

**CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE
DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE RESPONSES TO
THE ADVERSITY ENDURED BY SIERRA
LEONEAN REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM**

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ABSTRACT

The basic rationale of this research was to identify as many relevant factors and issues as possible that have enabled Sierra Leonean women emerging from a brutal civil/rebel war in Sierra Leone to develop resilience(“To spring back into shape” –Oxford English Dictionary) and Adversity-Activated Development(AAD) as they resettled, integrated and became part of their new communities. Their resilience enabled them to adapt successfully in the face of threats and disaster into a new society, environment and community in the United Kingdom (UK). This was despite the fact that they had endured many different types of adversity, including sexual and psychological violence during the civil/rebel war in Sierra Leone.

The research examined various relevant and contributing factors, including personal, professional, family and community circumstances, status, attitudes, religious belief systems, social networks as well as behaviours. It also investigated the unique way that Sierra Leonean refugee women (a) experienced adversity (connected with the civil war in Sierra Leone), (b) addressed adversity at different stages (e.g. during the war, their flight, their transition through various, countries, refugee camps and also during their final phase of resettlement in the UK), and (c) integrated into their new communities.

This research is based on the theoretical framework developed by Papadopoulos who:

- (a) Mapped out the four stages of the refugee experiences, i.e. Anticipation, Devastating Events, Survival and Adjustment (Papadopoulos, 1999), and

(b) Differentiated the range of responses to adversity by using the Trauma / Adversity Grid that includes not only the negative responses but also the retained positives (i.e. resilient dimensions) as well the new positives that were the direct result of being exposed to adversity, that he termed Adversity-Activated development (AAD). (Papadopoulos 2004, 2007).

The research followed a qualitative research methodology and took into account a gendered perspective on the views and personal experiences of Sierra Leonean refugee women living and working in the United Kingdom (U.K.). The data was collected through in-depth interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, group meetings and individual sessions with the participants, who are all Sierra Leonean refugee women living and working in the United Kingdom (UK).

These participants had all been granted full refugee status. They were given time to complete questionnaires and they were also interviewed about their life histories using the heuristic method, theory and approach. This allowed the participants and the researcher to experience self-awareness and self-knowledge throughout the research process, while understanding the phenomenon of the factors that led to the resilience of these Sierra Leonean refugee women.

Particular attention was paid to understanding the cultural framework (the use of traditional and cultural values and practices), coping mechanisms and capacities, integration and participation of these participants as well as to the wider psychosocial dimensions of their experience and how these women were able to adapt successfully to a completely new

unknown environment, integrating and resettling into new ways of life in the United Kingdom (UK) despite all their traumatic experiences.

The research also investigated the multidisciplinary nature of the care of refugees in general and how this relates to some of the specific issues affecting refugees, including their socio-economic development, human rights, cultural and traditional disorientation and dislocation, and sought to connect these to the loss of home, personal identity and community for refugees.

The research is extremely topical, especially right now at this very moment in time when the world is facing an unparalleled crisis with migrant and refugees streaming into more developed countries, particularly in Europe.

This refugee crisis created a lot of emotional responses in everybody, it touches the sensitivities of people, some react with fear and horror that their safe countries will be invaded by unruly and uneducated refugees that would burden their already economically stretched countries and others react with compassion wanting to open up their homes and welcome these troubled refugees who had to flee their unsafe countries looking for places of refuge.

What happens in these situations, people see the refugees as a threat, as an additional burden and they cannot possibly see that these people may be in a position to help their host country and enable it to thrive.

This research has shown that these Sierra Leonean women that came to the UK following the horrors of the civil war in their country certainly they did not prove to be a burden on the UK. On the contrary, they not only survived and supported each other but they also thrived and contributed to the development of the local communities where they settled.

Therefore this research can be used as a proof that there is no justification to bring all the refugees under one umbrella and consider all of them as a burden to the host country.

What this research also shows is that it is important to allow refugees tell their own story and help them digest their experiences and identify the various factors that contributed to them being able to survive and thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

During the civil war, many Sierra Leonean women lived in various refugee camps and displacement units. Whilst moving from place to place they were able to improve their personal skills and abilities and those of other women they lived, worked with and supported. Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the UK have been involved in social and community groups, and some have even founded their own organisations.

This is in sharp contrast to the situation before the war. In traditional communities, women were supposed to endure with dignity and resilience all the pains of womanhood and motherhood. Their everyday lives and activities were governed by prejudicial cultural values, discriminatory traditional beliefs and myths, which moulded them into good citizens. The majority of women were not allowed to participate at the same levels as the male population or to contribute socially and politically to community and national development. There was also a significant lack of educational opportunities for women.

Furthermore, before the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone, the women, like many of their counterparts in other African countries, suffered human rights abuses that included Gender Based Violence (GBV), and traditional and cultural practices such as Female Circumcision (FC) also known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

It was this contrast between the status of these women before the civil war and their new status, attitudes and assumed roles and responsibilities that led me to conduct this research.

What were the factors that led to this extraordinary transformation?

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 SIERRA LEONE

The country has rich mineral resources including diamonds, gold, iron ore and bauxite. It also boasts the oldest university in West Africa – Fourah Bay College, which opened in 1827. Sierra Leone is a former British colony and its capital city, Freetown, was at one time the headquarters of British West Africa, then made up of Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The country gained its independence from Great Britain on 27 April 1961(Gbla2007)

1.2 BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SIERRA LEONE

The name "Sierra Leone" dates back to 1462, when Portuguese explorer Pedro de Cintra, sailing down the West African coast, saw the tall mountains rising up on what is now the Freetown Peninsula and called them the "Lion Mountains", or "Serra Lyoa".

There have been various suggestions as to why Pedro de Cintra decided on this name, one of these being the shape of the coastal mountains in the western area of the country, which looked like "lion's teeth". Others suggested that de Cintra thought the thunderstorms over the mountainous peninsula sounded like the roar of lions, so he called the country "Sierra Lyoa" meaning Lion Mountains in Spanish. In the sixteenth century English sailors called it "Sierra Leoa" which evolved in the 17th century to Sierra Leone. The British officially adopted the name Sierra Leone in 1787.

FREETOWN - The capital city of Sierra Leone

The local name for Freetown before the white man came was 'Romarong', meaning the place of the wailers because of the constant weeping and screaming of victims of storms and cross-current disasters at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River.

Freetown is one of the oldest cities of West Africa, and according to Gberie (2005)

It had West Africa's oldest western-style university institution, Fourah Bay College, and was then known as the Athens of West Africa (Gberie, 2005:3).

The early settlers and peoples of Sierra Leone

According to historians and archaeologists including Christopher Magbaily, David Hancock, Akintola Wyse and Arthur Abraham, Sierra Leone is believed to have been inhabited for thousands of years by different tribes living and working together before the early European explorers and settlers came to the country.

Traditional historiography has customarily presented Sierra Leone as being inhabited by successive waves of invaders; but the language pattern suggests that the coastal Bulom

(Sherbro), Temne, and Limba have been in continuous settled occupation for a long time, with sporadic immigration from inland Mende-speaking people including Vai, Loko and Mende. They organised themselves in small political units of independent kingdoms or chiefdoms, the powers of whose rulers were checked by councils and secret societies.

Portuguese sailors Alvaro Fernandez (1447) and Pedro De Cintra (1462) were among the first European explorers to describe their adventures along the coast of Sierra Leone. Located near present-day Freetown, the Rokel estuary was established as an important source of fresh water for Sea Traders and explorers. Over the next 30 years, sea traders opened a bay for trading goods such as swords, cooking and other household utensils in exchange for beeswax and fine ivory works.

By the mid-1550s, slaves had replaced these items as the major commodity. Though the Portuguese were among the first in the region and their language formed the basis for trade, their influence had diminished by the 1650s. English, French, Dutch and Danish interests in West Africa had grown. Trade was established through coastal African rulers who prohibited European traders from entering the interior. Rent and gifts were paid for gold, slaves, beeswax, ivory and camwood. British traders of the Royal African Company established Forts along the coast for trading in 1672, but the British did not have a monopoly over the area. Rival European nations attacked the Forts.

The Tribes and people of Sierra Leone

According to the UNHCR WEBSITE

No single ethno-linguistic group forms an absolute majority of Sierra Leone's population, which consists of 18 tribes.

The Mende inhabit the south and have benefited from the relative prosperity of their southern homeland. The Temne live an area inland from the coast to an area north of Mendeland; the Limba, in the Northern Province; and the Kono and Kissi in Eastern Province. Kuranko, Fula, Loko, Susu and Mandinka also live in the north. Limba are among the earliest inhabitants of Sierra Leone and speak various dialects of a language largely unrelated to other tribal languages in the area. They are concentrated in the north. Sherbro live in the coastal region together with the smaller groups of Vai and Gola, all of which have larger numbers living across the border in Liberia. Krios are descendants of freed slaves who returned to Africa from the Americas, and their Krio language, based largely on English and African languages, is used as a lingua franca across the country. They live in the Freetown area, where small numbers of Lebanese, Indians and Europeans are also found. The Krio community was dominant during the colonial era but never held a monopoly of power similar to that of the Americo-Liberian elite in Liberia.

www.refworld.org Accessed October 2013.

According to Gberie (2005)

Sierra Leone was settled by freed slaves brought there by the British navy in 1787, and became a Crown Colony in 1808. At the time, the Colony covered the small coastal peninsular area around Freetown. The much larger hinterland of the Colony

was declared a Protectorate in 1896, and together-Colony and Protectorate- Sierra Leone gained its independence from Britain in 1961. (Gberie, 2005:4)

1.3 BRIEF GEOGRAPHY OF SIERRA LEONE



Map of Sierra Leone showing the capital, Freetown, main provincial towns and major rivers.

Sierra Leone is a country situated on the west coast of Africa, sharing boundaries with the Republic of Liberia on the east and south and the Republic of Guinea to the north-west and north-east. The east and south of the country are covered by large dense rainforest and the north-west and north-east are mountainous with cool weather conditions compared to the other areas of the country. The west and south-west of the country give onto a beautiful peninsula, and the coastline overlooking the Atlantic Ocean consists mainly of mangrove swamps, with about thirty miles of beautiful natural coastline along the Atlantic Ocean, coastal villages and towns with white sandy beaches and woody hinterland.

1.4 BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone was a British Colony from around 1792 until it gained independence from Britain in 1961 and republican status on 19th April 1979. It has a population of some six million people. The first prime minister was Sir Milton Margai, of the Mende tribe and culture from the southern provinces of Sierra Leone. He was a British-trained medical doctor “who truly wished to unify the country” According to Hirsch (2001)

“The country’s first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai – head of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) – though he changed little of what the British had established, was much loved and genuinely sought to build a unified nation.”

(Hirsch, 2001:28) (Gberie,2005:4)

Upon his death in 1964, Margai was succeeded by his younger brother Albert Margai, who used his leadership for personal gains. Hirsch (2001) stated that:

“Upon Sir Milton’s death in 1964, the pattern of corrupt politics began and accelerated as the leadership passed to his brother Albert, who by all accounts saw the state not as a stewardship in the public interest but as the power base for personal gain and aggrandizement. Regional and ethnic factors also came into play early on.

Albert’s use of patronage led the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) to become an

even more ethnic party, drawing its support primarily from the Mende network in the south and the east”. (Hirsch, 2001:28)

All of these factors contributed to the creation of regional and ethnic division by the politicians and the supporters of the two main political parties of Sierra Leone; the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) and the All Peoples Party (APC). According to Hirsch (2001) this regional and ethnic division created political tensions, ethnic clashes and intimidation, which were seen regionally, nationally and internationally as the defining factors that led to the defeat of the ruling party and the government of the day, the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP), in the elections of 1967. As a result of this defeat, there was a big change in the political picture of Sierra Leone and a new era was born. Siaka Probyn Stevens, who was then the leader of the opposition, the All Peoples Party (APC) was victorious in the general elections with a huge majority. He thus took over power despite all the attempts by Albert Margai to reverse the elections’ results. President Siaka Probyn Stevens ruled Sierra Leone for 17 years (1968-1985). Political historians such as Gbla (2007) stated that President Stevens ruled the country with authoritarian and predatory politics.

This situation of authoritarian and predatory politics impacted negatively on the country’s security forces in several ways. In the first place, it precipitated the de-institutionalisation of the security forces and the formalisation of violence. During the reign of Siaka Stevens, for example, paramilitary forces such as the Internal Security Unit and the State Security Department were used to suppress political opponents. (Gbla, 2007; 15)

Essentially, the regime of Siaka Stevens was not only authoritarian but it was also suppressive and this lasted for 17 years. Papa Siaka, as he was sometimes called, presided over all political policies and issues pertaining to the state. He also made sure all the ministers and parliamentarians received direct instructions from him concerning their ministries, offices and regions. Siaka Stevens made it clear to the entire nation that he was the head of state and was in full control of all state affairs. The nation was made to understand that you either obey or abide by all rules and regulations or risk imprisonment for a very long time.

When President Siaka Stevens finally decided to hand over power, he chose retired Major - General Dr Joseph Saidu Momoh, whom he had groomed to succeed him as President because he had sensed the risk of appointing somebody else to this important political position who would not have been prepared to give Stevens the security that he needed during his retirement. There were too many contenders for the presidential seat and he had to choose the best for his own personal safety and peace of mind. This was seen by many as a deliberate attempt to cover his track records of “bullying” into submission, nepotism, tribal division, mismanagement and many more factors that had helped to destabilise the country. President Stevens knew he would be protected from prosecution by Major General Momoh.

Sierra Leone under Retired Major-General Dr Joseph Saidu Momoh

When Retired Major-General Dr Joseph Saidu Momoh took over government in 1985, he inherited a country rife with social inequalities, economic hardship, poverty, social and economic deprivation, cultural and tribal divisions and mismanagement of resources at all levels of government. President Momoh was ill-equipped for the job, lacking the skills, knowledge and dynamism needed to rule the country. His presidency came at a time when Sierra Leone had suffered much through tribal divisions during the leadership of President Stevens, but most of all, through mismanagement of the country's natural resources and revenue. President Momoh was also surrounded by ministers and parliamentarians from the old regime of ex President Stevens, who were all still loyal to him and his past regime and leadership style. This has been is cited by Hirsch (2001):

When he assumed office the public expected a new leadership. They became quickly disillusioned when Momoh's early cabinet was made up of recycled APC politicians. Stevens continued to be influential behind the scenes, maintaining contact with his corrupt friends and former colleagues. (Hirsch, 2001;30)

These were some of the aspects that prevented President Momoh from governing with a free hand as the people of Sierra Leone had expected. He was being watched, monitored and bullied into submission from all angles of the political arena. Many people saw him as being the ceremonial head and controlled by the retired "Pa Siaka" (as Siaka P. Stevens was fondly called). According to Hirsch (2001),

A dismal pattern of official corruption, mismanagement, and electoral violence led over the years to deepening public cynicism, the virtual collapse of the education system, and the creation of a generation of young men and women who became the Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) rank and file. (Hirsch, 2001;29)

Thus it can be seen how the government of retired Major General Joseph Sadu Momoh is perceived as having failed the people of Sierra Leone.

1.5 BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE SIERRA LEONE CIVIL/REBEL WAR: 1991-2002

The civil war in Sierra Leone was a direct result of the spillover from the civil war in Liberia and also the invasion of the Eastern region of Sierra Leone by some Sierra Leonean dissidents, including Foday Sankoh, former army corporal and his Revolutionary United Front (RUF)

The crisis in Sierra Leone started in March 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Corporal Foday Sankoh, crossed the border from Liberia to launch its rebellion against the government of President Momoh. Since then, the war between the government and the RUF has claimed at least 20 000 lives and has forced more than half the country's population to flee their homes. (Douglas, 1999; 175)

Foday Sankoh joined forces with Liberian fighters led by Charles Taylor who, according to afrol.com, took advantage of the situation:

With the breakdown of state structures and the effective suppression of civilian opposition, wide corridors were opened for trafficking of arms and ammunition and drugs, all of which eroded national/regional security and facilitated crime within the country and between Sierra Leone and Liberia and even Guinea. www.afrol.com

The civil war in Sierra Leone lasted for about eleven years, during the period 1991-2002. This left the country in a state of total devastation, with human lives ruined and private, public and personal properties destroyed. Many of the outdated government offices and infrastructure which the British¹, their colonial masters, had left in the country after it gained independence in 1960 were burnt to the ground. The trail of destruction that the rebels left behind all over the country was sight that many Sierra Leoneans never imagined they would see.

Even though Sierra Leone had all its own internal problems, the government of Sierra Leone under the leadership of President Joseph Saidu Momoh decided to help address the instability of neighbouring Liberia. President Momoh decided to send some of his junior officers including Captain Valentine Strasser to join the Economic Community of West African

¹ According to Frankel and Western (1988) Sierra Leone became an official British Colony.

States Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG)² contingent fighting against Charles Taylor's NPFL in Liberia. This was to show solidarity and support as a founding member state of the Mano River Union (MRU)³ to stop the war in Liberia and help establish peace and stability to the region.

The Mano River Union (MRU) was essentially the only organisation that supported the government of Sierra Leone and also protected the people of Sierra Leone during the civil war. The Sierra Leone nation and its people owe a lot to all the member states of the Mano River Union and it was the intervention of the MRU that formed part of the road map for the start of the peace process in Liberia.

The regime change in Liberia was one of the most volatile in African history and this needed to be addressed, to prevent an all-out war in the region. The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOWAS)⁴ decided that there was an urgent need to contain the peace and stability of the region within the Mano River Union (MRU) countries.

Heads of states in the region which included Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia decided to

² The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, or ECOMOG, was a West African multilateral armed force established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was a formal arrangement for separate armies to work together

³ The Mano River Union (MRU) is a regional organisation established in 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone, with the objective of sub-regional economic integration. In 1980, Guinea joined the union. It is named after the Mano River which begins in the Guinea highlands and forms a border between Liberia and Sierra Leone. The goal of the Union was to foster economic cooperation among the member states. Aagon Lingord. www.liberiaforum.com Jan 2009

⁴ The idea for a West Africa community goes back to President William Tubman of Liberia, who made the call in 1964. An agreement was signed between the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in February 1965 ... Finally 15 West African countries signed the treaty for an Economic Community of West African States (Treaty of Lagos) on 28 May 1975.

join forces and a Nigerian-led contingent of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was put into action to help address the situation.

In 1992, some government army officers who were in the front line fighting against the rebels in the southern region of the country decided to revolt against the government of President Joseph Momoh. President Joseph Momoh was ousted in military coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser one of the young army officers fighting against the rebels in the southern region of the country. Valentine Strasser was in power until January 1996 when there was another military coup and he was ousted by his defense minister, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio.

In February 1996, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected president of Sierra Leone and in November after several negotiations a peace accord was signed with the rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

This was a fragile peace. President Ahmed Tejan Kabba was deposed and, **according to the BBC new Africa⁵ in 1997**, the peace deal unraveled and President Kabbah was deposed by the army in May. Major Johnny Paul Koroma, in prison awaiting the outcome of a treason trial, led the military junta - the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Koroma suspended the constitution, banned demonstrations and abolished political parties.

⁵ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa 14094419 accessed 2/3/2015.

President Kabbah fled to Guinea to mobilise international support and in February 1998, the Nigerian-led West African intervention force Ecomog stormed Freetown and the rebels were pushed out. In March 1998 President Kabbah made a triumphant return to Freetown amid scenes of public rejoicing. This did not last long and in January 1999, the rebels backing Revolutionary United Front leader Foday Sankoh seized parts of Freetown from Ecomog. After weeks of bitter fighting they were driven out, leaving behind 5,000 dead and a devastated city.

The civil war was prolonged because of several factors. These included the failure of the international community, including Britain and the USA, to intervene and also the support that the rebels got from other groups in and out of the country.

The rebels and the Liberian President Charles Taylor, who was widely considered to be the chief architect of the instability in the Mano River area,⁶ knew that the government and people of Sierra Leone had very little support from the international community, including the world's powerful nations, and the United Nations, and reports stated that this led to a deterioration in the situation. This then gave the rebels and their leaders more power and authority to continue their onslaught and destruction of lives and infrastructure. The most notorious of all the atrocities of the conflict was one of the worst of any recent conflict; this was the brutal amputation of hands and limbs of men, women and children by the rebels in their campaign of terror, violence and destruction.

⁶ See footnote 5 about the Mano River Union (MRU).

As a direct result of the lack of international support for the government the rebels, their leaders and supporters took advantage of the situation to form special groups of fighters using mainly children: boys to fight and girls as sex slaves, cooks, equipment and arms bearers and carriers. Some of these child soldiers had been made orphans without any parental or community support because of the conflict, and had only the rebel leaders as their main source of support and stability. They were young, agile and easy to train and could give maximum impact to the campaign of terror and brutality. Most of these children were initiated into the rebel movement by being instructed to kill close members of their families or forced to watch family members being killed or raped as a way of strengthening them mentally and psychologically for combat and front line duties.

The government of Sierra Leone lost control and could not guarantee the safety or welfare of its people, particularly those in the rebel-controlled areas including the Eastern and Northern region of the country. These areas of the country– particularly the mining regions – were heavily guarded and well-fortified by the rebels and their leaders who had financial support, arms and food supplies from internal and international supporters and sympathisers, who wanted an end to the government of President Kabba.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 OVERVIEW

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 19.2 million refugees, asylum seekers, and others of concern to the UNHCR at the end of 2004 (UNCHR, 2004).

This literature review gives a critical, practical and theoretical insight into the personal experiences, both negative and positive, of refugees from a global perspective and a country level in the case of Sierra Leone. Specific attention will be given to some research studies that have been conducted and also on the personal experiences of refugees in general, but the main focus will be on the resilience of Sierra Leonean refugee women and how they were able to adapt to their new environment and host communities, despite their traumatic experiences of a decade-long rebel/civil war.

The theoretical framework will reflect my core research work, based primarily on my professional skills, knowledge and experiences gained while studying and working with diverse communities including refugee community groups in the UK and internationally.

This theoretical framework will also endeavour to include relevant facts and details of studies that will reflect the different views of scholars and researchers who are experts working in the

field of refugee care and management to better understand some of these issues and aspects connected to the subject of this PhD research study titled:

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This theoretical framework will also help me to understand some aspects of the unique resilience, different survival and coping strategies, adjustment to changing circumstances and the adversity-activated development of Sierra Leonean women despite their traumatic experiences of war, traditional and cultural Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Human Rights Violations. The review will also include a critical look at the psychological and psychosocial effects of wars, legal perspectives of asylum, the human rights of refugees, specific issues related to women in the refugee context, their resilience, resourcefulness and rape as a weapon of war. Special focus will also be on cultural and traditional disorientation and dislocation and how these are connected to the loss of home, personal, social and community identities. Important aspects such as living and working in another culture and language barriers will be looked at in the context of their integration and resettlement and making use of new opportunities that have been available to them in their new communities.

Even though this research is based on the experiences of Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the UK, it is relevant to consider various aspects of the refugee experience, feminist studies, socio-cultural and psychosocial aspects of refugee care and the refugee situations at

global and international levels. Concepts of resilience and AAD (Adversity activated development) will be introduced. The ways in which adversity is transformed into resilience and AAD will be discussed.

Papadopoulos (2004) developed the Trauma/Adversity Grid within which he identified the range of all possible and relevant consequences of a traumatic experience.. AAD can take place in difficult situations and circumstances particularly when working and providing care and managing issues pertaining to refugees who have experienced different types of trauma. Connections will be made between the ideas of positive psychology and positive development such as AAD. According to Papadopoulos (2004):

AAD refers to positive developments that assist with personal growth, which are a direct result of the experiences gained from being exposed to adversity. These are new elements, characteristics which did not exist prior to the adversity.⁷

The aspects and factors of adversity-activated developments (AAD) according to Papadopoulos (2004) will be considered as an important tool that will be used to understand some of the key concepts of the resilience of the Sierra Leonean refugees participating in this research study. AAD is an essential concept that should be taken into consideration when working with refugees and assessing their personal, emotional, social, family, health and psychological situation and needs.

⁷ Papadopoulos (2004) The refugee trauma re-visited: storied communities and Adversity-Activated Development; paper on Extreme History: University College London; Two day Seminar with Homi Bhabha; May 2006; p7.

2.2 DEFINITION OF WHO IS A REFUGEE

An important and necessary starting point in understanding the refugee experience is to define the word REFUGEE. For the purpose of this study, I use the legal definition of a refugee as adopted in the 1951 United Nations Convention:

A person who, owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it. (United Nations Convention, 1951)

This definition has been used ever since its inception and it has been useful but it is now considered a little out-dated as it does not include all the categories of reasons that people require protection from other countries when their own country fails to offer them safety. Examples of these are categories include sexual orientation as well as a threat of girls being violated by Female Genital Mutilation.

How people become refugees

People become refugees for a variety of reasons, as a result of different types of upheaval, dispute, environmental disasters, change of government, religious and social conflicts and sometimes personal and family breakdown in relationships.

All of these factors make some people become refugees, sometimes displaced in their own communities but often having to leave and find safety elsewhere. Many people are left devastated because of their traumatic experiences and most of the time they are not in control of their own lives. Sometimes decisions will have to be made for them by others who may not know their personal identities and backgrounds, social and professional status and their community lives. In most refugee population more than fifty per cent are women and girls and these are the most vulnerable groups of refugees.

3.2 THE GLOBAL REFUGEE SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVE

“Today, no continent, and barely any country, in the world is untouched by the global refugee crisis. At the beginning of 2000 an estimated 14 million people were living as refugees, uprooted from their homes and forced to cross international borders.”⁸

The global refugee crisis has been made worse because of military and political conflicts, bad governance and corruption by governments in the developing countries. According to the UN, refugees are created every day and there is a need to address this at international level; these and many other reasons pertaining to the refugee situation, particularly after the Second

⁸UN at 50: What Future For Refugee Protection? www.essex.ac.uk accessed July 2009

World War, promoted the establishment of the first United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). This was the creation of an international and global refugee body that would oversee all aspects relating to the status of refugees on a global scale, and seek mainly to support, care and also protect and provide solutions for millions of displaced people and refugees. In its mandate, the UNHCR cares for 21.8 million refugees, around half of whom are women and girls. This highlights the realities of the experiences of war, conflict and disasters for refugees and their families and the devastating effects on the lives of women, children and their communities⁹.

Refugees are created every day as a direct result of external or internal conflicts or disputes between communities, tribes and factions in the same country. Some of these conflicts can also be between rebels and government forces such as in the case of Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Uganda. They can also be between neighbouring countries, in the case of Eritrea and Ethiopia, Israel and Palestine in the Middle East. Most refugees come from developing countries, for several reasons including bad governance, religious persecution, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, etc. Most persons are forced to leave because of circumstances beyond their control and their wishes. They are forced to seek safety – this has been highlighted by Zephaniah (2001) in his well-known book ‘Refugee Boy’.¹⁰

⁹ According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (UNHCR) there are approximately 50 million uprooted people around the world – refugees who have sought safety in another country and people displaced within their own country. Between 75-80 percent of them are women and children. Refugees-volume, number 126(2002) p6

¹⁰Some people believe that I gave up my homeland and lost my parents in order to become a refugee; some people actually believe that I gave up thirteen months of sunshine to live in the cold and to be called a scrounger. I didn't. Circumstances beyond my control brought me here. (Zephaniah, 2001:292).

However, some members of the general public who do not understand some of these reasons tend to blame refugees for some of the social problems that they are experiencing within their own communities.¹¹ There are bad press reports about refugees being scroungers and living on benefits from British taxpayers, jumping ahead of British citizens on housing waiting lists, refusing to work and not connecting with other members of the host community. These have, over the years, not only fuelled the anger vented on refugees but it has also increased the prejudice against them and their families.

Yet, despite their plight and their difficulties, refugees do not cease to be human beings and they continue to retain many of their positive characteristics and, also, they may develop even new positive characteristics. As a direct result of their traumatic experiences and the new roles that they had to assume,¹² Thorpe (2006) showed how women became empowered and made vital contributions to local, regional and national development. This was a significant

¹¹I do not see why any country should be forced to allow the dilution of its way of life and the character of its people by allowing others to enter at will. How can we preserve our individuality if too many different races try to exist and live 'cheek by cheek'? No, let those who wish to improve their way of life do this through the democratic process at home. We are already an overcrowded island. Other countries like Australia have plenty of space. J Siddon, Chesterfield UK: Talking point: Should the west open the gates www.bbc.co.uk **Accessed January 2011**

¹²Indeed the nation was at the tether but that national agony became the labour pains that gave birth to the realization of the strength in solidarity for womanhood in Sierra Leone. (Thorpe, C. A.M., 2006:68)

way forward for these women because they had not been given the chance or opportunities to contribute to local, regional and national development, before they were exposed to the adversities that they were exposed to.

Sierra Leone is a patriarchal society where women and girls are subjected to structural discrimination by practice, custom and law. The subjugation of women was worsened by the 1991-2002 war and its aftermath.¹³ Traditional and cultural values make Sierra Leonean women, like most other women from developing countries, the invisible partners in development, and most of the time their efforts are not acknowledged or recognised. The civil war changed attitudes, perspectives and women's roles and, according to Thorpe (2006), they became accountable on behalf of their households.¹⁴ Her findings are mainly centered around research that she conducted in the field and her work with Sierra Leonean refugee women during the conflict, while they were living in refugee camps and also as they try to resettle into their communities after the war.

3.3 THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

“Things are very hard for me. Look at me, look at all the things that I am capable of, and think of all the things you could call me – a student, a lover of literature, a

¹³ A place in the Army for Sierra Leone www.ipsnews.net Accessed November 2010

¹⁴ Consequently as household heads women became the responsible recipients of food, medicine and clothing for their respective huts. They had to interact and liaise with humanitarian agencies ...before the war these roles had been the prerogative of their husbands or male partners, now because of the war the women were learning the tricks of the trade. (Thorpe, C. A. M., 2006:62)

budding architect, a friend, a symbol of hope even, but what am I called? A refugee.”

(Zephaniah, 2001:292)

These words by Zephaniah are the true reality for most refugees.

This quotation shows very dramatically how refugees acquire a blanket identity that masks the complexity and individuality of each person and makes them all as if they are one type of person. This means that when we work with refugees in any capacity, we need to be careful not to see them all as if they were one group of people with the same characteristics, history, abilities, ambitions, difficulties and values, but realise that despite the fact that they are all grouped as refugees, each person still does retain her or his individuality and all our efforts either on the ground in terms of working directly with them or when we write about them or theorising about them or doing research with them should be aimed to promote the restoration of their individuality.

The Refugee Experience has for many years been a major topic of different types of discussions, conferences, symposia, surveys and research studies. The care and management of the experiences and issues pertaining to refugees should be of a multidisciplinary nature and must be dealt with using both a theoretical and practical framework. This framework should be centred on some of the issues affecting refugees, including personal and professional loss, legal perspectives of their asylum claims, their human rights, cultural disorientation, personal dislocation, immigration and citizenship. These are all specific issues

that are connected and related to loss of home, identity and community, integration, resettlement and contributions of refugees to the host community

3.4 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF WAR

Loss of Home:

The eventual loss of home is one of the main factors that creates the dislocation and disconnection of refugees. The loss of home for refugees creates issues pertaining to personal, emotional and psychological ill-health. This in turn affects their integration, resettlement and psychosocial development.

The loss of home therefore affects the essence of their existence and the personal dynamics that give them their identity in their communities. According to Papadopoulos whenever the home is lost, ‘all the organizing and containing functions break wide open and there is a possibility of disintegration at all these three levels: at the individual-personal level; at the family-marital; and at the socio-economic/cultural-political levels’. (Papadopoulos, 2002: 24)

The involuntary loss of home is something that all refugees will always experience and connect with, irrespective of their conditions and situations. This aspect is one which all refugees have in common, as stated by Papadopoulos (2002: 9): Becoming a refugee ‘after all, is not a psychological concept, as such. Yet, the loss of home is the only condition that all refugees share.’ This means that regardless of any other difficulties refugees may

experience, personal, psychological, even psychiatric, financial, etc the only common characteristic that all of them share is their loss of home. This identification by Papadopoulos is important because for a long time whenever people used to hear about refugees they would consider that all of them are traumatised, i.e. trauma is the main characteristic that all refugees share. This is not the case.

There is so much variation in each individual how they experience becoming refugees and there are so many factors and variables that affect each person, each, family, each community, each group that there is nothing that is shared by all refugees, except what Papadopoulos clearly expressed – the involuntary loss of home.

The loss of their homes makes refugees vulnerable and affects them even more so because they also lose a great part of their personal and social identity. When one loses their home, one loses some of the most human fundamental needs.

Using the hierarchy of needs that were identified by Maslow,¹⁵ losing one's home would affect not only the most basic human needs, i.e. *Biological and Physiological* needs (that include need for air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep) and *Safety* needs (that include

¹⁵Abraham Maslow: Hierarchy of human needs:

1. Biological and Physiological needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep.
2. Safety needs - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.
3. Love and belongingness needs - friendship, intimacy, affection and love, - from work group, family, friends, romantic relationships.
4. Esteem needs - achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, respect from others.
5. Self-Actualization needs - realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.

protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear), but also other needs that are higher on Maslow's hierarchy, i.e. *Love and belongingness* needs (that include friendship, intimacy, affection and love, - from work group, family, friends, romantic relationships) as well as *Esteem* needs (that include achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, respect from others).

This shows that when one loses one's home it affects a very wide range of human needs, some of them being very fundamental.

This also affects one loses some of the most important dynamics of human nature in relation to their community, intimacy, relationships, identity and all these have a wide range of psychological and social consequences.

Therefore the concept of home and the reluctant loss of it are fundamental in understanding the dynamics of refugees.

According to Papadopoulos in *Therapeutic Care For Refugees: No Place Like Home*:

“Home is one of the most fundamental notions of humanity. Regardless of the shape or style of home, all human beings have a sense of home (if not an actual experience of, at least, one home) which often evokes powerful feelings, be they positive or negative.” (Papadopoulos, 2002: 10)

Therefore within the Refugee Experience, the loss of “Home” is a multidimensional process, since Home relates to the personal, psychological, social networks, religious, physical, spiritual, educational, language, cultural and traditional values and aspects of the individuals and their perceptions of the dynamics of their lives within their own communities and social groups.

Loss of home for most refugees is in many cases closely linked to disintegration of identity. The “mosaic” of identity puts together a unique pattern of different elements of one’s identity. Similarly, different people create a mosaic of a community. It is these mosaics that are disturbed when people leave their homes to find a safer place to live.

According to Papadopoulos, the identity of a person consists of two parts – the tangible and the intangible. The tangible part includes most of the aspects of identity that people can identify consciously, e.g. gender, job, family affiliation, etc and the intangible part includes a wide variety of elements that he calls “substrate of identity”¹⁶ and “consists of a great number of smaller elements which together form a coherent whole” (Papadopoulos, 1997b, p.14) in (Papadopoulos, 2002, p.17). This consists of an endless list of dimensions related to various sense and belonging experiences, e.g. visual, auditory, etc that cover a wide range of ways people every day experiences. Papadopoulos maintains that the intangible part of a person’s identity is taken for granted and therefore people are not aware of it. They become aware of it when some of these dimensions are changed.

¹⁶The fundamental sense of home forms part of the core “substratum of identity” which is structured as a “mosaic” and “consists of a great number of smaller elements which together form a coherent whole” (Papadopoulos, 1997b:14) in (Papadopoulos, 2002:17).

For example, people live in a place where they see lush greenery all around them, walk on wide dirt roads, hear constantly the loud noise of children playing in the open, have to shelter themselves from the scorching sun, wear very light clothing due to the heat and high humidity of the atmosphere; and then, they have to move to a country where they hardly see any vegetation but are surrounded by concrete buildings, the streets are narrow full of cars, no children can be seen playing outside, hardly any sun ever appears on the sky, they have to wear warm and heavy clothes to protect themselves from the cold, they hear foreign language spoken around them, the buildings look differently, the people behave differently, etc. – all these changes would definitely make these people to feel a very fundamental change not only around them but also inside them. They will feel differently. They will feel ‘not at home’. They will realise that all the various elements of the mosaic substrate of their identity did matter to them and they gave them some base, some sense of belonging that now is missing. Each one of those elements on its own, e.g. seeing children playing noisily in the street, is not important but as part of the entire mosaic that provide the base of their identity, it matters when it is missing. In this way, Papadopoulos emphasises that when we look at refugees we should also be careful about not neglecting the impact that all parts of their identity have on them moving away from their homes. Not only the tangible parts but also in the intangible (i.e. the ‘mosaic substrate of identity’).

That is why Papadopoulos also argues that “Home is not only the place but a cluster of feelings associated with it,” (Papadopoulos, 2002:10). Thus there is a very clear understanding of the meaning of the “Loss of Home” to refugees and those that work with them. To understand the wider concept of the loss of home for refugees, one must associate

the loss of home for refugees with the loss of everything that they had in a place that they call home, that gives them intimate and personal safety and a feeling of belonging and value.

The loss of home creates a void and a feeling of helplessness that can lead to anxiety, depression, anger, homesickness, guilt, loss of self-worth and powerlessness as all major decisions are in the hands of others who might not understand the refugees and their values.

Furthermore, the refugees lose their personal status in their communities that they have left behind and their skills and abilities that they can use to address some of the situations and predicament that they find themselves in.

The loss of Home is sometimes seen as a cultural and traditional bereavement, hence the most important aspects of one's life which include families, social networks, institutions, authorities, day-to-day routines, communities and surroundings, but most of all the culture of things and the way of life. According to Papadopoulos, the sense of home ranges "from a physical and geographical community, to a psychological locus of relatedness and communion." (Papadopoulos, 2002:11)

According to Papadopoulos: "Whenever the home is lost, all the organizing and containing functions break wide open and there is a possibility of disintegration at all these three levels: at the individual-personal level; at the family-marital; and at the socio-economic/cultural-political levels." (Papadopoulos, 2002:24)

Therefore it is of great importance that a lot of focus is put on the psychological and mental distress linked to loss of community and culture and that some of the feelings attached to loss of home are addressed. When working with refugees, this all-important aspect will have to be understood to demonstrate the interrelated aspects of the refugee experiences.

Addressing the loss of home from a systemic perspective gives the added advantage of working within a positive structure that helps to demonstrate and illustrate that “Home” is a dynamic concept and represents a delicate balance of all aspects of life and living for most people and refugees in particular, considering the unique situations and conditions that they find themselves in.

Loss of family:

The family unit is one of the most important integral parts of the human existence and experience. There are strong empirical evidence in our personal and community way of living linking mental and physical health outcomes to the presence of effective personal, community engagement and social interaction. The loss of family during conflicts and disasters effectively destroys supports and structures that have always served as protective factors to individuals and communities.

Loss of personal identity:

The loss of identity is a factor of the refugee experience that affects refugees in many ways. Our unique make-up and identities define us as individual human beings and help us relate to our own ethnicity, socio-economic status, background, cultural and traditional beliefs and values, religion, personal integrity, relationships, professional skills, educational status, social capital and also our psycho-social perspectives on life in general.

When identities are lost as a result of migration, either in the case of war or conflict, or voluntary migration because of international trade, globalisation trends, educational and social- economic development, then it is not only losing our unique identities but also losing personal safety and integrity that forms the greatest part of life and home. That has been gained as a result of being a part of this group that we call our communities. We also lose our own special role that we had in the communities that we come from that gives us our focus of personal and social status. Disintegration of identity as related to the refugee experience may affect mental, physical and psychosocial sphere, social status, roles and capital, cultural and traditional values, religious beliefs, social networks, community resources and coping mechanisms.

Whenever there are any changes or losses in the way the two main parts of identity relate and fit together, Papadopoulos argues that a state of discomfort develops that he names 'nostalgic disorientation' and this can lead to issues related to psychological stress, mental problems, poor health, depression and psycho-social issues. As stated by Papadopoulos, "the fact that they all have lost their homes makes them share a deep sense of nostalgic yearning for restoring that specific type of loss. Nostalgia is the right word to describe this whole cluster of feelings, reactions, hopes, fears, etc". (Papadopoulos;2001:15). He calls the disorientation

as nostalgic because this state creates a very strong wish to return to the times when the people were settled in their own living contexts, with all the elements of their identity in a familiar position. The nostalgic disorientation, according to Papadopoulos, is not a psychiatric disorder but it can create a lot of psychological difficulties.

In addition to this, our social integration, relationships, values beliefs, emotional needs, social-economic development, social status are all affected as a direct result of this loss of our community and the culture that we live in and the longing to return.

Loss of community and culture:

The loss of community is more or less related to the disconnection to unique values and experiences with systems which are physical, emotional, mental and psycho-social. These also include social capital, collective values of beliefs and social networks that people normally depend on for their everyday existence within their communities and the society that they come from. These provide a sense of belonging, of being an indigenous member of the community. The loss of community sometimes results in the total or partial loss of our will to live or make a conscious effort to be part of a totally new community that is alien to us and our normal way of life. Most of us depend on our relationships with our immediate families, extended families and our communities for the basic factors in life. All of these are some of the main factors that add and give us the core value to our lives in a personal, social, ethnic, cultural and professional way. These core values are of collective importance within

our communities and our societies and they form a major part of the fundamental factors that determine our quality of life and source of our strength, inspiration and development.

It is perceived that culture is like special glue that holds and also binds communities and group of people together in a unique way. Culture is also an important factor in helping a group of people or a whole community to adapt to a new way of life without losing their own personal identity or their own self worth in their new environment. This ability to maintain some aspects of life despite the adversity is in the literature known as 'resilience', resilience being that personal inner strength to cope and address adverse experiences with hope and courage to overcome and succeed at all cost. Cultural coping mechanisms and resources are unique to every community and society and can be adapted according to the situations presented.

The loss of community provokes emotional and psychological distress that can lead to feelings of shock, disbelief of the change of status, anxiety, fear of the unknown which might be the new host community, grief of the loss of personal and emotional aspects, anger at all the experiences which might include emotional, cognitive, interpersonal and spiritual. There may also be resentment towards the authorities that have failed them and the ones that are dealing with their claim for asylum, and guilt that things might have been better managed. Hopelessness at their present situation, circumstances and predicament, betrayal because others have let them down and not given them the protection and care they deserve.

Depression because of their confused state of mind and the complex situation and circumstances that they find very difficult to comprehend and shock that all is lost and that there does not seem to be an end in sight.

This complexity makes the refugee experience and all that relates to it, profoundly difficult to comprehend as they struggle to find a way to belong to their new community.

It is difficult for others to actually comprehend that the loss of community is also related to social capital, collective values and social networks that people normally depend on for their everyday existence. These factors were and will always be the important and binding factors and aspects that provide them that all important sense of belonging. Hence the reasons to address issues of the refugee situation and general well-being of refugees are vital to their resettlement and integration into their new communities.

Some negative perceptions of refugees and the impact of these perceptions on their lives of refugees.

As discussed previously there are many reasons for becoming refugees and there are many different types of refugees with a range of needs; including social, personal, psychological and emotional. Refugees come from different nationalities and regions of the world where there are conflicts and upheavals including political unrest and change of government, religious, tribal conflicts and rebel wars leading to economic and social change of a

community, nation and country. One thing that most refugees have in common is the loss of any form of identity. This is cited by Marlowe (2009): The concept of 'refugeehood' within resettlement contexts can become a master status that defines a person above and beyond any other form of identity.

All of these compounded with the simple fact that most refugees are experiencing some degree of psychological distress as a direct result of their lived experiences that can lead to traumatic and emotional devastation with negative consequences effectively creating changes in their personal circumstances, family relationships, professional lives and gender roles and status.

Steel (2006) indicated the level of trauma and lived experiences of refugees:

Resettled refugees from Sudan evidenced a history of trauma. Less than 5% met criteria for posttraumatic stress but 25% reported clinically high levels of psychological distress.

This research is one of many that have highlighted the fact that refugees are traumatised and as a result of this the perception of refugees that has prevailed for a long time has been negative, and this negativity still persists even up to the present day. Aspects of this negativity of the perception of refugees can be or related to:

1. Trauma
2. Loss of identity, family and culture

3. Mental health issues
4. Perception that refugees are a group of people who are unable to cope and make decisions pertaining to them and their families.
5. Host communities and structures encourage refugees to accept the situation they find themselves in, and in a sense refugees are made to believe that they cannot work and earn a living but are better off living on handouts and benefits.
6. Refugees are given new names and identity 'refugees and scroungers'
7. They are forced to accept the perception of them.

The perception of researchers and others that most refugees are traumatised only compounds the problems that refugees have and continue to have even when they try to resettle in a host community. The personal loss that refugees suffer including loss of identity, cultural norms and values is perceived to be one of the issues that make refugees develop mental health issues. This is highlighted by another research work by Crawford et al (2004): The Mental health outcome scores indicated elevated levels of depression and anxiety symptoms; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) scores were comparable to scores in other communities affected by war and persecution.

As a direct result of refugees being made to believe that they are unable to cope they are given the encouragement to accept the situations that they find themselves in. These factors make it very difficult and traumatic for the refugees to make adjustments to their shattered and altered lives.

Refugees are put in a category of people being unable to work because of lack of skills, transferable qualifications, and lack of technical ability to work and earn a living. Refugees experience professional negations and as a direct result of these they are made to live on handouts and social security benefits. Most refugees find these difficult to accept but are encouraged to do so because of the circumstances they find themselves in.

As a group of people who have being given a new identity and called refugees and labeled scroungers, most refugees find it difficult to move away from this perception as they try to live a normal life in their host community. Some members of the host community make them feel like the “other” and this is compounded with language and communications barriers and other related experiences, difficulties and feelings. As cited by Marlowe (2010) the refugee label acknowledges the plight of people marginalized, oppressed and pushed to the periphery of society.

In most cases refugees are eventually forced to accept this perception and go with the flow accepting whatever is perceived of them, despite the fact that they are a resilient group of people who have gone through different phases of trauma on their flight to safety.

As indicated by Martin (1992), refugees are a group of people who are resilient but the stigmatisation and the labelling turns them into a completely different persons and this is cited by Martin (1992):

I am behaving strangely, I don't recognize myself I am lost, I am scared, I don't communicate, That is not me. That is the refugee, as they call me. Without a home, without work, without any conditions for a normal life. Things are no longer as they used to be! You have to face up to things and adjust to the situation. We are refugees.
(Martin; 1992:90)

These are the indications of the inner feelings of refugees as they try to understand their present situation and at the same time protesting and highlighting the facts that they have been turned into a person who is different from the person that they used to be

3.5 THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN

- Specific Issue Related to Women in the Refugee Context
- Rape of women as a weapon of war
- The cultural and traditional violations of women's Human Rights

According to a report by the Refugee Council (UK) on refugee women, more 'than 70% had experienced violence either in their country of origin or in the UK

- 57% had experienced gender based violence in their country of origin
- 44% had been raped

- Just under 30% had been tortured
- 33% had fled ethnic persecution
- Half had mental health needs and over 20% had acute mental health problems
- 33% had been refused asylum
- More than 20% were destitute
- More than 20% had experienced gender based violence since arriving in the UK¹⁷

This data show that women refugees experience a wide variety of difficulties and it is important to consider the gender issue when we think of refugees.

In most societies, women are responsible for many more complex functions and range of duties and tasks than men. These include the care for the children, the care for the house, the maintenance of most community links, etc. All these areas are affected when they become refugees and as women they experience becoming refugees in very string ways that affect their own sense of identity as women but also as persons and members of family and social groups and communities.

According to Friedman (2008) refugees face health and protection problems but women face additional problems because of their gender and their social roles in society according to cultural norms and values. This is highlighted by (Friedman 2008):

¹⁷ [Refugee Council Briefing. The experiences of refugee women in the UK, March 2012.](#)

Although all refugees face health and protection problems, women are susceptible to additional problems as a result of their gender. Women and girls who flee their home countries to escape violence and persecution are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Rape is a common experience for refugee women, and the resulting trauma has life altering affects for both the women and their families. (Friedman, 2008:67)

This highlights the fact that women refugees face multi dimensional problems and as result have complex and specific needs.

One of the most difficult events that often happens to women when the become refugees is that they are exposed to gender-based violence, especially rape.

“Rape is a common experience for refugee women, and the resulting trauma has lifealtering effects for both the women and their families.” (Friedman, R.A., 1992:65)

Rape is a devastating experience, an extreme event – most rape victims are subjected to an inhumane act of violence that leaves them psychologically, mentally and physically traumatised. According to Sideris (2003), the trauma of rape is tied to both the violation of the body-self and the violation of the social body.¹⁸ Rape takes away the personality and

¹⁸ Thus the trauma of rape is tied to both the violation of the body-self and the violation of the social body. Victims respond to the lived experience of rape as a discrete incident of violence and to the social

identity of an individual, leaving the individual feeling humiliated, a huge sense of shame, contamination of the inner self and a great sense of loss of one's soul and mind. In other words the personal inner-self, self-esteem, confidence and dignity of the rape victim are lost and they become vulnerable; finding daily life extremely difficult to cope with.

According to some experts on the subject of rape, most people think about rape as a single act that, although sudden, can be contained. They fail to realise that this single and sudden act goes on well after the actual violation itself as these victims try to cope with their experience – which remains with them for a long time.

The psychological effect of rape concerns all the factors and elements that enable the victim to live life to the fullest. The experience of rape not only has a devastating effect on a person's psychological way of life but also on their psychosocial perspective; hence it affects the inner-self and also the wider social contexts of life. Most victims of rape continue to live in constant fear and lack of trust in all respects. The dignity of the rape victim is lost.

The psychological scars are far greater and most difficult to heal, because these are the scars that are not seen, and they might be the stigma and shame that remain intact within the victims. These lead to many psychosocial problems, psychological distress, fear of the stigma that it carries, isolation within that no one will understand, guilt and shame of being unclean

fragmentation it creates.(Siders, T., (2003) *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees: Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003) : 721)

and, most of all, the risk of unwanted pregnancies or an unwanted and unloved child, conceived through a violent encounter.

Rape during conflict is used as a weapon of war to prove some form of defeat, to weaken the opponent and, according to the United Nations Convention, rape is a crime against humanity and this is definitely a breach of all aspects of human rights.

THE EFFECT OF RAPE ON FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY HUSBANDS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WHO WITNESS RAPE:

The rape of refugees in conflicts leaves them, their families and communities with devastating consequences and also with deep psychological pains and experiences that often lead to physical, psychological, personal and mental suffering and fears of rejection and condemnation by the communities that they belong to.¹⁹

The rape of refugee women is one of the personal lived experiences of most refugee women and this is also very traumatic for them and their families particularly when these sexual attacks are witness by other family members. Hence rape is not only suffered by the refugee woman but the family as a whole with devastating results, personal feelings of shame, guilt and unclean as cited by Friedman (2008):

¹⁹ Nevertheless, the threat of rejection contained in values combines with actual rejection to leave women fearing condemnation for the rape and social chaos it can produce. (Siders, T., (2003) *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees*: Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003) : 721)

Rape is a common experience for refugee women, and the resulting trauma has life altering affects for both the women and their families. Often male refugees suffer from "heightened male vulnerability" as a reaction to witnessing torture, violence or rape. This, combined with the additional stress of resettlement in a new culture, often leads male refugees to resort to domestic violence and rape trauma present serious obstacles to the self-sufficiency of refugee families.(Friedman;2008:5).

These issues, although unbearable, may be considered unimportant and insignificant to these refugees as they willingly relinquish their rights in order to focus their energy on addressing other serious issues of their plights that are related to their refugee experiences and, most importantly, to their immigration and refugee status. This means that most rape cases are not reported and therefore all the issues pertaining to their experiences and suffering are not dealt with in a professional and specific way. Most refugees who are raped do not get the professional and specialist medical care they need.²⁰

According to some refugee victims, rape is not reported because issues such as personal and everyday family issues are much more important to deal with than making complaints about being raped and tortured. Most refugee victim of rape pay very little attention to their

²⁰ One of the most serious risks for refugee women, one which is rarely addressed by the health community, is the problem of rape and sexual violence. Refugee women, many of whom are widowed or young, have few structures to protect them. (Friedman, A.R. 1992: 66)

physical and psychological pain and suffering and adverse effects it has on them and their families.

Rape during war and conflict is a deep source of stigma and horrific medical complications because of the circumstances of the incident. Most of these victims are also tortured and molested with brutality. They are made to pay a price aimed directly at weakening the enemy into submission and capitulation. Rape victims are mainly women or girls because of their subordinate and submissive nature and position in traditional communities and societies, and also because of traditional and cultural beliefs and values. All of these factors make women and girls very easy targets to be used as weapons of war and conflicts to gain more ground against the enemy, as stated by Roberts (1989) in *Women and Rape*.²¹

Rape is seen as and also used as a weapon of war that can be used to hurt and harm women and girls of the enemy community, meaning that their community cannot protect them and care for them and they will be used to pay the price. This is reiterated by Friedman (1992) in *Rape and Domestic Violence: The Experience of Refugee Women*.²²

²¹In the development of mankind, rape has been used as a weapon both in mass conflicts and everyday battles. For womankind, women's bodies have been used, not only to inflict pain on, but as the weapon with which to defeat and humiliate the opposing males – presumed real owners of those female bodies." (Roberts, C., 1989 'Women and rape' p.vii)

²²Rape is a military strategy used to humiliate and demoralise an opponent. Since women are a symbol of property and honour in many societies, they are not the only targets of rape. (Friedman, A.R., 1992: 67) *Rape and Domestic Violence: The Experience of Refugee Women*

These statements, and substantive evidence according to experts make rape one of the worst crimes to be committed against humanity, and this affects more women than men during war and conflict situations.²³ Most victims are subjected to inhumane acts and violence during war and conflicts that leave them psychologically and physically traumatised. The legal factors of rape are very complicated, particularly in war situations when it is very difficult to persecute perpetrators and provide a specialist team to work. The psychological effect of rape is only felt by the victim, and yet concerns all the factors and elements that make this individual live life to the fullest. Most rape victims say that their personal security has been shaken and will never be the same again. This feeling of violation of the inner self is greater in refugee rape victims because they already have compounded refugee issues because of all their experiences. Therefore, when refugees are raped, this compounds their plight even more and makes them very vulnerable and defenceless.

3.6 THE PHASES OF BECOMING A REFUGEE/REFUGEE JOURNEY

The phases and stages of becoming a refugee are very important aspects of the refugee situation. They are important because refugees, like all human beings, need to understand what happens to them and what is the impact of what happens to them. Becoming a refugee is not something that happens in just one moment. It is a long process that includes several stages. Each refugee goes through this process in a unique way. Refugees are individuals and each of them has different personal history, different needs and experiences of these different

²³. "In conflicts between different political or religious groups, sexual violence against women has been used as a means of aggression towards an entire section of the community..."(Friedman, A.R., 1992: 67)

phases and stages. Still, it is of great value to identify these stages and phases because all refugees go through variations of these.

Several researchers based the phases of becoming a refugee on the flight to safety. Crisp (2003), McSpaddan and Moussa (1993), Stell et al (1999), Malkki (1995) and Alan and Hiller (2009) cited the 3stages of becoming a refugee as:

1. Pre-flight, 2. Flight, 3. Post flight.

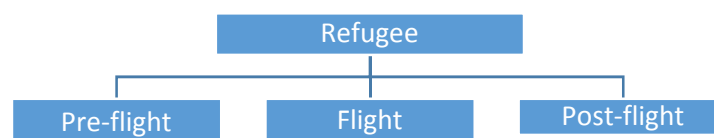


Diagram 1: The 3 different stages of their flight to safety.

- Pre flight: This is the stage before the uprooting of refugees from their communities.
- The flight: This is the stage when the refugees are actually forced to make a hasty decision to move because of the oncoming danger. Most decisions to leave are made in panic, fear and also in a confused state of mind. This is highlighted by Alcock (2008): People who have fled from home and from the trauma of war face a double challenge, external and internal. (Alcock;2008: 10)
- Post flight: The arrival after the journey to safety, when the refugees are forced to make certain adjustments to their lives. This is also the resettlement period.

According to Harrell-Bond (2002)

The post-flight refugee experience typically includes a series of events and encounters with many different actors and institutions that are uniquely stressful and take place in a variety of contexts. The post-flight experience involves the prolonged suffering that refugees are put through (Harrell-Bond; 2002:53-54)

Other researchers, including Keller (1975), Stein (1986), Walker et al (2004) devised different ways of understanding these phases. Papadopoulos (2006) divided the process of becoming a refugee into 4 phases. The four phases have taken into account more important factors and details than the 3 stages.

Papadopoulos (2006) named the four phases of becoming a refugee Anticipation, Devastating Events, Survival and Adjustment, as a result of his research with refugees from different parts of the world. Papadopoulos proposed that it is more appropriate to identify 4 phases.

An examination of the 4 phases of becoming a refugee affords practical insights and understanding of some of the main issues affecting refugees as individuals

Diagram 2: 4 phases



Anticipation, Devastating Events, Survival and Adjustment

In the context of this research the 4 phase's theory will be used because it offers an appropriate framework to research and discuss the complexity of the experience of the Sierra Leonean women.

The four phases will help to analyse the in-depth personal experiences of the participants of the study. The emotional, physical and psychosocial experiences of each of the participants can be expected to be different at each phase.

The four phases will also help to map out how these participants built up their resilience despite these experiences to finally resettle in the United Kingdom and make necessary adjustments to their social and gender roles, professional skills and status and personal and cultural identities.

3.7 THE FOUR PHASES IN MORE DETAIL

Anticipation

The anticipation period for all refugees is mainly a period of disbelief and uncertainty, with the constant fear of losing their homes and communities and of leaving for the unknown.

Most refugees at this particular anticipation period do not believe that the war will get to their own communities and make the decision to stay despite the danger they face. Others fear the worst. They fear that the worst will happen to them.

According to Ager et al (1995):

Mozambican refugees decided to live in the mountains above their home village, hiding from military forces, before their ultimate decision to leave their homeland for neighbouring Malawi (Ager et al., 1995).

At this particular point most people feel disorientated, disturbed by all the rumours and threats of the war that will eventually come to their doorsteps. They find it difficult to comprehend the situation.

During this period most people are unable to make any clear decisions, including whether or not to leave their home, their region, their community for safety elsewhere. It is very difficult to think rationally and most of the time the decisions made during this period are all based on strong emotions: fear and disbelief, or hope and expectation. During the anticipation period,

most refugees are living in fear of the pending move and uprooting of their families and the community that they live in.

At this particular time people also fear for their personal possessions and community structures that will be destroyed or taken away from them. They also lose their personal confidence and their faith in themselves.

Loughry&Ager (2001) also highlighted some of the mental, physical and emotional pain that refugees experience during this phases of their refugee experiences.

Devastating events

The devastating events period is the stage when refugees experience or witness physical and personal attacks committed against them or family members and loved ones and these can include rape, and physical and mental abuse. Refugees as individuals have their own needs and their experiences are all different as men and women but during this phase all of them experience the impact of violence and unsafety. This is the phase when raw violence takes place, when refugees, their families, their properties, their belongings, their communities, their places of worship are attacked, damaged and possibly destroyed completely.

As a direct result of these experiences most refugees develop complex emotions involving the witnessing of family members being attacked or seeing family members forced into committing violent and devastating attacks against others as commanded by the rebels. There may be total disintegration of the family and the loss of the family unit as it used to be.

Survival

This phase is when refugees are mainly safe from actual attacks and acts of violence and usually they are taken (or they reached) a place of safety, guarded by international organisations such as temporary refugee camps, etc. For most refugees this phase is long and with difficulties of its own nature. Papadopoulos states that this phase may not include dangers of being attacked and violated but refugees can experience other forms of dangers from protracted waiting, uncertainty and frustration.

Most refugees during this time have no identity and belongings and are aware that they live in a temporary place and are still in constant fear of possible physical attacks if they were to leave these places of sanctuary. According to Forbes (1992):

They face the rigors of long journeys into exile, official harassment for indifference, and frequent sexual abuse even after reaching an apparent place of safety. (Forbes; 1992: vii)

This highlights the fact that women live in fear even in an apparent place of safety during the survival period. Some women are raped when finding firewood to cook for their families and most of these women would rather not report a case of such nature because they have other more important issues to address. This means that women neglect themselves and put their families first and although this certainly compounds their psychological pain and suffering, they must learn to cope with all of this. Forbes (1992) cited this fact:

Women must cope with threats while being mum, teacher, breadwinner, and physical protector of their families. (Forbes; 1992: vii)

This is a period when refugees may experience hunger, poverty, personal illness and suffering. They are made to live on handouts from others to survive because of their personal circumstances. This may be in stark contrast to their lives before the war. As stated by Geiger (2009):

"Before they became refugees, however, they had experienced lives in which there was peace, stability, enough food to eat today and tomorrow, a place in society and a future for themselves and their children" (Geiger,44:68)

For most refugees this is an unsettling period of uncertainty, confusion and fear as they make the journey to safety, still in shock and disbelief at their new status and the circumstances

they find themselves in. This phase is also the time when most refugees face the enormity of their experiences and sufferings.

Adjustment

The adjustment period for most refugees is considered to be the period when they are out of physical danger and fear; they are living in a new environment in their host community and then start the resettlement phase. During this period they have to learn how to accept the pain and suffering and also the relief that they have been fortunate to make the journey to safety. They have to make the effort to settle into their new environment with members of their family and loved ones that might have survived the journey with them.

Despite the fact that they have been privileged to survive the journey, the adjustment period for most refugees are also a grieving and bereavement period and also a phase of disbelief and dislocation. These refugees have to find strategies and coping mechanism to deal with their personal lived experiences and come to terms with their multiple losses; including the loss of their personal identity, culture, community networks, structures and social roles that made them a part of their communities.

According to the American journal of sociology (1977):

Reflection on social sources of such loss leads to recognition of the unique particularistic relationships constitutive of the family as a source both of identity bestowal and identity loss. The archival function, the retention and display of symbols of highly personal identities, furthers the family's potential as a reactive and proactive source of identity loss.

The adjustment period is a time when most refugees start to experience personal inner pain that had been kept inside, feelings of guilt about their personal loss of loved ones and the communities that they have left behind and will sometimes never see again. As stated by Alcock (2008)

The experience of trauma can result in a fragmentation of the ego and a rupture in the continuity of being. People who have fled from home and from the trauma of war face a double challenge, external and internal. (Alcock, 2008: 10)

It is also a time when refugees are forced to start to adjust to the host community, accept the new culture, structures and environment that they are going to be living in and also try to regain some purpose and meaning in their lives and work towards a positive future.

At this stage most refugees will start to accept that they have lost their professional and socio-economic status and these factors lead to loss of confidence, with refugees developing low

self esteem and becoming disorientated. Most refugees during this phase have to gain new professional qualifications to gain employment.

Most refugees during the adjustment period will also need to deal with barriers that hinder their settlement into their host communities. These barriers may be understanding and learning the new language, the new culture and also the new structure of their host community. They can also include some of the critical issues of being a refugee, the survivor guilt, the pain and grief of loss, personal traumatic experience, personal and cultural bereavement. Most refugees are left feeling not understood because of the circumstances they find themselves in but as cited by Chrostowsky (2009):

Upon resettlement in receiving countries, refugees face many challenges and experience enormous stress (Chrostowsky, 2009: 45)

With hostility from some members of their new communities, some refugees develop mental illness and other illness related to the stressful personal and community loss they have suffered

3.8 THE COMPLEXITY OF BEING A REFUGEE

Whilst the experience of refugees can be analysed in terms of the four stages, the reality is more complex. The actual experience of each individual will be influenced by various factors. These may include personal identity, professional status, gender role and social background

Personal identity: The personal characteristics and traits that gives the refugee their identity as an individual, with their own personality and ambitions.

Professional status: Includes the technical and personal skills, acquired through education and training, personal talents and potential. All of these factors help them to secure a better social and economic status and life for themselves and their families towards a better future.

Gender roles and social background and status: Gender roles and social backgrounds of the refugees are very important factors when analysing the complexity of the refugee experiences. These factors are all inclusive of the bigger picture of the general, social life, professional way of life of the particular groups according to their gender roles within their families and communities. These will include the special social roles these groups play in the community according to the cultural norms and structures of the communities that they live in. These are all part of the bigger picture of the social way of life of the group, family and community to which the refugee belongs, according to cultural norms.

3.9 TRAUMA, RESILIENCE AND ADVERSITY-ACTIVATED DEVELOPMENT (AAD)

TRAUMA: According to the oxford English dictionary, trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. The Cambridge dictionary defines **TRAUMA** as severe emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience.

Trauma can also be defined as an emotional, physical or psychological painful experience suffered or witnessed. This can lead to stress, anxiety, personal, mental and physical suffering.

RESILIENCE: According to the oxford English dictionary is the ability of a substance or object to spring back to shape. The Cambridge dictionary defines **RESILIENCE** as able to quickly return to a previous good condition. **Resilience** can also be defined as the personal kept inner self- will and strength despite negativity and limitations. Resilience can also be defined as caring and coping attitude, staying and remaining positive despite negative circumstances and experiences.

Adversity Activated Development (AAD) is the positive aspect derived from traumatic experiences. AAD can also be defined as personal and inner development after adversity and negative experiences.

The trauma grid

The Trauma/Adversity Grid was devised by Papadopoulos (2004, 2007) to systematize the various responses people have when they face adversity, e.g. becoming refugees or developing a psychological trauma.

The Grid includes three types of negative responses according to the degree of severity, retained positive strengths (resilience) and new strengths that were acquired from the exposure to adversity, AAD. The three types of negative responses include Psychiatric Disorder (the most severe), Distressful Psychological Reactions, and Ordinary Human Suffering (the least severe). Then the Grid, addresses not only Individuals but also Family, Community, and Society/Culture. This means that the three groups of responses are seen from each one of these perspectives.

According to Papadopoulos (2006)

The Grid helps to remind us that there are at least three major categories of responses to a traumatic experience and not just a pathological trauma in an isolated form. These are marked in the three main columns; and horizontally there are the four different levels, those of individual, family, community and society/culture, so that we can see the total range of possible and actual consequences

(Papadopoulos; 2006:6)

A large percentage of the research conducted with refugees has, for many years, focused on the personal and psychological experiences of refugees, aspects of Gender-Based Violence

(GBV) and mental health issues. All thought these aspects help to ascertain and bring to light the violence suffered by women but some of these research have fallen short of addressing how refugees can directly turn some aspects of their traumatic experiences into AAD. According to a growing number of studies, there are demands to address this shortfall so as to help address a change in ideas and attitudes on trauma as it relates to refugees.²⁴

A growing body of literature that deals with refugees and their traumatic experiences can be connected to aspects of resilience that stem from certain developments of negative refugee situations such as in the Sierra Leonean refugee context.²⁵ According to this contribution by Thorpe (2006), it is of great importance that one look at certain aspects and facts of positive psychology as they relate to trauma and the positive outcomes and the specific ways in which adversity transforms into resilience and AAD. Martha Brownfield Baird (2009) mentioned that very little is known about the positive and healthy responses to the resettlement phase of forced migration and behaviours refugee women adopt.²⁶ This reiterates that there is another side to trauma and some experts such as Martha Brownfield Baird (2009) believe that, given the right programmes, professional support, and care and understanding, refugees can turn negative health and well-being consequences – which are a direct result of their traumatic experiences – into AAD. Hence, the merits of helping them to address their present situations in a positive way and making them survivors rather than victims.

²⁴ (Siders, T., (2003) *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees*: Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 713)

²⁵In the Sierra Leone context the realisation was brought about during the rebel war, and women are now being empowered to make contribution to national development. (Thorpe, 2006:xvii)

²⁶ Martha Brownfield Baird; *Resettlement and Transition Experiences among Sudanese Refugee Women*: Doctorate Dissertation, (2009) University of Arizona Library.

Therefore one can argue that these sources of literature on the aspects of trauma and the transformation of adversity into resilience and AAD can be achieved through the exposure and a combination of personal, family, community, and cultural strengths. These are the ultimate personal skills of survival and the best way of changing bad and difficult situations, such as the rebel war in Sierra Leone. These issues that lead to positive responses by these refugee women after the Sierra Leonean conflict and their resiliencies are highlighted by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.²⁷

I strongly agree with some researchers working in the field, that it is important to examine the positive outcomes of resilience and all related issues to the understanding of human sufferings, the horrors of the vast personal human experiences that can be mainly compared with all these specifics and factors to the Resilience and AAD shown by some refugees in the face of adversity and trauma. Some of the literature on the resilience of refugees builds a practical, comprehensive and also compelling picture of the positive outcomes despite all the devastating impacts of war, including the ill effects of the loss of home, the loss of identity and the loss of community – these being some of the main aspects of becoming and being a refugee.

²⁷ The impact upon women, children and whole family was particularly severe. Despite the difficulties they faced, the women of Sierra Leone showed great resilience, and were active and resourceful in looking for ways to restore peace to their country. As civil war engulfs the country once again, women are struggling to make sense of it all." (Mano River Women Front-Line Action, 2000)

Hence one can say that resilience, which is a function of life, is also that personal inner strength, identity and character which is built on the hope and willpower of an individual or a group to cope and contain the present situation using all their unique coping resources, mechanisms and protective factors. These include one's gender, age, temperament, physical health, sense of humour, self-esteem, family and community support, personal discipline and control to address the situation with understanding that there will be a positive result at the end.²⁸

As Papadopoulos explains with respect to Adversity-Activated Development (AAD), one sees the way in which some refugees make positive use of traumatic experiences such as the distrust from their host, the hostility and discrimination that they suffer on a daily basis as they resettle, integrate and try to find a binding factor that can connect them to their host community and also develop a positive notion to succeed.

A growing number of studies on the refugee experiences have found out that most refugee communities have, over a period of time, shown resourcefulness and a unique character of hope and determination to overcome their traumatic experiences at all costs.

²⁸ ...been shaken by highly disruptive and powerful adversity, having come close to death and destructiveness they now appreciate that they have survived – this appreciation of survival does not only give them a sense of relief in connection with the past but also a new perspective on life and the opportunities that are now open to them. (Papadopoulos, 2006; 2)

RESILIENCE: In her research, Thorpe (2006) included various stages and aspects of survival strategies used by women in Sierra Leone during the war. According to her accounts on survival she remarked that women of Sierra Leone had to struggle to survive and found hitherto untapped potential in them.²⁹ This was a major step towards making adjustments for the new role that they had to play as a direct result of the facts that, as involuntary victims, they became household heads.³⁰ As a result of this, Thorpe (2006) also cited that these women developed survival skills and a sense of responsibility.³¹

In line with the contributions of Thorpe (2006), Sideris (2003) in her paper on *War, gender and cultural: Mozambican women refugees* said that suggestions that the adaptive capacities of survivors are irreparably damaged are a definite incomplete picture.³² These two analyses of the external and internal survival strategies of refugee women showed some clear connections between traumatic experiences of the women and the development of AAD.

Sideris (2003) states

²⁹ In their struggle to survive and care for their children, hitherto untapped potential in women found release.

-The fearful became fearless.

-The voiceless became vociferous

-The beneficiary became the benefactor. (Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006: 69)

³⁰ As involuntary victims women who became household heads in displaced camps emerged from these camps armed with management and livelihood skills that would advance them socially in the future... (Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006: 69)

³¹ The survival skills and sense of responsibility consequently developed during the process provided these women with basic developmental tools, a sense of independence, and the desire for social advancement on their return to their areas of origin after the war.(Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006: 69)

³² The women who are the focus of this study demonstrated a remarkable will and capacity to survive. They drew on internal and external resources to deal with what had happened to them (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 714)

“...But the cries they had to master and the survival strategies used were provided by the constraints and the possibilities of the situations to which they fled, and the socio-historical experiences of suffering and survival.”

These clear demonstrations of resourcefulness, resilience and determination to survive were remarkable and, according to Sideris (2003), their survival represented more than the difference between living and dying.³³ Sideris also added that their capacity to survive resulted in an increase in their sense of strength and resilience, and altered their sense of what it meant to be a woman.³⁴ United Nations Commission for Refugees also illustrated some of the difficulties faced by Sierra Leonean refugee and their survival strategies.³⁵

³³ (Siders, T., (2003) Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 714)

³⁴ (Siders, T., (2003) Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 719)

³⁵ Aminata Sesay, a 55-year-old Sierra Leonean refugee living in Boreah camp in Guinea, calls life in the camps “very difficult.” When she first arrived with five daughters in Guinea in 1997, she recalls, she had “no husband, no son. I had no clothes, and we carried nothing when we fled. I humbled myself, working [in a nearby town] for women younger than me. I used to work on farms every day, cutting brush and planting trees.” She shows her hands, lined and calloused from years of labor.” www.refugees.org accessed July 2009,

Another positive view of survival was cited by Jones (2001) in her interview with Zimbabwean female activists; the view is that even though women are in the frontline of the struggle for survival they still take responsibility for production.³⁶

AAD: According to different research studies, women are better at making adjustment to their lives in their new environment and host communities because of their gender roles and family commitments.³⁷ Such is their commitment to their families that women are prepared to take up roles previously reserved for men.³⁸ A good example of a positive look at the resilience of women refugees is the research conducted by Kibread, G., (1994) on Eritrean Women Refugees in Khartoum, Sudan 1970-1990. In this research paper, the author shed positive light on the survival and coping strategies of these refugee women and their situation to make necessary adjustments. These are the main forces behind women refugees using their negative experiences to develop a unique strategy to heal their personal and social wounds.³⁹

³⁶Of course women are on the frontline of this struggle for survival because, as we know, women in Zimbabwe and the world over take responsibility for the reproductive/care work of the household. In a country at war, women do the care work but they also do the normalising work. Women carry multiple burdens of what it means to survive under such circumstances. (Jones R., *The crisis in Zimbabwe: A gender perspective*: www.awid.org accessed July 2009

³⁷ Where the demands of hostile conditions force women to survive, many make up successful family units with their children, units that men may find difficult to reenter. (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 719)

³⁸ One aspect of the social disintegration wrought by recent and current conflicts in Africa is that, in their efforts for survival of self and of dependants, women take on roles previously reserved for men. (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 719)

³⁹ ...they had experienced loss of traditional roles, responsibilities and supportive networks...However, their cultural backgrounds and the institutional constraints operative in the country of asylum notwithstanding

- **The four phases of becoming a refugee in relationship with the experiences of Sierra Leonean refugee woman.**

During my search and review of available literature, I had to focus on the multidisciplinary nature of the refugee experience to get practical insights and understanding of some of the main issues affecting refugees with a special focus on trauma and resilience within the four stages of becoming a refugee.

Other experts have critically analysed these four stages from different angles and have come out with different outcomes and meanings. Thorpe (2006) takes a direct and critical look at the contributions of these stages in her research "*The rebel war years were catalytic to development in the social advancement of women in post-war Sierra Leone*" and they are also addressed in a paper by Sideris (2003) *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees*. Thorpe and Sideris have both highlighted the interconnections between trauma and resilience and the dramatic positive changes that can occur as a direct result of the changes in the gender roles of women in conflict situations.

In her research Thorpe (2006) effectively described and connected some details of each of these different stages according to the experiences of Sierra Leonean refugee women. This

exhibit remarkable openness to change and to assuming new and unfamiliar roles in an environment characterized by male violence to women's independence and self-assertion. *Journal of Refugee Studies* (1995)8 (1): 1-25.doi: 10.1093/jrs/8.1.1

was done at different parts of her research work entitled “*The rebel war years were catalytic to development in the social advancement of women in post-war Sierra Leone*”. Thorpe (2006) described the experiences of the participants in-depth according to the four stages; her work describes and connects some key aspects of the four changes in the context of resilience of the women of Sierra Leone. The outcome underpins the fact that there is a need to understand and connect these four stages. I will mirror and connect these results in my research on the resilience of Sierra Leone women living in the UK.

ANTICIPATION: Although some women got involved in the Sierra Leone conflict involuntarily, others, according to Thorpe (2006), organised themselves to render assistance as activists.⁴⁰ Even though these women were anticipating the dangers of the conflicts, some of them decided to get involved and, according to Thorpe (2006), participated in the conflict in two categories.⁴¹ Because of these aspects women had either to play a greater part and get involved and try to become survivors or a lesser part and become victims of the conflict. In the outcome of her research, we realise that most of the participants she worked with chose to get involved, and this was the turning point towards women’s development and social advancement of women in Sierra Leone.

⁴⁰ This category of females comprises the group that our study refers to as getting involuntarily involved in the conflict and ending up as the direct **Victims**. Another category of organized women that mobilized in organisations to render assistance are referred to as **Activists**.(Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006:39)

⁴¹ Women participated in the conflict in two categories: a. Women as Activists. b. Women as Victims. (Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006:39)

DEVASTATING EVENTS: The paper by Siders (2003) entitled *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees* draws on evidence from the most marginalised survivors of war – African women refugees. It also addresses the social structured relationship of the way men and women experience distress, giving a subjective understanding of the different issues.⁴² Some of the devastating events recorded by Siders (2003) include the rape of women by their children, fathers killed by their sons and the dead left unburied.⁴³ All of these, according to this research paper, contributed to the destruction of social order that undermines a coherent sense of life and meanings – in itself a traumatic experience. In the words of a woman who went through it, “the war was the end of the world”.⁴⁴ These can be applied to some of the devastating events that women in general have experienced during the conflict in many countries, including Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka.

SURVIVAL: In her research, Thorpe (2006) included various stages and aspects of survival strategies used by women in Sierra Leone during the war. According to her accounts on survival she remarked that women of Sierra Leone had to struggle to survive and found

⁴²Testimony gathered from Mozambican refugee women allows us to explore how socio-historical experiences and socially structured relations between men and women can modulate subjective expressions of distress. (Siders, T., *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees*. Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 715.)

⁴³ Those social arrangements and relationships which provide people with inner security, a sense of stability, and human dignity are broken down. For example, in Mozambique, sons killed fathers. Children raped mothers. The dead were left unburied.(Siders, T., *War, gender and culture: Mozambican women refugees*. Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 715.)

⁴⁴ (Siders, T., (2003) Social Science & Medicine 56 (2003): 715)

hitherto untapped potential in them.⁴⁵ This was a major step towards making adjustments for the new role that they had to play as a direct result of the facts that, as involuntary victims, they became household heads.⁴⁶ As a result of this, Thorpe (2006) also cited that these women developed survival skills and a sense of responsibility.⁴⁷

In line with the contributions of Thorpe (2006), Sideris (2003) in her paper on *War, gender and cultural: Mozambican women refugees* said that suggestions that the adaptive capacities of survivors are irreparably damaged are a definite incomplete picture.⁴⁸ These two analyses of the external and internal survival strategies of refugee women showed some clear connections between traumatic experiences of the women and the development of AAD.

Sideris (2003) states

⁴⁵ In their struggle to survive and care for their children, hitherto untapped potential in women found release.

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⁴⁶ As involuntary victims women who became household heads in displaced camps emerged from these camps armed with management and livelihood skills that would advance them socially in the future... (Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006: 69)

⁴⁷ The survival skills and sense of responsibility consequently developed during the process provided these women with basic developmental tools, a sense of independence, and the desire for social advancement on their return to their areas of origin after the war.(Thorpe, C.A.M., 2006: 69)

⁴⁸ The women who are the focus of this study demonstrated a remarkable will and capacity to survive. They drew on internal and external resources to deal with what had happened to them (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 714)

“...But the cries they had to master and the survival strategies used were provided by the constraints and the possibilities of the situations to which they fled, and the socio-historical experiences of suffering and survival.”

These clear demonstrations of resourcefulness, resilience and determination to survive were remarkable and, according to Sideris (2003), their survival represented more than the difference between living and dying.⁴⁹ Sideris also added that their capacity to survive resulted in an increase in their sense of strength and resilience, and altered their sense of what it meant to be a woman.⁵⁰ United Nations Commission for Refugees also illustrated some of the difficulties faced by Sierra Leonean refugee and their survival strategies.⁵¹

Another positive view of survival was cited by Jones (2001) in her interview with Zimbabwean female activists; the view is that even though women are in the frontline of the struggle for survival they still take responsibility for production.⁵²

⁴⁹ (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 714)

⁵⁰ (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 719)

⁵¹ Aminata Sesay, a 55-year-old Sierra Leonean refugee living in Boreah camp in Guinea, calls life in the camps “very difficult.” When she first arrived with five daughters in Guinea in 1997, she recalls, she had “no husband, no son. I had no clothes, and we carried nothing when we fled. I humbled myself, working [in a nearby town] for women younger than me. I used to work on farms every day, cutting brush and planting trees.” She shows her hands, lined and calloused from years of labor.” www.refugees.org accessed July 2009,

⁵² Of course women are on the frontline of this struggle for survival because, as we know, women in Zimbabwe and the world over take responsibility for the reproductive/care work of the household. In a country at war, women do the care work but they also do the normalising work. Women carry multiple

ADJUSTMENT: According to different research studies, women are better at making adjustment to their lives in their new environment and host communities because of their gender roles and family commitments.⁵³ Such is their commitment to their families that women are prepared to take up roles previously reserved for men.⁵⁴ A good example of a positive look at the resilience of women refugees is the research conducted by Kibread, G., (1994) on Eritrean Women Refugees in Khartoum, Sudan 1970-1990. In this research paper, the author shed positive light on the survival and coping strategies of these refugee women and their situation to make necessary adjustments. These are the main forces behind women refugees using their negative experiences to develop a unique strategy to heal their personal and social wounds.⁵⁵

burdens of what it means to survive under such circumstances. (Jones R., *The crisis in Zimbabwe: A gender perspective*: www.awid.org accessed July 2009

⁵³ Where the demands of hostile conditions force women to survive, many make up successful family units with their children, units that men may find difficult to reenter. (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 719)

⁵⁴ One aspect of the social disintegration wrought by recent and current conflicts in Africa is that, in their efforts for survival of self and of dependants, women take on roles previously reserved for men. (Siders, T., (2003) *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003): 719)

⁵⁵ ...they had experienced loss of traditional roles, responsibilities and supportive networks...However, their cultural backgrounds and the institutional constraints operative in the country of asylum notwithstanding exhibit remarkable openness to change and to assuming new and unfamiliar roles in an environment characterized by male violence to women's independence and self-assertion. *Journal of Refugee Studies* (1995)8 (1): 1-25.doi: 10.1093/jrs/8.1.1

These research findings have given me some psychosocial understanding of the four stages of becoming a refugee. These analyses also give me a subjective view, allowing me to connect my professional and personal work with the Sierra Leonean community and Sierra Leonean refugee women in particular to their own accounts of personal experiences as they relate to the four stages of becoming a refugee. My thesis will endeavour to critically connect these four stages according to the experiences of the research participants in the latter part of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH

3.1 OVERVIEW

In this chapter the methods used to conduct the research and analyse the data collected are outlined and discussed. The main focus of the research is on the personal accounts by Sierra Leonean refugee women of their lived experiences of the civil war in Sierra Leone and after, right up until the present time. The civil/rebel war lasted from 1991 to 2002 (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

The research examines, analyses and critically discusses the women's responses to personal and collective violence sustained and endured during and after the war. The research also examines their experiences of displacement and dislocation, whilst living in refugee camps, travelling to other countries for safety and also during the period of seeking asylum in the UK. The research also examines how Sierra Leonean refugee women coped by making the necessary adjustments to their lives as they resettled and integrated into new communities in the United Kingdom.

Research with refugees is research with human subjects that requires maximum sensitivity over and above the usual human sensitivity one has to have with other human subjects. It requires specific attention because of the challenges and issues faced by refugees and the unique nature of their experiences that might be affecting them. This has been highlighted and addressed by Temple and Moran:

The challenges we faced in securing written contributions from refugees are not purely technical concerns but also methodological ones. First, refugees' lives may be taken up with issues that many academic researchers do not have to face: deportation, the memories and effects of torture and even ongoing threats to friends and relatives. (Temple and Moran; 2006:4)

This important and vital point was given a lot of consideration during my literature search on methodologies that were used in other comparable research projects. The methodology and the methods to analyse the collected data has to be appropriate with the context of the research involving refugee subjects. Taking into consideration the value of their contributions, involvement and participation in the research that will also adequately answer the questions and understand some the difficulties that might be encountered during the research.

According to Temple and Moran

Refugees could be involved in many different ways in both small-and large-scale quantitative and qualitative research. The way they are involved depends on the aims of the research. (2006:5)

These are very important points to consider when working with refugees as participants in sensitive research studies. Appropriate methodology needs to be used in order to yield the best possible results that fit in with the aims of the research.

3.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The main aim of this research is to investigate the contributing factors to the development of positive responses to the adversity endured by Sierra Leonean refugee women.

This research is based on a theoretical framework that emphasises the importance of identifying the uniqueness of the refugee experience in terms of the different stages and phases of their journey and endurance. The argument that Papadopoulos (2000b; 2001a) developed is that each phase represents a distinct set of conditions that refugees experience completely different realities. Accordingly, this research was planned to examine how the Sierra Leonean refugee women experienced their circumstances and themselves in each one of these phases. This research attempts to enable the refugee women, the research participants, to identify their experiences and feelings that were predominant for each one of these four phases. The value of this is to enable them to differentiate the overall impact of the experienced adversity and thus address each effect in a more appropriate way.

Overall, the emphasis of this investigation is on the personal lived experiences of these refugee women. The investigation is a combination of how the wider collective events and circumstances are shaped and experienced through the mediation of the meaning that is

attributed by the societal discourses, by the way groups and communities within each society understand what has happened.

This experience involves the socio-political perspectives that are predominant at the time, the political ideologies, the religious and spiritual practices, the community bonds, the gender issues, the power parameters, the social roles and all the various other social factors and dimensions that contribute to the way individuals experience and make sense of their own predicament.

The study also endeavors to discover through the research what the factors of resilience for these six refugee women are from their own personal account and point of view. Another important point is also to try and understand the effects of some of these factors on these women, members of their families and their communities.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two main types of research methods used by most researchers when conducting social science research, these are Qualitative and Quantitative research methods.

According to Amaratunga et al (2002).

The former concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. In contrast, the quantitative approach grows out

of a strong academic tradition that places considerable trust in numbers that represent opinions or concepts (Amaratunga et al; 2002:19)

According to Horna (1994), 'Quantitative research method is based on numbers, representing opinions or concepts' (Horna; 1994:67)

In addition to these two research methods another research method has been developed by using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods; this method is called mixed method.

The research methods

1. Qualitative method:

The qualitative research method focuses on the quality of the data rather their quantity. This method does not require large numbers of participants. Instead, it focuses on smaller numbers but endeavours to gain deeper understanding of what the data provide. Therefore, this method enables the researcher to gain deeper insights into individuals rather than establishing general trends in wider populations. According to Amaratunga et al.

Qualitative data is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve

chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. (Amaratunga et al; 2002: 45)

2. Quantitative method:

The Quantitative research method involves the collection of a large amount of data, all collected in the same way, which are then analysed to produce generalisations. The nature of data produced is amenable to numerical classification, e.g. how many times a certain characteristic appears.

Therefore, this method is suitable for establishing wider conclusions and trends in larger populations, effectively this method is

‘Characterised by the assumption that human behaviour can be explained by what may be termed "social facts" which can be investigated by methodologies that utilise "the deductive logic of the natural sciences"' (Horna; 1994: 87)

3. Combined method or Mixed research method:

These two main research methods can be combined and used together as one method.

This is used in studies where the researchers intends to find both general trends as well as focus on some aspects of the research in greater depth. As Bryman observes

There can be little doubt that research that involves the integration of quantitative and qualitative research has become increasingly common in recent years. (Bryman; 2006: 97)

In addition to its popularity, the mixed research method can combine several advantages:

Generally speaking, [it is] an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research) (Johnson et al; 2007: 9)

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

There are different strengths and weaknesses of each one of these research methods.

- The Qualitative research method provides the researcher with a wealth of material that lends itself to a wide variety of analyses in order to obtain detailed and in depth understanding of the phenomena studied.

The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers. (Maxwell; 1992:17)

The inductive method enables the researcher to examine data in a 'bottom up' way, i.e. starting from in-depth (a) observations that can lead to (b) identification of patterns that can then lead to (c) developing tentative hypotheses that can then (d) culminate in formulating theories.

According to Polkinghorne

Qualitative data are gathered primarily in the form of spoken or written language rather than in the form of numbers. Possible data sources are interviews with participants, observations, documents, and artefacts.

(Polkinghorne; 2005:45)

It is only through this research method that it is possible to get a clearer and deeper grasp of the uniqueness of each individual experience and existence. General trends do not provide this.

In terms of weaknesses for this method, the obvious ones are the following:

It is difficult to develop generalisations and make statements about wider trends of a phenomenon by focusing only on a limited number of subjects. Richards and Richards (1994) also mention another limitation that the qualitative research, may neglect the social and cultural construction of the variables studied.

- **Quantitative research method**

This method follows a deductive, 'top-down' approach according to which the researcher starts (a) with a given theory the validity of which is taken for granted and then (b) develops hypotheses that flow out of this theory; then, (c) uses observation in order to find out how these hypotheses feature through the data gathered and then, finally (d) the testing of the hypotheses takes place in order to confirm them or not. An important strength about quantitative research method according to Easterby-Smith (1991) is that it helps to search for causal explanations and fundamental laws, and generally reduces the whole to the simplest possible elements in order to facilitate analysis (Easterby-Smith; 1991:8)

Quantitative research method tend to be more valid, reliable and more objective (Amaratunga et al, 2002).The reliability and validity may be determined more objectively than qualitative techniques.

According to Duffy (1986) the quantitative research enables the investigator to maintain a detached, objective view in order to understand the facts.

The negative side of this research method is the fact that it does not allow the researcher to gain access to deeper and more personal types of data. The nuances of individual experiences cannot be picked up using a quantitative method. Also, there are some dangers in accepting existing theories without questioning their applicability in the context of the give research situation.

- **Mixed research method:**

One of the most important facts about the mixed research method is that more than one approach and method can be used to design the research, collect and analyse the data.

Johnson et al (2007) clarifies that

Mixed methods research involves the use of more than one approach to or method of design, data collection or data analysis within a single program of study, with integration of the different approaches or methods occurring during the program of study, and not just at its concluding point (Johnson et al; 2007: 10)

Another strength of the mixed method approach is that when the qualitative and quantitative methods are used together the combination provides a more complete and more comprehensive approach in a research study.

This method combines the best of both worlds. It uses both inductive and deductive methods and as such it can provide a more complete perspective to the researched phenomena.

‘Mixed methods- the combination of the two provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone’. (Creswell; 2009:14)

The weaknesses of the mixed method is that not all phenomena are amenable to being studied with this method and such a combined approach can create confusion both in terms of the theory used and the analysis of data.

Comparison of the three Research Methodologies

	<u>Qualitative</u>	<u>Quantitative</u>	<u>Mixed</u>
	Usually following Inductive method; Small samples	Usually following Deductive method; Large samples	Usually following both Inductive and deductive
<u>Types of accessing data</u>	Personal interviews, focus groups	Standardised questionnaires	
<u>Type of data</u>	Words, individual narratives	Data that can be quantified , e.g. responses to questionnaires	
<u>Type of analysis</u>	Narrative, hermeneutic, focusing on deeper meaning of experience	Statistical	

<u>Function</u>	To describe, explore, interpret; to build a theory	To explain, predict, confirm, validate; to test a theory	
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The methodology of the present research

The method of this research study is qualitative rather than quantitative or combined method with detailed attention paid to the method of analysing the collected data, from the interviews with participants, focus groups meetings and questionnaires that will be based on their lived human experiences.

The main reason for choosing a qualitative research methodology is to focus on the detailed human lived experiences of a small number of participants and not, in any way, try to establish general principles. This will be aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people’s lives (Bryman; 2006). Polkinghorne (2005) also stated that qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience, hence the reason why this research is aimed at understanding the lived human experiences of six Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the UK.

Another important reason for choosing a qualitative method of research for this study is to help build sufficient flexibility within the research study, in order to capture the innermost

personal experiences of the participants in a comprehensive manner guided by the questionnaire and interviews. The emphasis is on the details of each individual experience and the unique personal circumstances of these Sierra Leonean refugee women within the different phases and stages of their refugee experiences.

For participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences. (Maxwell; 1992:17)

The use of a qualitative approach to conduct this research not only helps these Sierra Leonean refugee women to narrate the details of their stories from their own viewpoint, but it provides the descriptive details that will put into place the qualitative results into their human context. Hence by narrating their stories and experiences the participants also feel empowered to overcome their difficulties and lingering issues of violence that they encountered that are yet to be resolved. The qualitative method also helps to explore in a more concise way the experiences of these refugee women that also include some narratives of their life histories using in-depth one to one interviews.

This research is conducted using qualitative research method but emphasis is also given to the cultural framework, focusing on the use of traditional and cultural values and practices, coping mechanisms and capacities, integration and participation in their new communities, emotional and therapeutic care of victims of war from Sierra Leone. The research addresses

the wider psychosocial dimensions of their experience and this is self-reported by them as subjects of the research. This aspect of a qualitative research is mentioned by Polkinghorne:

Thus, the data gathered for study of experience need to consist of first-person or self-reports of participants' own experiences. (Polkinghorne; 2005:138)

Another important point about using qualitative method for this research is that this method of research helps to access the core meaning and understanding of the lived experiences of these six Sierra Leonean refugee women, as opposed to using the quantitative research method which does not allow access to their lived experiences. This fact has been noted by Sale et al. (2002):

....evidence of this is reflected by the notion that quantitative methods cannot access some of the phenomena, such as lived experiences. (Sale et al.; 2002:44)

Accessing the phenomena of the lived experiences of these Sierra Leonean refugee women is one of the important points of the research that is being investigated.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The major data collection activity of my research is based on semi-structured in-depth one to one interviews. The study was conducted within the Sierra Leonean community and six

Sierra Leonean refugee women with refugee status living in the United Kingdom willingly gave their time to help with the study.

This research involves questionnaires, in-depth interviews (semi-structured), focus group interviews and also participants' observation of six Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the UK who have lived through the Sierra Leone civil/rebel war. Saleet al. (2002) stated that:

The emphasis of qualitative research is on process and meanings. Techniques used in qualitative studies include in-depth and focus group interviews and participant observation. (Sale et al; 2002: 45)

One of the main aims of the study is to discover through the research what the factors of their resiliencies are and also to try and understand the effects of these factors on these women, members of their families and their communities.

The subjects will each complete a questionnaire and they will also be interviewed about their inner feelings and own personal experiences. As stated by Polkinghorne (2005)

People have access to much of their own experiences, but their experiences are not directly available to public view. (Polkinghorne; 2005:138)

Different types of Interviews

Basically, there are three types of interviews:

- (a) Structured,
- (b) Unstructured, and
- (c) Semi-structured.

The structured interview uses lists of pre-established questions that are asked in the same order and in a strict standardised protocol without any variations when they are used. Surveys are most suited to use standardised interviews because they want to ensure objectivity that each participant is asked exactly the same questions as the others.

The unstructured interview follows no pre-established pattern and it is driven entirely by the interviewee. This means that the interviewer feels totally free to change and adapt the questions according to the specificities of the interviewee. Examples where this method of interview is used is in general oral histories where the aim is to follow whatever the interviewee introduces and only ask questions in order to clarify what the interviewee says and to expand what the interviewee introduces. All this means that the interviewer does not have any actual research question in mind except from listening to the interviewee's story.

The semi-structured interview is a combination of the two above. The interviewer has a framework of what she wants to investigate but also wants to allow the interviewee to express

herself. This means that the interviewer has a general list of very basic areas that she wishes to address during the interview but, depending on how each interviewee responds, the interviewer formulates questions to enable the interviewee to express herself in the best possible way but not at random but along the lines of the interviewer's pre-established framework.

This type of interview is best suited for case studies and this is the reason that it was chosen for this specific research project.

- **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

There are several key methods of collecting data for a research study; these include participants' observations, focus groups, in-depth interviews and questionnaires. This research study uses questionnaires and interviews. The main reason for using these two methods of data collection for this research study is to focus on the personal human experiences and also the points of view of the participants of the study. As cited by Orb et al (2001)

To describe a phenomenon from the participants' points of view through interviews and observations. (Orb et al: 2001; 94)

3.6 SELECTION PROCEDURE

CRITERIA OF SELECTION:

Choosing participants for the research study is based on specific criteria and not random, because of the sensitive nature of the research study; that will try to draw upon their attitudes, beliefs, feelings and personal experiences before and after the civil war in Sierra Leone. All of the six participants selected for the research are Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the UK with legal refugee status according to the United Nations conventions and also that of the UK laws and policies on refugees.

The selection process critically looked at the ethical issues, sensitive nature and social aspects and factors that might affect their participation in the research. Some of these issues are the willingness to participate, the length of time involved, the legal status of each participant at the time of the selection process and participation.

In order to produce a credible and worthy research study that will yield results the decision was taken to work with Sierra Leonean refugee women who had gained legal status as refugees, and who are willing to participate in and contribute to the overall outcome of the study.

I first made contact with participants for the research through my community work and their respective members' network and community groups, participants were given letters explaining the purpose of the research and also asking them to participate in the research study (See Appendix). This letter was to give more clarity to the participants, assisting them to understand the broader context of the research, the task at hand and any questions that will reflect their personal views, understanding and the importance of their contributions towards the research study getting their personal experiences without any bias or intuition on their feelings.

The participants are Sierra Leonean refugee women from different regions of the country, with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different levels of social status, varying levels of educational and professional backgrounds and age groups. This approach is used to get a varied balance to the research study, in order to get a fairer representation for demographic balance and composition. It was also very important to draw a practical and good insight from the experiences of women from different regions since the war affected all areas of the country.

The participants chosen are a sample of the cross section of the female population who experienced the civil/rebel war and this was done to be able to apply the findings to the female population as representatives of this group of the population. As stated by Polkinghorne

Those chosen are a sample of a population and the purpose of their selection is to enable findings to be applied to a population. Sampling implies that the people selected are representative of a population (Polkinghorne; 2005:139)

Most of the participants had lived with others from different area of Sierra Leone and had used their special coping mechanisms to help them adapt to a new way of life. The participants of this study were taken from a cross section of Sierra Leonean refugee women living in different regions of the United Kingdom.

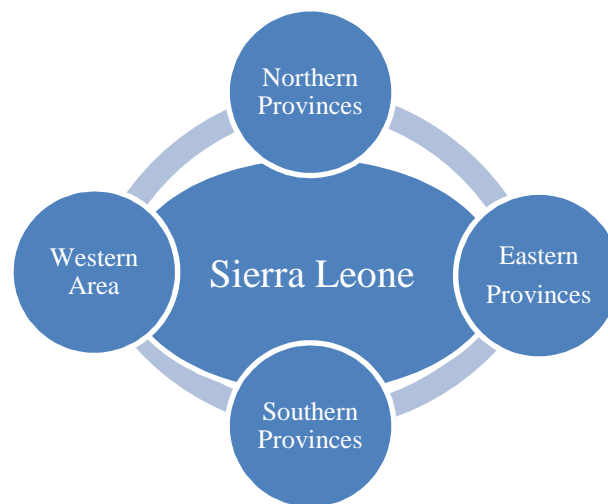


Fig 1: The demographic graph of the regions of Sierra Leone where participants lived and worked in Sierra Leone.

This meant that each of these participants had different experiences and views of living in different regions of Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom, the Asylum process, gaining refugee status, resettlement and integration in different communities in the UK. Special

focus on their experiences of integration and resettlement in their new environment and regions also played an important role. The binding factor is that all of them at some point suffered the traumatic effects of the civil/rebel war personally, physically, psychologically and emotionally.

- **Participants of the study:**

Participant A.M.

A.M. was born in Makeni and grew up in several towns around Makeni town. She is a Temne by tribe and most members of her family are from the Northern region of Sierra Leone. She is age 50-55 and married with four children. She is a Christian and a baptised Catholic and brought up in the Catholic faith with Muslim background and heritage. She is a teacher by profession. Participant A.M now lives in Reading with her family.

Participant T.G.

TG. is a Kono by tribe and come from the Kono district of Sierra Leone. She is a Jehovah's Witness by religion and lived with her family in Kono district all the time she was in Sierra Leone. Participant T.G. is 40-45 years old and married with three children. She is a community nurse by profession and has been a nurse for more than twenty years. Participant T.G. now lives in Coventry with her family.

Participant I.S.

I.S. is a Muslim by religion with very strong belief and faith in her religion. Participant I.S. is 30-35 and is married with two children. She is a Mende by tribe and was born and grew up in Tinkoko Town, Bo town the second city of Sierra Leone. Participant I.S. is a business woman. Participant I.S. now lives in Essex with her family.

Participant J.T.

J.T is a baptised Christian and a member of the Methodist congregation with strong religious faith and beliefs. J.T. is age 25-35, single and has lived with her family in the east of Freetown all her life. J.T. is an accountant and a professional banker. Participant J.T now lives in Kent with her son.

Participant E.U:

E.U is a baptised Christian and a minister of religion. She is aged 60-65 years and married with five children. She was born in Freetown the capital city of Sierra Leone, in the Western area of the country and has lived all her life in Freetown. EU is a teacher by profession and a local community leader and preacher. Participant E.U. now lives in Northampton with her family.

Participant T.P:

T.P. is a baptised and confirmed Christian of the Anglican faith. She was born in Panguma a town in Kenema District, southeast region of Sierra Leone. T.P. is a nurse by profession and

has been a nurse for over twenty years. She is aged 50-55 and married with two children.

Participant T.P. now lives in London with her children.

3.7 INTERVIEWS

- **RESEARCH INTERVIEWS:**

The interviews were conducted within a fairly open framework which allowed the participants and the researcher to be focused, providing greater scope for discussions, probing and prompting, exploring different facets of the issues of the research study. Neutrality and objectivity was maintained throughout the interviews.

I personally decided to employ the use of this researching technique because of a previous research study that I had conducted which was investigating the post-conflict experiences of Sierra Leonean Refugee women and girls within psycho-social, personal experiences and attitudes towards traumatic experiences. This research work gave the participants the chance to narrate and put into perspectives their inner-most feelings and experiences of how their personal traumatic experiences were affecting their health, well-being, integration and resettlement into the United Kingdom. By using the narrative, which was conducted in English and Krio, the *Lingua Franca*, this is a mixture of Portuguese, French, English and some of the different tribal and local languages and dialects, the participants were able to express themselves and their innermost feelings in depth.

- **Interview guide:**

An interview guide was developed and put together with focus and attention paid to the research question with every detail covered. The ethical code of the university and the administration of the interview according to the specific type of research work to be conducted were followed according to the rules and regulations of conducting such a research study. All the participants were all asked the same questions during the interviews to get a balance. The set up and conduction of the interviews was done with flexibility and also with the personal needs and feelings of the participants as the main focus.

An effective interviewing technique was used to be able to get as much from the participants as possible; a starting point was to ask some simple questions related to the topic of the day. Some notes were taken during the interviews for reference purposes and further clarity but other details were recorded only as bullet points and simple notes. The details were filled in after the interviews and this was done to avoid intensive note taking and distractions during the interviews.

These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, on an in-depth and one-to-one basis in an informal setting. All questions were structured and based according to the ethical code authorised by the Ethical committee of the university. The main components and themes used for the interviews and questionnaires was to allow participants perspectives of past and

future events, also to allow participants to reflect on their internal thought process and emotional responses to events and important milestone or turning points in their lives.

This method enabled the participants to describe and narrate their experiences and personal feelings in the most appropriate way and manner. Some of the participants were also given the opportunity to review their narratives from the recorded interviews to respond and make any amendments according to their personal experiences.

- **IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:**

The main reason to use in-depth interviews of the semi-structured kind, as a method of collecting data for the research study is to be able to get as much more detailed information from the participants about their views and their personal experiences as it relates to the research questions. As cited by Boyce and Neale (2006)

The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods. (Boyce and Neale: 2006; 4)

Another reason for choosing in-depth interviews was because of the intensive nature of the study, and the fact that only a small number of participants were chosen (6 participants). Both

the researcher and the participants worked closely together and their different roles were clearly defined. The participants were able to get the good view of the research questions and then gave detailed accounts of their experiences in relationship to their views opinions and personal experiences endured during the civil/rebel war in Sierra Leone.

This was cited by Boyce and Neale (2006)

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involve involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspective on a particular idea, program or situation. (Boyce and Neale: 2006; 3)

All interviews were scheduled over several visits and these visits allowed trust to be built and clarifications to be made about the aims, objectives and purpose of the research study. An informal interview schedule and approach was used to prevent the possibility of the participants feeling obligated to tailor their responses to any perceived expectations about the research.

3.8 QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaire was another method of collecting the data for this research study because the questionnaire was a written document with good point of reference and records. Some of the details that might not have been covered and recorded during the interviews were recorded in detail using the questionnaires and this was a detailed reference for the research study.

The other reason for using questionnaires is for participants to maintain a follow up of their ideas and their experiences in a way that will help them to recall some of the key important points which had been omitted during the interviews.

- **The draft questionnaire:** see app.

The draft questionnaire was designed with the main research question in mind. Most importantly I was able to design the questionnaire with some important knowledge and skills which I had gained and acquired from my own community work with different refugee communities and groups and more so with refugee women from Sierra Leone.

During my community work I was able to interact with refugees, and specifically with Sierra Leonean women, I learned how to develop and build a positive relationship of trust and mutual respect. This helped me to develop skills as a researcher. These skills and knowledge gained helped me to be on an equal footing with them, with their role being as important as

mine as a researcher. This was an important aspect of the data collection and it gave me a good insight into some of the roles and status of these women.

Some of the knowledge gained was about the importance of their different roles and status in their communities, the type of work they were committed to, their educational and professional backgrounds and personal skills and abilities. This was all done with my knowledge of what jobs command respect in Sierra Leone, and the range of roles women may assume in the community, I was able to structure these questions accordingly in the draft questionnaire.

Some of the skills gained were the development of researching skills which helped me to work with refugee women with a better understanding and views of their personal and social status and ability. These skills gained were used to build and develop mutual trust and respect for each other, confidence to work together and map out the different and important roles that both the researcher and the participants had to play during the research. The knowledge and skills gained were of significant value to the research work.

Ethical issues

Ethical issues in any research are very important and considered also one of the key factors of a research structure when dealing with participants of any research study. The ethical issues should be addressed and implemented according to the Ethics committee, with attention paid

to the recommendations, structure and principles as specified by the committee. One of the important principles of the ethical issues of any research study is the rights, protection and most importantly the privacy of every participant involved in the research study. As stated by Orb et al

The protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative.
(Orb et al: 2001; 93)

Working with participants as subjects in most social science research can be challenging because of the nature of the research study, this can be made less challenging and reduced with clear guide lines and procedures that are in place. These are implemented to help address any crucial issues or problems that might come up or arise during the data collection. As cited by Orb et al

Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles. (Orb et al: 2001; 93)

Another important point to focus on in relationship with ethical issues is the importance of confidentiality and safe guarding personal disclosure and feeling; the informed consent of the participants. The professional role and skills of the researcher as required by the research procedures is another key factor, the researcher should have appropriate professional skills

and ability to be in the position to address and deal with sensitive and unexpected issues that might occur during or after the data collection. This is cited by Orb et al (2001)

An interview is usually equated with confidentiality, informed consent, and privacy, but also by recurrence of “old wounds” and sharing of secrets.

(Orb et al: 2001; 94)

- **PILOT STUDY:** A pilot study had to be carried out before the semi-structured questionnaires were finalised. Visits were made to focus and community support groups which also included refugee organisations, during the visits informal interviews and discussions were carried out with members of the groups and organisations. These interviews and discussions began with questions asked about their general personal and social lives experiences in order to put the women at ease. Detailed information was also given about the research study in order to give the women a good understanding of the type of research being conducted.

The pilot investigations and interviews conducted before the actual research provided me with an opportunity to explore and understand some of the methods to be used for collecting and analysing the data. The responses from the pilot study gave me as a researcher a good position to explain my research to the actual participants of the research study. The pilot study assisted me to gain better understanding of the experiences of refugee women in general.

The pilot study and findings also gave me some relevant detailed information about the importance of certain aspects and perspectives of the lives of these refugee women that defines them and their identities. These being their religious beliefs, cultural and traditional values; and social support and community networks and how all of these connect with their personal aspirations and developments.

The pilot study also helped me as a researcher to critically look at the pivotal role that religious beliefs, cultural and traditional values play as factors of importance to the resilience of people in traumatic situations such as the participants of this research study.

- **FOCUS GROUP:** The pilot study included working with focus groups of women aged 25-60 years living in the UK. The focus group meetings were a rehearsal before conducting the main research study.

The main reason to work with different focus groups was to create an open discussion and a platform of change for women's empowerment, as they made personal contributions in a positive way to research of this nature.

The focus groups meetings and discussions were also created to find out from other women about their own lived personal experiences of civil conflicts. The focus group meetings were always a positive social occasion creating and developing better

communities, sisterhood and friendship, personal development and raising standards of empowerment. They also gave the women a platform and a forum for change and positive focus; sharing of ideas, developing new skills, gaining knowledge. These women were also given the chance to take up new status within the groups and make valuable contributions towards positive development and advancement of their lives and their different communities. They were being given a chance to take up new ownership of their lives, which some of them had lost as a result of the civil conflicts which had dominated their lives.

These findings were all put together and used as references; transferred to the main study.

- **Modifications to questionnaires as direct result of pilot study**

The pilot study was a key working tool that helped in critically looking at the relevance of the questions and structure of the questionnaire. The results gave me in depth ideas to modify the data collection methods of the research and also how to maximize time and information according to my research. The use of this approach gave me a better understanding of developing the final semi-structured questionnaires, after a general questionnaire was devised to gather information from different refugee women about their personal experiences.

The questionnaire was modified after the pilot interviews to incorporate relevant changes made to reflect new details according to the views and personal accounts of their participants of the pilot study. This also allowed the participants to present and give their subjective

views, personal experiences and perceptions of their in-depth feelings about the study and the most important changes they wanted made.

As a result of the pilot study, I decided that some of the questions had to be open-ended to address the main aim of the research. This was especially to extract personal narratives and also obtain as much important in-depth and relevant information pertinent to the research study as possible. This was very important because the whole study was to obtain as much information as possible from the , and was the main reason why the questionnaire was less formal and flexible, looking at all factors and aspects related to their personal experiences and their past and present situations.

An example of this is Question 5: Religious beliefs.

Question 5 on religious beliefs was added during the modification of the questionnaire as a direct result of the participants talking about their faith and religious beliefs.

As a result of the open-ended questionnaire used the participants were able to answer the questions as appropriately as possible. The format and framework of the questionnaire took into account levels of education and understanding to incorporate women from different levels, experiences, social status and ethnic backgrounds. This meant that the questions were simple and straightforward with details easy to read and understand at all levels for all the participants.

As a result of the pilot study, I also had to modify my interviewing and note-taking technique in order to get as much work done within the structure of the design of the research study.

- **Practical issues:**

Practical issues: To work with human subjects was always going to be difficult but this was more so because the participants are refugees with some other personal issues; this point was addressed by, Temple and Moran:

Identifying refugees willing to be interviewed took time and patience, especially given the necessity of recording the interviews on tape. (Temple and Moran; 2006:30)

My personal experiences when working with the participants was similar to some of the experiences as cited by Temple and Moran (2006). A lot of time was spent first of all identifying refugees willing to participate in the research, particularly when they were told that all the interviews will be tape recorded. They thought that their voices would be heard by other people who might know them and also used for other purposes other than the research study being conducted.

Some of the participants that were approached for the study thought that the research work was being conducted on behalf of the Home Office for immigration and nationality purposes. Other participants had to obtain special permission from relatives and family members before the consent letters could be signed and work could begin.

Some of the other participants were very committed to their cultural and traditional beliefs and values and felt that they should not disclose their traumatic experiences to a wider audience that will get to know about their problems. They were afraid they would be labelled as victims of different types of atrocities such as rape that were committed against them during the war. Even with the anonymity some of the participants still feared the stigma within their communities.

I was also asked by a few of the participants to pay them for their time and effort spent during the interviews. According to them they felt that I had been given money to conduct the research. This was personally very difficult for me because the letters given to them asked them for their personal contributions towards the research study. I had to explain to them that such a request if honored by me will definitely change the design of the research study and the results. I had to search for other participants who were willing to take part in the research study without been paid for their time and efforts. As a result of this the interviews took longer to complete.

- **Methods of analysis:**

Data analysis is an important part of all research methods. As cited by Hewitt-Taylor:

It is important to consider how data will be analysed at the design stage of any research, to ensure that the analysis procedures proposed are in keeping with the overall philosophy, and fall within the evaluative criteria of the study. (Hewitt-Taylor: 2001; 39)

I considered several methods of data analysis appropriate for qualitative data:

Content analysis: According to Krippendorff (1989) this seeks to analyze data within a specific context in view of the meaning someone- a group or a culture- attributes to them. Another point to make about content analysis as cited by Smith (2000) is that it is used primarily in quantitative research.

Framework analysis: According to Srivastava¹ and Thomson (2009) framework analysis is flexible during the analysis process in that it allows the user to either collect all the data and then analyze it or do data analysis during the collection process. (Srivastava¹ and Thomson: 2009; 73)

Narrative analysis: According to Feldman et al (2004) Narrative data can be gathered from many different sources. Interviews and documents both readily provide narrative data.

(Feldman et al: 2004; 148)

Constant comparison analysis: According to Hewitt-Taylor (2001) Constant comparative analysis is one method that can be used to identify broad themes and patterns, or categories that emerge from qualitative research studies.

All these methods of analysis were considered but narrative analysis method was considered the most appropriate method to use to analysis the data collected from this qualitative research study.

There are several reasons why I decided to use narrative analysis to guide me through the analysis process, one of the most important reasons was because I felt that a narrative analysis would be useful in helping the participants to interpret their personal experiences and also by using a narrative analysis as a researcher I would be able to understand these experiences according to the participants. I also wanted to collate and present the collected data in a systematic way. As cited by Hewitt-Taylor

Successful analysis and presentation of qualitative data requires a systematic and ordered approach so that complex data that emerge from a variety of sources can be collated and presented in a manageable form. (Hewitt-Taylor: 2001; 39)

Another reason for choosing narrative analysis is because of the different types of data collection methods that were used to conduct the research, based on the lived experiences of Sierra Leonean refugee women. These methods included interviews, questionnaires and discussions. (See above, Feldman et al)

The narratives and stories of these women were tapped using diverse methods because of the structures in place for such a research study. The one to one interviews and the discussions, and questionnaires recorded with the disclosure of the views, lived experiences and the innermost feelings of the participants has been one of the most important factors has been investigated in depth. These have all been an essential part of the data collection and these stories were all documented as they were told by the participants.

Another reason for choosing narrative analysis instead of content analysis, framework analysis and constant comparison/grounded theory is that the data collected is from a small group of the participants, who are willing to share their innermost feelings about their lived experiences. As cited by Webster and Mertova (2007) narrative also provides a means to investigate the individual's inner experience of human activity. This aspect will be an important part of this research and the data that has been collected.

The use of the narrative approach and method of analysing the data collected actually gave a better understanding of the innermost feelings and also the traumatic experiences of the participants; in relationship to their attitudes towards accepting the changes in their lives and their capability to adjust to new and different status, cultural and community.

This was cited by Viney and Bousfield

It is based on the assumption that people create meaning in events by telling stories about them, and that these stories can be identified in interviews. Viney and Bousfield (1991; 757).

ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS:

The narrative analysis method used for this research will attempt to map out the experiences of Sierra Leonean Refugee women in relation to the four stages of the Refugee Trauma (i.e. Anticipation, Devastating Events, Survival and Adjustment; Papadopoulos 1999) as well as to differentiate the various experiences in relation to the Trauma Grid (which differentiated between the negative, neutral and positive effects of trauma on individuals, families and communities; Papadopoulos 2002). Emphasis will be given to the differentiation between Resilience and Adversity-Activated Development.

The study collects the data in storied form, through questionnaires, group meetings and discussions and personal accounts of the personal lived experiences of these participants. These will help to not only to identify the meanings and values of the participants as individuals but it will also help to form important aspects of the overall picture. As cited by Hewitt-Taylor

In qualitative data analysis, the main focus is not on quantification of facts, but rather on identifying the meanings and values attributed by individuals in real-life situations, with idiosyncratic and personal views forming an important part of the overall picture. (Hewitt-Taylor: 2001; 41)

Vignettes from participant's questionnaires and recorded interviews will be used to map out their personal lived experiences according to the different stages of their individual journeys.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: CODES / THEMES.

1. The stages:
 - a. *Before:*
 - b. *Anticipation:*
 - c. *Devastating Events:*
 - d. *Survival:*
 - e. *Adjustment:*

- i. *During flight*
- ii. *In other countries*
- iii. *In the UK:*

2. Themes:

- a. Vignettes- questionnaires
- b. Recorded interviews.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS

5.1 OVERVIEW

In the case of Sierra Leonean women, although the war created casualties and devastation, it also created a new group of Sierra Leonean women who became international business women, peace makers, negotiators and key players in the fight for freedom, and women's rights activists working for social and gender equality at the highest levels; these new roles changed and transformed their lives forever.

This chapter presents the primary findings of the research study and analyses them. It attempts to grasp the personal attitudes, views and perceptions of the participants and their experiences of the civil/rebel war.

As I explored in my research the factors that contributed to the participants' resilience and positive adjustment to their new roles and status despite their negative experiences, some important themes seemed to be emerging and reoccurring about the participants' characteristics.

Most of the participants had fairly similar experiences, views and perceptions about the war. Most of these experiences, views and perceptions can be made intelligible once we approach them through the Trauma/Adversity Grid (Papadopoulos, 2004) as it relates to the Refugee experience.

A very important additional benefit that I was able to identify was that the participants, by engaging in the process of this research and with me, they were able to sharpen their own personal observations and were able to develop a greater depth of understanding about their own experiences and their own stories and understand better what happened to them and what contributed to their positive adjustment and thriving. This became evident in my various group discussions and one-to-one personal meetings and interviews I had throughout the duration of my research project.

During the data collection it was clearly established that some of these factors had profound effects on the lives of the participants and their families. According to participants, these factors formed the basis for their resilience and were of sustaining value to them as they tried to address some of their experiences.

According to the primary data collected, the main factor that contributed to the resilience and the development of Adversity-Activated Development (AAD) in the participants was the assumption of new roles; these new roles included those of community leaders, religious leaders, negotiators, and spies for rebel groups, rebel fighters, and commanders for small

units of fighters, as well as heads of households. These new roles also came with very important responsibilities and duties.

Most of the participants talked about their newly acquired personal skills that they were able to gain during the transforming experiences of the war and adversity. This means that in addition to their traumatic experiences of the war, these participants were also able to adopt new and key roles of responsibility that, in turn, enabled them to realise that they had abilities, skills and characteristics that they were not able to see before their exposure to the adversities of war and civil disruption and country devastation.

This is very important because the majority of studies in these situations focus exclusively on the negative effects of the war consequences and they miss these most vital implications of the war. This is a most significant observation that needs to be taken on board very seriously.

Positive outcomes for Sierra Leonean women resulted from their new roles, responsibilities and commitments but also from the new awareness that these new roles and activities enabled these women, in effect, to form a new identity and instead of seeing themselves as ineffective wives that were subordinated by society, they understand that, in fact, they have abilities and capacities far greater than they had ever considered.

These are the important aspects that created the changes pertaining to their social status and gender roles. Taking into consideration the capabilities of these women to achieve positive

goals despite the ‘injuries’ and ‘wounds’ that they sustained during the devastating events of the conflicts, it is true to say that the best way to characterise them is by using the term Adversity-Activated Development (Papadopoulos, 2007). This means that the development that they were able to achieve was a result of what they learned during their exposure to adversity.

5.2 RELIGION AND FAITH: THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND FAITH IN THE LIVES OF SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEE WOMEN

Religion and faith: According to some of the participants of the research study religion.

- **Religious leadership and guidance**
- **Constant and tangible when everything else is lost**
- **Source of comfort, relief and continuity**
- **Providing a sense of belonging, at all stages of the experience**
- **It brings people together to share experiences and support and care for each other**

5.3 THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND FAITH IN THE LIVES OF SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEE WOMEN

On the subject of religion and religious beliefs and values, there is no single definition to best describe the subject and other areas related to religion. This is an important point to take note of and to understand. Everybody defines their religion and religious beliefs and values in their own personal way of thinking, personal understanding, experiences and attitudes. These are all addressed from their own critical point of view and, most importantly, from their level of beliefs and understanding of the subject. This might depend on their personal and emotional state of mind, different situations, understanding, beliefs, and moral values.

One can therefore point out, for all of these stated reasons that it is difficult to generalise about the term religion without some kind of critical thinking and understanding of different perspectives and views.

In the context of this research, the nature and role of religion has been described by Y.S. one of the Sierra Leonean refugees in this way:

“Religion has played very important roles in my life and also in the life of my family and community. Religion brings different groups of people together to work and support. Religion and prayer support was one of my main sources of support and personal will and inner strength during the rebel/civil war. The group gave me with a sense of belonging and hope” Participant Y.S. of the research study.

According to the Sierra Leonean refugee women who participated in this research, religion was one of the most important factors that provided for them a continuous motivation and positive structure to face up to their adversities and traumatic experiences of their situation in a way that helped them to turn the negative into positive. Religion gave them inner strength and ability towards them becoming resilient.

Religion is perceived to sustain many refugees and Gozdziaik (2002) write that:

“Religion and spirituality sustain many refugees in their process of uprooting, forced migration, and integration into the host society.” (Gozdziaik, 2002:90)

This was also confirmed by the participants of this study as they asserted that their religious faith and beliefs were very important tools of their resilience and this was a source of strength for these Sierra Leonean refugee women, their families and communities. Religion had been one of the most important factors, helping them to hold on to their faith, hope and believe that they will survive their ordeals and will also be rescued. Essentially, religion played a direct role in their lives when they had nothing else to hold on to.

According to most of the participants, their religious faith and beliefs were the tangible elements within their minds that they could hold onto for support, peace of mind and inner strength. Their communities, religious and social activities had offered them a unique and special place for belonging, caring and personal reflections and understanding of all their

difficulties and experiences. According to some of the participants, this gave them an overall sense of balance and hope from their daily psychological, emotional, physical and mental difficulties. Religion created a balance for them during the most difficult periods.

According to participant A.M. of the research study:

“My religious beliefs and values will always be fortified with hope and faith in God. As a Christian I do believe in God and have faith and hope in him, I also believe that I should help others and give support where it is needed. It was my faith and hope in God that helped me and family through all the difficulties of the war, when my town was attacked, my brother killed, living in the refugee camps, begging for food and water and finally coming to a good country to settle with my family.” Participant A.M. of the research study

- **It brings people together to share experiences and support and care for each other**

Most of the participants in the research made these connections during the research study, connecting their religious beliefs and cultural and traditional beliefs and values and their community. This means that religion acted not only in terms of personal faith, belief that God will be of help to that particular individual, or that suffering had a particular meaning in the context of considering God caring for a person (i.e. that suffering can be a trial sent by God),

but also in terms of the social and community dimension that belonging to a religious group can bring about.

This means that it is important to differentiate the various different types of benefits that religion can bring for refugees who live perilously and in uncertainty.

Returning to the social dimension of religion, participant Y.S. stated that:

“Religion has played very important roles in my life and also in the life of my family and community. Religion brings different groups of people together to work and support. Religion and prayer support was one of my main sources of support and personal will and inner strength during the rebel/civil war. The group gave me with a sense of belonging and hope. “

Participant Y.S of the research study.

Most refugees find help, support and care from their local community church, religious and social groups. These religious groups often provide a lot of valuable services that most government and local authorities cannot provide.

If this is anything to go by, then looking at religious faiths, hopes and beliefs of refugees, it is right to note that these three factors have indeed played fundamental roles in their substance of emotional, physical and psychological well-being of these Sierra Leonean refugee women.

The result of this study re-affirms the importance of religion in their lives of these refugees giving them the sense of hope and continuity in their traumatic lives.

- **A constant and tangible substance when everything else is lost**

Religious faith and beliefs were very important tools of resilience for these refugee women, their families and communities. Religion had been one of the most influential factors that had given them hope and strong belief that they will survive, a constant reference point, an unshakable centre of their lives that did not change in the midst of everything changing around them.

According to most of the participants, their religious faith and beliefs were the only tangible elements within their minds that they can hold onto for personal and spiritual support, peace of mind and inner strength. Their community, religious life and social activities had offered them a place of belonging, care and understanding of all their difficulties and experiences.

According to the participants, this gave them an overall sense of balance and hope of release from their daily psychological, emotional, physical and mental difficulties. Religion created a balance for them during the most difficult periods. Most felt lucky to have been given another chance to live because others lost their fight and will to survive all the devastation.

According to participant A.M. of the research study:

My religious beliefs and values have always been based on hope and faith in God. My personal faith and Christian understanding have helped me to give support to others from other denominations. I hold deep personal Christian beliefs and faith which have influenced my cultural and traditional values and commitments to understanding, helping and supporting others from different communities and denominations. As a Christian, I believe that I should help others and by doing so, I'll also get help from God.

Participant A.M. of the research study

“After prayer meeting we all felt that something had been given to us and this feeling brought us hope and courage. We imagined the best in our hearts and minds. There was always the feeling of ‘Self-fulfilment’. Praying to God was an escape into positive imagination and inner thoughts of better days and our prayers answered when we got help during the most terrible times”

Participant B.D of the research study (2009)

Participant J.T. also stated that:

“Religion was a great source of comfort to us physically, mentally and psychologically. This was a great source of spiritual guidance, community support and links. Religion was also a great source of self-fulfilment.

Participant J.T. of the research study (2009)

Participant T.P. also stated that:

Praying together with others gave us hope and also kept most of us going and we were all making all the effort during this traumatic situation to help and support each. Prayer was the only easy thing that we could all do together. When we were praying and singing, it remained me of the Slaves, who were taken from Africa to America, who had hope and prayed together and called on God to help them in their hour of great need.

Participant T.P. of the research study

Their beliefs and the value of their religion are fully illustrated in these vignettes from some of the participants in the research study. These are positive expressions of shared beliefs, hope and courage built on their religious faith. Here is one testimony:

Many of the participants in this study acknowledged that their different religious faiths and beliefs in the different branches of the Catholic, Pentecostal, Muslim, Church of England and Methodist congregation were the main source of emotional, personal and cognitive support for them and their inner feelings during the most difficult periods of the war. According to them, religion also played a significant part in their lives during their stay in the refugee camps and during the uncertainty and the long period of waiting for their asylum applications to be processed.

Providing a sense of belonging, at all stages of the experience

These research interview vignettes clearly illustrate the important and supportive role that religion played in the lives of these refugees. The research participants were able to understand and put into perspective the connections of their religious beliefs and their finding some form of continuity to their lives in unique way. According to them, religion is one of the things that most of them can engage in; together it gives them some form of balance because to believe and hope was better than not to believe, otherwise there was no hope for them. This strong faith and hope was also highlighted by participant J.T.:

“During the war and hard times, I had hope and faith that God will find a good road for me and my family to travel on and reach the refugee camps to get some help. Because I believed that God would help me and my family.” Participant J.T. (research study)

Participant also added that:

“Everything changed overnight for all of us. I lost all hope but believed in my faith and my religion, that God would make a way for me and my family. There was something, such as an inner spirit.” Participant T.P. (research study)

These vignettes endorsed the strong faith and beliefs of these refugee women in their religion.

Religion, according to some of the participants, also helped them to gain social and community support in their new communities and a great sense of belonging as members of a particular group of people that shared all their positive and negative experiences together towards a common goal, which was trying to make sense of the war, the devastation and the big changes to their lives, their families and communities.

Some of the research participants also felt that, through religion, they were united in a very special way. Their religious values, norms, emotions and beliefs encouraged each of them to integrate in a way that helped them to become socially and physically active within their religious groups. Religion also helped them to form a bond of solidarity binding them together in a way that led to them becoming conscious about achieving a goal despite what they were going through. These women prayed together as Christians and Muslims with very similar traumatic experiences and situations, and wanted to help and support each other to overcome their difficulties.

Sierra Leone is a country where Muslims and Christians live together in peace and harmony. There are a lot of interfaith marriages with families accepting each other's religious faith and beliefs. Children born into these interfaith marriages are normally allowed to practise both religions and benefit from and gain liberal views and attitudes from both religions. According to participant Y.S. of the research study:

KRIO: *“Me nar Chris-mus becos me mama na Christian en me pap na Muslim, en a believe pan the same God en we all nar wan befor God.”*

ENGLISH: *“I’m both Christian and Muslim because my mother is a Christian and my father is a Muslim and I believe in the same God and we are all one before God.”*

Participant Y.S. of the research study.

During the war, members of both religious communities prayed together because, according to the participants, they had to live with each other in the camps and saw the need to hold on to something tangible, their hopes, faith and beliefs. Prayer for them was something that they had in their hearts and they offered each other comfort to help them to address their present situation.

According to the participants, prayers were collectively beneficial for them and this became a common ground connecting people with different faiths, values, beliefs and background together as a supportive group, prepared to share their experiences of devastation, pain and anguish with each other.

According to participant E.U. of the study, they formed prayer groups and this gave them security and determination to stop the rebels from killing their people.

“During the period of the heaviest fighting in the city of Freetown I decided that we should organise prayer meetings for different community groups. I led the prayers as

one community for God's guidance and protection. It became a practice for most members of different communities , different religious and ethnic backgrounds to form prayer groups to pray with each other and also to give each other physical, psychological and emotional support and courage to fight the rebels in their communities. As a group we all felt secured together and became determined to stop the rebels killing our people.”

Participant E.U. of the research study.

Some participants of the study also said that religion strengthened the bond between them and other members and together they were able to face up to their experiences. In their own words the participants said that religion was one of the important factors towards their resilience and helped their resettlement and development in their new communities.

According to participant E.U., they found strength by praying together:

“I must say that religion played a very important role in the lives of a lot of people during the war. I still had my faith and hope for God to bring a stop to all the brutality and devastation. There was complete hopelessness in every community and these were very difficult times for everyone. My religion and faith in God sustained me and other members of my community during the most difficult times. As a community we prayed together, supported each other and found strength to resist the rebels.”

Participant E.U. of the research study.

Essentially this illustrates that, even during these difficult periods in their lives, the refugee women talked about their prayer meetings, community and religious support groups in these different camps. These meetings were a great source of identity, personal comfort, fulfilment, guidance and inspiration to them. Even when they were subjected to incidents of extreme trauma, human rights abuses and gender-based violence, they still found time and inner strength to organise different groups to support themselves and others.

Religious beliefs and personal coping strategies helped some of the participants to strengthen their innermost personal will towards containment of some of their experiences. Their religion and faith helped them to stabilise their belief system against their innermost pain and suffering, devastation and traumatic experiences of the civil war.

Religion gave some of these women sustenance and helped them to create new possibilities for themselves and others around them in a positive way.

Participant A.M. said that:

“As a Catholic, It was my faith, religious beliefs and hope in God that helped me and family through all the difficulties of the war. I believed that it was God who protected me and my family when my town was attacked and burnt down.”

This illustrates how religion, spiritual strength and their faith are key factors helping them to realise these possibilities. Even though what they had experienced was like an illness, they still had the will to find ways to adjust and start to self-heal themselves through personal determination against all the negative side of their sufferings and experiences.

5.4 NEW ROLES STATUS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: WOMEN AS LEADERS FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE IMPACT OF WAR AND CONFLICTS CREATED NEW ROLES FOR WOMEN AND THESE NEW ROLES TRANSFORMED THEIR LIVES FOREVER.

THESE NEW ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDED

- **Counselor**
- **International business women**
- **Spiritual and religious leaders**
- **Heads of house-hold**
- **Freedom fighters**
- **Collaborators**
- **Spies**
- **Activists**
- **Interpreters**
- **Peace negotiators**
- **Community leaders**

The new leadership roles that these women assumed were negotiated by them, sometimes forcefully, because they had become aware that they had special powers to move things forward for good governance.

Participant T.G. became a counsellor as a result of her work with some international aid agencies as a nurse. According to participant T.G. she felt there was a need for counselling within her work and she was able to use her nursing skills and knowledge gained from a short course that the international aid agency gave her when she worked with them as one of the specialist nurses in the camps.

Participant Y.S. said she became an international business woman because she moved between different camps and internally displaced units in Liberia, Senegal and Ghana. She was able to buy and sell essential items that earned money for herself and her family. Participant Y.S. also said she learnt how to use different currencies in each of these countries which she had never done before the war in Sierra Leone. She stressed that the war certainly created a platform for her to improve her business skills and also enabled her to meet and do business with others, gaining international business skills and ability. These participants including Y.S. had to learn to do business internationally because of the scarcity of items in Sierra Leone. The Freetown sea port was closed because of the war and goods had to be bought from neighbouring countries including Guinea, Liberia and Senegal. Women were determined to continue their businesses and this was a time for them to make more because some people were prepared to pay any price to get basic items. These women had to find ways of travelling to business merchants in neighbouring countries to succeed and make

something out of their lives despite the danger and the high risks of the dangerous road and unsafe journeys in and out of the country.

Participant E.U. became a regional religious leader who used both her teaching and religious skills to work with other women to achieve peace for her community and the country. Participant E.U. also said her new skills and ability with the help of her religious beliefs and personal values had helped her to succeed in giving spiritual counselling and guidance to other refugees in camps in different countries including Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

New spiritual leadership roles:

According to E.U. she developed new spiritual leadership skills as a result of other refugees coming to her for spiritual guidance. E.U. also became part of the team for peace negotiation in her capacity as a religious leader.

Participant EU said that women became the agents that will change the course of the war, bringing stability to a very volatile region. Her strong religious belief, personal commitments to community and dedication to support others helped her to earn a special leadership role. E.U. was asked to join the peace campaign with other organisations and groups.

Participant J.T. became the leader of her household because of the absence of her parents and other family members. She had to look after younger siblings and other family members, making all the important decisions and finding food and safety for them. This she did for the very first time. Participant J.T. said learning to look after other family members was very important to her. Family commitment and values were some of the most important aspects of her upbringing, and she rose to the challenge of this new leadership role in determination for her family to survive and live to tell the tale and share their experiences with others.

Participant T.G. who was captured by the rebels and commanded to look after both the sick and injured rebels and captured civilians also became a freedom fighter. This was as a result of the simple fact that joining the rebels and becoming a member of the team would help her community to survive the onslaught. Participant T.G. said she had to do something about the devastation and suffering, and by joining the rebels she gained an insight into some of their planned activities and attacks. T.G. said as a result of her becoming a member of the team other women joined her for their own safety and protection and they also became freedom fighters. As a result of this some rebels groups changed dynamics and fighting tactics to incorporate the women into their teams.

According to T.G. their tactics of diplomacy and collaboration worked well and women became agents of change influencing the direction of the war at some levels. Participant T.G. also said that women in her group who became collaborators with the rebels did this because this gave them sanity, safety and security for themselves and their communities.

Participant A.M. said she spied on others and some women became special agents for government authorities working undercover in the camps. Sensitive matters and important details were disclosed to some aid agencies to alert people about imminent attacks and destruction by rebels.

Participant E.U. developed the skills of becoming a community leader, leading different communities in and around the refugee camps and other settlements and surrounding villages. This was a respectable role with huge responsibilities. **Participant E.U.** become an interpreter for the very first time using her skills as a teacher and a religious leader to be able to interpret for aid agencies who were working within the camps in different countries. Participant E.U. also became for the very first time an activist working with other women to fight for peace and to bring a peaceful end to the war.

Participant J.T also became a freedom fighter. She said she realised that she had the resources to move things forward and she decided to join the rebel groups because she said that this was a way of safeguarding herself, her family and her community. J.T. said she became a freedom fighter by choice because it way the best thing to do and this choice made her a special woman commander in charge of a small unit of young rebel fighters.

The roles for Sierra Leonean women changed dramatically for the better. There were new possibilities for them in their personal and professional lives. These in return helped to improve their social and personal status as women and they were able to secure new identities

as leaders and contributors. They experienced and commanded equal rights, self-respect and self-worth and then there was a change in attitudes within their different communities. As a direct result of this, women were then able to contribute to and participate in their different communities, and make valuable contributions towards community development and growth.

This important point is one of the many indicators that the Sierra Leone civil war was indeed a medium of change for Sierra Leonean women and their identity and status. They were given responsible and frontline positions by some of the rebels' leaders and some of these women took up the challenge.

The war brought significant changes to the personal and social roles of Sierra Leonean women. I would like to draw upon the connection between women's development, social status, empowerment and advancement during and after war in Sierra Leone, despite the negativity they experienced and the brutality they suffered.

T.G. developed skills as a specialist nurse and counsellor assisting and working alongside the international aid agency staff within the health care unit of the camps. She was caring for and supporting women and girls who have been sexually abused including raped victims and others who had been tortured. She became a nurse counsellor and worked with international aid agencies in the refugee and displacement camps.

According to T.G. while working with the other international staff she saw the need to help to counsel women who were accessing the field hospitals and clinics in the camps. When the opportunity was given to her by the aid agencies, she decided to take up the challenge and started to assist with basic counselling within a professional framework.

All of these were vital contributions made by Sierra Leonean women to the war effort and peace. These new roles equipped the Sierra Leonean women with the tools they needed to gain equality, empowerment, and the change in attitude among their communities towards them. Most of the vital roles that Sierra Leonean women played were acknowledged in the peace-keeping efforts and this underscores how women's gender roles not only changed with important responsibilities to take up during the war, but the women also made vital contributions to the war efforts, developed socio-economic strength and the ability to lead and support others.

Development of personal economic activities

Sierra Leonean women increased their economic ability by trading in essential goods and commodities because of scarcity. Women of Sierra Leone who were business women increased their skills and ability to make money during the war because of the scarcity of goods and commodities.

Participant Y.S. said she felt as though she became an international business woman as a direct result of her moving from place to place crossing different borders to find safety. She had moved from her town of Tinkoko in the southern provinces of Sierra Leone to different refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia. In each of these camps she always found something that she could sell to others to make some money because of the business skills that she had.

Participant Y.S. said she also learnt the skills of exchanging goods instead of selling because money was scarce. She learnt credit and exchange as a result of the new skills that she developed. According to YS she became an international business woman in her own right because she lived in different refugee and displacement units during the war and as a direct result of that her business skills increased because she had to work with different people during her trips.

Essentially, the status of women changed for the better, with a positive boost to their personal, professional, social status and working lives. As a result of this, society's attitudes towards them changed in a positive way. The traumatic experiences of these women, their different life situations and new social gender and community roles prepared them for these positive changes.

This empowerment and advancement of women in Sierra Leone took a new direction and women were prepared to work with others to advance Gender Equality, take up decision-making roles and work in public offices set aside for their male counterparts in the communities. This therefore led to the formation of several women's, social, political,

community and development groups all with one common aim, to promote the advancement of women and gender equality at all levels of the Sierra Leonean society, including taking part in elections and standing for political offices. The political arena had always been very difficult for women to enter because of the low level of women's education, lack of the self-confidence and personal financial resources to support their political campaigns.

5.5 FAMILY COMMITMENTS, CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL VALUES

Sierra Leonean women, like many other African women and women from other developing countries, experience Gender-Based Violence and the violation of their human rights as part of their everyday lives. These are all connected to community and social reforms, traditional and cultural beliefs, value and practices.

According to **Participant A.M.** her home was always open to others and all the members of the community came to us to help, support and advice. Participant A.M. said that she and members of her family were well known in the local community for helping, sharing and giving to others in the local community. We were able to play some important roles in the local community and we were very much a part of the community serving as advisers and community leaders to the Makeni community, various other Church and Community Services groups.

Despite the war, Sierra Leonean women still remain the caregivers, the home makers and the driving force behind the upkeep of their families and their communities. In a way, it can also be said that it is not despite the war but because of the war, they experienced new identities, found new abilities, became aware that many more resources that they had thought of before, and for all these reasons they were able to continue living and working based on their newly acquired identities, no longer as subjugated second class citizens but as persons in their own right, confident in their abilities that were proven by what they were able to achieve during the war and the years after when they were struggling to survive as uprooted refugees.

They hold, uplift and repair the broken structures of their families, communities and societies in the face of adversity, including during natural and manmade disasters, civil wars, conflicts, devastation and all the human sufferings that they experience personally. These women still keep their families and communities together at all costs and this remains to be an important aspect of their lives.

Women remain the custodians of their culture and their traditions and they bind and link their families together; despite their low social, political and economic status and value because of their gender and their traditional roles as women. Most African women play a significant role in parenting, nurturing, providing for and keeping their families together.

Some of the participants said that their commitment to their families was important to them and, therefore, family commitment and their roles as mothers and wives in their traditional communities. According to some of the research participants, despite the violence, tension,

social, personal, psychological and emotional disruption to their lives, they were prepared to do all they could to keep their families together, including their cultural heritage and the community mechanism and support systems.

Vignette

“I was able to develop some personal skills to survive and to make quick positive decisions. I had to lead other women to help me bury some of the dead in my town. This was a duty performed only by the men in our community but I had to do something to help and support grieving families. Although this was a very difficult decision for me to take, I was determined to remain focused and help my community. My decision to carry out funerals in my community helped me to become strong physically and mentally and I was able to remain focused. This new role, gave me a strong sense of personal commitment to my community. I was able to address some of my own personal loss and inner pain which I was experiencing.” Participant Y.S. of the research study.

This illustrates that these Sierra Leonean refugee women y remained committed to their families and their communities and continued their roles and to keep the family unit together despite the fact that their lives had been completely destroyed by the senseless war that destroyed their homes, their communities and everything that they had.

For the first time some of the participants realised that they had to move beyond the experiences of devastation and relate to their present situations. They also realised that their

gender roles had changed from being second-class citizens, to effective key players within their new communities and also other levels of society. These roles changed because of family commitment, as women, mothers, sisters and wives from different communities took new roles and became peacemakers between different fighting groups. They also became skilled negotiators, to negotiate for peace and bring an end to the war, whilst some women also became freedom fighters; joining in the fighting in their new situations and circumstances.

For these women, the sanctity of their families, support systems of their communities, the way that they lived within these communities and the mosaic of the place called home had helped them to developed inner strength. These factors also shaped their memories during all the difficulties that they went through. The tradition of the family and the significant value that each member of the family brought into the unit helped shape the functional structure of the whole family. Each member had a special role to play to fulfil certain vital functions as a family unit held together by special bonds and values unique to their family structures, supporting each other at a time of need and valuing each other's support in a very special way. Some of the participants talked about how they recognised that the needs of their families and their personal commitments to their families played a major role in helping them to become resilient. Most of them acknowledged that this was one of the main factors of their determination to support their families at any cost to them and their lives.

Sierra Leonean refugee women participating in this study had been exposed to different kinds of disasters including the civil war and changes to family structures, including the loss of family members, friends, loss of personal identity and status. However, they still did all that

they could to maintain their cultural and traditional values. This was in spite of their being subjects of rejection by different West African countries, the loss of their social and personal world, psychological pain and sufferings and the general emotional disruption to their lives. These women were prepared to do all they could to keep their families together. This has meant working to preserve and pass on their cultural heritage and building new social networks and support systems.

Women from different cultures, backgrounds and status, have often been described as the traditional carriers of cultural heritage and the backbone of their societies. The Sierra Leonean refugee women that participated in the research were no different to this as they were prepared to stay connected to their heritage and cultural identity, despite their lives having been changed by the senseless war, which destroyed their homes, their communities and everything that made them the unique group of people that they are.

Participant Y.S. talked about the way that she tried to maintain the cultural and traditional values at every stage of her flight to safety.

“I have always helped others and have always been a caring, supportive and understanding person; always respecting the beliefs and personal values of others. Despite the war and my personal suffering I still found a way to help others. It was also part of my culture and tradition to help and support others in need”.

According to her, their cultural roots and their family commitments had a direct primary influence on their resilience. This meant that they had the chance to play an important and significant role within their family structures and communities. Some of the participants including T.G. who is a nurse also mentioned that being exposed to different cultures other than their own actually helped them to change their attitudes, their views and understanding of different cultural and traditional practices. Some of the participants had to question some of the practices and the reason for some of them.

TP also used her specialist nursing skills to work with other organisations within the camp identifying women and girls needing specialist care and attention as a result of cultural and traditional practices. (FGM).

Essentially some of the cultural and traditional barriers were broken, and some of these women were able to achieve empowerment within the different stages of their traumatic experiences.

They felt empowered by having actually crossed different borders and then realising that they had to build for themselves various ways to engage with members of the host communities and develop strategies for building themselves up in their host communities.

Essentially, the war in Sierra Leone – despite causing devastation and making a lot of Sierra Leoneans refugees – was an important determining factor and the main medium that changed the Sierra Leonean society's attitudes to the low status of women.

The civil/rebel war brought dramatic change in attitude and breakdown of society's norms, systems, barriers, cultural and traditional Gender Based Violence such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM⁵⁶), the gender gap in education and the low social status for women. These cultural and traditional barriers, norms and systems had for many years prevented many Sierra Leonean women from using their personal skills, talents and potential towards personal and professional development and social-economic empowerment.

According to participant **T.G.** some of the traditional barriers were broken when they left the shores of Sierra Leone and experienced first-hand the way of life of other communities. Her personal experiences of diversity, realisation of different gender roles and gender equality in other communities helped her to develop new ways of thinking and understanding, change of attitude about some traditional and cultural practices.

Participant T.G.

⁵⁶Female Genital Mutilation(FGM) is according to the World Health Organisation(WHO) FGM involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons(WHO) In Sierra Leone, FGM is practiced within the bondo secret society Mgbako et al(2009) This a rite of passage into womanhood and adulthood, members acquire personal status and respect within their communities and non members are called unclean and have no community status and respect.

“I am a member of a networking group that works with women from different countries, nationalities and social backgrounds. I work in partnership with other groups and organisations to promote Gender Equality towards addressing issues pertaining to social and cultural barriers which had negative effect on women and girls from different communities. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was an important topic for me to discuss with others. This traditional and cultural practice had to stop because of the health issues pertaining to it”.

Participant T.G. of the research study

Some of the participants in the study including had experienced great cultural and traditional inequities within their communities and also mentioned that being exposed to different cultures other than theirs actually helped them to change their attitudes, break barriers and achieve empowerment within the different stages of their traumatic experiences.

The participants talked about their change in attitude towards some of their cultural and traditional beliefs and values and reflected on the role that some traditional and cultural practices had played in the lives as women. They have become aware of Gender Based Violence including traditional and cultural violence as a violation of the human rights of women and girls, in the name of religion, traditional and cultural beliefs and values. Some of these cultural practices are also potential barriers to women’s development, empowerment and advancement.

According to participant E.U., even in the refugee camps Gender Based Violence was being committed against women and girls living under such difficult circumstances.

“In the refugee camps everyday life was a big struggle to cope with all the burden of the stressful situation and basic survival. Violence against women was being committed all around us; women and girls were raped everyday and every hour. As a direct result of this fear women had to carry multiple burdens, the care and protection of their families and their own personal safety and survival in the absence of a male relative. This made life very difficult and dangerous. This was the very first time that most of us we had to live in such conditions and circumstances and also called refugees” participant E.U. of the research study

These Human Rights abuses are still committed against women and girls and most probably about six to ten women will suffer such abuse every hour. This is a true reality for women and girls living in these countries and societies, and it is one of the key challenges that women and girls face today and every day. Some of these women, prior to these revelations during the interviews, had suffered in silence in order to respect their culture, without being able to tell anyone of their innermost pain and suffering because the tradition forbids them to show signs of pain and suffering. Women are supposed to endure with dignity and resilience all the pains of womanhood, motherhood and the gender disparities. Hence their personal everyday lives and community activities are governed by their cultural and traditional beliefs and values according to the rules within the traditional systems that govern the community. These traditional systems have played a great part in controlling and moulding them into culturally sensitive individuals of their communities and societies. This makes women from

these communities suffer cultural and traditional inequities, in contrast to their male counterparts.

5.6 MEMBERSHIP OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND FOCUS GROUPS (SHARED EXPERIENCES AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING)

VIGNETTE

“Being a member of the group was for me a wonderful way to share my experiences with others and this gave me a sense of community.” Participant J.T. (Research participant)

In the context of the findings of this research study, most of the research participants talked about the positive values they had gained over a period of time through group membership that took place as part of my research project. Group meetings gave every one of them a sense of belonging and interaction, sharing together their day-to-day experiences, but most of all, their faith and hope for a better life. According to the participants their group meetings were always flexible and informal, allowing everybody to participate and make valuable contributions. This approach gave them the opportunities to discuss their views, experience and feelings in a holistic way and share with others some of the most traumatic experiences. They also had a direct, open and responsive interaction with others and they also felt as if it was a healing process.

Most of the participants are members of several different groups with other community organisations, religious and focus groups. Participants said group membership was a vital aspect of their resettlement and integration towards adapting to the changes to their lives and their new communities. They felt that the sense of belonging to a group gave them confidence to deal with some of their personal experiences and situations. Their group discussions with others who were in a similar situation gave them some understanding and knowledge of how to cope with some of their personal experiences, because they were given the chance to share with others and also learn from them.

The participants found that members of the groups were generally supportive of each other and time was always provided for sharing personal thoughts, concerns, problems, advice and new ideas to help members with their integration and resettlement. They all felt a great sense of belonging, togetherness, acceptance and respect for each other. Members of the group also found their group meetings holistic and empowering. This helped them to benefit collectively from the programme and projects on offer and this played a significant part in rebuilding their shattered lives within their new communities and groups. Participants described how their group meetings give them a great sense of belonging, nurturing, survival and community. Their inclusion and acceptance was of great importance to them and the intensity of the needs and purpose was the deciding factor that ensured the survival of the group at whatever cost.

BEING A MEMBER OF ONE OF THESE GROUPS, ACCORDING TO PARTICIPANT T.G. GAVE HER A VITAL CONNECTION.

Vignette T.G.

This group has given me a lot of help and practical support and guidance. Group members have created an environment that is supportive, interactive and holistic. There is always a great sense of belonging and my personal views and opinions are respected and valuable. I'm given a chance to talk and share with others from different communities

Participant T.G. expressed her feelings and sense of belonging to the group as very important to her.

Participants who were members of different social, community groups and networks said that their experiences of being members of this support network had helped to provide positive support as they integrate into the local communities in such a way that their emotional and psychological needs were met, giving them a structure that they needed as they wait for their asylum claims to be processed.

Participant Y.S. who had permanent residence out of London said that these groups gave her the support which the local authority was not able to provide for them to help them integrate into their host communities.

Within these support groups, according to participants, there was always a space provided for members to share their experiences, socialise and learn from each other about different aspects of their new lives and new communities. They were also able to learn how to access the relevant services that had been provided by their Local Authorities.

The positive aspects of group support and networks within refugee communities were a very important factor that helped the refugees to be able to integrate into their local communities in such a way that they would be able to use their own skills and experiences to make some contributions towards community cohesion and development. This demonstrates that support networks are a vital tool that could be used to empower different groups of people from diverse communities to understand, share and work with each other towards achieving a better community structure and an understanding of each other's way of life and values.

It was of vital importance for me as a researcher to interact with some of the participants within their different social and community support groups. The open-ended interaction of the members within their different social and community support groups was found to have been valuable and significant; hence it helped to simulate the thoughts and emotions of the members.

This interaction helped me to obtain other important information about the collective views and personal experiences of the participants when they were together as a support network, during their meetings and support sessions. I was also able to observe how these participants interacted in their various roles within their groups and these observation results were very important to the research study as some sort of field experience.

As a researcher, I was also able to observe and gain insights into the group dynamics of these social, support and community groups and how these dynamics helped to facilitate positive

interaction and simulation towards revelation of certain aspects of their experiences that I was not able to get from a participant on a one-to-one basis. Therefore, group support for these participants made it easier for them to talk about and share their experiences collectively and gain from shared and collective views.

They wanted to share their stories together and they also felt that they were supporting each other because of their similar experiences, views and opinions about their traumatic experiences. According to them they felt they were at the same level and hence they gave each other support as they probed deeply into their feelings and thoughts in meaningful discussions as they shared their experiences.

The participants said that their group meetings were special events for them to have interaction with other members of the group and this for them was of the utmost importance as they try to find their way through the maze of their new communities, with all the hurdles that they have to jump before they get to the winning point: being given full refugee status.

The group meetings, according to participants, were flexible and this kind of approach gave them the opportunity to discuss their views, experiences and feelings in a holistic and simple way, which made it easy to share experiences and feelings. The meetings created an open space where they could talk about their experiences with others in similar circumstances. , most of the participants found that becoming members of different groups had been one of the factors that gave them inner strength. Their groups provided for them a sense of purpose,

acceptance, understanding, emotional balance and way to meet each other's needs in difficult times.

5.7 AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITIES IN HOST COMMUNITIES

Many of the participants were given opportunities in the UK, in education and skill training, work in local communities, local government, healthcare sector and hospitality.

According to participant TP of the research study:

“I gained personal confidence as a result of the opportunities that were available to me as I resettled in my new community; and also gained the ability to help others who had lost everything like myself but who were not that strong to cope with their present circumstances and situation I achieved a BSc Honours degree in Midwifery. I'm a mentor to other nurses working in the same department, giving them practical support towards gaining skills needed to achieve more in their Midwifery career.”

Participant T.P. of the research study

The participants realised that they had to explore various issues that have been made available to them during their flight to safety and becoming refugees. They were therefore able to connect and relate to their present predicament in such a way that they saw their roles as second-class citizens changing into those of effective and key players within their own communities.

Participant T.G. said:

“The chance to take up leadership roles and work with others from different communities and ethnic groups of Sierra Leone. I also got the chance to work as a nurse again after a long time in a private nursing home and looking after senior citizens in the UK. Members of my family and myself gaining refugee status been able to help and support others as they resettle in the UK. Attending night classes to continue improving some of my skills and to keep up with new technology and skills within nursing”.

Participant T.G. of the research study

These women now had the chance and privileges to fulfil their potential as women, wives and mothers in their new host communities.

5.8 THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS AND ADVERSITY-ACTIVATED DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS

According to the Oxford English dictionary, **Psychosocial**: Relating to the interrelation of social factors and individual thought and behaviour.

In the context of this research, the data collected will be analysed with the social factors and the individual thought and behaviour of the Sierra Leonean refugee women who participated in the study.

During the research and data collection, the participants had some concerns about the way their newly assumed roles and responsibilities impacted on their social lives, personal thoughts and behaviour and also their professional, family and community lives. Most of these women had been deprived of their basic rights over the years; hence their new roles were a platform of change that they had to handle with caution and sometimes limited personal inner resources and professional skills.

This was the challenge that they faced and the positive developments of certain skills and attitudes of their adversity experiences gave them some of the qualities that they needed to address some of the issues affecting them as they resettled into the United Kingdom. These women were therefore able to renegotiate certain aspects of their traditional and cultural ways of lives. The participants talked about being excluded from participating in the political systems of government at national, regional and local community levels. In addition to all of these aspects, it is very important to highlight the positive responses that they developed against the adversity that they endured. Hence, the main aim of this research is to look at resilience, instead of the negatives and adversities that they experienced during and after the war.

According to participant A.M. of the research study:

“New roles as a woman, who can make some good contributions and opportunities that, have been made possible for me in the new communities that I have been able to live in. To be in control of my own life and my future, more resilience and willpower to succeed in the face of "Uncertainty" and “Adversity” and “Danger”.

Goodness in other people whom we have met for the first time even after going through hardship. Love, compassion and respect for others in spite of past personal suffering and losses. Supporting others that are in need. Believing in myself with positive confidence.” Participant A.M. of the research study (2009)

According to the research findings, the new roles for these participants were not only the key factors for their resilience. According to some of them, these new roles helped them to develop strength and stability within themselves and their different communities, all-important for their personal development, economic and community growth that is sustainable within their communities. These were positive changes at all levels in their different communities within women’s political, social, civil participation and contributions towards development and advancement.

Some of these psychosocial impacts were bringing together all that they had learnt and experienced during the war, and using all of these towards economic strength and stability, organising themselves in such a way that they were able to effectively establish and start different organisations to help others in similar circumstances. Participant A talked about being able to set up a voluntary organisation. The aim of this organisation is to work with

others in similar circumstances to help them address some of the negative experiences that they might have encountered as they try to re-settle and integrate into their new communities.

Another psychosocial impact is that these women were able to use their own basic knowledge, new skills and abilities that they developed during the years of the civil war to generate financial income and become self-sufficient towards socio-economic empowerment and stability. According to some of them, they had to learn the hard way but gained the ability to provide for their families. Taking a critical look at other aspects of the psychosocial impacts of the new roles of the participants, it is clear that there was a transformation of some of their cultural and traditional attitudes into an understanding of the equal roles that all members of the community have to play towards development of the community. Therefore, the social roles that have been given to different members of the communities changed in such a way that women in particular realised that these roles were just cultural and traditional norms and values, and that they themselves as women can make contributions to and participate in their different communities.

Another vital point that needs to be highlighted is how these participants were able to draw strength and personal resilience from some of the key findings of this research. The participants were able to balance their personal, emotional and social needs because of the psychosocial aspects and nature of their assumed roles.

To sum up the psychosocial impacts and effects on the participants, there is a need to look at how they were able to balance their emotional strength and physical needs during their

traumatic experiences and as they assumed new roles that they needed to take up because of the situation they found themselves in.

The baseline to their balanced needs depended on their personal inner strength, resilience, new and developed skills, abilities, attitudes and the way they were prepared to accept the changes in their lives as well as the new roles that they had to assume, the new opportunities that have been made available to them in their new communities. The war and the trauma attached to it was a negative experience, but at the same time it helped to motivate them to understand and reinvent themselves. This then gave them the tools and the skills that they could use to negotiate their traditional and cultural views and attitudes for positive changes towards their personal and public lives.

5.9 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The best framework to understand the findings of this research is provided by the Trauma/Adversity Grid advanced by Papadopoulos (2004, 2007) that differentiates the three main categories of responses to adversity, i.e. negative responses (that include possible Psychiatric Disorders, but also Distressful Psychological Reactions, and Ordinary Human Suffering), existing strengths that they had before their exposure to adversity and they were able to retain (i.e. various Resilient functions) despite their exposure to adversity, and new strengths and positives that they were able to develop as a result of, because of their exposure to adversity, i.e. Adversity-Activated Development.

The research participants clearly were shaken by their horrible experiences of the war, all their losses, and their uprootedness. These belong to the negative spectrum of the Grid. But at the same time, they also realized that their losses and trauma did not prevent them from still accessing some of their positive strengths that they had before the war, e.g. religious faith and religious affiliations, their family and community bonds, some specific skills, etc. Some of these positive strengths were affected negatively, for example their family connections for those women who did lose members of their family during the war.

But they also realized that they did not lose everything and they understood that they still had many positives that they were able to use during their times of trial, during the war and when they were searching for a safe place to hide and when they came to the UK and when they started their new lives in this country. These are the resilient dimensions according to the Grid.

Then, what they also realised was that the way they coped during the painful years of the war and destitution taught them a lot of new things and made them realise that they have strengths that they were not aware that they had during their previous lives when they were oppressed by the family customs and social prejudices. These new skills, abilities, characteristics, relationships etc they did not know that they had and they only surfaced because of their exposure to adversity, all these are in effect what Papadopoulos calls 'Adversity-Activated development'.

The research participants were not always aware of their strengths. Their devastating experiences of the war and the new roles which they had to assume led the women to emerge

suddenly as leaders of their families and communities. These women played active roles while they lived in the refugee camps and during their journeys to safety, essentially the new statuses they gained were the change factors and the growth opportunities that they needed to activate some positive development towards achieving success.

According to participant E.U. of the research study:

“The realisation that I had to start playing a major role as a woman to support and assist others in greater need of help than myself. My experiences and the many things that I encountered during my journey and flight to safety, the sight of others suffering and the need to give some help from me had made a big impact on me to develop new positive characteristics. As a team leader and member of a group, there was a need and I was in a better position to help others. There was the chance and opportunities open to me to help others and I took up the challenge.” Participant E.U. of the research study

The conflict and their experiences had forced them to develop and adopt new strategies to support themselves, their families and their communities; it gave them the skills and tools that lead to positive responses (resilience and adversity-activated development). But it is fully evident that most of the participants relied on their religious faith and beliefs had helped them during the most difficult stages of their experiences of the war, which include their flight to different countries, living in refugee and displaced person’s camps, asking for help and also their resettlement and adaptation into their new communities. It was their religious faith, hope

and beliefs that helped them to live through the most difficult, helpless, hopeless times during the different stages of their flight to safety.

As I reflect and take a critical look at all aspects of this research study, I have realised that Sierra Leonean women have indeed used their personal skills, abilities and capabilities that they had in them, but which had not been utilised before, because of certain aspects and factors of their lives, which include cultural and traditional norms, beliefs and values, according to their different gender roles in their communities.

Most of these women were unaware of their potential, including their willpower, determination and the leadership roles that they could take up. All of this changed when they were actually in the traumatic situation that was created as a result of the civil war.

During the many one-to-one meetings, personal interviews and group discussions, the women were able to talk about their personal achievements. These women, on reflection during the final discussion, realised that they had personally contributed towards certain aspects of development at regional, community, national and international levels within areas including civil society, political, professional and the business sectors.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 OVERVIEW

“Sierra Leonean women faced widespread discrimination in practice, law, and custom before armed conflict erupted—each compounding and reinforcing the other, to women’s enormous disadvantage”. (Jefferson, 2003:4)

Despite “Women’s enormous disadvantage” Jefferson (2003) there was significant changes as a direct result of their new and assumed roles and responsibilities during the civil war of Sierra Leone.

This research explored factors that have contributed towards the building of resilience and the Adversity-Activated Development (AAD) of Sierra Leonean refugee women living in the U.K. The data have been collected from six women with different experiences relating to personal loss, trauma and devastation that they encountered during and after the civil war. The data also reveal positive personal gains and development from their new and assumed roles, their personal contributions and participation towards the peaceful end to the civil/rebel war, and how they benefit from being members of community, social and religious groups.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research focused on the personal lived experiences of six Sierra Leonean refugee women; and explored how narratives related to personal loss, trauma and devastation that these women encountered during and after the civil conflict in Sierra Leone have impacted on their lives personally, socially and professionally. Most importantly, their inner strength, determination, resilience has been examined from the perspective of Adversity Activated Development (AAD) (Papadopoulos, 2004: 2007) and positive gains of their new roles, status and identity. The positive way in which they were able to adapt to their situations, organised themselves, formed groups and also coped with the various changes to their lives brought about as a result of the civil conflict in Sierra Leone. This was also observed by Castillejo (2009):

“Women’s civil society activism in Sierra Leone emerged during the war, with the development of women’s groups that advocated and campaigned for peace”.

(Castillejo, 2009:16)

Sierra Leonean women took the challenge and formed civil, community and social groups and became very active to campaign for and also find peaceful solutions to bring the war to an end. Most importantly, these women were able to mobilise others to fight for their rights that had been denied to them for such a long time because of cultural and traditional norms, beliefs and values.

**IN HER STUDY ‘HOW WAR CHANGED THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES’,
JOYCE BRYANT CONCLUDED THAT**

“After the two wars women became free to create their own lives and senses of self. With this increase in freedom also came an increase in equality. World War II gave women the chance to prove they are just as capable as men. As World War II continued, greater numbers of women began to take control.”⁵⁷

Therefore, this is not a new phenomenon. It seems that after wars and adversity, the role of women improves but as Bryant says, it is not only their roles but also their ‘sense of self’, their identity, the way they view themselves in the light of the new roles that they find themselves playing as a result of the war experiences.

What can be argued that it may be specific and unique in the context of Sierra Leonean women is that the difference between the position, role and identity of women before and after the war may be greater than in other places because before the war women lived in very traditional societies where the prejudices and low position of women was dominating.

The point of cultural and traditional norms and laws was also highlighted by Holt-Rusmore (2009), researching *The Social Reintegration of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone*. She noted that:

⁵⁷<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/2002/3/02.03.09.x.html>

“Women have faced additional challenges as they are greatly affected by the structural and social cultural system of patriarchy that legitimates a variety of laws, customs, and norms which kept women and girls as second-class citizens”. (Holt-Rusmore; 2009:7)

The civil war fuelled the changes and Sierra Leonean women made use of the window of opportunity to change their circumstances. These women changed their social and gender roles and some of them became community leaders and heads of their families and households during the time when men and boys had been taken away, killed, or joined the rebel army.

According to Hartman and Zimberoff (2005)

“In between these stages are transitional experiences, special windows of opportunity for transcendent growth.... Transitional space, or potential space, can be instigated by trauma”. (Hartman and Zimberoff, 2005: 3)

Sierra Leonean women stepped into the roles of family, household and community leaders, in the absence of men and boys. These women took the challenge and the window opportunity made available to them within their new and assumed roles. This was a critical milestone in their lives.

The research also investigated the multidisciplinary nature of Refugee Care as it relates to some of the issues affecting refugees including socio-economic development, their human rights as refugees, cultural disorientation and empowerment. The research looked at specific issues that are related to loss of home, personal identity and community; the integration, resettlement and contributions of refugees to the receiving and host communities.

The research explored the wider context of these six women's various experiences in relation to the different phases of the Refugee Trauma (Papadopoulos, 2004) i.e. Anticipation, Devastating Events, Survival and Adjustment. The collected data was analysed by grouping recurring themes and patterns of participants' narratives, one-to-one interviews and group discussions. These patterns were used to understand and ascertain the in-depth meaning of these women's inner strengths and resilience and also to explore how Adversity-Activated Development (AAD) has propelled them towards empowerment and advancement.

All of the six women interviewed were exposed to war related trauma and adversity that had been part of their lives for many years during the conflict and also while living in displaced camps in Sierra Leone and in different refugee camps out of the country. For many of these women taking part in this research has been the first opportunity to talk about and also share their first-hand experiences with others with similar experiences.

Adversity Activity Development (AAD)

According to the Trauma/Adversity Grid of consequences and implications (Papadopoulos), there are three main responses to trauma which are: negative (injuries and wounds), neutral (resilience) and positive (AAD).

According to Papadopoulos (2004, 2006) Adversity Activated Development (AAD) refers to the positive developments that are a direct result of being exposed to adversity.

“Having come so close to death or having experienced the unbearable anguish of substantial losses, people often emerge transformed, re-viewing life, themselves and their relationships.”

(Papadopoulos; 2006:305)

Considering the positive aspects of the Trauma Grid (i.e. resilience and AAD), it is essential that attention is paid to this specific aspect in the case of Sierra Leonean refugee women who helped me in this study. To assist with the analysis of the research data I compiled trauma grids for each participant. These trauma grids maps out in details some of the negative aspects of the war as it affected these participants; but also show the resilience of these women and the development of Adversity-Activated Development (AAD) in relations to their unique and specific experiences.

Participant 1T.G.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal and professional status and roles</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p> <p>Feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness</p> <p>Disoriented</p>	<p>Ability to use previous skills as a nurse to care and support others.</p>	<p>Living and working with the rebels and helping to look after others particularly girls and women who had been sexually and physically abused</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members, culture and home</p> <p>Separation from children and husband</p> <p>Community bereavement and suffering</p> <p>Loss of professional roles and financial independence</p>	<p>Care and support for family and community</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and responsibilities to support and advice others in need.</p>
Community	<p>Loss of community support and structure.</p>	<p>Joined in the fighting with others to achieve peace.</p>	<p>Ability to convince and lead other women to</p>

	Community bereavement and suffering	Organised group meetings to help teach others survival skills from physical and sexually attacks Developed special survival kits for women to wear if attacked by rebels(Awareness trousers)	join supporting groups to work together for peace and unity Developed ability and confidence to motivate others to demand peace and end to the senseless war
Culture (religion, ideology)	In constant fear of injuries because of her religious beliefs and ideology as a Jehovah witness. (No blood transfusion)	Strong religious faith and belief with liberal views and understanding as a Jehovah witness and Muslim.	Community and group meetings and prayer time together for personal and community empowerment.

Participant 2 I.S.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal status and community roles</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p> <p>Feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness</p> <p>Disoriented</p> <p>Loss of financial independence as a business woman</p>	<p>Living with others in the refugee camps helping to look after the vulnerable particularly women girls who had been sexually and physically abused</p>	<p>Determination to attend adult education courses to gain new personal skills, knowledge, qualification and confidence to give support and advice to women with similar war experiences.</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members, culture and home</p> <p>Separation from children and her husband was taken away by the rebels</p>	<p>Care and support for family and others of her community.</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and responsibilities to support others in need.</p>
Community	<p>Loss of community support and structure.</p>	<p>Organised support group meetings to help</p>	<p>Developed the ability to convince and lead other</p>

	Community bereavement and suffering	motivate others. Created awareness for the rights of women and girls to make their own personal choices in related traditional and cultural norms and beliefs.	women to join support groups. Developed ability and confidence to motivate others to fight for change.
Culture (religion, ideology)	Difficult to observe religious obligations in her Muslim faith.	Strong religious faith and belief as a Muslim woman to give assistance and support to others, both Muslims and non-Muslims.	Developed ability and confidence to motivate others to support the campaign to end the practice of Bondo-female Genital Mutilation (FGM). A traditional and cultural practice and rites of passage

Participant 3 J.T.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal and professional status and roles as a Banker</p> <p>Living in constant fear of the unknown and rebel attacks</p> <p>Feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness</p> <p>Disorientation</p> <p>Loss of financial independence as a Banker</p>	<p>Living with others in the refugee camps helping to look after others particularly girls and women who had been sexually and physically abused; despite her own personal experiences and suffering as a victim of physical and sexual violence and abuse</p>	<p>Development of new personal skills, knowledge, qualification and confidence. Career advancement and personal development to give support and advice to women and girls with similar war experiences.</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members, culture and family home</p> <p>Separation from other important family members and became the head of the family.</p>	<p>Care and support for family and others of her community despite her own personal experiences and suffering as a victim of physical and sexual violence and abuse.</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and responsibilities to lead other family members and make important decisions.</p>

Community	Loss of community support and structure. Community bereavement, suffering and dislocation. Moving from camp to camp for safety.	Organise, motivate and support and assist other bereaved families.	Developed ability and confidence to motivate others. Motivation of others to support the campaign to end the war.
Culture (religion, ideology)		Strong religious faith and belief as a Christian woman to give assistance and support to others	Became pray leader and personal adviser to others in need.

Participant 4 A.M.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal and professional status, personal and community roles.</p> <p>Loss of financial independence as a business woman and teacher</p> <p>Fear of the unknown and attack by rebels</p> <p>Feeling of hopelessness, worthlessness and loss of personal identity documents</p> <p>Disoriented, being given a new identity and being called REFUGEE</p>	<p>Living with others in the refugee camps and assisting and supporting women and girls who had been abused.</p> <p>Gaining paid employment and working in the refugee camps with girls and women who had been sexually and physically abused camp officials.</p>	<p>Development of new personal skills, knowledge, qualification and confidence to give support and advice to women with similar war experiences.</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members, culture and</p>	<p>Care and support for family and others of her</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and</p>

	<p>home</p> <p>Separated from family members.</p>	<p>community.</p>	<p>responsibilities to bury the dead, this was a role for men in the different communities of Sierra Leone.</p>
<p>Community</p>	<p>Loss of community support and structure.</p> <p>Community bereavement, suffering and disorientation.</p>	<p>Organised burials and motivated others to join her to support and assist other bereaved families.</p> <p>Teaching women personal protective skills because of physical, sexual and psychological abuse and attacks by rebels and some camp officials.</p>	<p>Developed the ability to convince and lead other women to join and support burial ceremonies.</p> <p>Developed ability and confidence to motivate and lead others to move the peace campaign forward.</p>
<p>Culture (religion, ideology)</p>	<p>Churches were all burnt down and prayers held in secret locations.</p>	<p>Strong religious faith and belief as a Catholic woman to give assistance and support to others in the community.</p>	<p>Developed ability and confidence to motivate others to support the campaign to end the war.</p>

Participant E.U.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal and professional status and roles</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p> <p>Feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness</p> <p>Disoriented</p>	<p>Living with others in the refugee camps helping to look after others particularly girls and women who had been sexually and physically abused</p>	<p>Development of new personal skills, knowledge, qualification and confidence to give support and advice to women with similar war experiences.</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members, culture and home</p> <p>Separation from children and other family members.</p> <p>Community bereavement, suffering and dislocation</p> <p>Loss of financial independence as a school teacher and</p>	<p>Care and support for family and others of her community.</p> <p>Organising prayers meetings and group advise session to share and empower vulnerable members of the community.</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and responsibilities including burials. (Burials are performed only by men in the different communities of Sierra Leone).</p>

	minister of religion		
Community	Loss of community support and structure. Community bereavement and suffering	Organised burials and motivated others to join her to support and assist other bereaved families. Teaching personal survival and defence skills against physical and psychological violence and abused.	Developed the ability and confidence to convince, lead and motivate others to demand an end to the war.
Culture (religion, ideology)	Difficult to observe some religious obligations as a minister of religion.	Strong religious faith and belief as a Christian and a minister of religion. Supporting and giving assistance, hope and courage to others from different religious faiths and beliefs.	Developed ability and confidence to motivate others hold on to their faith and beliefs to address their personal circumstances.

Participant 6 T.P.

	Negative effects	Resilience	AAD
Individual	<p>Loss of personal and professional status and roles</p> <p>Being physically and sexually abused by rebels</p> <p>Flashback as a result of personal lived traumatic experiences</p> <p>Begging for food</p> <p>Loss of financial independence as a midwife and community nurse</p>	<p>Living with others in the refugee camps helping to look after others particularly girls and women who had been sexually and physically abused</p>	<p>Development of new nursing and personal skills, knowledge, qualification and confidence to give support and advice to women with similar war experiences.</p>
Family	<p>Loss of family members and relatives.</p> <p>Loss of culture, personal home and community structure and resources</p>	<p>Care and support for family and others of her community.</p>	<p>Development of new assumed roles and responsibilities to lead and support other family members</p>

	Separated from children and husband		
Community	Loss of personal friend and colleagues. Witnessing the rape and abused of women and girls in the camps. Total loss of community and support systems	Organise care and advice secession to support other community members.	Developed the ability to convince and lead other women to join and support others. Developed ability and confidence to motivate others toward empowerment
Culture (religion, ideology)		Strong religious faith and belief as a Christian supporting others with prayers.	Developed ability and confidence to motivate others to support the campaign to end the practice of Bondo-female Genital Mutilation (FGM). A traditional and cultural practice and rites of passage

These trauma grids clearly illustrate that these women gained new identities and ultimately created the platform for change to their social and gender roles within their different communities, all this in addition to the actual and real losses and pain and suffering that they experienced.

Some of the participants talked about how family commitment, community roles and responsibilities, society and culture gave them the tool of empowerment towards (AAD) and enabled them to develop inner strength and the ability to cope because, according to them, they did not have the option to give up. Their only way forward was to make something positive out of the negative as in injury and wound that they had sustained.

The Sierra Leonean women who took part in this research study according to the collected data seem to have been able to find strength in their personal experiences of the civil war. They also seem to have used their negative experiences to make some positive gains towards personal developments and the transformation of their gender roles.

When asked about the possible gains and transformation, participant JT of the study responded by saying:

What I gained was self confidence, personal development and strong will power to succeed as a result of all the negative experiences. I was able to develop a strong inner strength which I was not aware was a part of me until I was left with nothing to hold on to except my

determination and belief that one day I will be able to be get out of this bad situation as a very strong person who will help others by sharing my experiences. I gained personal confidence as a result of the opportunities that were available to me as I resettled in my new community; and also gained the ability to help others who had lost everything like myself but who were not that strong to cope with their present circumstances and situations. I was not aware of some of my personal skills such as leadership role to work with other women, until I came to live in the refugee camp. Participant JT of the research study (2009)

When asked the same question, participant TP also responded by saying:

I gained personal empowerment and a new role to work with different members of different communities living in the UK; of which I would not have had the privilege of doing if I had continued to live in Sierra Leone. I have been able to use my new empowerment skills to help develop and strengthen other communities in the UK.

Participant TP of the research

These factors of positivity, inner strength and determination have clearly shown huge changes at all levels of the social and political aspects of the nation as whole, with women as partners and major contributors towards peace and development. .

According to the data from this research, some of the participants became leaders and advocates for peace in their different communities and social groups. Some of them also

gained valuable experiences, skills and knowledge to set up community and social groups and also local and national charitable organisations. These women had common ground and shared goals to work in partnership with others to promote women's rights and equal opportunities at all levels of the Sierra Leonean society.

Sierra Leonean women were now able to assume leadership positions and roles, engage with others to pursue peace and stability at all cost. They became key players in the fight for peace, reconciliation, gender equality and the building of the new Sierra Leone with positive developments.

According to Eshun-Baiden (2007):

It is the women who bore the brunt of the war, the loss of our loved one, the loss of our homes, the hunger and the fear, it was our children who were maimed or stolen from us and forced into combat by the rebels. (Eshun-Baiden; 2007:6)

These words by Eshun-Baiden (2007) are the true realities of the pain, loss and sufferings and how the civil war impacted on the lives of the women of Sierra Leone. But notwithstanding all of the devastating effects of the war, they responded with self determination, personal will power and fortitude to achieve peace and stability for their nation and country. Their positive responses to all the devastation and personal experiences were as a direct result of their empowerment and personal self will. Sierra Leonean women began to believe in themselves

and their abilities and capabilities to make their points on issues affecting them as women to the authorities and governing groups.

They demanded peace and stability for the entire country. These women developed bravery and because they were selfless, articulated and united with a common goal to succeed, their goals were achieved. They were able to achieve their aims and objectives at all cost despite all risks to their personal lives.

5.3 THE CHANGING ROLES, STATUS AND IDENTITY OF SIERRA LEONEAN WOMEN DURING AND AFTER THE CIVIL WAR. THEIR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS BRING AN END TO THE CIVIL WAR AND THE COLLECTIVE ACHIEVEMENTS OF SIERRA LEONEAN WOMEN DURING AND AFTER THE CIVIL WAR.

In this research study, the changing and new roles and responsibilities that Sierra Leonean women had to assume during the civil conflict in the absence of their husbands, sons and other male relatives appear to have been pivotal in the transformation of gender roles and gender equality in Sierra Leone. The transformation of gender roles and women's participation in community and public life was highlighted by Castillejo (2009)

“Sierra Leonean women's peace activism was the first time that women had come together as such a large political force and taken such a prominent role in public life,

and this experience gave women the empowerment, capacity and influence to carve out more political space for themselves in politics following the end of the war (Castillejo; 2009: 3-4)⁵⁸

In effect, despite the devastation of the war, there was a complete transformation in social and gender roles for women of Sierra Leone. All of this then led to an alteration of the structures of governance and political power in Sierra Leonean society.

According to participant E.U. of the research study:

I became more positive and determined to fight for the rights of women and girls and to express myself without fear of reprisals.

I became a personal safety teacher and taught women and girls about personal safety and protection. The ability to develop self protection and share with others in similar circumstances.

The development of confidence and ability to become more proactive and take up important roles and duties in my community.

The determination to develop new personal and professional skills, ability and knowledge towards future achievements and advancement.

⁵⁸Castillejo, C. June 2009: **Women's Political Participation and Influence in Sierra Leone**

Participant E.U of the research study

Miguel and Bellows (2008) stated that:

“Many Sierra Leone scholars argue that the civil war transformed society and culture”

(Miguel and Bellows; 2008:26-27)

This was the new Sierra Leone and the transformation of the Sierra Leonean society and culture, this led to the changes to the political landscape of the country. Indeed the women of Sierra Leone earned their new gender and social status and identity, and with the new skills that they developed were able to negotiate their way about different sectors of government and their personal and social lives.

The political landscape of Sierra Leone today has been transformed and women are being given the opportunities and chances to contribute and participate in public offices. These include the political sector and for the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, women have been allowed to negotiate for a 30% quota in parliament, and the present day government has also acknowledged a fully equal role for women and men according to Eshun-Baiden (2007). This equal role for women is being actively pursued by the 50/50 group of Sierra Leone⁵⁹, lead by Nemata Eshun-Baiden.

⁵⁹The 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone is a non-partisan campaign for more young women in politics and public life. The group was formed in November 2000 and formally launched on November 30th 2001.

The current elected government has acknowledged the enormous contributions and sacrifices that have been made by Sierra Leonean women towards peace and stability of the country and appointed several women as senior public officers. These appointments have included women heading the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and other government institutions and parastatals. This was the beginning of the reversal of social and gender roles in Sierra Leone and this reversal also significantly influenced the change of cultural views and attitudes of the role and status of women in the Sierra Leonean society.

According to Holt-Rusmore (2009)

“In the past, age and the influence of elders were powerful forces that defined social standing, prestige and the rights of control. (Holt-Rusmore; 2009:7).

Such was the status of the women of Sierra Leone, that their social standing and rights were controlled until the civil war and the changes that occurred as a result of their experiences and new roles.

It is important to note that the civil conflict appeared to transform the lives of Sierra Leoneans in general but more Sierra Leonean women in particular. These research findings support “Ibrahim's (2009) observation” that the war time roles of Sierra Leonean women

effectively brought about changes and growth towards gender transformation and a shift in gender role and responsibilities.

It appears that there was a transformation in gender roles as a direct result of the conflict.

Researchers and authors including Brown et al (2005) have acknowledged that the civil war was the medium of change that brought significant changes to the roles, attitudes, social, personal and professional development of the women and girls of Sierra Leone.

“Gender relations have been partially reshaped by the conflict. During the conflict many families were scattered and women were left to support young families on their own. In doing so, they gained greater control over livelihoods and household decision making. As a result, women are more active in the rural economy than they were before the war. In some cases, women began to take a more active role in governance and decision making within their communities during the conflict.”

(Brown et al; 2005:9)

The transformation was as a direct result of their personal courage and inner will to resist adversity and their determination to survive their negative and devastating experiences.

They had a purpose in life, coping abilities and strategies and also personal, social and community resources and support that helped to give them some stability and stance as they faced adversity, negativity and uncertainty.

5.4 NEW AND ASSUMED ROLES: NEW IDENTITY, STATUS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER ROLES

The impact of war and conflicts often creates new roles for women and these new roles transform their lives forever. This important point was highlighted by Holt-Rusmore (2009) in her research on Sierra Leonean women.

“Among these, I have hinted that the value of women in Sierra Leonean society has not only positively influenced reintegration, but also has potentially opened up new possibilities for women as they redefine their identities.” (Holt-Rusmore; 2009:15)

According to this research by Holt-Rusmore (2009) the roles for Sierra Leonean women changed dramatically for the better. There were new possibilities for them in their personal and professional lives.

Their determination to bring an end to the civil war became the important tool for their transformation and new identity and status. Most Sierra Leonean women accepted their gender and social roles according to societal norms and beliefs. They accepted the pathway of their destiny. The civil war brought about a complete transformation and changed their perception and capabilities about themselves. According to this research by Holt-Rusmore (2009) the roles for Sierra Leonean women changed dramatically for the better. There were new possibilities for them in their personal and professional lives. These in return helped to

improve their social and personal status as women and they were able to secure new identities as leaders and contributors. They experienced and commanded equal rights, self-respect and self-worth and then there was a change in attitudes within their different communities.

This transformation of gender roles was a significant step to the change of attitude and views about women and their capabilities to contribute to society. According to Eshun-Baiden (2007):

On May 7, 2000, I joined a group of Sierra Leonean women determined to bring an end to the civil war that was ravaging our country, we demonstrated for peace at the residence of the late rebel leader , Corporal Foday Sankoh. This move set the stage for Foday Sankoh's arrest. This move eventually contributed to the end of the civil war. (Eshun-Baiden, 2007:1)⁶⁰.

This was the beginning of the transformation and the significant step forward for the women of Sierra Leone. Many Sierra Leonean women became the agents of change in their own right. They developed relevant skills to facilitate, contribute, negotiate and implement peace.

⁶⁰Remarks of Dr. Nemata Eshun-Baiden 50/50 Group

National Democratic Institute – Madeleine K. Albright

Grant, Washington, D.C.

October 24, 2007

They formed partnerships and collaborate with others to gain maximum impact towards achieving peace. Most of these women also worked hard towards gaining gender equality and the rights for women to contribute and participate in public offices and most importantly in politics and governance.

According to Ibrahim (2009):

Although people's lives, whether male or female often transform after conflicts, these transformations often help women change their perception of themselves and others and lead to opportunities that enable them to occupy "public" and other spaces.

(Ibrahim; 2009:185)

On reflection and also considering all the aspects of the data collected during this research study, it seems that Sierra Leonean women have indeed gained a new identity and for themselves. The new identity for some of these women includes the realisation of their leadership qualities, skills and the ability to renegotiate their social and gender roles. This new identity and these roles brought about a significant change of attitude and perception of women and their gender and social roles at all levels of the Sierra Leonean society.

They have not only used their personal skills, abilities and capabilities to cope during the most traumatic periods of the war, but they have also put into use their new skills and ability to change certain aspects of their gender roles and status.

Most of these personal skills, abilities and coping mechanisms which these women had to put into use during the conflict, had been lying dormant and had not been utilised for different reasons. Some of these reasons included traditional and cultural practices and beliefs governing the lives and status of women. Some of these cultural and traditional norms, beliefs and values depict their different gender roles and social value in their different communities. Sierra Leonean women, like most women from developing countries, have their lives shaped and determined by their communities because of their gender.

During the research interviews, participants talked about how they had changed their personal attitudes towards some of their cultural and traditional beliefs and values as a direct result of the things that they now know and have become aware about. During the many one-to-one meetings, personal interviews, most of these women talked about becoming aware of their potential, including their leadership skills and roles they had to take up, will power and determination to end the war and be a part of the peace building efforts.

This was exemplified by research participant A.M. when she stated,

The realisation that I had to start playing a major role as a woman to support and assist others in greater need of help than myself. My experiences and the many things that I encountered during my journey and flight to safety, the sight of others suffering and the need to give some help from me had made a big impact on me to develop new positive characteristics.

Participant A.M. of the research study.

The participants were able to talk about their personal achievements and on reflection during the final discussion, realised that they had indeed made some personal contributions towards certain aspect of developments at regional, community, national and international levels in different areas including civil society, political, professional and business. According to some of the participants, they were able to use their new roles and acquired skills to work with others to address gender inequality issues affecting them and other women in the areas of politics and governance their different communities.

‘When asked about her new role, T.G. a participants of the study, responded about the changes in the personal life.

“Becoming very strong willed and very determined to achieve and be successful in my new community. Change of attitudes and fighting for my rights and the rights of others. Changing some aspects of my cultural and traditional beliefs and values and being able to address issues of Gender based Violence”

T.G. participant of the study.

The six women interviewed for this research reflected that their new roles had given them the tools needed to negotiate for equality but most importantly this was a significant step forward

towards bridging the gender gap in equality in the history of Sierra Leone. Eshun-Baiden (2007) maintained that:

“But I felt that inasmuch as we women constitute 52% of the population and sacrificed for peace, we should be able to work side by side with our men to manage that peace, and rebuild our country. (Eshun-Baiden, 2007:2) ⁶¹

Essentially it was not just their personal devastating war time experiences of Sierra Leonean women that lead to significant changes in their lives. It was also the way that these changes occurred and eventually contributed to major historical and important developments in the areas of social and gender roles, gender equality, women’s rights, leadership role and contributions towards political , towards women’s empowerment and advancement in Sierra Leone. As cited by Eshun-Baiden (2007);

I set up the 50/50 Group. Our goal: to develop mechanisms for more women to have a voice in parliament and public affairs and in the decisions that affects their localities, and lives. (Eshun-Baiden; 2007:1)

⁶¹Remarks of Dr. Nemata Eshun-Baiden

50/50 Group.

National Democratic Institute – Madeleine K. Albright

Grant, Washington, D.C.

October 24, 2007

In the light of setting up the 50/50 group and helping to develop mechanisms for more women to have a voice according to Eshun-Baiden (2007), another researcher, Nzomo (2002) also highlights the positive effects of the well organized network of women and the dynamic and powerful force for positive change that women were able to accelerate towards a much needed change. They also took advantage of the opportunities that had been made available to them in their quest to promote women's empowerment and advancement at all levels of the Sierra Leonean society.

Nzomo (2002) argued that although women's political activism has not prevented Sierra Leone from reverting back to war, the lesson from this action by Sierra Leonean women is instructive. Among other things, it demonstrates that, even in a politically volatile situation, a combination of political will, and a well-organized network of women, can be a dynamic and powerful force for positive change.

Essentially even though these Sierra Leonean women had practically lost their homes, personal and community identity which had caused the disintegration of their identities, they were still able to draw upon several core factors including their personal skills, coping mechanisms, strategies, social and community networks and groups with sheer determination within themselves to resist the negative effects of their traumatic experiences. These different factors assisted them during their transformation.

According to most of the data that was collected during this research study, it seems that Sierra Leonean women have indeed gained a new identity and status for themselves. This new identity and these new roles brought about a significant change of attitude towards women. Their gender and social roles changed at all levels, locally, regionally and nationally in the Sierra Leonean society.

As Sierra Leonean women began to develop themselves and acquired new identities and roles during the civil conflict, they gained confidence and developed the skills and ability to negotiate, demand and push for peace at all costs. They then made sure these skills were put into good use. According to researchers and authors, including Mazurana and Carlson (2004) and Kleen (2005), Sierra Leoneans had suffered devastations. The people of Sierra Leone had had enough of the civil conflict and wanted an end to all the violence and needed a positive change. Women were in the forefront during the peace negotiations which included demanding to meet the rebel leader Foday Sankoh. According to Mazurana and Carlson (2004):

“From the early days of the war, women in rural and urban centers mobilized to protest the atrocities and call for peace. In May 2000, with the RUF flouting the 1999 Lomé accords, a group of elderly women came together, demanding a meeting with Sankoh. On arriving at the RUF compound, they were mistreated and insulted. Frustrated, the women tried a different tactic. They collectively hitched up their skirts, bent over, and bared themselves to Sankoh and his coterie. In Sierra Leone, such an action by women is the worst curse that can be brought upon anyone.” (Mazurana and Carlson; 2004:4)

This was an important and significant step forward for the women of Sierra Leone and effectively for their transformation towards the roles they would play as agents of change to demand and bring peace to Sierra Leone. According to several reports including Mazurana and Carlson (2004), Richards (2005), Wood (2008) and Thorpe (2005) the women had to take the lead, when their male counterparts seemed to have failed during the civil conflict of Sierra Leone, in demanding and bringing peace to the country. These women, through their efforts, determination and resourcefulness gained recognition for their work and this also gave them the chance to participate and work in partnership with others towards bringing a peaceful end to the civil conflict and to take positive steps toward peace building and governance. According to Mazurana and Carlson (2004):

“The news had a galvanizing effect on Sierra Leoneans. They had an obligation to uphold the women’s honor and support the cause. But the women’s actions also gave people the courage to stand up to the RUF.” (Mazurana and Carlson; 2004:4)

According T.G., one of the participants of the study stated that:

Before the war I was a respected member of my community and people came to me for help and support and I was determined to continue giving help and support to other members of my community even during this hard and difficult times. I had been given this responsibility by my community and I had no choice but to continue. My determination not to give up helped to overcome some of my own physical and mental

pain and sufferings and I refused to be put down by the rebels. We had to do the best for our community and I refused to be put down by the devastation and human sufferings.

(T.G. participant of the research study)

This was an important and significant step forward for the women of Sierra Leone and effectively for their transformation towards the roles they would play as agents of change to demand and bring peace to Sierra Leone. According to several reports including Mazurana and Carlson (2004), Richards (2005), Wood (2008) and Thorpe (2005) the women had to take the lead, when their male counterparts seemed to have failed during the civil conflict of Sierra Leone, in demanding and bringing peace to the country.

They were able to organise themselves and mobilise and support others to participate and contribute to this important aspect of the peace process. Sierra Leonean women took centre stage in protesting for all the different government and rebel groups to hold national elections.

This was an area that few women took part in. This was important development and contribution of Sierra Leonean women was highlighted by Nzomo (2002)

“During the 1995 parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone, local women's groups, notably, the Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN) and the

Federation of Muslim Women's Association organized themselves to mobilize other women to participate in the national elections that most would not otherwise have participated. These women NGOs conducted a door to door campaign, ignoring threats to their security, to persuade other women to vote.” (Nzomo; 2002:11)

This was another important aspect of the changing role, status and identity of Sierra Leonean women. All of these impacted on their lives and in the light of this they became empowered. These changes in the gender roles contributed to wider changes in society that in fact altered the history of the civil war. Their efforts, determination and resourcefulness were a concrete illustration of this. According to Schroven (2006):

“Discussions by women’s rights activists describing perceived changes due to war-time influences regarding women’s enlarged responsibilities in a war situation or even propose women’s empowerment happening through direct participation in combat”
(Schroven; 2006:2)

This was certainly the case for Sierra Leonean women and their new status and how they adapted to the new changes in their lives. These changes propelled women towards using their new status and identities to form significant partnerships and also to collaborate with others to make the voices of women heard in order to achieve gender equality at all levels of Sierra Leonean society. These women at the same time took advantage of the opportunities that had been made available to them in their quest to promote women’s empowerment, enlightenment and advancement. Essentially their new identity and status also gave these

women the scope and stance to enter into the political and governance arena to address some of the specific gender, cultural, traditional and social issues pertaining to them as women.

5.5 THE PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS AND ASPECTS OF THE ADVERSITY- ACTIVATED DEVELOPMENT ON THE PARTICIPANTS

During the research and data collection, most of the participants had some concerns about the way their new assumed roles and responsibilities impacted on their personal, professional, family and community lives. The research has found significant psycho-social aspects on the ego and strength of the participants in such an important way, that it led them, not only to develop resilience, but also assisted them in their fights for equal rights and justice towards their development and advancement as women. Most of these women had been deprived of their basic rights over the years; hence therefore their new roles were a platform of change that they had to handle with caution and sometimes limited personal inner resources and professional skills.

This was the challenge that they faced and the positive developments of certain skills and attitudes of their adversity experiences gave them some of the qualities that they needed to address some of the issues affecting them as they resettled into the United Kingdom. These women, hence therefore, were able to renegotiate certain aspects of their traditional and cultural ways of lives. The participants talked about being excluded from participating within the political systems of government at national, regional and local community levels. In addition to all of these aspects, it is therefore, very important to highlight the positive

responses that they developed as against the adversity that they endured. Hence, the main aim of this research is to look at the positive responses towards resilience, instead of the negatives and adversities that they experienced during and after the war.

According to Participant AM of the research study

“New roles as a women, who can make some good contributions and opportunities that have been made possible for me in the new communities that I have been able to live in. To be in control of my own life and my future, more resilience and will power to succeed in the face of "Uncertainty" and “Adversity” and “Danger”. Goodness in other people whom we have met for the first time even after going through hardship. Love, compassion and respect for others in spite of past personal suffering and losses. Supporting others that are in need. Believing in myself with positive confidence”

Participant AM of the research study

Some of these psycho-social impacts were, bringing together all that they had learnt and experienced during the war, and using all of these towards economic strength and stability, organising themselves in such a way that they were able to effectively open up different organisations that they use to help others in similar circumstances. According to the research findings, Participant AM of the research study (2009) talked about gaining confidence and then being able to set up a voluntary organisation. According to participant AM, the aim of this organisation is to work with other women in similar circumstances. Mainly to help them

address some of their negative experiences that they might have encountered as they try to re-settle and integrate into their new communities.

Another psycho-social impact is that these women were able to use their own basic knowledge, new skills and abilities that they developed during the years of the civil war to generate financial income and becoming self-sufficient towards socio-economic empowerment and stability. According to some of them they had to learn the hard way but gained the ability to provide for their families. Taking a critical look at other aspects of the psycho-social impacts of the new roles of the participants, it is very important to look at the transformation of some of their cultural and traditional attitudes towards understanding the equal roles that all members of the community have to play towards development of the community. Therefore, the social roles that have been given to different members of the communities changed in such a way that women in particular realised that these roles were just cultural and traditional norms and values, thus they themselves as women can make contributions and participate in their different communities.

Another vital point that needs to be highlighted is how these participants were able to draw strength and personal resilience from some of the key findings of this research. As a direct result of this, the participants were able to balance their personal, emotional and social needs because of the psycho-social aspects and nature of their assumed roles.

In summing up, it seems that the new and assumed roles had psycho-social impacts and effects on the participants and they were able to take up ownership of their own lives with

positive views and personal values within a feminist's perspective. There is a need to look at how they were able to balance their emotional strength and physical needs during their traumatic experiences and, as they assumed new roles that they needed to take up because of the situation that they found themselves in.

The baseline to their balanced needs depended on their personal inner strength, resilience, new and developed skills, abilities, attitudes and the way they were prepared to accept the changes in their lives. As well as the new roles that they had to assume, the new opportunities that have been made available to them in their new communities. The war and the trauma attached to it was a negative experience, but at the same time it helped to motivate them to understand and reinvent themselves. This then gave them the tools and the skills that they could use to negotiate their traditional and cultural views and attitudes for positive changes towards their personal and public lives.

The impact of the bravery and personal will and determination of the women of Sierra Leone was highlighted by Rubio-Marin (2006):

The bravery, vibrancy, and effectiveness that women's groups displayed were unrivalled in the history of the country. They led and participated in the conferences and demonstration demanding that the military government hold elections and hand over power to a democratic government. (Rubio-Marin, 2006:252)

As a direct result of these gender transformations Sierra Leonean women now have better status and identity as women and also more significant roles to play at different levels.

Hence therefore during most wars and upheavals women do not only suffer violence but they also find ways to improve their status and take up important responsibilities and roles. This was certainly the case for most Sierra Leonean women, who formed partnerships with others and worked together to realise their aims and goals.

According to Brown et al (2005)

“At a national level, the conflict and post-conflict period has propelled
Women to prominent positions within NGO and advocacy organisations”

(Brown et al; 2005:9)

This affirms that they had developed new skills and ability to recover from their traumatic experiences in a very remarkable way despite their personal loss and devastation. As a direct result of the given circumstances women had to take up different responsibilities and positions such as peace negotiators, community and women leaders.

Thorpe (2006) highlights this:

“That in the Sierra Leone context the realisation was brought about during the rebel war, and women are now being empowerment to make contribution to national development” (Thorpe, 2006: pxv11)

In the case of Sierra Leonean women even though they had experienced devastation during the war they were still able to use their personal virtues, coping mechanisms, social and community networks and strategies to address their present personal situations. At the same time, try to maintain and balance the physical and emotional health and well-being of their families.

This was also exemplified by some of the participants of the study talked about the multiple burdens of care and responsibilities for their families and themselves during devastation of the war and also after the war. Most of the women remained sometimes as the main source of balance, understanding and focal point for their families and communities during the most difficult periods.

This was mirrored by some of the participants of the study they became the binding and linking factors for their families and their new communities.

According to participant IS of the research study (2009):

When we were finally granted entry into Ghana to live with some friends and relatives. We were able to live as a family again and then felt that the Lord had answered some of our prayers. I become one of the members of my community group, to help, support and work with others. We lived and worked with groups supporting Sierra Leonean refugees, this was a very important stage in my life and I felt like being part of the community and can share my skills and experiences with others in similar circumstances.

Participant IS of the research study

5.6 RESILIENCE AND AAD TOWARDS SOCIOECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND ADVANCEMENT OF SIERRA LEONEAN WOMEN.

Resilience

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of resilience is the act of rebounding or to spring back. In the case of Sierra Leonean women who took part in this research study, they were able to ‘spring back’ from the traumatic experiences and changing circumstances because of certain factors and also personal characteristics that played a big part in their lives. According to some of the participants, they already had certain qualities and skills within them that they were able to use in addressing their traumatic experiences. As Papadopoulos (2006) has observed, the key characteristic of resilience is that it retains qualities that existed before (Papadopoulos, 2006:5).

In the case of some of some of the Sierra Leonean women who took part in the research, some of them were able to retain their personal qualities that existed in them before as a result of their determination to address their present circumstances because of certain factors. These factors included their personal commitments and responsibilities to their families as care-givers, personal attributes as women and their gender roles, social and community support which they were able to get from their different communities and social groups.

This was also exemplified by some of the participants of the study. According to participant TP:

I believe that it was all my personal experiences of the war, the trauma of losing everything, personally and professionally lead to my determination to turn the negative into positive. Being captured by the rebels, living and working with them as a nurse, helping other women and girls in the rebel camps using my personal and professional skills and experiences all of these gave me inner strength. I felt that because I had survived and this was a chance to turn all the negative and difficult experiences into something good. I felt lucky to be alive and I had to make the most of this because others had lost their lives and everything that they had. I had been given another chance and was going to make use of this chance which some other never had. Participant TP of the research study

To mirror this, participant BD of the study also said:

Some of the positive qualities that kept me going are my strong determination to achieve and succeed in life. My Christian way of life, hope and faith in God. My education and profession as a teacher, good home and family life. Love, care and respect for family, friends and others. Strong sense of personal, community values and beliefs, helping others, sharing and supporting others who are less fortunate. Good professional background and social status in my community. Before the war I was a respected member of my community and people came to me for help and support and I was determined to continue giving them help and support even during this hard and difficult times. My determination helped to relieved me of some of physical and mental pain and sufferings and I refused to be put down by the rebels.

Participant BD of the research study

These were some of the bases of their resilience that enabled and also motivated them to spring back from their traumatic experiences. Many of the participant including A.M. realised that they had survived, whilst others had either lost their lives, been raped, or suffered physical or emotional abuse; some of these women saw their survival as being given another chance and for some of them this was a major positive turning point.

Reflecting on their personal coping strategies and survival techniques essentially gave a new meaning to their lives. According to Papadopoulos (2007)

“Once they realize that they have survived the initial and life-threatening adversity, the refugees have the opportunity to begin to appreciate life in its own right.”

(Papadopoulos; 2007:87)

According to participant TG of the research study:

I was able to develop some personal skills to survive and to make quick positive decisions. I had to lead other women to help me bury some of the dead in my town. This was a duty performed only by the men in our community but I had to do something to help and support grieving families. Although this was a very difficult decision for me to take, I was determined to remain focused and help others. My decision to carry out funerals in my community helped me to become strong physically and mentally and I was able to remain focused. This new role, gave me a strong sense of personal commitment to my community. I was able to address some of my own personal loss and inner pain which I was experiencing. Participant TG of the research study

Such was and still is the determination and resilience of Sierra Leonean women during and even long after the civil war that devastated and ravaged the country. Sierra Leonean women refused to give up the fight for their rights and for peace even though they suffered the most in the hands of the rebels and the government troops.

According to Mazurana and Carlson (2004)

“Throughout the conflict, women led civil society peace efforts. In 2002, as the country faced the breakdown of the 1999 Lomé accords, women were pivotal in galvanizing mass demonstrations that led to the end of the war”. (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004:6)

Sierra Leonean women galvanizing mass demonstrations was certainly one of the important roles they were able to take. Many Sierra Leonean women were the driving force behind the survival of the country and their communities during the civil war. Even during the most difficult periods of devastation, human sufferings and uncertainty many women were still active in their different groups and communities and for them there was never the option to give up and allow the rebels and the government to continue fighting.

As stated by Papadopoulos (2006)

“It is well known that following a difficult and intense experience, people may respond in ways that emphasize the renewing rather than the injurious effects of the experience. Despite (or even because of) the pain, disorientation, disruption, devastation and loss, people may still feel that the very same ‘traumatic’ experience also made them re-evaluate their priorities in life, change their life-styles and acquire

new values – all in all, experiencing a substantial change and renewal in their lives”(Papadopoulos, 2006;p305)

In the case of the Sierra Leonean refugee women who took part in this research their personal and sheer determination, inner self will, skills, capability and resourcefulness played a significant part in relation to their developing Adversity Activated Development (AAD).

Some of the participants also stated that family commitment, community roles, and their responsibilities to society and culture gave them another important tool of empowerment towards (AAD). According to some of the participants their inner strength and ability to cope and effectively bounce back against all the odds because of these responsibilities left them with no other choice but to make something positive out of the negative. Sierra Leonean women navigated their way through trauma and human suffering using their personal attributes, capabilities and the community resources and networks that were available to them.

When asked about responding positively to their negative experiences, participant IS of the study responded by saying that:

As women we decided to form a group to help support families and to bury the dead. This was done in secret and we were determined to bury the dead according to our traditional and cultural beliefs of give the dead a decent burial. We had to brave the

fighting in town and hide to bury the dead; this was the last honour that they deserved. Even though this was a job that only men did before the war, we decided that in the absence of the men and boys we had to respect and give honour to the dead. We had family commitments and community values to keep and respect.

Participant IS of the research study (2009)

To dig a grave and also bury the dead was a role played only by men; this was a new role that some women had to take up in the absence of men and boys. This was also a significant change of gender roles and responsibilities in war time Sierra Leone. As a direct result of these gender transformations Sierra Leonean women now have different roles, status and identity. During most wars women not only suffer violence but they also find ways to improve their status and take up important responsibilities and roles. This was certainly the case for most Sierra Leonean women who developed certain new skills during the war.

5.7 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE LIVES OF SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEE WOMEN

Group membership seems to have created deep trust and mutual support. Members were able to share ideas and personal experiences and also some of the challenges they faced. They also had strength in numbers and this had an impact on them. They had a purpose, which was to protect themselves and others. They also had some unique personal, community and social

coping strategies, personal faith and beliefs. These were the framework and structure of their determination to survive and bring peace to the country.

Eshun-Baiden (2007) maintained that:

“Little did I know that there were hoards of committed and dedicated Sierra Leonean women who were just waiting for a chance to air their views and channel their energies for change. Before long, we were organizing demonstrations, holding meetings, seminars, and training programs, preparing training materials, going on radio and TV, and in the process, learning new things and meeting new challenges”.

(Eshun-Baiden, 2007:3)

Such was the determination and willingness of Sierra Leonean women to be part of a group and work in partnership with others. The role of community, social, civil society organisations and religious groups was of great significance to most of the participants. These groups according to some of the participants became the place of solace, personal development, capacity building, community planning, friendship and kinship. This was stated by Rubio-Marin (2006)

“The initiatives undertaken by women’s groups across factional divides, Sierra Leone in the diaspora, who had fled the country as a result of the conflict and sought refuge

in other countries formed networks and pressured the Sierra Leone government and the international community to initiate measures to end hostilities and restore peace”.

Rubio-Marin (2006:253)

Many researchers reported that it was the pressure from women’s groups that lead other international organisations and groups to put certain important factors into place that helped to bring peace to Sierra Leone. According to some participants of the research being part of one of these groups was very important to them and all the other women as they became well organised and determined to put up the fight for peace and stability. According to these participants they were also able to gain support from the international community because of their resilience and personal determination to help bring peace and unity to the country that had been ravaged by war.

Becoming members of these groups was for many of them not only a vital part of their resettlement and integration into their host community but it also helped them to adapt to the changes to their lives and their new communities. They felt that belonging to a group gave them confidence to deal with some of their personal experiences.

This fact was confirmed by participant A.M. of the study:

My Christian and community group and some members of my family living in the UK gave me personal support, hope and faith. Their help and support, I believed gave me some courage to start a new life again despite my age and personal loss.

The community group was the bridge between me and my new community and their support was of great value to me as I integrated into the community.

Participant A.M. of the research study

The group meetings according to participants were flexible. This kind of approach gave them the opportunity to discuss their views, experiences and feelings in a holistic and simple way that helped them to share without holding back any personal issues or experiences. Most of the participants found that becoming members of different groups had been one of the factors that helped them to realize their inner strength and their ability to persevere. This open space created for them a platform to talk about their experiences with other women in similar circumstances.

According to some of the participants of the study, they had to set up groups to give help and support to other women and their families.

Participant I.S. of the study:

We also set up a peace group talking about peace for our country and most of the members of this group worked with others to find peace and security for women and girls who were suffering the most. We had to fight for our rights and help others.

Participant I.S. of the research study

This fact about the women of Sierra Leone responding with a peaceful demonstration was highlighted by Rubio-Marin (2006)

“After the peace accord was signed in 1999, the rebels defaulted by capturing and detaining more than 500 United Nations peacekeepers and their ammunitions. The women responded with a peaceful demonstration at the rebel leaders’ home in Freetown on 6 May 2000, demanding the release of the peacekeepers and a number of girls abducted since 6 January 1999, as well as the cessation of hostilities’ in accordance with the Lome’ accord”. (Rubio-Marin; 2006:253)

This was the beginning of the change for women in Sierra Leone. The positive will power, bravery and personal determination of Sierra Leonean women to bring peace to the country were unbelievable. They certainly had the drive and skills needed to raise up to the challenges presented to them and they then used their personal will and fortitude to bring the change that they needed in the country. This was mirrored by participant A.M. of the study

***Krio:** e do so wey Oman dem de suffer, we don tire!!*

English: *Enough is enough, women have suffered enough!!!*

We had to take the lead now because most of us have lost our husbands and sons and we have survived all the bad experiences and we have to do something good for ourselves and others that need our support and help.

We have now become very strong willed and we came to realise after so many years of male dominance because of our cultural and traditional values, we as women can also contribute equally to our families and communities, stop violence, promote peace and development

Participant A.M. of the research study

According to participant A.M. of the study:

Yes, my gender role as a Sierra Leonean woman has changed because of my experiences; I now have a voice to talk with others. I also feel that I'm at the same level as my husband and I can make participant and also make contributions on equal terms without any discrimination or gender inequality. I do not see myself lower than my husband according to the rules of my traditional and cultural beliefs and values. I have been able to find my own personal skills and inner strength of character.

Krio: *Now a know say den man respect me as a woman cos I don do plenty tin for hep other people dem. Inside de camp na we din de help dem people dem. De wa don mak mi srange, en watin mi ya ci, don hep mi for tinap srange wan.*

English: *Now I know that I do have respect as a woman, because I have done a lot of things to help other people. I also help a lot of others inside the camps. The war has made me a strong woman and all my experiences have helped me to become a very strong woman.*

Krio: *“Me self kin play me yone part as woman”*

English: *I can play my own part as a woman.*

According to most of the research participants Sierra Leonean women they have known have lived most of their lives internalising their experiences of lack of education, training and personal development, lower gender status, obvious aspects of poverty, specific gender role, social exclusion and gender inequality at all levels. Some of these experiences changed during the civil war.

Women’s behaviour changed because of some of the new roles that they had to assume. Their experiences of adversity during ten years of civil war in Sierra Leone had equipped Sierra Leonean women with the tools and skills needed to develop positively and adopt new strategies towards gaining equality at all levels of the Sierra Leonean society. They became empowered and changed society’s views and attitudes towards them as second class citizens with inferior status. Their voices were being heard because of the significant contributions they had made during and after the civil war. Women became aware of their gender, social and personal rights and in the history of Sierra Leone, women started to challenge and seek justice for themselves and gaining positions in political and government offices that had been over the years set aside to men. This was cited by Nzomo (2002)

“Women are challenging laws and constitutions that do not uphold gender equality. In addition, they are increasingly moving into government, legislative, party, NGO and other leadership positions previously the nearly exclusive domain of men”. (Nzomo; 2002:3)

According to a participant I.S. of the research study

We also set up a peace group talking about peace for our country. and most of the members of this group worked with others to find peace and security for women and girls who were suffering the most. We had to fight for our rights and help others.

Krio: e do so wey oman dem de suffer, we don tire!!

English: Enough is enough, women have suffered enough!!!

Participant I.S. of the research study (2009)

THE TRANSFORMATION AND THE DRIVING FORCE FOR CHANGE

During the Civil War in Sierra Leone, women were propelled to change their roles because of their personal experiences and the realisation that they now have the skills to change their present situation. These experiences included them being able to contribute to public offices and also in the political sector. Most of the jobs in public offices and the political sector had

been set aside for men as a direct result of gender and social roles in Sierra Leone, particularly in the northern region of the country. The determination of Sierra Leonean women to succeed and to change certain aspects of their lives was a direct result of their resilience and the inner strength which they had, but they were not aware of. This resilience and determination became apparent when they knew that they had lost loved ones, their homes, their professions, community and social lives, but came to the realisation that they had developed some new skills and capabilities to turn the negatives in their lives to something positive.

These women had a new insight into their own lives and the impact on them from their personal experiences became the driving force for them. These points were highlighted by Eshun-Baiden (2007):

“So we have earned – more than earned – the right to advocate for a different system ... one that mandates a fully equal role for women and men.”(Eshun-Baiden, 2007:6)

This important fact that was highlighted by Eshun-Baiden (2007) about Sierra Leonean women, being able to earn the right to advocate for a different system marks an important milestone in the lives of Sierra Leonean women. Sierra Leonean women had for many years been denied their basic rights. In summary the collected research data suggests that, Sierra Leonean women assumed new roles, aspirations, responsibilities, gained new skills, identities and then became empowered through adversity. These developments happened as a direct result of the war, and of their living in and also adopting different cultures, meeting, sharing

and interacting with others. They have been able to thrive and grow in a positive way in the face of adversity.

This was their positive way forward as a result of the critical roles that they had to play during the war but also most importantly the opportunities that were made available to them as they accessed some of the systems and structures of their new communities. There are now new defined changes to their personal, economic, social and political status. Some of these women also developed high level leadership qualities and the personal will-power to participate in politics. Most of the women who took part in the research have been able not only to make valuable contributions to the development of their communities but they have also been able to participate in the social and economic development of the nation.

Sierra Leonean Women as the vehicle and medium of change

According to the research result the scale of their resilience and some of the factors that helped these women to develop Adversity Activated Development (AAD) were beyond understanding .Despite all of the atrocities committed against Sierra Leoneans during the civil war they were determined to fight for peace, and to maintain peace at all cost.

These changes helped them acquire new identities that were created as a direct result of their involvement during the war and also the international influences of the different groups, organisations, humanitarian and aid agencies that worked with them at different stages during

the war. These new roles that they had to take up as a result of their experiences created and promoted some form of behavioural changes. These changes have for some of these women been the compelling factor that has lead them to pursue new professional, economic and social roles towards enrichment, empowerment and development in their new and various communities.

Their personal experience of adversity was for them a learning curve and also a realisation of their potential. Their willingness to use their negative experiences to achieve positive goals were as direct results of their personal determination and drive, inner strengthen and skills. Even though according to researchers including Rubio-Marin (2006)

“The civil war in Sierra Leone did not spare women and children. Instead, their vulnerability was deliberately exploited”. (Rubio-Marin; 2006:250)

Despite the fact that their vulnerability was exploited this not deter some of them from helping to bring peace to the country and help to make positive changes for future generations.

This was certainly the case for Sierra Leonean women, who actually experienced substantial and significant changes and development in their lives. Despite the fact that some women had experienced horrific atrocities including Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual Violence during the war, they responded with clear determination to address issues of gender

inequalities and women's rights. Therefore one can reiterate that the Sierra Leone conflict created and promoted behavioural and personal changes that actually compelled women to use their voices and personal skills to advocate for women's rights, gender equality at all levels, and also to address issues related to their empowerment and personal development and enrichment.

This research took a critical look at the personal capabilities, skills and determination of these women to achieve positive goals despite the 'injuries' and 'wounds' which they sustained during the devastating events of the conflicts Papadopoulos (2004; 2006). It showed that some of their individual capabilities, characteristics, family values, community, society and cultural values essentially all played a big part in their resilience and the way they were able to develop Adversity Activated Development (AAD).

THE STRENGTH: The main strength of this research is based on valuable contributions of personal experiences of and views of Sierra Leonean refugee women as participants rather than them being the subjects of the research. According to the participants the research study gave them the chance to share and narrate their personal and human experiences and a way of getting their voices heard and them feeling empowered by their personal contributions to the research study. This important point of working with refugees as participants has been highlighted by Temple and Moran (2006).

.....encourage service development and research that has capacity-building and capacity-releasing elements in it. This may take the form of help with the

development of skills for creating and implementing action plans and /or with initiating or advocacy. This kind of alternative community development model of research values the capabilities of people with different perspectives, (Temple and Moran; 2006:11)

Temple and Moran (2006) have demonstrated the invaluable contributions of refugees as participants in research studies that affect them and the wider community that they live in. As stated by Mills (1963):

This research project was designed to involve and empower refugee people seeking asylum, the local community and local service deliverers, being most fundamentally distinguishable from casework by the fact that the process consciously sought to understand the nature of the presenting problems, and reactions to them in relation to the wider social context and surrounding networks (Mills; 1963:440)

Throughout my research study this important aspect of involving refugees as participants was an integrating part of the way the research study is conducted. Most of the participants showed varied behaviours and emotions during the research and investigation of the unique way that Sierra Leonean Refugee women experienced adversity connected with the civil war in Sierra Leone.

The study helped some of the refugee women to talk about their different personal developments and how they were able to address adversity at different stages during the war, their flight to a safe country, their transition through various stages and during their final phase of resettlement in the UK including their integration into their new communities. Another strength of this research was the fact that some of the participants mentioned that taking part in the research study gave them a sense of empowerment, and that talking and sharing their experiences with others gave them a chance to relate with others with similar experiences.

Most of these women believed that the semi-structured interviews and also the one to one interviews helped them to talk in their own special way about their perceptions of their war experiences. This included the beliefs and values which they had before the war and which changed after the war because they were exposed to adversity and they had to use their inner strength and will to explore positive approaches to solving and understanding some of their problems. This was cited by Mazurana et al (2004):

Despite the horrors they endured, the women and girls showed tremendous agency and initiative during their times in the force. Within the confines of their environment they regained some control of their own lives by developing skills to ensure their survival and strategies to protect others. (Mazurana et al; 2004:17)

During the research study some of the participants said that the study and the research was an educational process, a learning process for them as they began to better understand and

collect complex information with a great degree of understanding of some issues, including gender roles within communities and societies in the UK and Sierra Leone.

Mazurana et al (2004) stated that:

Women have held leadership roles throughout Sierra Leone's history. During the war, despite the widespread violence, women were fundamental to the reorganization of civil society, mass mobilization for peace, and the eventual cessation of the war.

(Mazurana et al; 2004:21)

These facts are all clear indication that some Sierra Leonean women were the driving force behind the peaceful end to the war and they paid a heavy price but never gave up hope to succeed in their fight for peace.

Mazurana et al (2004) also stated that:

Women's organizations such as the YWCA⁶² played central roles in the processes that led to the signing of the Lome' peace accord.

(Mazurana et al; 2004:24)

⁶²YWCA-Young Women Christian Association. YWCA played a key role during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leonean women joined civil society organisations, religious and educational groups to contribute and play valuable roles in the peace process. Organisations including the YWCA of Sierra Leone played a major role at this time of need and Mazurana et al (2004) stated that:

The YWCA openly encourages women to “unite and initiate programs for sufficiency and take up leadership roles in our communities and country as a whole.”(Mazurana et al; 2004:

25

It is of vital importance that women’s war efforts be recognised, and that their new assumed roles and their first leadership roles in the absences of their husbands, sons and other male family members be acknowledged. These roles that women had to assume in their different communities, led to women’s personal and professional development and advancement in the face of adversity and their overall experiences.

For many years through different wars, conflicts and political unrest, women have been emerging as survivors and not victims, and this in itself has given them opportunities that they never had before. Positive changes occurred as a direct result of women’s experiences and their changing roles in their communities and the wider society.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Part 1: Overview

Part 2: Conclusion

Part 3: Recommendations

Part 4: Suggestion for Further Research

6.1 OVERVIEW

This research has been able to identify the key factors that contributed to the Sierra Leonean refugee women (that participated in this research) succeed in retaining many positive abilities, characteristics, qualities, relationships, functions that they possessed before their exposure to adversity despite all the adversity they were exposed to during the war in their country and subsequent turmoil to find a place of safety and during their new life in the UK. These resilient dimensions these women were able to retain despite the losses, suffering and devastation they had also experienced during the war and during their uprooting period.

What this research also revealed was that these women were also able to develop new positive characteristics, functions, relationships, abilities, qualities that they did not possess before their exposure to adversity, i.e. before the onset of the civil war in Sierra Leone.

The key characteristic of resilience is that it retains qualities that existed before and Adversity Activated Development (AAD) introduces new characteristics that did not exist before (Papadopoulos, 2006; 309)

This means that the existing positive strengths that they were able to retain despite their exposure to adversity correspond with what Papadopoulos calls *resilient* functions, and the new positives that they were able to develop because of their exposure to adversity he calls Adversity-Activated development.

In this way, this research confirmed that the Adversity/Trauma Grid (Papadopoulos, 2004, 2006, 2007) is, indeed, a useful heuristic framework to research these phenomena.

According to the research findings, the main factors that contributed to the dimensions of resilience and of AAD were:

- Family connections
- Community connections and other Supportive systems
- Religious faith
- Religious affiliation
- Belief systems
- Personal, family and cultural values

- Women solidarity
- Consciousness of their social role as women

Essentially these Sierra Leonean refugee women used their personal experiences of the war and other parameters including new roles that they had to play, religion, family values and commitments. One of the most important of all of these parameters is the personal strength of character and determination which they used to help them restructure the social and community systems within the cultural and traditional framework of Sierra Leonean society. This is a society and background where women and girls are born and bred to become second class citizens; their lives and roles in society are dictated and also defined by their communities because of their gender.

This is highlighted by Jefferson (2003) when he stated that:

“Sierra Leonean women faced widespread discrimination in practice, law, and custom before armed conflict erupted—each compounding and reinforcing the other, to women’s enormous disadvantage”. (Jefferson, 2003:4)

It is true to say that despite “Women’s enormous disadvantage” Jefferson (2003) there was, essentially as a result of the conflict, a fundamental change in their social and gender roles and family commitments. These factors were very significant in their personal development and in their determination to address issues and experiences related to them becoming refugees.

6.2 CONCLUSION

Destruction, Devastation and Resilience

During the conflict within Sierra Leone, whole communities were destroyed, with many lives, homes and personal belongings lost, in some cases forever.

The war not only destroyed the lives of individuals and certain groups but it also in many cases destroyed the way of life of different communities and the people in them.

Certain groups and individuals, particularly women and girls who suffered Gender Based Violence and abuse were pushed over the edge and some decided that they had to fight back and address their situation. The abuse ceased to be a deterrent for some Sierra Leonean women and many of them used their resilience to remain positive and decided to fight back. It appears that some women even used the experiences of different kinds of adversity as a platform towards changing opinions and attitudes about women and their capabilities within many different communities of Sierra Leone.

According to Hamilton (1999)

In the upheaval accompanying displacement, refugee women often demonstrate remarkable flexibility, adaptability and resilience. As heads of households, they must

be able to provide for their families without traditional social networks and the support of husbands and brothers, and often take on new economic and social roles. While these experiences often lead to considerable trauma, they may also act as a source of empowerment for refugee women. (Hamilton; 1999:11)

Sierra Leonean women have shown their resilience through the ways in which they have confronted their situation and circumstances. These women used different strategies and coping mechanisms to maintain reasonable balance for their families and also their different communities.

Women as agents of change

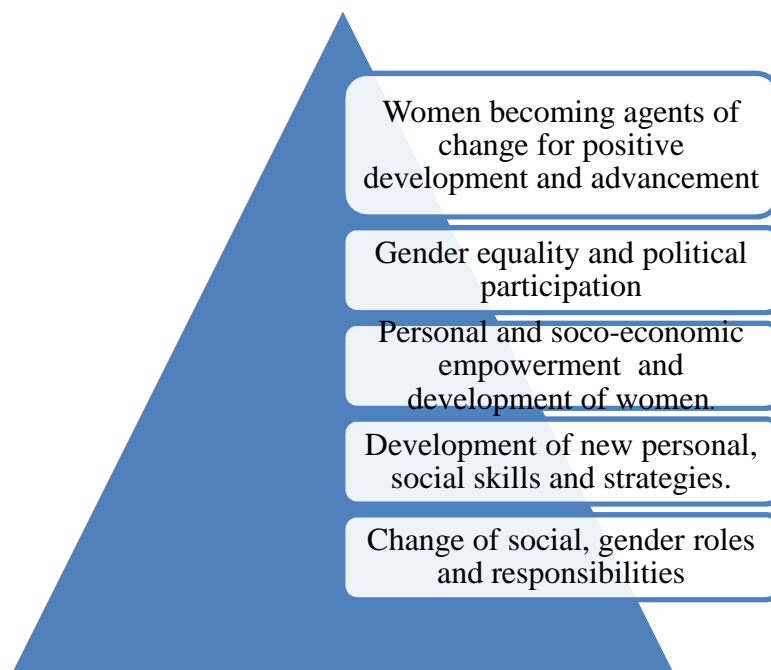


Fig 2: The changes to social, gender role and responsibilities in Sierra Leone

Essentially the ultimate change of social and gender roles, family commitments, religion, cultural and traditional beliefs and values, development of new skills, job opportunities, education and skills training in host communities for these refugee women have been very significant in their personal development and determination to address issues and experiences related to their personal experiences.

As stated in the previous chapter, this research was able to find some of the factors that lead Sierra Leonean refugee women to become resilient in the face of adversity, personal loss and total devastation during the period of the conflict in Sierra Leone. In order to understand these results from my current research study and also make some connections with other women refugees, I have decided to look at other similar studies that have been conducted with women refugees as participants who have had similar experiences to some of the Sierra Leonean refugee women in this study.

These research studies have been conducted by researchers working with participants from countries that have been in conflict including Rwanda, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Eritrea and Liberia. I have examined these studies and have found out that the refugee women who were participants in these research studies had similar personal experiences of conflicts in their regions to most of the participants in my own research study.

I have looked at these studies and decided to focus on some key factors that are connected to the resilience, resourcefulness and adapting to changes of refugee women and their

determination to succeed and becoming the agent of change in very difficult situations and circumstances that they find themselves. According to Hamilton (1999)

Refugee women are subjects in their own right, individuals coping creatively with adversity who desire not only to be protected but to be empowered as well.

(Hamilton; 1999:1)

To link this to my current research, I have tried to investigate the positive aspects developed by women refugees from Sierra Leone and how they turned adversity into resilience and bridged the gaps they had in their lives before and during the conflict.

In an explorative, qualitative study conducted by Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani (2012) there were a few similarities with my own study as they also examined the experience of African women refugees, aiming to explore their experiences of violence during conflicts whilst identifying the connections and the relationship between resilience, access to rights and support and identity (Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani; 2012: 4).

According to Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani (2012):

Previous research on refugee women's experience has focussed on negative impact on psychological functioning, despite indications that they show great strength and resilience (Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani; 2012:72)

I agree with Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani (2012) that previous studies had focussed on the negative experiences of refugee women, and failed to highlight their positivity and determination to succeed despite the situations that they find themselves in.

This is one of the reasons why I decided that I would try to focus on the positive aspects of refugee women and their resilience and also the factors that made them agents of change. I have decided to highlight and understand what made them bring to the forefront their abilities and capabilities to change their status and their lives in a positive way. It is very important to examine the indicators that show the great strength and resilience of these refugee women.

To link the research done by Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani (2012) and my research, I want to acknowledge that refugee women have got strength of character, endurance, capabilities and abilities to survive in difficult situations. But above all these individual positive personal qualities, what this study revealed was that the Sierra Leonean women also relied a great deal on the *relational* qualities of the various *support systems* that they were able to access and use fruitfully to address effectively their plight. In this way, these women not only developed special coping mechanisms to be able to push forward, survive and thrive but they also succeeded in making a positive impact on others and also in changing the entire social landscape that previously dictated a subservient role to women.

A participant in my current study said:

“Women had to wear special clothing to keep them safe from rape and sexual attacks. We all wore very tight fitting short sports trousers and was always close together. We believed that if we were together we will stop the rebels attacking us. We gave each other support and together we were strong in numbers and determined to fight with all our inner strength.

This just highlights how these women developed strength from their women sense of solidarity.

I have focused on the factors of their resilience, their ability and inner strength of character, and also looking at the coping mechanisms and above all their unique use of their supportive systems.

The participants of my current study were given the chance to talk about themselves and the impacts of the conflicts but, at the same time, they were given the platform that would help them to identify and appreciate the factors that enabled them to survive and thrive and assist others and become as agents of change, positive change for themselves, for others but also for their wider own society.

What this research shows is that these women changed positively not only themselves but also the narrow and unhelpful cultural prejudices that held them subjugated as second class citizens.

During the study, as a researcher, I always had in mind that the most important aspect of this study was to adopt the appropriate psychological approach that would make these women share their personal stories with me as their researcher and with other participants in the research group. To highlight this particular aspect of my work, when a participant was asked about the changes and the impacts of the conflict on them, she mentioned that the new roles that they had acquired had given them additional strength that they never thought that they were capable of.

This is very important. These women experienced a real breakthrough in their lives, in their very identity as human beings, as women, as community leaders.

According to participant AM of the research study (2009):

We had to hide from the rebels fighting in town and hide to bury the dead. This was my first time to do such a job but I was determined to give the dead the last honour that they deserved. Even though this was a job that only men did before the war, we decided that in the absence of the men and boys we had to respect and give honour to the dead.

Participant AM of the research study

Participant J.T of the research study stated that:

The new roles, like becoming a special community officer, helping others. Some of the new opportunities that became available to me, such as being part of the counselling group in the camps. My attitude, willingness and ability to accept and understand new changes to my life and all the different circumstances and situations.

Participant J.T. of the research study

This shows that women, when given the special task and opportunity to speak about their experiences, tell the stories, either positive or negative, they were able to reflect and understand what contributed to their survival and thriving.

This relates to what Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani claimed:

Literature has highlighted how refugees, particularly women, can be silenced due to huge stigma about their experiences during war and conflict. Consequently, research has shown that giving women the opportunity to speak out about their experiences empowers them and strengthens their capacity to cope. (Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani; 2012: 75)

In connecting this important aspect of giving refugee women the opportunity to speak about their experiences, I also found out that some the participants of my current study had developed inner strength of character, positivity and determination to succeed, as they felt that they had been given the opportunity of a life-time.

Another similar study that I examined is one that was conducted in Sudan with Eritrean women refugees as participants. This study examined how Eritrean women refugees, living in the urban sector of Sudan coped with their lives, despite the situation that they found themselves in. According to Kilbreab (1995):

An empirical examination of how Eritrean women refugees in the urban sector in Sudan coped with their lives also confirms that despite the structural and institutional constraints under which they operate, they display a high degree of adaptability, resilience, creativity and resourcefulness (Kilbreab; 1995: 1).

These qualities shown by Eritrean women refugees in research conducted by Kilbreab (1995) are reflected in the qualities of the participants of my current research. Most of the participants in my current research found ways to adapt and cope in every situation that they were confronted with during the conflict and also as they moved from place to place to find refuge. These participants were able to become creative and resourceful in different ways for their personal survival and also in helping others in their different communities. According to some of the participants of my current research study:

Participant T.G. of the research study:

Commitments to family, faith in my religious beliefs and values, social roles and self motivated, perfectionist, respectful and valuing good upbringing and family life and community care and commitment.

Participant T.G of the research study.

These two research studies show that refugee women, given the chance, will be able to operate with a high degree of adaptability, resilience, creativity and resourcefulness in helping themselves and their communities. This has also been endorsed by Kilbreab (1995):

Their resourcefulness has enabled a considerable proportion of their community to avoid sinking into abject poverty (Kilbreab; 1995: 1)

A close examination of each of these research studies actually brings to light the changing roles and the personal skills that women refugee developed as a result of conflicts. The results of these research studies also highlight that they were able to use their resourcefulness to adapt to their new roles and become the agents of change in their different communities.

They become empowered and liberated in different aspects of their lives, and according to some research it is also believed that not all women were victims of conflicts as had been documented. Some women refugees had to join the rebels for their own personal survival and also sometimes to protect their families and communities and therefore they became agents of change in every aspect of the conflicts.

As noted by Hamilton (1999) in a research conducted with women refugees from Rwanda living in refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania. In this research Hamilton (1999) in her own words, Adding Women to the picture: Looking at the Great Lakes refugee crisis through gendered lenses (Hamilton; 1999:25)

In this research Hamilton looked at the Great Lakes refugee crisis through gendered lenses and this brings a whole new dimension to the refugee crisis, highlighting the roles played by women during conflicts and their contributions towards all war efforts. This research was adding the voices of women refugees to the debate and research studies being conducted; making sure their roles, personal involvement and contributions are acknowledged and published.

To connect this to my current research, I set out to find the factors of the resilience of women refugees from Sierra Leone and also to acknowledge the roles played by them and also the remarkable way they assumed these roles and the part they played to bring the conflict to an end. Some of them accepted that they were forced to join the rebels because they had no choice. As noted by Hamilton (1999) they participated sometimes willingly, sometimes under threat of death (Hamilton; 1999:25)

Essentially these three research studies also show that these women had in them strength of character, skills and abilities that were lying dormant because of cultural and gender roles within their different communities. It looked very much as if the conflicts in their different regions had been the turning point in their lives and when they acquired their new roles.

Nothing could stop their determination and they made all effort to bring about change and demanded an end to all the violence.

I would like my current research study to help facilitate and play an important role in that change; that will give women refugees the status that they deserve and increase their empowerment.

Based on the collected data it seems that the Sierra Leonean women who participated in this research had endurance and resilience and were driven by their own personal skills and ability but most importantly their courage and determination to spring back and turn their negative experiences into positive goals and achievements.

From the researcher's own personal point of view, with all the facts from this research study and from other well documented research studies including Thorpe (2006), although some Sierra Leonean refugee women became victims of the war, many of them also survived and ultimately became agents of change (Hamilton(1999).

Far from being simply passive victims or recipients of aid, women refugees are capable of acting as agents of change in support of their families and their community.

(Hamilton, 1999:11)

According to participant A.M. of the research study (2009)

Krio: “Dis war make mi eye open, watin mi see don make me strong inside and outside.”

English: This war has given me a sense of better understanding and I am strong inside and outside.

According to participant A.M. of the study this was one of the ultimate changes in her life and in the lives of many others. Women then realised that they and others can work together to bring about changes to the country and this ultimately made them more determined to fight for peace and help to bring an end to the civil war.

WOMEN AS SURVIVORS AND NOT VICTIMS

According to Zack-Williams (1999)

Nonetheless, the removal of large numbers of men from the household, and the changing responsibilities of women mean that gender relations have undergone a transformative process as a result of the war. (Zack-Williams; 1999:p160)

There was a creation of new job opportunities and positions for women as a result of the fact that a lot of men were killed or injured, or disappeared during the Sierra Leone civil war. Jobs and positions occupied by men becoming vacant and job opportunities and roles were then available for women for the first time in the history of Sierra Leone. Some of the participants

who were interviewed for this study reflected on how they had able to transform some challenging adversity into opportunities to change gender and social roles in the Sierra Leonean society. Some of them talked about their new perceptions about themselves and others and the new identity that they were able to gain. This was highlighted by a participant of the research study:

“As a community we prayed together, supported each other and found strength to resist the rebels. We were all determined to put an end to the war at any cost. We the women decided to take up the fight for peace and made every effort to get other women involved in the fight for peace and we knew we will succeed if we were all together. This was our chance to use our personal skills.”

Participant B.D. of the research study

This vignette certainly acknowledged the fact that Sierra Leonean women were able to navigate their way from the trauma and human suffering of the civil war using their personal attributes and skills, community resources, social and personal networks.

There were certainly positive developments in the lives of Sierra Leonean women, particularly in the case of the refugee women who participated in this research study. Most of these women had turned adversity to positivity and this also highlights some of the key points and findings of this research study. These women were able to develop strategies and also

gained better understanding of their own personal and inner strength and capabilities. In their own rights they also became human rights defenders and extended this to others.

Most of the Sierra Leonean women who participated in this research study developed new positive growth or Adversity Activated Development (AAD) Papadopoulos (2004, 2006) as a direct result of being exposed to the civil war and being pushed beyond the limits of their personal and physical strength and character. The new characteristics they were able to develop actually transformed their lives and they were determined to fight for their rights and make sure their demands were all met. They were able to increase their status and realise their own rights as individuals and also as women.

These changes provided women with various skills, capabilities and opportunities to form different local, community and national organisation working to improve women's leadership roles, governance abilities and economic enterprises. Helping to promote women's personal and socio-economic empowerment and also reducing the poverty gap between men and women. This was a great impact. Essentially, these then lead to women's personal, social and economic status been transformed, creating new social and economic opportunities for them, which they never had access to before the civil war.

According to Papadopoulos (2004, 2006):

This reaching of limits can be experienced as transformational in so far as it may then open up new horizons beyond what was previously planned or even imagined.

(Papadopoulos, 2006; 308)

These Sierra Leonean women were transformed beyond imagination, from being considered victims of the civil war and second class citizens in their different communities to becoming survivors but most importantly agents of change and leaders of their different households and communities. They were also able to use different strategies and the newly acquired personal capabilities to confront and also address their situations and circumstances.

They were able to maintain reasonable balance for their families and their different communities. Throughout this research study, the involvements of these Sierra Leonean refugee women as participants have been a key element of the research study. The researcher acknowledged their new roles and their involvement in the research study as they represented their first-hand experiences, encountered and also endured during the civil war. They shared with the researcher the vivid accounts of their unique, individual and personal experiences and most of the participants showed varied behaviours and emotions during the research and investigations.

The organisation, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) highlighted that women have been able to manage and suppress painful experiences related to conflict-related trauma including rape and other acts of Gender Based Violence and aggression in such a unique way.⁶³ In the

⁶³PHR FOUND THAT INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE SUFFERED AN EXTRAORDINARY LEVEL OF RAPE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND OTHER GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WITH HALF OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY CAME INTO CONTACT WITH THE REBEL REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT (“RUF”) FORCES REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE. (*MAKING THE INVISIBLE WAR CRIME VISIBLE: POST-CONFLICT JUSTICE FOR SIERRA LEONE’S RAPE VICTIMS*) WWW.LAW.HAVARDS.EDU/STUDENTS/ORGS ACCESSED DEC 2010

context of this research, I would like to highlight the fact that some Sierra Leonean refugee women like many other refugee women from Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Bosnia, Democratic Republic of Congo to name a few were able to use their feminist capabilities, skills and social gender roles to manage, endure and suppress the painful experiences of war; to become empowered women with great resilience with new skills and abilities to participate and contribute to the peace efforts to end the conflict in Sierra Leone.⁶⁴ As a direct result of this, there was a societal change of attitude towards women and the value of their contributions to society at all levels.

According to Thorpe (2006)

Women were the major breadwinners of many homes during the Sierra Leone civil/rebel (1991-2001) and have remained so after the war. (Thorpe; 2006; 29)

These women became empowered both personally and economically and were also able to gain financial independence by buying and selling to make huge profits across the borders of Sierra Leone into Liberia and Guinea and also within the refugee and displaced peoples camps.

According to participant IS of the research study:

⁶⁴ Throughout the conflict, women led civil society peace efforts. In 2002, as the country faced the breakdown of the 1999 Lomé accords, women were pivotal in galvanizing mass demonstrations that led to the end of the war. Mazurana, D. and Carlson, K.: From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone, www.peacewomen.org/assets, accessed Dec. 2010.

I was able to make some money to support my family by buying and selling to others in the camps and with this we were able to survive. Most women who were traders before continued to trade with the little that they had.

Participant IS of the research study.

This was the reality of economic gains and personal empowerment of Sierra Leone women during the civil war. There was also nationwide acknowledgement of their skills and capabilities which did not happen before the civil war.

Their contributions and strategies towards negotiating for peace for the country were outstanding and their efforts had positive impact on the overall outcome of the peace efforts. The war situation and their circumstances had helped these women to search for and find their own inner strength, capabilities, personal skills and abilities that some of them were not aware that they possessed. They were able to find out about their own competence and resourcefulness that had been suppressed by their societal norms, traditional and cultural values. These women however took their traumatic experiences to their own advantage towards gaining positive results by achieving gender equality at all levels of society.

Some of these positive developments have been documented by Thorpe (2006)

I am delighted that my husband now calls me to decide on matters in the home, this only happened after the war, before it was different. Women emerged as partners in development and are now seen as claiming their rightful place in society.

(Thorpe; 2006; 29)

According to this research study by Thorpe (2006) some Sierra Leonean women found in themselves for the first time the relevant skills and tools needed to help them develop their socially and personally attitudes and the results were outstanding. These Sierra Leonean women were able to develop new skills that enabled them to contribute to and also most importantly participate in the economic and social development of their different communities. These have proved that during war/conflicts, the female population has shown great resilience despite their conflict-related trauma they are the ones that in most cases during resettlement and integration into the host countries.

McMichael and Manderson (2004) also highlighted the positive developments of Somali women living in Australia⁶⁵. Martin (1995) also cited that “The extent to which women in this situation are economic resources has been underestimated. While household strategies for economic survival differ greatly, women in all situations play an important economic role” (Martin, 1995:51). Holt-Rusmore and Thalia (2009) in their research ...shows that these linkages are spaces of strategic manipulation which women use to increase their economic and social standing⁶⁶. These women according to Holt-Rusmore and Thalia (2010) had to

⁶⁵McMichael, C. and Manderson, L. (2004) ‘Somali Women and Well-being: Social networks and social capital among immigrant women in Australia’. *Human Organization* 63(1): 88-99.

⁶⁶Holt-Rusmore and Evarosa, *The Social Reintegration of Women: Reconstructing Womanhood and Moving Past Post-Conflict in Sierra Leone*: Berkely Undergraduate Journal, 22(1), www.escholarship.org accessed November 2010.

manipulate their way to succeed in adjusting to their new environment and community, socially and personally in some remarkable ways towards new identity formation for women. Essentially, these research studies give an insight into how much effort these refugee women make to help their families to make socially adjust and integrate into their new communities in a positive way, bridging the gaps for members of their families in their host community.

Contributions of Women to Research:

If there is going to be a positive change of thinking and attitude towards the contributions of women and the acknowledgement of the skills, knowledge and understanding that they possess, and then there must be a strategy of change towards involving them in the context of different research studies. Drawing upon the work of different researchers such as Devault (1990) and Harding (1990)

As stated by *Pavlish (2005)*

Women's perspectives are a valuable source of knowledge. Unfortunately, research attention to African refugee women's perceptions and experiences is lacking.

(Pavlish2005:884)

This is one of the important points that my research work has endeavoured to address by conducting my research with Sierra Leonean refugee women and allowing them to give me their own perspective and their personal experiences about the war and the impact on their lives.

Acknowledging and endorsing these skills could then be used as tools of empowerment towards gender equality, development and advancement. This would help these refugee communities towards the realisation that they are not victims of their circumstances but they are survivors in a collective way. These facts of focusing on the assets of refugee women have been endorsed by researchers such as Baird (2009):

It is important to gain the perspective of refugee women by focusing on their assets rather than their deficits. (Baird; 2009; 14)

These aspects were highlighted by participant A.M. of the research study, when asked about:

What new positive qualities/characteristics do you think you have developed following the war, refugee, exile experience which you did not have before the war?

She responded to this question by saying:

New roles and status as a woman to lead and support others and also make valuable contributions to the development of my community and society. She is now in control of my own life and her future. She also said that, the new opportunities that have been

made possible for me in the new communities that I now live in. She also had the willpower to succeed in the face of Uncertainty, Adversity and even Danger. She also mentioned that she had more compassion and respect for others in spite of my own personal suffering, feelings and losses. Finally she believed in herself with positive confidence to make her personal points of view and work with others to succeed.

Participant A.M. of the research study

This vignette echoes the words of Kelly (1979) Responding to women's changed, and rapidly changing social situation and consciousness, as a female researcher I would endorse this major advance in social vision and also the positive change that this will bring to women. Kelly (1979) also offers another example of this social change and presents the prevailing sense of these by stating that

Significant transformation in social vision is both called for and being accomplished and this will make a significant difference to research studies in the context of women's lived experiences. (Kelly; 1979: 216-227)

Another reason for citing this important fact is the simple reason that women because of their feminine capabilities and social gender roles will be able to make other unique contributions towards further research. The emphasis of involvement as participants must therefore extend beyond individual interventions. There must be relevant focus on strengthening not only socio-cultural and community coping mechanisms but also the capacity of women to rebuild

their lives with the new skills and knowledge that they had gained. These changes of their situations should be acknowledged and understood from a gendered perspective.

These changes provided women with various skills, capabilities and opportunities to form different local, community and national organisation working to improve women's leadership roles, governance abilities and economic enterprises. As a direct result of these women gaining these skills, it also helped to promote women's personal and socio-economic empowerment towards reducing the poverty gap between men and women. This impacted greatly on national development. Essentially, these then lead to women's personal, social and economic status been transformed, creating new social roles and more economic opportunities for them, which they never had access to before the civil war.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

If there is going to be a positive change of thinking and attitude towards the contributions of women and the acknowledgement of the skills, knowledge and understanding that they possess, and then there must be a strategy of change towards involving them in the context of different research studies. Drawing upon the work of different researchers such as Devault (1990) and Harding (1990) will not only acknowledge the contributions of women as participants of research studies but will be a medium of change that will help to assist women to draw upon their own personal experiences as a tool for development at all levels. This would mean that women would be able to use their voices, share their experiences, skills and untapped knowledge and ability in areas of academic research, social and community

development that have for so long been untapped and out of reach because of traditional research methods. These underpin the fact that the inputs and contributions of women are of significant importance for development to take place and this has been highlighted by the former UN Director-General, Kofi Annan.⁶⁷

6.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The remarkable flexibility, adaptability and resilience of refugee women have yet to be accepted, acknowledged and celebrated. Researchers will have to conduct more research that will examine the flexibility, adaptability and resilience of refugee women. This will give refugee women the status and acknowledgement that they deserve. To acknowledge the remarkable skills of refugee women will not only raise and add value to their personal and social status but it will also recognise their skills and capabilities as important tools for development, socio-economic change and advancement. This will then help to create the platform of socio-economic change for refugee women from different communities and backgrounds.

- These research studies should be based on a more gendered approach of investigating and acknowledging the positive development of refugee women.
- Critical analysis of their personal skills, abilities, resourcefulness and capabilities to adjust to changes and development.

⁶⁷Kofi A. Annan of Ghana, the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1997-2007.

- Research results of these research studies should be utilised as tools of empowerment and development when planning, developing and implementing policies and programmes for the care and management of refugees. Particularly refugee women and some of the personal, psychological and gender issues related to their resettlement, survival skills and integration into the host community.
- Positive approach of researchers with specific skills of engagement to be used in most area of research work with women and refugee women in particular.

There must be acknowledgment of the resilience, achievements and contributions of Sierra Leonean refugee women in particular and other refugee women in general who have been affected by conflicts but have been empowered as a direct result of their personal experiences.

As stated by Pavlish (2005)

Women's perspectives are a valuable source of knowledge. Unfortunately, research attention to African refugee women's perceptions and experiences is lacking.

(Pavlish, 2005:884)

Thorpe (2006), more Sierra Leonean women survived the war,⁶⁸ their contributions and strategies towards negotiating for peace for the country were outstanding and their efforts had

⁶⁸The 2004 population census reveals a 2% increase of females over the 1984 census, as more women survived the war than men who were mostly killed in battles. The national human resource base today comprises more women than before the war. Thorpe, C. 2007; p29

a positive impact on the overall outcome of the peace efforts. The war situation and their circumstances had helped these women to search and find their own inner strength, skills and abilities that they were not aware they possessed. They were able to find out about their own competence and resourcefulness that had previously been suppressed by their societal norms, traditional and cultural values. These women turned their traumatic experiences to their own advantage to gain positive results by achieving gender equality at all levels of society.

Some of these positive developments have been documented by Christiana Thorpe (2006)⁶⁹ in her PhD thesis entitled: *The Rebel War Years Were Catalytic To Development in the Social Advancement of Women in Post-War Sierra Leone*. According to this research, some Sierra Leonean women found in themselves for the first time the relevant skills and tools needed to help them develop their social and personal attitudes and the results were outstanding. These Sierra Leonean women were able to develop new skills that have helped them to contribute to and more importantly participate in the economic and social development of their different communities. This proves that during war/conflicts, the female population has shown great resilience; despite their conflict-related trauma they are the ones that in most cases manage to resettle and integrate into the host countries.

⁶⁹I am delighted that my husband now calls me to decide on matters in the home, this only happened after the war. Before it was different. Women emerged as partners in development and are now seen as claiming their rightful place in society. Christiana Thorpe, 2007; p29

McMichael and Manderson (2004) also highlighted the positive developments of Somali women living in Australia.⁷⁰ Martin (1995) wrote that “The extent to which women in this situation are economic resources has been underestimated. While household strategies for economic survival differ greatly, women in all situations play an important economic role.”⁷¹ Holt-Rusmore and Thalia (2009) in their research “show that these linkages are spaces of strategic manipulation which women use to increase their economic and social standing”⁷². In their view, these women had to manipulate their way to succeed in adjusting to their new environment and community, socially and personally in some remarkable ways towards new identity formation for women. Essentially, these research studies give an insight into how much effort these refugee women make to help their families make the social adjustment and integration into the new communities in a positive way, hence bridging the gaps for members of their families in their host community.

If there is going to be a positive change in thinking and attitude towards the contributions of women and the acknowledgement of the skills, knowledge and understanding they possess, there must be a strategy of change towards involving them in the context of different research studies. Drawing upon the work of different researchers such as Devault (1990) and Harding

⁷⁰McMichael, C. and Manderson, L. (2004) ‘Somali Women and Well-being: Social networks and social capital among immigrant women in Australia’. *Human Organization* 63(1): 88-99.

⁷¹ Susan Forbes Martin, *Refugee Women* (1995) p.51

⁷²Holt-Rusmore and Evarosa, *The Social Reintegration of Women: Reconstructing Womanhood and Moving Past Post-Conflict in Sierra Leone*: *Berkely Undergraduate Journal*, 22(1), www.escholarship.org accessed November 2010.

(1990), this research will not only acknowledge the contributions of women as participants in research studies, but will be a medium of change that will help to assist women to draw upon their own personal experiences as tools for development at all levels of society.

This is one of the important points that my research work has endeavored to address by making Sierra Leonean refugee women the main subjects of this research. This allowed them to give their own account and perspective of their personal experiences about the war and the impact it had on their lives.

I would also suggest that the following research be conducted that will allow Sierra Leonean women to be the main subjects.

A comparative study of the achievements, participation and contribution of Sierra Leonean refugee women living and working in:

- United States of America(Maryland, Delaware or Texas)
- Europe(Germany, Norway, Sweden)
- West Africa (The Gambia, Guinea or Liberia)

Some of the main reasons for suggesting these research studies:

1. This research study will be based on field work undertaken in urban locations in these countries. It will also endeavour to examine the host nations' integration and resettlement policies, programmes, available resources including provisions for specialist health care with a specific gender focus, education and skills training towards personal, professional and socio-economic development and empowerment.
2. To highlight the achievement and contributions of Sierra Leonean women after the civil war towards community development, socio-economic empowerment and advancement of Sierra Leone, at local, regional national and international levels.

The study of the contributions, resourcefulness, socio-economic empowerment, achievements and development of refugee women living in an African country or refugee camp.

This research will acknowledge the resilience of refugee women living and working in a refugee camp in an African country. Resilience will play an integral part of this investigation. This research study will endeavour to examine the host nations' integration and resettlement policies, programmes, available resources including provisions for specialist health care with a specific gender focus, education and skills training towards personal, professional and socio-economic development.

The achievements and contributions of Sierra Leonean women towards achieving gender equality within the political arena and government sectors at national and international levels after the civil/rebel war.

The research will examine the achievements and contributions of Sierra Leonean women and the vital steps that women of Sierra Leone took to develop new and sustainable skills, the process of empowerment and the move towards gender equality.

This research will identify the personal skills, motivation and capabilities of women but most importantly how women got access to leadership roles and governance duties and economic opportunities, within local government, civil society organisations and national and international agencies. It will examine how the resilience and determination of women played a part in Sierra Leone as a nation realising greater gender equality and better national socio-economic development.

This access to leadership roles and governance duties made a significance impact in the area of gender equality. The positive result of this was the building and implementation of framework and structures for women's social and economic justice. These framework and structures helped to reduce the gap in gender inequality which had been created by cultural norms, traditional rules and customary laws. Women developed stronger voices; they were heard and were then given leadership roles and became partners in development.

Sierra Leonean women were able to make important gains during the conflict. These gains included becoming innovative and taking the initiative to help implement changes within their various communities, then at regional, national and international levels. These women also developed team building skills and capacity building techniques. Sierra Leonean women were present in large numbers at peace meetings and also organised several high profile conferences to address the war situation, push for change and bring peace at all cost to a country and a nation devastated by civil war .

According to reports from several researchers including Thorpe (2006), these women were at the forefront during the peace negotiations, which included the Lomé Peace Accord meetings. They organised the Bintumanni conferences and demanded to meet with the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh.

According to Mazurana and Carlson (2004):

“Women’s Campaign for Peace: From the early days of the war, women in rural and urban centers mobilized to protest the atrocities and call for peace. In May 2000, with the RUF flouting the 1999 Lomé accords, a group of elderly women came together, demanding a meeting with Sankoh.

(Mazurana and Carlson; 2004; 4)

Referring to this determination exhibited by women, participant B.D. of the research study stated that:

Women decided to stand up against the rebels and I was a member of the team of women, who organised peace meetings and also conferences. We had to act and do something to end the total destruction to our country, its people and the nation.

Participant of the research study (2009)

Participant T.G. of the research study also says:

After several months working and living with the rebels and others in the camps, I finally escaped with others when the town was attacked by the KAMAJORS, a local vigilant group. This was my chance to fight back and escape and I was determined to do anything possible to find safety for myself and others in my care. I joined the fighting and had to lead some of the women and girls to safety. I was determined not to be captured again by the rebels.

Participant T.G. of the research study (2009)

These vignettes clearly illustrate the personal determination of these women and also most importantly the simple fact that the impacts of the war on these women had transformed their lives in a positive way and they have been empowered to hold on to the changes in the different social and gender roles that they found themselves in.

Judging by the successes of some of the research participants of this study, it seems that women refugees are making all the efforts to change attitudes, opinions and concepts about them. Rather than being victims they are survivors who are helping to change the situation in a positive way. The successes of these women can be measured in a variety of ways, including most importantly their personal involvement in the civil war and their lived experiences during and after the civil war.

The most fitting way to end this thesis is by allowing the voice of one of the participants to speak, in her simple but clear way:

Participant AM of the research study:

I had to help give some support to women and girls that had been raped by the rebels and also other members of the community that had lost family members. There was no government support and help for our communities, we had to help and support each other as a community this was a very difficult time for all of us. I had to be strong and this nothing was going to stop me.

Participant A.M. of the research study.

Truly, what this research found out was that nothing could stop these women from surviving, thriving, helping others in a positive and also helping to transform the political landscape of their own country; bringing down the age old system of prejudices about the gender roles in Sierra Leone.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

MRU	Mano River Union
AU	African Union
IDP	Internally Displaced People
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
ECOWAS	Economic Community Of West African States
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
PHR	Physicians For Human Rights

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