals, highlights that women's vulnerability is often simply accepted as a fact that requires no justification or analysis. The portrayal of the female population in the conflict-affected regions of Cameroon tends to conflate women, sexual violence and vulnerability. As Brun notes, the "view that women are in all circumstances the most affected, even when available data might qualify that perception, can occasionally mislead interventions."¹⁶⁰ The study reviewed documentation on protection projects and found that even though males are particularly affected by this protection crisis, as few as 9% of the reviewed protection project proposals discuss how the crisis is affecting boys and men (against 32% that mention how females are affected).

3.8

Fifty-six per cent of the protection proposals include activities targeting females, as compared to 12 that include actions focused on males. Brun 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.”¹⁶¹

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.”¹⁶²

By the same token, this focus on GBV, and in particular sexual violence, can divert “attention from other forms of violence that are also horrific, such as non-sexual torture, arbitrary arrests, recruitment of child soldiers and killings.”¹⁶³

A review of available documentation from humanitarian agencies, conducted by Brun, makes clear that these other forms of violence are routinely documented but rarely analysed in gendered terms, as forms of violence to which men and boys are often particularly vulnerable.

This in turn, the study 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.”¹⁶⁴

Consequently, men may not be prioritised when organisations define who to help first. Male youths, in particular, are not considered as requiring humanitarian assistance, both because their vulnerability is rarely acknowledged and because they are readily stigmatised as potential combatants and perpetrators of different forms of violence.

Equally, as Brun explains, in a tense political environment, in which adolescent boys and men are systematically suspected by the military, providing a targeted humanitarian response to them can be a perilous venture. Several key informants interviewed for Brun’s study explained that there is a fear among the humanitarian community, that assisting the male population can cause aid structures to be labelled as supportive of anti-government forces, or as taking sides between rival factions of such forces.

Over the years there have been attacks on humanitarian organisations, particularly in the health sector. Health personnel have been assailed by different parties to the violent dispute for treating injured men. Key informants also expressed legitimate concerns over the difficulties of targeting programmes at affected men and boys appropriately.

In practice, it can sometimes be difficult distinguishing between affected male civilians, spies and fighters.

Because men and boys might also be involved in the hostilities, some organisations hesitate to engage in programmes benefiting them.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p23

¹⁶² Brun, D.(2022). p23

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* p24

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p24



04

MEN AND FEMINIST PEACE: DIRECTIONS FOR WORK

4.1

SUPPORTING FEMINIST ACTIVISM FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Lived experience as well as empirical research makes clear that the prospects for, and progress towards, feminist peace depend on women-led feminist activism.

As Kaushal makes clear, although, “[w]omen’s voices from distinct socio-political locations are largely marginalised in the coverage of the conflict” it remains the case that “women’s groups are organising and making demands both to the state and to other bodies.”¹⁶⁵ A range of tactics have been used, including “traditional modes of protest to generate political solidarity and demand for greater inclusion within the State”¹⁶⁶ as well as “methods that would shock male state agents, such as, disrobing in public, in order to assert their agency within public spaces.”¹⁶⁷ Kaushal notes that:

*Several women’s groups such as 74 and Women for Change have come together to demand the inclusion of women in the peace processes and any future dialogues. They led a social media campaign on International Women’s Day in 2019 to bring attention to these demands.*¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Kaushal, T (2020). p8

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p8

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p9

These demands remain largely unmet. In an effort to resolve the current conflict, the government organised a Grand National Dialogue from 30 September to 4 October 2019. While widely criticised for its lack of inclusivity and the over-representation of Francophones, the Grand National Dialogue led to the release of hundreds of political prisoners and recommended the introduction of new political institutions. This led to the granting of special status to the two conflict-ridden Anglophone regions, though as Adams and Fonjong note “this status fell short of calls for independence or a return to federalism.”¹⁶⁹ In addition, the government re-organised local government across the country, establishing ten new regional councils and 14 city councils. These institutional reforms follow on from the establishment of two commissions aimed at addressing the Anglophone conflict, namely the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM, established January 2017) and the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee (NDDRC, established November 2018). This flurry of institutional reform has, however, only entrenched rather than challenged male domination of government.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p9

¹⁶⁹ Adams, M and L Fonjong (2023). *Anglophone Conflict, New Institutions, and Women’s Access to Political Power in Cameroon*. *Africa Today* 69(4): (June 2023, in press). p2

4.1

As recent research has found, the presidents of all the new regional councils are men, the mayors of all the new city councils are men, and men make up a supermajority on the NCPBM, while the NDDRC membership consists solely of men. As a report of this research makes clear:

*Based on an analysis of women's political representation in these institutions and responses to an online survey on the gendered effects of the conflict and women's access to political power, we conclude that the new institutions created in response to the Anglophone conflict have not created opportunities for women.*¹⁷⁰

The challenges facing women-led activism for peace remain significant. Yet, such activism can draw on a long tradition of women's protests against one of the major causes of the current armed conflict, namely land dispossession. As research by Fonjong et al. makes clear, in "almost all the affected communities surveyed, women were rarely represented formally or informally in land negotiations granting concessions to investors."¹⁷¹ But in a 2017 paper, Fonjong reviews the many ways in which women are fighting back:

*As a result of feeling being cheated, although usually left out in the process of allocating land to investors without participation, employment or compensation, the women are fighting back together. Women's social and legal actions are producing far-reaching results.*¹⁷²

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.*¹⁷³

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."¹⁷⁴ 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. Beyond this division of protest labour, the WILPF Cameroon study highlights the need to build stronger alliances between women's rights organisations and groups working with men on gender equality issues. Civil society leaders interviewed for the WILPF Cameroon 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."¹⁷⁵

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 organizations such as "Femmes pour la promotion du leadership moral (FEPELM)", 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.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Adams, M and L Fonjong (2023). p1

¹⁷¹ Fonjong, L, I Sama-Lang, L Fombe and C Abonge (2016). p428

¹⁷² Fonjong, L (2017). p1121

¹⁷³ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p41

¹⁷⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p52

4.2

BUILDING ON CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS

Changes in gender relations as a result of the armed conflict are also creating opportunities for such cross-gender activism for peace and justice.

Research on the impacts of the armed conflict makes clear that economic dislocation and massive population displacement are disrupting traditional gender relations and hierarchies. Fonjong notes that:

*The anglophone conflict is redefining gender roles and pushing the majority of men to the margin of decision-making, whilst concentrating power in the hands of those men using violence. For the majority of men, reeling from the consequences of the conflict, perhaps especially men who are now IDPs or refugees, it has challenged men's ability to live up to the social expectation that they protect, provide, and decide.*¹⁷⁷

Men's restricted mobility and loss of economic power in rural areas of the North-West and South-West regions has opened up opportunities for women:

*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.*¹⁷⁸

In focus group discussions with community members for the WILPF Cameroon study, participants unanimously said that perceptions of gender roles and relations have changed considerably, with girls now sometimes being able to go to school and women able to do the same jobs as men, even though these changes are associated with men allowing it. Women in an FGD in Bamenda said:

*Women now are no longer seen as housewives but as job creators. Men now understand that a home is best when there is a woman. There are changes in education, more women are going to school, societal beliefs have changed. Now women can work unlike before when women were only having a place in the kitchen.*¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ WILPF Cameroon (2022), p35

4.2

On the other hand, findings from these focus groups show that men continue to make decisions on behalf of women, despite the fact that they do not share the same experiences as women and girls. This has limited women's contribution in matters of peace, irrespective of the fact that issues of gender equality and peace disproportionately affect them. There is also some evidence that such changes in gender relations have provoked men's resistance and backlash in some cases. Brun emphasises that, "Men also experience the change in traditional family roles, with women taking up traditionally masculine-coded functions, as an affront."¹⁸⁰

But 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."¹⁸¹ 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."¹⁸² These interviews make clear that some men are responding positively to changes in gender relations.

All the civil society leaders interviewed by WILPF Cameroon for its research study, indicated that they thought that increasing the engagement of men in women's rights organisations could help advance gender equality. Strengthening men's allyship in relation to women's rights struggles was highlighted as an urgent priority. As one male civil society leader put it, the "functioning of communities will be more serene with the involvement of men and women in decision-making, women will have more time to carry out other activities."¹⁸³

In his Background Paper, Fonjong outlines some of the practical ways in which men, in their different roles and institutional positions, have supported women's rights to land and economic justice. This includes 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."¹⁸⁴

At the same, there are signs that men as husbands and fathers are taking opportunities to promote women's land rights, by purchasing and registering land in the name of their wives or daughters. Equally, "Other men are advocating for traditional communal farming to be converted to individual holdings with potentials to promote private land ownership for women."¹⁸⁵ Efforts to mobilise men for feminist peacebuilding must build on these examples of men's support for women's rights struggles. The WILPF Cameroon study highlights the crucial role that traditional leaders can play in this. These leaders can ensure and protect the fundamental rights of girls and women, including the right to education, the right to own land and inherit from a parent, and the right to freely choose a spouse. Focus group discussions were conducted with 56 community leaders (religious and traditional) in the East and West regions of Cameroon, of which two were female and 54 male. These focus groups drew attention to the progress being made in terms of equal access to education for girls and boys. The vast majority of leaders endorsed the equal right to education for girls and boys, highlighting special initiatives to improve girls' access through sensitisation of parents, counselling, prayers and payment of tuition.

¹⁸⁰ Brun, D (2022). p20

¹⁸¹ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁸² WILPF Cameroon (2022). p41

¹⁸³ Ibid. p41

¹⁸⁴ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

4.2

One pastor emphasised that particular efforts must be made to keep girls at school, because “our community is made up of 60% female students for whom we are sometimes responsible.”

¹⁸⁶ With regard to women’s participation in decision-making at family and community levels, most of the traditional and religious leaders who were interviewed, felt that progress was being made, though the WILPF Cameroon study was unable to verify or quantify such progress. Most leaders agreed that more should be done to educate men about women’s rights, and to support women to be more influential in their decision-making roles, as well as to strengthen women’s rights in customary and traditional law. Fonjong’s research on the roles of men in advancing gender equality in rural Cameroon, emphasised the need to publicise and celebrate the unseen efforts being made by some groups of men to advance gender equality, both because these efforts are significant in their own right, and because shining a light on these practices can shift social norms and encourage other men to similarly champion women’s rights. As Fonjong notes:

Hence, chiefs can be catalysts of paradigm shifts that will lure those with conservative ideas to the importance of women’s rights on development and society.

By creating an enabling environment and setting examples for their daughters to inherit... will sway those still reluctant to join the crusade. ¹⁸⁷

On the basis of this research, WILPF Cameroon recommends that civil society advocacy efforts should target traditional and religious leaders who, through their actions, influence families and communities. The first level of action identified for religious and traditional leaders to carry out, is to influence dominant models of masculinity to bring about more equitable values and practices in the long term through education, and at family and community levels. WILPF Cameroon also 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.” ¹⁸⁸ 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.” ¹⁸⁹ The need to address the anxieties generated by changing gender roles and relations is highlighted by Brun. She emphasises the value of

using “existing networks within communities that could serve as dialogue spaces, for women or men, girls or boys, so they can safely reflect on the changes in their social identities and challenge restrictive and discriminatory beliefs about gender roles and relations.” ¹⁹⁰

Brun also highlights the need to link humanitarian response and development programming in a joint effort to address the “root causes of violence against women and girls, such as poverty, land conflicts, physical and economic insecurity and oppressive gender norms.” ¹⁹¹ Brun also insists on the value of working with men and boys, not as problems to be fixed, but as allies and activists in processes of change. As she makes clear, it is important to “[b]e mindful of the fact that men and boys will resist approaches that they perceive to be negative or judgmental” and that aim to “fix” them” and that the priority, for government, civil society and international agencies alike, is to:

Agree on key messages that focus on the positive contribution males can make and what they want for themselves and for their families, including better relationships, enhanced sexual and reproductive health, and greater involvement in the health and education of their children. ¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p37

¹⁸⁷ Fonjong, L (2022).

¹⁸⁸ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p60

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p63

¹⁹⁰ Brun, D (2022). p33

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p33

¹⁹² Ibid. p34

4.3

FACILITATING DEMILITARISATION

Fostering men's support for women's activism for feminist peace and justice will depend, in part, on efforts to disengage men from their involvement in and attachments to armed conflict.

But, as Brun makes clear, "there are significant impediments to returning to civilian life, including lack of support in social reintegration and lack of employment opportunities."¹⁹³

A clear finding from Brun's study of men's experiences of the armed conflict, is that current disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes are inadequate. As Brun writes:

Without providing economic alternatives, preventing young men from getting involved with armed elements or supporting their reintegration is a chimera.

*Breaking the spiral of violence also requires implementing effective humanitarian, recovery, and development interventions that help reduce males' violent behaviour and that protects those who are affected by violence.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Ibid. p16

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p30

¹⁹⁵ Duriesmith, D and G Holmes (2019). The masculine logic of DDR and SSR in the Rwanda Defence Force. *Security Dialogue* 50(4): 361-379.

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.¹⁹⁵

There are lessons to be learned and good practice to be shared from innovative efforts to develop more gender-transformative approaches to DDR programming.¹⁹⁶

In the case of Cameroon, such approaches must take account of the complex web of motivations and pressures that lead to men's involvement in the armed conflict.

As Brun makes clear, this web ranges from forced recruitment, to economic incentives, to a desire for revenge to masculine norms of protection, and the peer pressure that often accompanies such norms:

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

¹⁹⁶ 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.

4.3

*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 militarized norms of masculinity, equating virility with power, violence and control.*¹⁹⁷

Developing DDR programmes to support men in disentangling this web, with practical pathways for social and economic reintegration into communities, is necessary. This should include vocational training and livelihoods support for adolescent boys and men and, as Brun notes, “advocacy of stronger programmes for the economic re-insertion of demobilized male youth in communications with the government.”¹⁹⁸

But this in turn depends on changes at the policy level. The failure to include men and boys within protection mechanisms has put demobilised men at risk of reprisals.

Brun recommends that, where relevant and where possible, men and boys have access to “single-sex secure spaces to discuss protection issues, including measures to mitigate harassment by armed men and the risks of getting forcibly involved in armed violence.”¹⁹⁹ Brun also highlights the value of using livelihoods programming as an entry point to “provide initial counselling and support so that men and boys can access that help without feeling stigma or ‘less manly’.”²⁰⁰

In line with the above, WILPF Cameroon recommends the development of a “comprehensive policy of reintegration of ex-combatants, to prevent them wanting to get back to the use of weapons to survive”,²⁰¹ and points to the need to facilitate the broader demilitarisation of society, in part through the establishment of a national peace education programme, starting at the primary level “to challenge the gender and social norms that promote male dominance and violence.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Brun, D (2022). p16

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p34

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p34

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p34

²⁰¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p66

²⁰² Ibid. p57



ADDRESSING THE GENDERED SPECIFICITIES OF SUFFERING AND TRAUMA

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.

In this sense, demilitarisation depends in part on recognising male vulnerability to such suffering and trauma. 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.*²⁰³

But as outlined above, humanitarian actors still fail to adequately understand, let alone address, the gendered

²⁰³ Fonjong, L (2022).

²⁰⁴ Brun, D (2022). p29

specificities of men's and boys' vulnerability. In part this is simply the result of a lack of data; survey tools and needs assessments rarely include specific questions about men's and boys' experiences and needs. Vulnerability criteria are typically defined with reference to population groups rather than prevailing conditions, with adolescent boys and men usually placed at the bottom of the vulnerability scale. A range of services rarely account for the gendered specificities of men's and boys' health and social welfare needs. As Brun notes, "[s]exual and reproductive health services are not commonly designed with boys and men's needs in mind" and "[r]eference to the role fathers should play in child nutrition and in child health is also absent from the proposals reviewed."²⁰⁴

Brun's study found that men have repeatedly appealed for support to start businesses and receive training from development and humanitarian actors, but income-generating activities mostly target women.

At the same time, there is still a lack of recognition that men can be victims of sexual violence. As Brun notes, "Gender-based violence against adolescent boys and men is a reality."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p34

4.4

This neglect of male vulnerability is not intentional. As Brun writes, the “slighter attention given to men and boys’ needs is never explicitly presented as ignoring their situation” but “while other vulnerable groups’ needs are clearly expressed and emphasised, boys and men’s situations are unmentioned.”²⁰⁶ The effect though is to create a “dynamic where the lack of acknowledgement of [male] vulnerabilities reinforces, and even generates, those vulnerabilities” because the “lack of international attention to the situation of male youth, combined with the paucity of adequate protective measures, constitute a fertile soil for more young men to get involved in violence.”²⁰⁷

It is time, Fonjong urges, to recognise that men are “more allies than adversaries, confronted by the same economic interests and vulnerabilities fueled by public policies that sometimes lack humanism, anticipation, and rigor.”²⁰⁸ This recognition requires expanding “our vision of who the people of concern should be.”²⁰⁹ 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.*²¹⁰

As a result of its study, WILPF Cameroon calls on donors to, “Fund psychosocial support components in projects to address conflict-related trauma and disrupt cycles of violence.”²¹¹

Brun also makes a number of recommendations for the humanitarian assistance community to include male vulnerability within their remit of concern, including the need to:

- Ensure humanitarian response is based on facts, not assumptions.
- Acknowledge and address women’s and men’s anxieties about changing gender roles.
- Support boys and men at risk of being targeted by armed violence.
- Ensure that co-ordination mechanisms, particularly cluster meetings, focus on addressing specific gender risks, vulnerabilities and needs in emergencies.

- Analyse needs according to gender and age groups and ensure that the humanitarian response plan (HRP) responds to them adequately.
- Make sure that all assistance promotes the protection, safety and dignity of affected females and males and that monitoring mechanisms verify people’s equitable access to aid and benefits.
- Train protection and psychosocial staff to provide high-quality, age-appropriate, stigma-free, male-friendly services.
- Review and prioritise project proposals that are grounded in a solid gender analysis and that seek to address the needs of different sex and age groups, beyond assistance to predefined categories.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p28

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p30

²⁰⁸ Fonjong, L (2022).

²⁰⁹ Brun, D (2022). p30

²¹⁰ Ibid. p30

²¹¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p67

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WORKING FOR INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The emphasis on addressing male vulnerability, is to ensure accountability for the atrocities and human rights violations perpetrated thus far, and to promote the kinds of institutional reform that can sustain a feminist peace.

Both tasks require a focus on elite men, in positions of political authority and economic power, inside and outside Cameroon. As the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa notes, this call for greater accountability is long-standing. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights met at its 62nd Ordinary Session on 25 April to 9 May 2018, to release a Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Cameroon, and requested that impartial and independent investigations be conducted to identify the perpetrators of violations and bring them to justice, calling on all parties to engage in a dialogue towards saving lives and restoring calm, security and peace as soon as possible.²¹² This request has yet to be properly met.

As one protection specialist said, when interviewed as part of Brun's study:

²¹² CHRDA (2019).

²¹³ Brun, D (2022). p30

*The international community does not know how to address the systematic violations boys and men face. It has a vested interest in having a good relationship with the government, which is the main perpetrator of human rights violations. [...] It does not have the bravery, it does not act.*²¹³

The Cameroon Conflict Research Group is clear that the international community must do much more to speak out against such human rights violations, and exert pressure on all parties to come to the negotiating table. This effort must also be contextualised within a broader agenda for feminist peacebuilding. As WILPF's own report on the 20th anniversary of the landmark UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security notes:

*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.*²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Kaptan, S (2020). UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: Perspectives from Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society. Geneva, Switzerland: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. p9

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The global arms trade is flourishing. Arms sales increased even as the global economy contracted by 3.1% during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic. WILPF Cameroon, in its report, calls on government to “[r]educe considerably military expenditure in order to allocate more resources to socio-educational sectors in decentralized communities”,²¹⁵ and to “[e]nsure 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” and “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.”²¹⁶

At the same time, elite actors within Cameroon must be held accountable for the economic inequalities and political impunity, which have fuelled the current conflict. 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.”²¹⁷

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.”²¹⁸ 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 recognize that only change can contain this revolution.*²¹⁹

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 earlier. 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.”²²⁰

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. 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. As WILPF Cameroon notes, “Government officials who participated in our research were

²¹⁵ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p57

²¹⁶ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p60

²¹⁷ Fonjong, L (2017). p1123

²¹⁸ Fonjong, L (2022).

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p66

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not aware of the dangers of militarized masculinities and the impacts of conflicts on men and boys.”²²¹

It is clear that 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.*²²²

One response to this “pernicious solidarity” must be to implement and enforce current international agreements on feminist peacebuilding.

Although Cameroon has signed up to Women, Peace and Security resolutions, and other UN declarations that call for the engagement of men and boys, Cameroon’s domestic laws do not consider militarised masculinities a factor in increasing violence and escalating conflicts.

To address this, WILPF Cameroon makes the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the UNSCR1325 National Action Plan acknowledges the critical role of men as partners in the implementation of the WPS agenda in Cameroon, as part of the localisation of the 2022-2026 NAP.
- Adopt UNHRC Resolution 35/10 and ensure that its key policy and programmatic provisions are implemented by government. Cameroon co-sponsored this resolution in 2017 and should champion its implementation.
- Implement the African Union’s 2021 Declaration and Call to Action on Positive Masculinity to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Africa.

More broadly, government action and international pressure are required to address the underlying drivers of the armed conflict. Fonjong summarises this fundamental challenge well:

As the Cameroon government labors to bring the broader conflict in the Anglophone regions to an end, it must pay keen attention to land reforms at national level. This is because the land crisis popping up in the cities of Douala,

*Yaoundé, and other several rural areas suggest that [...] the next revolution that might bring down Cameroon could come from land crisis. And here, both men and women are powerful players because they are both victims.*²²³

As WILPF Cameroon concludes its own report, building the foundations for a sustainable and feminist peace “requires understanding and addressing men’s and boys’ needs and vulnerabilities, but also addressing the structural privileges that they hold in comparison to women, girls and people with other gender identities.”²²⁴ It is to supporting this work that this report, and the research it summarises, is dedicated.

²²¹ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p42

²²² Ibid. p10

²²³ Personal communication by Lotsmart Fonjong.

²²⁴ WILPF Cameroon (2022). p68

ANALYSIS



Canada

Men, Masculinities & the Prospects for Feminist Peace in Cameroon

ALAN GREIG