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Reforming Masculinity? The SSR-Induced Change of Violence-Centred Masculinities in the Liberian Security Sector

HENDRIK QUEST

The main endeavour of this article¹ is an inductive one: I analyse how security sector reform (SSR) in Liberia has contributed to institutional changes of masculinity within the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberian National Police (LNP). With this, I seek to unearth SSR-related factors that are relevant for the change of violence-centred masculinities in post-conflict security institutions more generally. Thus, the article addresses two highly related issues, (1) gender and SSR and (2) the way masculinities change during post-conflict reconstruction. SSR tries to generate effective security and justice institutions, which are made accountable by civilian oversight (Hänggi/Scherrer 2008, 488). Several contributions have shown that SSR impacts on gender relations in the security sector and beyond (Bacon 2015; Kunz 2014; Mobekk 2010; Wilén 2019). However, much of this research remains silent when it comes to how masculinities in the security sector are influenced by SSR. Questions concerning the interaction between post-conflict reconstruction and mas-

culinities have gained prominence as well (Cahn/Ni Aolain 2010; Messerschmidt/Quest 2020; Porter 2013; Quest/Messerschmidt 2017; Schroer-Hippel 2011; Streicher 2011; Theidon 2009). Yet, the findings on what affects the change of masculinities remain scarce. That is why I employ an exploratory approach in my analysis. For the analysis of the Liberian case, two differentiations are crucial: Firstly, I need to distinguish between institutional practices before SSR started and those that emerged during SSR. As the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the civil war in August 2003, included some clauses on SSR, it is sensible to use practices during the war as a baseline for an assessment of whether changes have occurred. SSR was still ongoing when I conducted my research in 2017; hence I only differentiate between before and after August 2003. Secondly, to account for these changes, I need to distinguish different configurations of masculinities. By violence-centred masculinities, I mean institutional constructions that further direct physical violence, be it in the form of organised military violence or as unorganised violence against other individuals. Peace-compatible masculinities describe institutional constructions that are conducive to peace and non-violence.

In my framework, change means that practices move along continua between violence-centred and peace-compatible masculinities. I analyse how SSR has changed practices on three security sector-related continua (acceptance of women and femininity, construction of the ideal soldier/police officer, and institutional approach to sexual violence) and identify central factors for this development.²

Practice theory and the analysis of masculinities

I employ a practice-theoretical framework that guides the research on masculinities by distilling masculine practices from relevant strands of literature. The central premise of practice-theoretical approaches is that even the most complex social structures or processes can be reconstructed by observing practices (Bueger/Gadinger 2015, 453). I understand practices as “knowledge-constituted, meaningful patterns of socially recognized activity embedded in communities, routines and organizations that structure experience” (Adler 2008, 198). Practices are always gendered, and gender identities do not exist prior to or outside of performative acts in which specific gender roles are created, enacted, and reinforced (Butler 2015, 185). Additionally, there is always a practice of masculinity that gains hegemony due to its ability to legitimize the “dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 2005, 77). In this vein, we can grasp masculinity and femininity as ‘gender projects’ that shape social practice and can also transform it (ibid., 72). Consequently, hegemonic masculinities within the military and the police might change, depending on the wider context and the evolution of institutional cultures.

As security sector institutions are frequently male-dominated, they always produce different configurations of masculinity (Hearn 2012), which, nevertheless, can vary a lot as most components of these institutional masculinity constructions are not

determined by issues of efficiency (Seifert 1993, 220ff.). Based on earlier works (Messerschmidt/Quest 2018), I deem it feasible to conceptualize masculinities in the security sector as three continua ranging from violence-centred to peace-compatible complexes of institutional practices. These three continua, which are deduced from the literature on gender, masculinity, and security sector institutions, are (1) acceptance of women and femininity, (2) institutional construction of soldiers/police officers, and (3) institutional approach to sexual violence.

For the first continuum, the overarching question is whether there are practices that either devalue femininity or, in contrast, promote the acceptance of women and tasks traditionally regarded as feminine as part of the institution's work. At the violence-centered end of this continuum are practices such as the regular association of weakness with femininity (Barrett 1996, 133), using gendered or racialized insults (Whitworth 2004, 161), as well as the construction of physically challenging tasks as tests of manhood (Woodward 2000, 651f.). At the peace-compatible end of the continuum are practices such as linking peacekeeping tasks, like the ability to control the use of force and being impartial, (Duncanson 2009, 70) with masculinity.

The second continuum concerns the institutionally strengthened image of how members need to be in order to be perceived as legitimate parts of the institution. Here, violence-centred practices include rebuking any forms of individual or emotional expression (Keats 2010, 294), trying to eradicate "expressions of gender 'otherness'" (Morton 2014, 199), and linking masculinity with physical fitness, toughness, and heterosexuality (Dittmer 2009, 242). Peace-compatible practices that are mentioned in the literature encompass having training (and the related masculinity) geared to something else than combat, e.g. technical rationality (Barrett 1996, 138f.).

The third continuum deals with the question of whether the respective institution is permissive or repressive when it comes to sexual violence. At the violence-centred end of this continuum are practices like normalising sexual assaults against women within the military (Maxwell 2009, 112), viewing women as sexual objects (ibid., 115), and a culture of non-intervention towards sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations by members of peacekeeping missions (Higate 2007, 111f.). The peace-compatible end of this third continuum is constituted by practices that reinforce the idea of zero tolerance toward sexual violence, such as having clear disciplinary and penal proceedings like for example in the German armed forces (Bundesministerium für Verteidigung 2004, 2ff.), annual reporting on sexual violence to civilian oversight bodies, such as the US Congress and Senate in the case of the US armed forces (United States Department of Defence Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office 2018) and the framing of sexual violence as an impediment to military efficiency (United States Department of Defence 2010, 5).

All these practices constitute examples of how practices on the respective continua might look like and thus guided my research in Liberia. The framework helped me to determine whether the practices I observe belong to one of the three continua and if so, to clarify whether they are centred on violence or not. In this understand-

ing, change means relevant practices are replaced by those that are more or less violence-centred. In other words, if we can see a movement along the continua, we observe a change. Importantly, the practice-theoretical premises of this article imply that the ‘effect’ of SSR on the change of masculinities should not be understood in a strict causal-analytic sense but rather as a means to understand the observations I present.

My findings are predominantly based on 15 semi-structured interviews I conducted during six weeks of field research in Monrovia at the end of 2017. To increase reliability, I triangulated the interview data with documents that were either produced by the AFL and the LNP or that address them, such as the National Security Strategy (NSS), laws on the AFL and the LNP, training curricula, gender policies, etc. Consequently, the direction of analysis was strongly determined by the interviews, while the actual interpretation of the interview data was guided by my sources for triangulation. Thus, when I identify factors for the change of masculinities, this is based mostly on what respondents reported. The main method for finding interview partners was snowballing. Nevertheless, the selection followed some criteria. Chief among them was the idea to understand both the process of SSR (by interviewing stakeholders like UN officials and people working in the respective Liberian ministries) and the way the AFL and the LNP now function internally (by talking to high-ranking officials in these institutions, training officers, normal soldiers, etc.). To avoid too strong biases, I included journalists and representatives of security sector-related civil society organisations (CSOs) into my sample to receive potentially more critical opinions on both SSR and the reformed institutions.

Acceptance of women and femininity in the AFL and LNP

During the war, several institutional practices aimed at the devaluation of women and femininity: firstly, support tasks done by women or girls were not treated as militarily relevant members of the fighting factions. This included even tasks directly related to military success, such as preparing ammunition (Specht 2006, 60). Secondly, although girls and women were part of all factions during the civil war, females were regarded as inferior fighters who needed to be accompanied by male units (*ibid.*, 26). By this practice, the respective units regularly showed men and women that gender made a difference for the assumed capabilities concerning combat.

In the new security sector, most of these practices have lost their central role and new ones have emerged (see figure 1). Especially the ability to control and regulate the use of force is crucial in this regard. In the AFL, soldiers are trained to understand different threat levels and the respective use of force that is legitimate. Pointedly, one training officer stated that “aggression has to be controlled, that is the most important thing” (Int. 1). Similarly, as an LNP official stressed, in the police, there are stages for the use of force and recruits learn that force should be used proportionally to the degree of resistance (Int. 2). Additionally, a government official pointed out that in

the LNP officers have to go through vetting before they are certified for carrying guns (Int. 3). All of this indicates that force control is much more relevant now.

Especially in the police, it is possible to observe the practice to link feminised routines or traits with effective policing. One LNP training officer explained that the LNP is based on six core values: compassion, respect, integrity, courage, empathy, and service. This entails the understanding that the ideal police officer is “humanity-driven” (Int. 4), which stands in stark contrast to the previous, violence-centred constructions.

Apart from that, the peacekeepers that Liberia regularly sends to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali are often depicted as heroes (Ministry of National Defense Liberia 2018). Interestingly, as a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Defence emphasized, people – both inside and outside the military – are mainly proud of the peacekeepers because they transport peace instead of conflict (Int. 5). In this sense, supporting peace and protecting civilians is now a source of pride for soldiers. Considering that many respondents talked about what makes them feel proud when I asked them about their concepts of masculinity, I assume that participation in peacekeeping missions confirms the soldiers’ sense of masculinity.

Summing up, we can state that while towards the end of the civil war femininity and feminine tasks were routinely devalued in fighting forces, in the new security sector they are, to some extent, institutionally regarded to be conducive to effectiveness.

Factors for the observed change

A chain of factors was relevant for this change, beginning with the disarmament and demobilisation of LNP and AFL. One UN official revealed that initially the police were disarmed at the beginning of the peace process as they were perceived as a threat to the UN mission (Int. 6). Even up to now, only special units of the police are carrying guns. All other officers do their duty without being armed. As part of SSR, all officers of the LNP were deactivated and had to reapply (Friedman 2011, 5). The AFL was completely demobilized and rebuilt afterwards (McFate 2008, 649). All this created a formidable challenge to violence-centred practices of masculinity in both institutions. As a result, there was a chance to create, negotiate and learn new practices.

One new practice was that of emphasizing the control of force and professionalization as central objectives in both institutions. Critical for this is the idea of conditional rearmament of the police. As a government official stated, the police have to become sufficiently professional before it will be possible to arm all officers again (Int. 3). Thus, only if police officers acquire the ability to control their use of force, they will be rearmed. For both AFL and LNP, the objective of professionalization was pursued by introducing stronger criteria for selection, among them the requirement to possess a high school diploma and a vetting that ensures the applicant has not committed any human rights violations (International Crisis Group 2009, 11-17). Adding to that,

the contribution to peace has been determined an essential task for the AFL, which in turn gave room to the institutional practice to regard Liberian peacekeepers as heroes. All the above mentioned objectives are codified in a legal framework that has emerged during the SSR process. Most crucially for the described development are the NSS of 2008, the Defense Act of 2008, and the LNP Act of 2015.

As these documents represent the institutional stance on matters, it is worth considering how they talk about the acceptance of women within the security sector. The NSS calls for “gender mainstreaming at every level of security policymaking and practices”, including training curricula (Governance Reform Commission 2008, 14). To achieve this aim, the attached “Implementation Schedule Matrix” defines as one step a “(r)einforced initiative to realize 20% women participation in the military and various security agencies” (ibid., 19). This can be interpreted as a clear statement that the participation of women within the security sector is institutionally desired.

Both the Defense Act and the LNP Act stress the relevance of female participation and, in the case of the LNP, link it with professionalism (National Assembly of Liberia 2008, 9; National Assembly of Liberia 2015, 4). Thus, the SSR-driven development of a legal framework for the security sector did serve as a means to reify the objectives of professionalism and gender balancing and has linked the two at least partially. This is mirrored in the finding that increased professionalism as a result of training in the LNP has had the side effect of making the respective officers more gender-aware (Karim/Gorman 2016, 175).

Furthermore, in 2005 the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Liberian government agreed that by 2014, there should be 20% female officers in the LNP (compared to 2% in 2005). As a lack of education of potential female candidates was identified as a major obstacle, they set up a programme intended to fast-track the education of female candidates without a high school degree (Bacon 2015, 374-377) and, as a result, would normally have been precluded from serving in the LNP. While this helped to strongly increase the number of female officers, according to a UN official, it also created a situation where the competence of women in the LNP was questioned (Int. 6) and they were confronted with obstacles when it came to promotion (Salahub 2013, 48). Additionally, the appointment of two women to the highest positions in the LNP symbolized the objective to have women as crucial components of the LNP and they served as important role models for new officers in the LNP (Bacon 2015, 386).

Another factor in this area is the presence of the peacekeepers itself. As a government official pointed out, international peacekeepers simultaneously acted as trainers and role models for members of the new security sector (Int. 3). Thus, it appears plausible that the massive international presence and its involvement in SSR helped to depict peacekeepers as the ‘good guys’. Especially, the long-term presence of an all-female police unit from India helped to broaden the understanding of who can be a capable police officer and, as a journalist stressed, boosted application rates of women for the LNP (Int. 7). Apart from that, they made the predominantly male peacekeeping

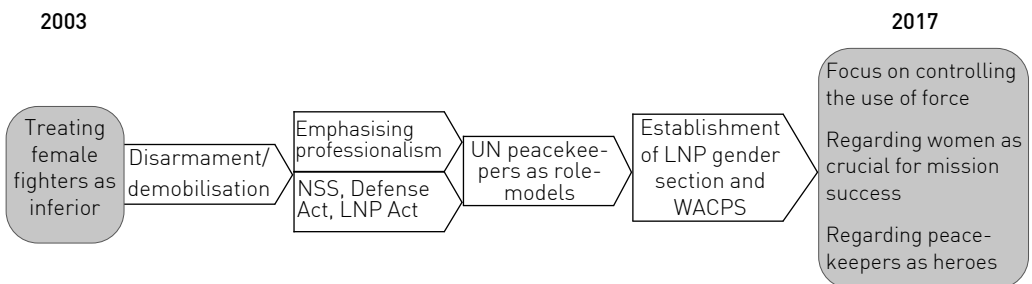
force more approachable for Liberian women (UNMIL OGA 2010, 40ff.). At the same time, the peacekeepers themselves were involved in violent practices such as sexual exploitation and abuse (Beber et al. 2017). While this gives the presence of the peacekeepers a quite contradictory meaning, my interviews allow for the assumption that the positive role-model effect remains relevant for the institutional construction of soldiering, policing, and masculinity.

Two additional factors for the transformation along the continuum acceptance of women and femininity should be mentioned here: the creation of the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) within the LNP in 2005 and the establishment of the LNP gender section in 2008. The foundation of the WACPS was UNMIL's reaction to high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Liberia (Carvalho/Schia 2009, 2). These sections contributed to an internal understanding in the LNP that women are needed for effective policing, as the previous inability to appropriately respond to cases of SGBV was attributed to a lack of female officers (Bacon 2015, 376). Consequently, practical knowledge has evolved that regards women as essential parts of the police force.

The LNP gender unit was established in 2008 to proactively work toward increasing the number of women. As one member pointed out, now there are women in all different sections of the LNP, including the armed units. Additionally, representatives of the gender section take part in the general training, working against gender stereotyping and encouraging female recruits to apply for all sections of the LNP (Int. 8). Doing so, they further the new practical knowledge that women can be good police officers.

Summing up, peacebuilding-related measures did play a major role in the change of violence-centred practices at the continuum acceptance of women and femininity. The disarmament and the demobilisation of AFL and LNP have created room for new institutional practices such as the control of the use of force and the emphasis on professionalization. The SSR-induced legal framework has clarified the new institutional objectives, including peacebuilding tasks and the promotion of gender balancing. Finally, women and femininity have gained acceptance by the creation of WACPS and the gender section within the LNP.

Figure 1: The change of the acceptance of women and femininity



Institutional construction of soldiers/police officers

The second continuum I examine is the institutional construction of soldiers and police officers. Here, it is crucial to investigate whether being male and being violent is constructed as a central component of being a soldier or police officer. During the war, regular abuse of civilians constituted a practice of its own for both AFL and LNP. As an AFL-officer reported, back then the AFL arbitrarily arrested and confined civilians (Int. 9) and committed a high number of atrocities against them (Human Rights Watch 2002, 2).

Furthermore, women were often constructed as an outgroup, even though they constituted up to 30-40% of the warring factions (Sherif 2008, 28). “Even where girls reached the frontlines, they would usually fight behind their male comrades” (Specht 2006, 62). Hence, a male ingroup was reinforced despite many female fighters. All this contributed to an institutionalized understanding of soldiers and police officers as masculine, abusive and tough.

The situation in the security sector today is quite different: Four new practices are relevant here. Firstly, as pointed out by an AFL training officer, the ideal soldier is now constructed as being citizen-oriented as opposed to the abusive regime soldiers and police officers before and during the civil war (Int. 1). The same applies to police officers. Additionally, the practice of citizen orientation also entails civil-military help for the communities, which, according to a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Administration and Public Safety, encompasses providing free mobile health services, cleaning-up campaigns, and rebuilding bridges (Int. 10).

Secondly, combats are not the only objective pursued by the two institutions anymore. For the AFL, this is represented by the new ‘A Force for Good’ motto. Adding to that, a training officer indicated that soldiers are expected to be proud not only of their weapons but also of their equipment in general, their uniform and “whatsoever that comes with it. (...) We don’t compromise our equipment because that’s what makes you a soldier” (Int. 1).

Thirdly, there is now a focus on technical rationality, represented for example by a specific engineering unit, which, according to a ministerial official, has engaged in improving the Liberian infrastructure (Int. 5). In the LNP, there exists a practice to stress the importance of rationality as well. This is demonstrated by the following quote of a high-ranking police officer: “You need to be a thinker. You need to have a mindset that you are a policeman and you are a role model. You need to be on top of your game” (Int. 2).

Fourthly, the emphasis on gender equality constitutes another new practice. One part of it is the statement of high-ranking officials (here of the LNP) that they deem gender equality to be relevant: “We respect gender equity. What a male can do, a female can do it. So we distribute our positions professionally, (...) everybody has to do the same training and everybody has to be measured using the same tools” (ibid.). This finding is confirmed by a 2009 report of the International Crisis Group that attested

a “high-level commitment” (International Crisis Group 2009, 11) to increase the number of women.

Altogether, it becomes obvious that during the war, institutional constructions of soldiers and police officers included highly abusive practices and aimed at making women an outgroup. In contrast, today the institutional construction of ideal members is related to citizen orientation, peacebuilding, technical rationality, and – to some extent – gender equality.

Factors for the observed change

One essential factor for the described change was vetting. All LNP officers had been deactivated and when they reapplied, they were vetted for human rights abuses. As a result, only one-quarter of the former LNP officers qualified for the new police force. Additionally, the ranking system in the LNP has been changed so that it no longer resembles the military. Interestingly, the very objective of this was to demilitarize the LNP (Friedman 2011, 4f.). The AFL was completely dissolved and all of its members lost their ranks. Everyone who applied was checked for human rights violations. Posters with pictures of the applicant were hung up in the communities from where they originated, and if people reported that person as a perpetrator of abuses during the war, the application would not be successful (International Crisis Group 2009, 12). Consequently, both within the AFL and the LNP there was a significant break with the former institution which, in the case of the AFL, is represented by people always referring to the ‘new AFL’ or the ‘old AFL’ respectively.

Thus, the vetting removed perpetrators of abusive practices concerning civilians from the military, and to some extent from the police. My interview data allows for the conclusion that abusive practices have been replaced by an institutional emphasis on citizen orientation, such as community policing, civil support by the engineering units of the AFL, etc.. As a result, as a government official pointedly stated, SSR did not only bring new personnel into the security sector but “it is bringing a new attitude how we are doing business” (Int. 3).

A mixture of selection of personnel, training and legal documents becomes visible here that furthers the aim of citizen orientation. In the LNP, new officers receive training on gender issues, human rights, ethics and the related code of conduct (National Police Training Academy received in 2017, 1-4). In the AFL, as one trainer confirmed, they use human rights violations by the ‘old AFL’ as negative examples to promote the objective of citizen orientation. Furthermore, new soldiers are taught that only lawful orders are to be followed (Int. 1). Finally, as pointed out by a high-ranking officer, in the training of the AFL it is emphasized that soldiers have to submit to civil authority (Int. 9).

Crucially, gender equality is also incorporated into training. The general policing section, a basic element of training, includes gender issues such as the construction of gender roles and, as an LNP training officer stated, aims to teach the recruits to

respect everyone the same way “irrespective of their sexual differences” (Int. 4). Similarly, a training officer of the AFL emphasized that there are gender roles due to traditional male-dominance but “in the military, we discourage that” (Int. 1).

Apart from training, especially the NSS has played an important role as it has introduced district and county security councils into the work of the LNP (Governance Reform Commission 2008, 4). These councils have been established to involve the citizens of the respective counties in security governance. According to an official in the Ministry for Public Administration and Safety, this has had a significant impact on police officers as well as on public perception of the police:

If you are part of it, you sit with a security officer, you sit with a local government, civil society, discussing issues of security in your own community, proffering a suggestion and taking those actions that will remedy the situation. And even the security officers themselves, (...) they are being made to understand that they are accountable to you. I mean, it changes the entire thing (Int. 10).

Apart from that, the NSS explicitly states the “new AFL shall also be trained to support civil duties and be subjected to civilian control” (Governance Reform Commission 2008, 16). This is the basis for the AFL doing engineering tasks, which in turn probably has resulted in military training being geared to something else than combat. Thus, the institutional construction of a ‘good soldier’ is no longer centred on violence only.

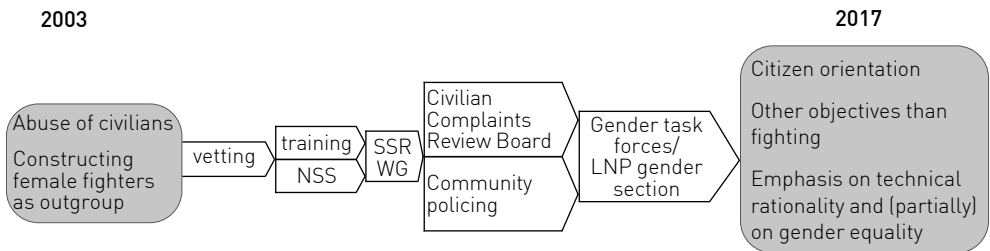
Another area in which citizen orientation is practiced is the concept of community policing, which the LNP pursues to build partnerships with communities. This concept has been introduced by the UN as part of SSR. Most critically, as an official at the LNP training academy explained, it helped to overcome the long-lived societal experience of fear and intimidation and has provided police officers with the practical knowledge that while the law gives them power, they will be held accountable if they use it to abuse citizens (Int. 4).

For the accountability of police officers, the issue of oversight is essential. The LNP Act of 2015 has introduced a Civilian Complaints Review Board that deals with allegations against police officers (National Assembly of Liberia 2015). Crucially, as a member of the Civil Society SSR Working Group (SSRWG) indicated, part of this board is the Liberian National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA), representing civil society (Int. 11). So here again some kind of citizen orientation becomes visible as civil society is involved in determining whether officers conducted themselves correctly or not.

It is worth mentioning that LINLEA was a founding member of the SSRWG, which was initiated in 2008 to give civil society a voice in the whole SSR process. As one member explained, the SSRWG is comprised of several CSOs including women groups, labour organisations, youth groups, and various others. Since 2008 they have been actively involved in drafting legal documents as part of SSR, such as the above mentioned NSS, the Defense Act, the LNP Act, etc. (ibid.). Furthermore, they sought

to increase the accountability of police officers by providing material to the public that explains how people can complain about the actions of police officers. Concerning the institutional construction of soldiers and police officers, I have also observed that, at least to some extent, there has been a shift from the practice to treat women as inferior fighters to questioning institutional gender stereotypes. One important factor for this change was UNMIL's gender mainstreaming effort during SSR. As a result of SSR, gender task forces were established in different security institutions. An official of the AU emphasized that there have been regular calls for the inclusion of more women into the military, both by the UN and the AU, in order to make it more gender-sensitive (Int. 12). As mentioned above, in the LNP there is an own gender section that has advocated a higher representation of women within the police and encourages female officers to apply for the riot police or special units. Taken all together, SSR has played a significant role in the occurred change along this continuum by first removing the perpetrators of abusive practices and then making citizen orientation a crucial objective for both institutions. Finally, by setting up gender task forces and the LNP gender section respectively, the idea that women belong to the AFL and the LNP has been reinforced.

Figure 2: The change of the institutional construction of soldiers and police officers



Institutional Approach to Sexual violence

Lastly, I want to focus on the institutional approach to sexual violence. During the war, all factions regularly abused women and girls as sex slaves (Amnesty International 2004, 10). Different studies have shown that most women who spent time in one of the warring factions did experience some sort of sexual assault (Liebling-Kalifani et al. 2011; Specht 2006, 46). Thus, we can state that there was a permissive culture concerning sexual violence. Even worse, as a journalist stressed, using sexual violence as a weapon of war became a practice in itself that aimed at dehumanizing people (Int. 7) and transgressed boundaries of what has been socially acceptable before the war (Specht 2006, 45).

By now, the institutional approach to sexual violence has changed considerably, especially in the AFL. However, in the LNP, there are no clear procedures on how to deal with sexual violence that is perpetrated by police officers. Although there was a

gender policy of the LNP in 2004 which condemned sexual harassment in the LNP, the Revised Gender Policy of 2011 stated that “(t)here are no in-house sanctions for perpetrators of sexual harassment” (Director Republic of Liberia National Police 2011, 10). As a result, it is only possible to analyse the change within the AFL.

Of particular relevance are two practices. Firstly, there exists a procedure on how to deal with sexual violence. A high-ranking officer explained that there is an AFL disciplinary board that deals with offences. Victims of sexual violence can report cases there and the case will be investigated (Int. 9). The fact that rank and file soldiers are also aware of the possibility to be prosecuted for sexual violence shows that this constitutes institutional practical knowledge.

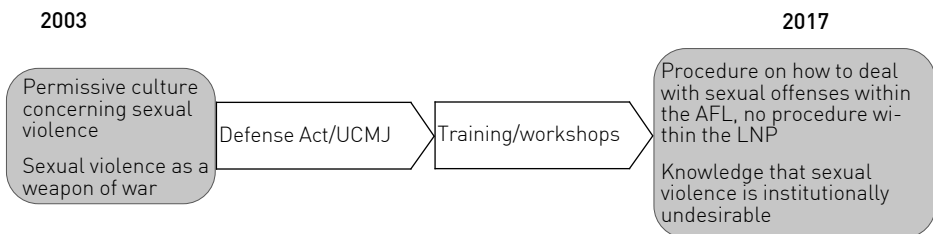
Secondly, knowledge has emerged that sexual violence is institutionally unacceptable (Int. 1). In interviews with individual soldiers, it seemed that this practical knowledge has in fact been acquired by them. As one soldier, for example, stated: “Among soldiers, the issue of rape is highly discouraged, yeah. We don’t accept rape, sexual violence. No, it’s against our institution” (Int. 13).

Factors for the observed change

The most crucial factor for the observed change in the AFL is the prosecution of sexual misconduct. One important way how this did come about was the definition of rape as a crime within the military. The Defense Act of 2008 states, that “(a)ll members of the AFL shall be subject to the uniform code of military justice whether on duty or off duty” (Government of Liberia 2008, 10). The mentioned uniform code of military justice (UCMJ) is that of the US military and includes sections on rape as a punishable crime. This can be regarded as a basis for then setting up the above-described procedure on how to deal with perpetrators of sexual violence.

Secondly, there are workshops and training components concerned with sexual violence. An AFL training officer emphasized that in the AFL, such workshops are part of the normal training and pre-deployment training for soldiers going on peace-keeping missions (Int. 1). Thus, concerning the AFL, it makes sense to interpret the combination of the legal framework and the training as relevant contributions to the observed change.

Figure 3: The change of the institutional approach to sexual violence



Conclusion: Towards more gender-sensitive SSR?

My findings show that there has been a considerable change in masculinity-related practices within the AFL and the LNP and that SSR did play a major role in this shift. However, two issues make the results less rosy than they may seem at first glance: Firstly, while there has been substantial change especially when it comes to violence-centred institutional practices, this does not imply a particularly high level of gender equality. Secondly, it is premature to assume that only because the institutional approach to gender issues has changed to some degree, the actual behaviour of all individual members has changed. This points to wider and more general problems concerning the implementation of laws in an institutional setting. However, this article focuses on institutional practices only, following the idea that the definition of adequate practices by the respective institutions constitutes an important way of creating change. According to my findings, there are good reasons to assume that SSR has contributed to an improvement of the situation in the AFL and LNP from a gender perspective.

This research represents a single-case study of the Liberian security sector. Still, there are some insights that can be abstracted from it. Firstly, disarmament, demobilisation, and vetting are crucial first moves in peacebuilding processes as they remove the artefacts and perpetrators of violent practices and clarify that the new institutions regard violent practices of masculinity as undesirable. Secondly, the combination of a change of personnel in the security sector and the creation of new practical knowledge concerning what practices the institutions consider as important are essential. Finally, gender balancing and the creation of gender units do have an effect, namely by incorporating and spreading the practical knowledge that women do have the same value for the institution as men. However, in themselves, they are not sufficient to create a comprehensive change in institutional practices. For this, masculinity-related practices have to be addressed and transformed in a way that makes them peace-compatible.

Notes

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- 2 Due to space constraints, I will only look at institutional practices, i.e. those practices that construct what is institutionally desirable. Yet, I assume that a change in institutional practices creates potential for a deeper transformation as it affects the masculine gender roles that are available in the respective institution.

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