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Title: Combating GBV and Building Feminist Peace in the Southern Cameroon Armed Conflict:
The case of WILPF- Cameroon and SCEW.

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) be it in peace or conflict settings is a persistent problem that has gained grounds and concerns for activists, women's organisations, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in general and international bodies like the United Nations. Social inequalities and cultural ideologies inform GBV and other forms of violence that are amplified in war times. Women in war play different roles including that of key actors in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, and peacebuilding. However, their contributions in these roles as agents of peace are often not recognised due to the dynamics of cultural ideologies that influence their positions in society and vulnerability to GBV. With the use of feminist peace and conflict theory, postcolonial theory, and the concept of intersectionality, this study explores and analyses the social forces and complexities defining armed conflicts and its often, disproportionate impact on women. Making use of qualitative methods such as document analysis, in-depth interviews and, secondary sources of data, the research focuses on the role of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)- Cameroon and Southern Cameroon European Women (SCEW) in the fight against GBV in the Cameroon anglophone conflict. It also analyses the interventions made by these organisations in promoting nonviolent peace measures and advocating for meaningful participation of women in the Cameroon national peace dialogue and peace processes in general.

The interviews were conducted through zoom and the findings indicate that GBV in war and conflict settings is informed and reinforced by social constructs and norms that define such societies and expose women to more violence and invisibilise the contributions of women to peace processes. Women's organisations play a pivotal role in combating GBV and promoting nonviolent solution to armed conflicts by engaging in advocacy, activism, capacity building and pushing forth the Women, Peace and, Security (WPS) Agenda. However, their works are threatened by insecurity, government restrictions, abuse of human rights and limited resources. Also, the shrinking civic space in which they operate has a direct and indirect effect on the effective and inclusive implementation of their projects.

Key words: Gender-Based Violence, armed conflict, cultural norms, Women's organisations, feminist Peace.

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List of Abbreviations

WILPF-	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
SCEW -	Southern Cameroon European Women
CEDAW-	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GBV -	Gender-Based Violence
WPS -	Women Peace and Security
CSOs-	Civil Society Organisations
NGOs -	Non-Governmental Organisations
WHO-	World Health Organisation
WPS -	Women Peace and Security
UN-	United Nations
NAP-	National Action Plan
UNSCR -	United Nation Security Council Resolution
UNFPA-	United Nation Population Fund
UNDP-	United Nations Development Program
OCHA-	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
IDPs -	Internally Displaced Persons
UN Women-	United Nation Women
CSPPS-	Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
ICC-	International Criminal Court
STDs-	Sexually transmitted Diseases
CHRDA-	Human Rights and Democracy in Africa
UNRISD-	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
ICG-	International Crisis Group
UNICEF-	United Nations Children's Fund
GCA-	Gender Conflict Analysis

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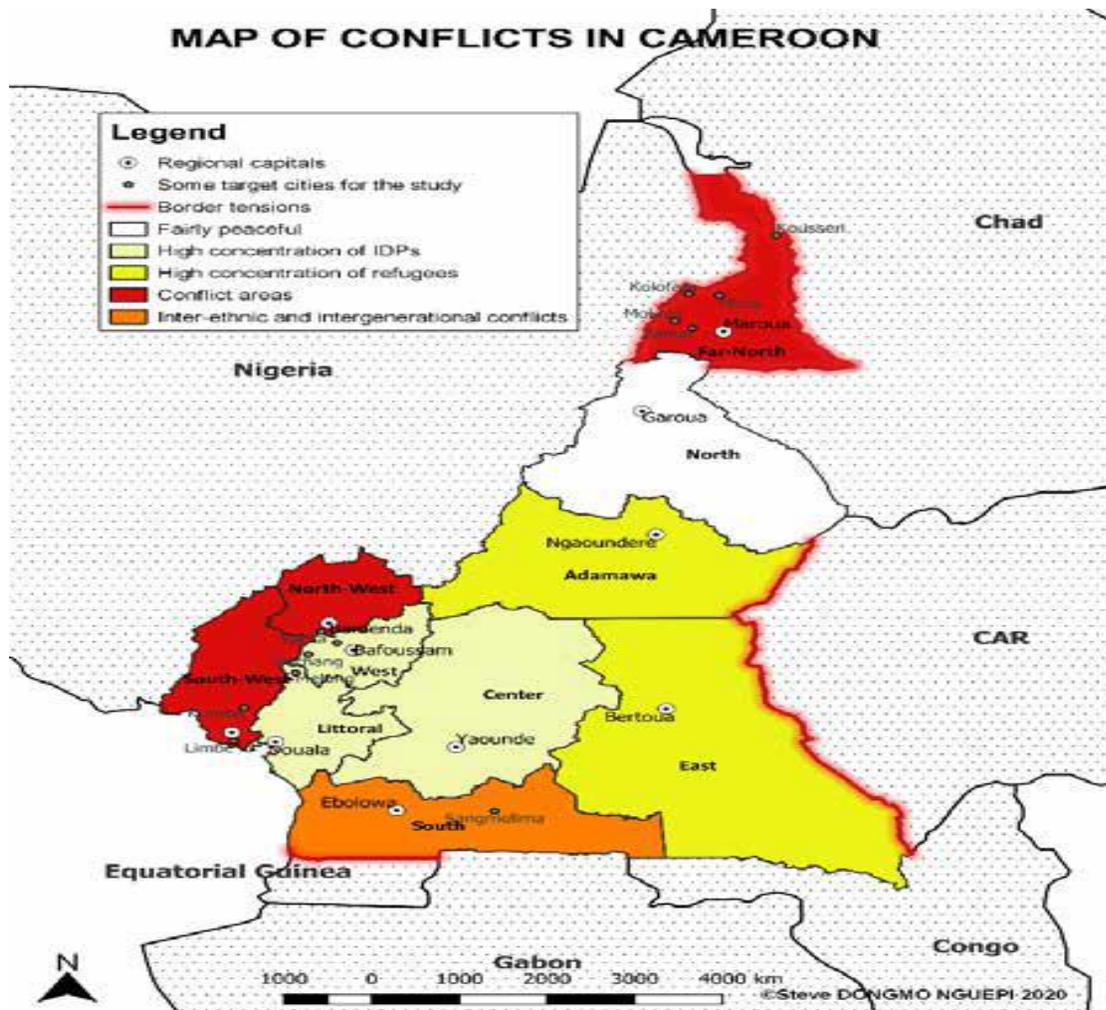
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Figure 1: This figure portrays the different conflicts existing in Cameroon, however, within the scope of this research, the focus is on the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest of Cameroon, otherwise known as Southern Cameroon.



Source: WILPF Cameroon

1.0. Introduction

Women generally play diverse roles in war and armed conflict and are disproportionately affected by conflict compared to men (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2005)¹. Armed conflicts amplify the existing inequalities that women and girls face due to the socially constructed position that makes them more vulnerable and susceptible to violence including sexual and gender-based violence (United Nations, 2003; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Women are also active agents of peace and change and have often contributed to conflict prevention and resolution (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). However, these contributions remain unrecognized in the peace and security arenas. To achieve sustainable solutions to conflicts, it is essential for those who are affected the most by it to be fully and meaningfully visible in peace forums and agendas (Snyder, 2017; Reardon, 1993).

1.1. Research Aim and Questions

Decades after gaining independence from Britain and France, the issue of identity, linguistics, and post-independent state nation-building has been a sensitive one in Cameroon (Agwanda et al., 2019). This has led to a series of protests from the disgruntled anglophone society in Cameroon which later aggravated into an armed conflict. Women and children are constantly exposed to violence and insecurities as they bear the brunt of the crisis in a highly patriarchal society. According to the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and State-building (2020)², the deteriorating anglophone crisis has resulted in a growing increase in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as part of the increase in violence. While there have been numerous reports and literature on women and children as the victims of the armed conflict, there has been less focus and recognition on women's agency, resilience, and their role as key actors who negotiate for peace and social justice. This research aims to explore the activism of women within the framework of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that fight to eradicate GBV and push for a peace and security agenda in the Southern Cameroon armed conflict. Guided by the research questions below, this research is a case study research that focuses on the role of the Women's International League

¹ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

² The Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (**CSPPS**) is the global network of civil society organisations (CSOs) supporting peacebuilding efforts in fragile and conflict-affected settings, jointly striving for inclusive societies and sustainable peace.

for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)- Cameroon and Southern Cameroon European Women (SCEW) as anti-violence, peace, and social justice organisations:

1. How has the Cameroon armed conflict impacted the lives of women and how has SCEW and WILPF-Cameroon engaged in the fight against GBV in this context?
2. What role does SCEW and WILPF -Cameroon play in promoting Feminist Peace?
 - i. What are some of the strategies employed by these organisations in promoting disarmament, dialogue, and sustainable peace? For example, Collaboration or collective efforts of women actors at all levels (community, regional, national, and international), bottom-up approach.
 - ii. Are these strategies sustainable?

1.2. Background of the Area of Study

1.2.1. Anglophone Cameroon (Southern Cameroon) armed Conflict

Cameroon is in central Africa with a population of about a 25.8million according to the world Bank population indicator (2019). The country is very diverse with about 250 ethnic groups of different ethnic languages but with French and English as the two main official languages. Religiously, the country is mostly made of Christians, Muslims, and native believers (The committee against Torture, 2004). The country is made up of 10 regions with two of the regions (Northwest and Southwest) constituting the anglophone region and 20% of the Cameroon population while 80% is made of the francophone majority (Ashu, 2020, p, 14836; International Crisis Group³, 2017). The country is currently suffering from a series of instabilities such as attacks from Boko Haram⁴ terrorist groups in the Far North Region which has left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced, and more intensely the war in the northwest and southwest regions of the country, also known as the anglophone crisis (CSPPS, 2020). Statistics show the conflict has resulted in the loss of about 4000 lives and has displaced approximately half a million people both internally and to

³ The International Crisis Group

⁴ Boko Haram (meaning that “Westernization Is Sacrilege” by name of Jamā‘at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da‘awah wa al-Jihād , known in Arabic: “People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad”, from 2015 also called Islamic State in West Africa) is an Islamic sectarian movement, also known as a terrorist organisation founded in 2002 by Muhammad Yusuf in north-eastern Nigeria that since 2009 has carried out assassinations and large-scale acts of violence in that country and neighbouring countries like Cameroon and Chad.

neighbouring countries like Nigeria, while 855000 children have been forced out of school due to insecurity (CSPPS, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The Cameroon military and the separatist fighters continue to kill, rape, and burndown private and government properties. Thousands of civilians have been arrested, torture, and thrown in prison and others killed as the violence continues (Mbongulo-Wondieh, 2020).

The anglophone crisis began in 1961 when British (Southern) Cameroon gained independence from its colonial powers (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997, p. 207; 2003) and intensified in October 2016 when anglophone lawyers and teachers organised peaceful protests against the underrepresentation marginalisation, and systemic assimilation of the common law system and Anglo-Saxon system of education in anglophone Cameroon by French Cameroon (Ashu, 2020). Protesters were violated, tortured, shot at and some were arrested and put in jail. This repressive action by the government made a bad situation worse as the people of Anglophone decided to create a defence force called the Ambazonia Defence Force commonly called the ‘Amber boys’ as a mechanism to protect their people from the brutal regime as protesters were labelled as criminals, terrorists, and a people who are out to destabilise the peace and unity of the nation (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2019; ICG, 2017). The anglophones through trade unions, CSOs presented a list of demands from the government including returning to two State Federation as that was the original agreement or condition for the unification of French and British (Southern) Cameroon in 1961.

1.2.1.1. Contextual History: The Unification of the Cameroons

Before the unification, Cameroon was made up of two separate states with different colonial legacies -French and British Cameroon (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997, p. 207). French Cameroon was colonised by France and Southern Cameroon by Britain after they defeated the Germans in World War I and the mandate of trusteeship was bestowed on them by the league of nations in 1919 (Okereke, 2018; Kaushal, 2020). In 1961, British Cameroon⁵ Trustee territory voted to join French Cameroon⁶ in a plebiscite in February 1961 organised by the United Nations (Okereke, 2018). They were given two difficult choices to either join Nigeria or Francophone Cameroon to gain independence. The third choice of becoming an independent nation which they hoped for was never

⁵ Also referred to as Northwest and Southwest of Cameroon or anglophone (British) Cameroon.

⁶ French Cameroon gained independence on January 1st, 1960 and was referred to La Republique du Cameroun.

given to them. Britain and some other countries were against it stating that Southern Cameroon was not big enough in terms of population, economic and financial resources to become a country of its own and so the UN excluded the option of making Southern Cameroon a nation (Kaushal, 2020). Contrary to the agreement of having the existence of two equal states, French Cameroon began to gradually integrate its supposed partners to its French system and culture while subjecting them to all forms of marginalisation (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997, p. 207). Gradually, the anglophones became a part of a centralised unitary state as the name of the country was changed from the Federal Republic of Cameroon to the United Republic of Cameroon and finally to “La Republique du Cameroun” which is the name French Cameroon had before the unification (Ashu, 2020; Mbongdulo-Wondieh, 2020, Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997).

1.2.1.2. The Administrative Structure of British Cameroon before Independence

During the period of trusteeship mandated by the league of nations, the colonial masters introduced and implemented different and separate systems of administration according to their norms and cultures (Kaushal, 2020). There were different official languages- English and French and the judiciary structures were built on common law and French law systems, respectively. The currencies in use, the system of education, political, economic, and social structures were all inherited from the colonial powers (Kaushal, 2020, p 5-6). Indirect rule was part of the administration in southern Cameroon where chiefs and traditional heads were maintained and a governing council made up of southern Cameroonians had some autonomy but reported and consulted Britain in terms of international issues and diplomacy (Kaushal, 2020; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003). Southern Cameroon was also characterised by freedom of expression and press, multipartyism, and democracy. On the other hand, Francophone Cameroon under France's powers was less democratic, France controlled every political and economic decision as there was a centralised political administration (Kaushal, 2020; ICG, 2017).

1.2.2. Women in political and Peacebuilding in Cameroon

Cameroon has ratified and adopted several conventions, laws, and policies both internationally and nationally such as the Beijing platform of action, CEDAW, but when it comes to implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the situation is different from what exists on paper. However, there has

been some interesting progress in some respects like women's representation in the parliament where there has been an increase (Fokum et al., 2020). Despite this, according to the United Nations development programme report on development index, Cameroon is still ranked as 150 out of 153rd when it comes to gender⁷ inequalities and other forms of inequalities. In 2017, Cameroon adopted a national action plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 since it came into existence in the year 2000. This is an action to achieve the women peace and security agenda which aims at promoting the active involvement of women in peace and conflict management - prevention, disarmament, resolution, and post-conflict building. The agenda also stresses on the protection of women and girls against armed violence and other forms of violence at every stage of conflicts and wars. (CSPPS, 2020). However, the action plan implemented by Cameroon is limiting as it does not take into consideration the aspect of arms and gender-based violence, neither does it have outlined plans on how to carry out control on the possession and use of arms which has grievous effects on women and children (CSPPS, 2020).

1.2.3. Gender-Based Violence in Cameroon

Women's subordinate or secondary position in Cameroon makes them more vulnerable to different forms of abuse including sexual and gender-based violence. It also exposes them to economic, socio-political, religious, and cultural violence (WILPF, 2019). The gender equality gap in Cameroon is still very wide given that most institutions, structures, and practices are built on patriarchal norms. Women are constantly faced with limited access to leadership positions, rigid legal systems that fail to adequately promote women's rights, and customary and religious laws that promote discrimination, and androcentrism (CSPPS, 2020).

1.2.4. Women's Organisations

This study makes use of two Civil Society Organisations – WILPF -Cameroon, and SCEW as research informants to gain an insight into the situation of Southern Cameroon women as they brave through the socio-political armed conflict. The research builds on the role of these women organisations in the fight against violence and the advocacy for feminist peace.

⁷ Gender in this research refers to the binaries -men and women with the exclusion of all others.

1.2.4.1. WILPF- Cameroon

Women's International League for peace and freedom (WILPF) was founded in 1915 by a group of women from different countries who were seeking an end to war and all its associated consequences in the world. It is the oldest women's NGO in the world and was created in the Netherlands. As time went on, the movement expanded, and it is now found in almost every country of the world (WILPF, 2015). The headquarters of WILPF international is in Geneva, Switzerland and an office in New York focused on UN works. The organisation's aims at achieving sustainable global peace and social justice through a feminist's peace agenda. Using the feminist lens seeks to deconstruct the root causes of violence which it argues are patriarchy, imperialism, militarism, and neoliberalism. WILPF international affirms that unequal power structures which are built on gender construct need to change for there to be lasting peace. Through different methods of critical analysis, campaigns and sensitization, advocacy, activism, and alliance building and mobilisation, WILPF international convenes with women around the world, share knowledge and build partnerships for better results. It creates a platform for women irrespective of location that can contribute to decision-making and other processes that define their lives and well-being. The organisation advocates for conflict prevention, demilitarisation and disarmament, and peacebuilding based on inclusion and equality (WILPF, 2015).

WILPF Cameroon, made of Cameroon women and men, is built on the foundation of WILPF international, and it is one of the NGO's sections in Africa that has been operating since 2014. It fights for a Cameroon and a world free from violence and the respect of human rights for all including that of peace, social justice, and equality where women and men have an equal chance at leadership opportunities at the international, national, regional, and community level. WILPF Cameroon's areas of work are Women, Peace and Security, Peace Education and Active Non - Violence, Human Rights, Conflict prevention, Disarmament. Its Structure consists of a general assembly, executive board, secretariat, and regional focal points (WILPF- Cameroon, 2014). WILPF International seeks to ensure political and social stability in Africa by building alliances with women's peacebuilding movements in the continent and the full and impactful women's representation at all levels of the society including economic, social, political, and environmental (WILPF Cameroon, 2014).

1.2.4.2. Southern Cameroon European women (SCEW)

SCEW is a social and political non-profit organisation that is constituted of women who come from Anglophone Cameroon. The organisation is located at Duisburg Germany with its members both in Europe and in Cameroon. It was created in 2017 after the Brussels European Conference that was held from March 31st to April 02, 2017. The organisation has as a motto “Unity is Strength” and it aims at advocating for women’s rights which is rights for all, campaigning for a peaceful or non-violent solution to the Cameroon anglophone conflict. The organisation also in collaboration with other organisations especially at the grassroots of southern Cameroon seeks to provide humanitarian aid to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees of the conflict, empowering the women of southern Cameroon to be active participants in conflict management, resolution, and be part of every peace decision making process. Its vision is to carry out political and social education for women, men, and children. SCEW is actively involved in social media campaigns and awareness-raising on Facebook and tweeter where it sends out information on different acts of violence perpetrated in Southern Cameroon, condemning such acts while taking up a collective responsibility to mobilise and fight the violence and the challenges brought about by the armed conflict. One of the main objectives of the organisation is to develop significant strategies to effectively provide aid to the political and social armed conflict victims who are mostly women and children, as well as committed to peace-seeking solutions to put an end to the war.

2.0. Literature review

There has been an ongoing political and social debate in Africa about the meaning of democracy, constitutional rights, where do governments or regimes get their powers and legitimacy from? How are movements perceived when they revolt against a government that does not want to do right by the citizens or the people? (Okech, 2020). With instability and insecurity on the rise due to wars and armed conflicts, intrastate conflicts are the most common after World War II. Some of the causes of these conflicts are fighting for political power, religious intolerance, insurgency, secession, terrorism, and fight over natural resources such as minerals, land (Nyadera & Bincof 2019). Across the world, the global south is the most encompassed by armed conflict -postcolonial states in the global south, especially in Africa struggle over issues of identity due to diverse cultural

differences because of differences in ethnicity and different cultures imposed by colonial masters (Nyadera & Bincof 2019). War is the absence of peace and where there is no peace, there is violence (WHO, 1997). Armed conflict bears with it all forms of violence because of the tension, anger, frustration, vengeance, power and powerlessness, dominance, precarity, and discomfort that surrounds such environments (WHO, 1997).

Feminist intervention in the areas of militarism, political violence, war, and peacebuilding has gained considerable grounds in academia and body knowledge production (Enloe, 2016; Cockburn 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Moser & Clark, 2001). Globally, women are taking the initiative to mobilise and fight against militarisation, war, and networking and creating alliances at all levels including the grassroots to mediate for peace, promote social justice and sustainable development (Cockburn, 2010) and so not just victims of war but participants in different aspects, including peacebuilding although their recognition is limited (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Patriarchal structures, practices, and gender relations contribute to the causes of war or are the driving force of war due to decisions made that are constructed on the perception of male dominance and force (Cockburn, 2010, p.153). As stated by Robert Connell in Cockburn (2010), other causes are economic power, national power, and religious power. For sustainable disarmament and demilitarization to take effect, there must be in place a strategic change in patriarchal norms since the practices of violence and possession of weapons or decisions on arms possession are prevalent among men (Cockburn 2010, 2012). Cockburn argues that there is a need to shape masculine culture as a policy issue since prevailing masculine traits and behaviours often result in violence such as military or armed violence. Literature indicates that women are disproportionately affected by conflict than men (UNRISD, 2005; Mbondgulo-Wondieh, 2020; Leatherman, 2011). Armed conflicts amplify the existing inequalities that women and girls face due to the socially constructed position that makes them more vulnerable and susceptible to violence. Research shows that it is only when conflict is located and recognized in its different specificities and particularities that more efficient and feasible solutions to peace can be adopted, ones that sincerely deconstruct structural and systematic inequalities and causes of violence affecting individual lives and that of communities/nations (Kaushal, 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) has gained substantial grounds in public debates and discourse and many international, national organisations, and CSOs are becoming more involved in GBV and its

implications on health, equality, economy, women's public and political participation and development (Harcourt, 2013, p.98;). According to the United Nations, GBV refers to any form of forceful act, threat committed or directed to women because of their gender, such violence may include, intimate partner violence, structural violence, sexual violence, domestic violence, non-partner violence, physical, psychological, economic, political, and armed violence. It is globally estimated that 35 percent of women experience some form of violence in their lives (WHO, 2017). Violence and its multiple implications on women have been explored extensively, SCOs, international organisations, and feminists have documented different forms of violence women at differentiated settings faced daily and have also in partnership with local groups and victim of violence been active in building awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns which has transformed to an extent, the way GBV is perceived by nation-states and international bodies (Wirtz et al., 2014; Harcourt, 2013; Nussbaum, 2005). However, care must be taken to avoid the essentialism that only women are victims of violence because men also suffer from violence perpetrated by women, other men, and the society (Correia & Bannon, 2006).

GBV such as rape, sexual assault, and harassment has always been used as a weapon of war to exercise control, instil fear, humiliation on men, and psychological destruction, and send a message of dominance to a community or a group of people (Wirtz et al., 2014; Rydström 2015, p. 199; WHO, 1997; Harcourt, 2013). According to studies, women, girls, and children are particularly more vulnerable to violence in times of armed conflict and displacement Wartime rape and violence against women has been defined by most organisations, such as United Nations and International Criminal Court (ICC) as war crimes and thus punishable offences (Harcourt, 2013). Defenceless women and children who head their households or have lost their partners and relatives to war or imprisonment, female prisoners, elderly women and women with mental and physical disabilities, homeless and displaced women are often the target and thus more vulnerable (Wirtz et al., 2014). Women in war suffer from rape, sexual slavery, unwanted pregnancies, force prostitutes and trafficking, sex in exchange for favours or survival, forced marriages, and sexual assault (WHO,1997; 2021). Some of these abuses even persist in post-war settings and understanding why and how this happens is essential (Harcourt, 2013; Kostovicova, et al., 2020; Cockburn, 2004, p. 24-44). GBV implications are deep and influence women's participation in public spaces such as in politics and advocacy, affects the individual and the society as a whole and limits the potential of a nation for social equality and sustainable growth. Feminist literature such as that of Rehn &

Sirleaf, (2002) stresses the need for equal representation and decision-making and the dismantling of patriarchy and all its manifestations at all levels to limit the occurrence of war and violence. Capacity building of women to grow beyond victims of armed conflict to leaders in conflict resolutions and peace talks is one of the biggest concerns of peace organizations and movements. Some organisations develop a bottom-up approach or a participatory approach in developing ways to integrate more women into peace processes (Harcourt, 2013, p. 113).

In Cameroon, the body of knowledge in the study of conflict and peace indicates that women bear the burden of armed conflict, and they and children are the ones most affected. Ashu (2020) in her article titled “The Impact of the Anglophone Conflict on Women and Children and their Advocacy for Peace in Cameroon”, illustrate that the poor response of the Cameroon government to the anglophone crisis has intensify the conflict and hence the suffering and abuse of women as the target of the government soldiers is not only to neutralised the separatist fighters but to continue oppressing the anglophone people through unlawful arrest, killings, burning of houses and infliction of abuse on women as they are constantly accused of protecting the separatist fighters. Her findings through the analysis of documents such as articles also indicate that women are deprived from accessing health services and furthermore, the research outlines that the anglophone women peace initiatives through marches and protest has yielded little results. Similarly, Zoneziwoh Mbongulo-Wondieh (in Okech, 2020) in her article- Women and the Anglophone Struggle in Cameroon, draws attention to the backlash women protesters face as they agitate for change. Using an ethno-sociological study focusing on social protester’s perspectives in the Cameroonian conflict, she highlights that they face abuse, threats, harassment, targets of hate speech.

Using a qualitative research strategy, Kiven et al., (2021) have examined the role that CSOs have played in trying to resolve the Cameroon Anglophone conflict in an increasingly restrictive environment, where civic space is closing. Using focus group discussions, interviews, and secondary literature such as NGO reports, they found that the conflict has further reduced the space for CSOs to influence government. They highlighted absence of rule of law and the breakdown of the judicial and security, administrative systems as major contributors to the crackdown of, and closure of civic space. As a result, CSOs face legal and bureaucratic obstacles and are subjected to anti-terror laws, surveillance, and travel restrictions. Other challenges CSOs face include

defamation, stigmatization, intimidation, criminalization, threats to personal safety, arrest, torture, and murder. Their study concluded that one way in which CSOs can counter this repressive environment is through working together, and through financial and political support from international actors.

Building from above, the current study explores the role of two women's organisations in combating GBV in the Cameroon anglophone conflict and building different strategies in promoting feminist peace. This contributes to the body of knowledge and brings in different theoretical perspectives such as feminist peace and conflict theory, Postcolonial theory, and the concept of intersectionality.

3.0. Theoretical and conceptual Framework

This section elaborates on concepts and theoretical framework which this study and its analysis are built as it gives interpretations to the phenomenon of the research. The study which is centred around the role of women's organisations in the fight against GBV in armed conflict in the context of the anglophone armed conflict in Cameroon stems from feminists' perspectives on women in conflict prevention, war, and participation in peace negotiations policies. According to previous research such as Cockburn (2007; 2012;), Okech (2020); Enloe (2017) most conflicts especially in the global south grow from colonial foundations, patriarchy/ toxic masculinity. Using Connell (2005) I refer to toxic masculinity perception that the idea of being a man or a boy represents superiority, strength, aggressiveness, and dominance. This perception is inculcated into different power structures at all levels in the public and private sphere. Theories like postcolonial theory explore the enduring legacy of colonialism in the present day and suggest that colonized worlds stand at the forgotten centre of global modernity. It focuses not only on the political and economic legacy of colonialism but also on cultural ideologies such as who is the master, the dominance and who is the subordinate. Structures, institutions build and governed on these male-dominant cultures where women and other vulnerable groups and communities are relegated to the back, deemed not worthy to have a voice or occupy decision-making positions. Cameroon is a post colony affected by the implications of postcolonialism and imperialism.

3.1. Feminists, Patriarchy, and Peace

Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory (FPCT) integrates feminist perspectives into peace and conflict discourse (Tickner, 1995). It introduces the interconnectedness of all forms of violence: domestic, societal, state-based, and inter-state and its gendered dimension. Feminist peace and conflict theorists like Cynthia Cockburn and Cynthia Enloe argue that if patriarchal societal order is problematised, and women integrated into every decision-making process, the occurrence of conflicts and wars will be limited because they believe patriarchy defines the dynamics and settings of war and peace negotiations. FPCT reviews visibility in conflicts and the interrelatedness of different types of violence to gendered construct. It critically analyses the gendered perspective of war including the subversion of women's experiences and knowledge and outlines the historical accounts of women in war. It critiques androcentric ideologies and epistemologies of peacebuilding that reproduce inequalities of power relations across the axis of gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality class, etc. (McLeod & O'Reilly, 2019). This theory is thus essential in the understanding of women's positions in the Cameroon anglophone armed conflict.

3.2. Agency and Participation

Feminist scholarship brings in a gender perspective in postcolonial theory. Colonisation can be referred to as but not limited to economic and political dominance and the production of a cultural and identity discourse about an oppressed state, or group of people (Lewis & Mills 2003, p. 49). Spivak highlights the concept of cultural hegemony, inspired by Gramsci, which she describes as the imposition of a specific framing by the dominant group to the disempowered groups. In the context of Cameroon, the disempowered group are the people of anglophone Cameroon (Northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon) who make up the minority group and the anglophone women who are subjugated not just as members of a minority but as women oppressed by structural and cultural patriarchy. The limited participation or lack of recognition of women's participation in peace and political spaces might be due to how social norms are welcomed and perform in these spaces, who cannot speak, who can speak and who can be heard (Spivak, 1988), and who can be part of leadership and decision making. Within this context, the research explored the women's agency and resistance, their act of rebellion against societal ordering, 'oppositional gaze' as bell hooks defines it (Lewis & Mills, 2003). She states: "not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality." Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the

face of structures of domination that would contain it opens up the possibility of agency...” Activism and standing up to dominant powers is a tool of deconstruction that can be used against structural power that hinders equal gender representation and lasting solution to peace. According to bell hooks in Lewis & Mills (2003), Foucault’s discourse on power defines it as “a system of domination which controls everything, and which leaves no room for freedom”. He states that, where there is power and oppression, there is also resistance. He further indicates that each society has its regime of truth conveyed through institutions and knowledge production in society. They come to normalise what we consider truth in society. How are regimes of truth- general politics structured in Cameroon? What is the social norm or order? And how are all these embedded and reinforced in institutions (political and social), structures, and at different levels of decision making. Furthermore, how are these regimes of truth being contested individually and collectively to advance the interest of the oppressed groups? These are some of the reflections that also guided this research.

3.3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is widely used and contextual and so, used differently depending on the social divisions or axis characterizing each situation. It is a conceptual tool that has become integral in research and a critical analytical tool or means of critical inquiry and practice (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.31; Hesse-Biber, 2012) as it emphasizes the interlocking effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc., highlighting how categories of identity and structures of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) states that the categories of intersectionality depend on every context and that it is not about identity, it is about how structures make certain identities the consequence of the vehicle of vulnerability and prone to marginalization or to violence which thus creates a society of exclusion and invisibility. She describes intersectionality as the multiple dimensionalities of oppression and using it requires the consideration of structural locations and power differentials such as cultural and structural domains of power (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The lens of intersectionality is used in this study in reviewing reports and projects of SCEW and WILPF to determine whether they effectively take into consideration power differential in Cameroon and the different intersecting social axes of gender, income, ethnicity, class, and culture. It will also critically examine how

different categories of women are included or represented in peace talks given that they are the ones who suffer most in armed conflict and insecurities.

4.0. Research Methodology

This section aims to highlight the methodological perspective which is aimed at answering the research questions. According to Harding (1987), methodology is the theorizing and analysing of how research should be carried out. For this research which sought to analyse the role of organisations in the fight against GBV in the anglophone armed conflict in Cameroon, the strategies set in place to promote feminist peace, and the participation of the anglophone women in peace processes, the research made use of feminist research epistemology. Feminist research is defined as feminist methodology, methods, and a theory of knowledge that confronts social assumptions about the world (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.5). It stems from a feminist perspective that highlights the struggles of women and their experiences to bring about equality, social justice, and transformation (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.5).

4.1. Research Design

The research was a case study of two organisations (WILPF- Cameroon and SCEW) who have common or similar objectives of combating armed conflict violence as they advocate for feminist peace, taking into consideration the perspectives of women who are more susceptible to the impact of war. A purposive sampling⁸ design was used to select participants for the in-depth interview conducted. A total of six workers of WILPF and SCEW were interviewed instead of the targeted number (seven). This is because, due to the busy schedule of the organisations, it was difficult to get hold of other workers. Three were from SCEW and three from WILPF. They were purposively selected from the organisations to obtain answers to the set research questions since the sample group had key characteristics relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2016. 408). The purpose was also to examine similarities and possible differences in methods used by organisations in their

⁸ It is a non-probability form of sampling where the research participants are not sampled on a random basis but will be purposively strategically selected so that the sample is relevant to the research questions that are posed (Bryman, 2016).

approach in combating GBV and lobbying for peace in anglophone Cameroon and Cameroon in general.

The research made use of qualitative methods essential to gaining an understanding of the roles of organisations in the fight against violence and advocate for peace in the Cameroon anglophone armed conflict. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared and administered since the researcher had some assumptions about the research participants⁹ (Mason, 2017, p.65), and what she sought to explore which required in-depth and contextual knowledge of the women's organisations experiences, processes, and social interactions with female victims of GBV. According to Mason, (2017, p.68-69):

all researchers have ontological and epistemological positions which get activated or expressed in their research decisions and judgements, and I now want to add that all researchers do make decisions and judgements in the conduct of their qualitative interviews. Therefore, I do not think it is possible to gather data in a wholly unstructured way through a qualitative interview, because the decisions and judgements the researcher makes give some form of structure and purpose to the data generation process.

Also, a semi-structured interview was a baseline to keep track of what the research participants were saying and to ensure that the conversations were structured. Interviews were conducted in the English language (as the workers of the organisations communicate fluently in English) and on Zoom. They took place mostly after working hours and on weekends because the respondents were not available during weekdays due to their busy schedules. The interview sessions were recorded using the zoom recording function and an external recorder (for backup) which were all stored in a secure folder on the researcher's computer. One thing the researcher observed and acknowledged was that online interviews are limiting since body gestures/language and eye contact cannot be easily observed.

I had been in contact with the NGOs, as an intern in one and had worked with the other on a project in 2020. With these connections, I gained access to the organisations and valuable information like projects and reports for document analysis and to conduct in-depth interviews, of course with the

⁹ I choose to use the word participants because as I said, it was more like a discussion and a social interaction without structures of hierarchies or who holds the power.

consent of the organisation. I have been working with WILPF- Sweden as an intern since January 18th, 2021. That granted me a gate pass to WILPF- Cameroon where we are in close collaboration with, and other sections/groups of WILPF Africa. This is because the unit in which I work within WILPF Sweden manages the overall activities and projects of the sections in Africa and works in close collaboration with them. It was easy to get in contact with the participants as I am to an extent considered an insider. At the same time, it was a struggle and a question of loyalty having to work for one branch of the organisation while I conduct research with the other. Concerning my interview with the Southern Cameroon European Women (SCEW) organisation, because of one of the members whom I have known way back and because in 2020, I worked with the organisation as an assistant organiser in a project and workshop, this made it easy to access the research participants.

4.2. Methods

The research made use of document analysis and in-depth interviews as techniques of data generation. According to Mason (2017) data is constructed and not 'straightforwardly excavated'. It is not just sitting around and waiting to be picked up, hence the reason for using data generation instead of collection. The document analysis gave a general and specific insight into the vision, policies, projects, and activities of the organisations directed to combating violence in the anglophone crisis and peace advocacy such as demands for a cease-fire, seeking justice for victims of violence. Mason (2017, p. 64) highlights that, most qualitative research is conducted with the belief that knowledge is situational and the act of interviews for data generation is as much a social activity as much social discussions or interactions. This research was conducted in a social setting where it was more like a conversation with the researcher's own experiences and background also discussed. This was to minimise any form of power relations and to align with the fact that with qualitative research, knowledge is situational, contextual, and interactional (Mason, 2017).

4.2.1. Document analysis

It is relevant to analyse policies as they can enhance mediation and structure aspects of social interventions, as well as help one develops and make sense of certain worldviews. It also gives interpretation to certain social, political, and economic issues and justifies actions and inactions (Prior, 2003, p. 67-68). Conducting a document analysis enabled me to understand the

organisations perspectives and style of working as a people who have in one way or another experienced violence and in collaboration with women on the ground to promote feminist peace as well as gaining insight into the different mitigation strategies employed to fight GBV. To achieve this, I analysed a report on a research that was conducted by WILPF- Cameroon between 2019 and 2020 titled ‘Gender Conflicts Analysis (GCA) in Cameroon. I also analysed some of the projects that SCEW organisation has carried out such as the Women’s Campaign for Justice, Peace, and Freedom (targeting anglophone women who have been arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned because of the armed conflict) and a Humanitarian aid project that targeted IDPs living in Bonaberi (a French municipality hosting thousands of IDPs from the war zone).

This method enabled the structuring of the interview guide. It also enabled the answering of research Q1 and part of Q2 in the data analysis. Furthermore, it gave an insight into the extent of how inclusive women were in these projects, especially those affected by the conflict. The framework of the theories of this research were also used to ascertain whether the organisations’ projects do consider different intersections of social categorizations and how well women’s peace and security agenda is being pursued and implemented.

4.2.2. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are an intensive technique of data generation through a one-on-one interview process and usually characterises a limited number of persons referred to as respondents to explore their beliefs, understanding, and experiences of a phenomenon (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3). In-depth interviews were conducted, specifically, semi-structured interviews with the help of an interview guide to gain the realities and detailed knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007. p.114) on the activities of WILPF and SCEW and to give leverage to the workers to elaborate their answers while paying attention to the scope of the research and to create space for follow-up questions to ensure adequate coverage, recognition, and realities of the work the organisations carry out. The interview guide helped me guide the respondent within the relevancy of the research topic, but at the same time giving room to the interviewees to talk extensively and for me to ask follow-up questions. I planned to interview at most two workers a day because in-depth interviewing is a time-consuming and exhausting task, and I did not want the process to be compromised due to lack of comprehension and focus caused by fatigue. Despite the time-consuming nature of in-depth interviews, they give room for the manifestation of detailed information in a conversational and

more friendly environment where the respondents might provide information, they might not feel comfortable sharing in a focus group discussion or other methods of data collection.

4.3. Validity and Reliability

Given the small sample size of the research, the issue of significance and representation was noted. However, in transcribing the material, I highlighted some tendencies that correlated with the interview guide structure since the interview process was a semi-structured one but then again, I also identified new themes which enriched by analysis such as the shrinking space of Civil Society Organisations which I could not ignore. The material spoke to larger issues that post concerns not just to women organisations but CSOs in general that work with gender, peace issues, and post-war issues (such as trauma and justice, and social issues). The data generated from the interview illustrates some general problems and concerns which I am aware of since I did not only conduct interviews but also read a lot about the topic and through my internship placement with an organisation that focuses on women and peace, advocacy, and activism on the effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Because of my internship, I have been opportune to attend webinars, zoom meetings, and other digital discussion forums with leading scholars and activists within the space of conflict, militarisation peacebuilding such as Cynthia Enloe¹⁰, Leymah Gbowee¹¹, and other prominent actors and organisations. The knowledge gathered from those meetings and discussions corroborates with the material from the interviews and so has enhanced or strengthened my research.

One of the things I would like to stress is that quantitative studies are very important and the research has taken into consideration some statistics which has helped emphasised the situation in numbers but, since the research focuses on impacts and strategies of women's organisations on dealing with these issues of violence and peace, there is need for the qualitative discussions and interviews to illustrate the multiple effects and complexities of these problems and visons on how to move forward. Statistics might help in giving a general rating of how profound and serious the

¹⁰ She is a feminist theorist, writer, and professor, with most of her work focusing on Gender and Militarism and contributions in the areas of feminist international relations.

¹¹ Leymah Gbowee is a Liberian peace activist, social worker, and women's rights advocate. She is Founder and President of the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, based in Monrovia. She is a Noble Price winner and is known for leading a women's nonviolent peace movement, Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace that helped bring an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003.

issues raised are, but it cannot fully represent or portray the specificities, different intersecting social categories, pain and suffering that comes with such issues. The research was not aimed at looking at statistical significance or representation but for tendencies and illustrations of the problems raised in this research by contributing through the in-depth material generated through comprehensive interviews and sharing of concerns and strategies to move forward.

To ensure that the data spoke for itself, low inference description phrases were a huge part if not, the greater part of the analysis. Direct quotes from the research participants' narratives were used. Also, different ways of corroborating the information were used as mentioned, above, including the use of multiple sources such as articles and reports from Human Rights Watch, UN agencies like WHO, OCHA, UNICEF, UN women and UNDP. Document analysis and other secondary sources of data were used to inform the research. Theoretical and conceptual perspectives, as well as the researcher's reflexivity were all taken into consideration.

4.4. Ethical consideration

4.4.1. Consent and power relations

In research, one essential thing is whether the research or interviews conducted observes ethical considerations (Mason, 2017, p.66). The dilemma of hierarchy and power in this research was managed by giving control on when, where, and how the respondents wanted the interviews to take place. Taking into consideration the perspective of the participants, before the data collection process was initiated, the focus of the research, its aim, and how the researcher is going to engage in the information provided was clearly explained to them. Since we could not meet in person for the interview, I read out the consent form to the participants, emphasising that their participation in the research was out of their free will and they had the right to withdraw from the conversation as they deep fit. Also, the researcher made the research participatory or interactive where the researcher and the respondents share some ideas. I shared my own background and experiences of the Cameroon anglophone armed conflict making my participants understand that they are not alone, and that I get where they are coming from. However, I was also mindful of the pre-existing relationships with the respondents that could influence the interview process or affect the objectivity of the research (Kruger, 2014), given the fact that we work in the same organisation (WILPF), though in different branches, have been in meetings and worked on some projects and

reports together. I had also had a previous working relationship with SCEW. Judith Stacey in Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 128) states that “while self-reflection is important to decreasing the power differentials between the researcher and the researched, being too personal with a respondent can provide a false illusion that there is no power and authority”.

4.4.2. Reflexivity

The researcher was aware of her positionality as a feminist and an activist who stands for social change and justice, her own experiences as part of the marginalised group- a Cameroonian, specifically from southern Cameroon which is the war zone, and the biases this might create in the research process, data generation and knowledge production (Hesse-Biber, 2007, P.129; Haraway 1988). Hesse-Biber (2007, p.129) defines reflexivity as “the process through which a researcher recognises, examines, and understands how his or her own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process”. Paying attention to one’s positionality in research reiterates the understanding that research is the ‘view from nowhere (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.21).

As an insider/outsider - doing an internship in one branch of the organisation (WILPF) and carrying out research in another, I made it clear to the organisation that I understand my position and I have a clearly defined boundary as a researcher and an intern in the organisation. However, alternating and separating these positions back and forth at times was a bit difficult. All the interviews were conducted out of office hours which at first, it was because of the busy nature of the respondents but it also gave the researcher some autonomy over the research questions because if the interviews were to be conducted within office hours, then the organisation would have had to review the interview guide.

Although the researcher’s positionality might have resulted in research bias, it also might have given me the vantage point in gathering more productive and detailed data (Collins, 1986). On the other hand, it might have also restricted the respondents from exposing too much information or might have limited me as an intern in gaining full access to the organisation’s sensitive information with the fear that I could include that in the research.

4.5. Data Analysis

In respect to the data analysis, it also made use of memos as Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 144-146) suggests, where daily reflections on data gathering and coding have been summarised such as what was missing, not connecting to the research questions, topic, interview guide, respondents body actions and reactions, personal observations, and the challenges the researcher faced during data generation. Patterns were generated in the data coding and labelled thematically. To analyse the data objectively transcription and coding categories were differentiated by sub-themes depending on the responses of the participants. The analyses were also guided by the theoretical and conceptual framework previously discussed in this thesis, and the methodology deemed relevant in answering the research questions. Furthermore, I created an outline containing different themes that were generated from the research questions and patterns that arouse from the material. This dialectical process with the material informed the analysis and it guided me in re-adjusting, merging similar themes, separating, excluding, or generating new themes. Also, the issue of 'shrinking civic space' constantly reoccurred throughout the research process which could not be ignored as it seems to be an essential issue faced by women organisations and SCOs in general.

5.0. Data Analysis

As I navigate through the data generation process, engaging in deep conversation with the research participants, I reflect on how we are gradually forgetting that humanity is like the sun. Its value is irreplaceable. The continuous increase in instability, armed conflict, and war in the world, global south, and Africa in particular, puts the world on the verge of more suffering, destruction and threatens the very core of human dignity and existence.

“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in conflict is not only a horrendous life-changing crime, most often perpetrated against women and girls. It is also used as a tactic of war; to terrorize families, dehumanise communities and destabilise societies, so that they struggle to recover for years or even decades after the guns fall silent...we must do everything in our power to end the horror and stigma that affects hundreds of thousands of women and girls, as well as men and boys, worldwide.”

(UN Secretary-General, February 2019)

This section of the research highlights the findings and analyses of the testimonies of respondents and secondary data generated through documents such as the 2020 report on Gender and Conflict Analysis research that was conducted by WILPF- Cameroon and the Women's Campaign for Justice, Peace, and freedom carried out in 2020 by SCEW (with the focus on female prisoners), as well as humanitarian aid project that targeted IDPs. It presents the findings on the role of WILF-Cameroon and that of SCEW as a women's organisation fighting against GBV, as well as advocating for nonviolent resolution of the conflict in the Cameroon anglophone regions. It also brings forth the strategies applied by these organisations in advocating for feminist peace. The analysis is guided and intertwined with theories presented earlier in this research, previous research, and other sources of data meant to shed more light on the studies. For safety and confidentiality, the research participants are labelled as 'respondents 1,2,3,4,5 and 6'.

5.1. French Cameroon and the politics of the 'Other'

Cockburn (2007) highlights that wars or conflicts can be a result of different issues and can also be manifested in diverse ways. The armed conflict in Cameroon can be defined as that of identity politics where a group of people (the anglophones) who share common values of culture, norms, and traditions, feel they are gradually losing their identity and all that defines them such as their laws, traditions educational system as they face marginalisation and oppression from French Cameroon (the majority). Respondent 1 indicates that:

(...) We want to have our own country where we have a voice, where we can stand up against bad governance and our voices heard because, from everything that is happening, we see that we are still under colonial rule. Worse still not even under those who colonised us first- meaning neither the Germans nor the British, but we are under colonisation from French Cameroon. So, our vision is to see a free SCs, (Southern Cameroons). We want our children to grow up in a country where they have a voice, free to voice an opinion and not thrown in jail, to air an opinion and not be rape or torture.

Spivak's essay- "Can the Subaltern Speak?" paints a perfect picture of the anglophone Cameroonians who have no freedom of expression or decision-making powers. Being a minority

group, they are regarded by French Cameroon as the ‘other’, the inferior not worthy of rights (Spivak, 1988, p.76). Most postcolonial discourse has been centred around the aspect of oppression and supremacy, who is the master and who is the servant, what constitutes the norm, the ‘order’, and what constitutes the difference. Young (2003, p.1) affirms this when he talks about what it means to be the minority - not qualified as the norm or authorised to speak. These ideologies of assimilation and oppression perpetuated by French Cameroon flow from the colonial world that still shapes the lives of the former British colonised Cameroonians:

It is getting worse every day. When you hear the declarations of members of the government, they call the people that are fighting for their rights ‘terrorists’. You cannot act like that and expect peace, no! You can at least call them, if you must, ‘the separatists’ because they are seeking an independent nation anyway, not terrorists. They call them extremists, terrorists, and so on because people came out to say that the conditions in which we are living are not appropriate - you give us people (such as teachers, magistrates, and judges) that cannot express themselves in the language that we understand better, it becomes a problem? It should not be a problem (respondent 4).

French brutality has been evident in many of the areas colonised by France and this brutality is often used to violate, instil fear, set examples, and send messages of who has the powers (Rydström, 2015, p. 192). The use of force and intimidation by French Cameroon is to instil fear and assert control and power over the southern Cameroon community. This pattern or informal rule of colonizers over supposed sovereign states problematises the concept of ‘postcolonialism’. In Cameroon and most postcolonial countries, colonial masters still indirectly influence the political, economic, and social atmosphere (Young, 2003, p.3). This indicates that colonialism still manifests itself in the contemporary world. Hence to say Cameroon is a postcolonial state is far-fetched and the term ‘postcolonialism’ is prematurely used as McClintock (1992, p. 87) puts it. The country being systemically constructed on the norms of patriarchy positions the anglophone woman in a double marginalised position - as a woman living in a society where she is regarded as a second-class citizen and as a woman of a minority group with little or no privileges.

5.2. (In)visible impacts of armed conflict on women

War has a tremendous effect on ‘everyday life’ (Cockburn, 2007, p, 208) in war communities. The impacts of conflicts can be felt directly and indirectly in varied and different dimensions depending

on the specificities of the conflict such as the location, economy, cultural and systemic structures in play. Defining the anglophone armed conflict in Cameroon from face value gives a very limiting and narrow projection of the conflict. An analytical perspective showcases a more in-depth and comprehensive picture of the crisis that takes into consideration and brings to light its complexities and thus paves a way for a sustainable solution to the armed conflict. According to most of the research participants, and secondary data, the anglophone women are described to bear the brunt of the conflict in different ways and often, have been the subjects of sexual and gender-based violence. According to respondent 1:

I get emotional when I talk about it. The impact has been very devastating. When this thing started, the women were pulled through series of...I do not know if you remember images of university students being pulled through series of abuse? They are still being raped, even grandmothers are being raped, some are thrown into jails. At the end of the day, women are the ones that suffer most. The men will take the bullets, but the women are the ones that suffer most.

Respondent 2 highlights that:

I think that the women in the northwest and southwest of Cameroon (southern Cameroon), are those who bear the brunt of this war because even though some of the women are front-line fighters, they are just a minimal part. Most of the women stay back home to take care of the children with little or no means to escape so they have to ensure the security of these children and then, on the other hand, they are the ones left back to bury those who are being killed, to bury their children, to bury their husbands- in most videos, you see mostly women coming together to bury those who have died.

This affirms what Cockburn (2007, p.206) means when she elaborates that women in a situation of war or armed conflict faced new challenges like a shift in gender prescribed roles wherein most women are left with the responsibility of looking after their families with little or no assistance, engaging in work they will normally not do, as well as having to flee or coping displacement.

Respondent 6 states that:

It might interest you to know that I visited the North west two weeks ago and everything has changed. A lot of girls are frustrated, a lot stopped going to school either because some of their parents have been killed in the conflicts while other young girls are victims of sexual harassment

from both sides, either from the separatist or from the military. I talked with a friend of mine who visited these suburbs and one of the shocking revelations she made was that in that area, if you have a girl child, allowing her to be there means you do not want the good of the child because the girl is caught in between. She is either harassed by the military or by the separatists. So, girls are used as weapons of war, cooks, and others for sexual gratification. And then one health consequence is that there is a lot of psychological trauma suffered by women and young girls and a lot of STDs that have increased because of the crisis.

Harcourt (2013, p.110) emphasises that sometimes the problem is not only the rape but also the fact that due to maybe bad living conditions and desperation, women are forced to exchange sex for food, for a ticket out of the conflict zone, for protection, money, and marriage. The outcome of GBV is not just physical but deeper than what meets the eye. It has been linked to long-term health conditions and traumatic experiences like restlessness, insomnia, nightmares, depression, outburst, and anger that could lead to mental illness (Mootz et al., 2017, p. 369; World Health Organisation, 2021).

According to respondent 3:

Haven interviewed a girl as part of the research we were conducting on Gender Conflict Analysis (GCA) in Cameroon, she was about 13years old who had fled from Southwest to Bafoussam¹² while her parents stayed in the village. She went there to school because, in the village, there was no chance she could go to school since their school was attacked and burnt by gunmen while she was at the school. She was traumatised by that situation because the day she was at the school, the gunmen came and asked everybody to leave as they set the school ablaze.

This is just one of the many cases of induced migration, psychological violence, and children's inability to access education fully. According to statistics from (United Nations Children's Fund, 2019)¹³, more than 70% of children in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon have been forced by violence to drop out of school. Another report by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2019)¹⁴ indicates that over 700 thousand children (about 9 in 10 children) have been out of school since 2016 with 80 percent of schools not accessible. As

¹² A city in the Western region of Cameroon

¹³ UNICEF (2019)

¹⁴ OCHA (2019)

the crisis continues, attacks on schools have intensified as members of the restoration forces (Amber boys or separatist fighters) are bent on crippling the educational sector until the government of Cameroon does the needful. Children have been specifically prevented from exercising their fundamental human right of education, an act of social and economic violence that threatens the wellbeing of their future (WILPF- Cameroon, 2019).

Respondent 4 highlights that:

From our encounter with victims of violence during the GCA research, their stories varied from gang-raping not even by the ‘boys’ (Amber boys), because the boys could not come to rape anybody there. The stories were facts about some terrible killings that we have seen and thinking that they were orchestrated by the ‘boys’. One woman asked me when we were doing the interview, that did I notice that the boys that killed Florence Ayafor¹⁵ did not wear masks but for the ones that cut her head? And what boy from that same area will be orchestrating something and not even be afraid of the reprisals of the law if they did not know where they stand? That gave me another mind and I started finding out things after that. Then I discovered that the killing might have been masterminded differently from what we thought. There were stories of gang-raping, and families being forced to see what is happening to the victims. There were stories of mothers depressed and traumatised from losing all their children. There were also stories of IDPs being psychologically broken because they were exploited sexually in the houses in which they are seeking refuge.

Affirming the words of respondent 3,4 and 6, a report published by Human Right Watch (February 2021) discusses 20 cases of rape in one of the conflict localities called Ebam, reported to have been committed by the Cameroon military. In the report, a woman gives her experience stating that: “It was dark, and I was alone. They searched the house and stole my phone and money. One of them abused me. He said: ‘If you do not have sex with me, I will kill you!’ I was too afraid to say or do anything. After the rape, I ran into the bush where I spent two months. I am still upset and traumatized”. Another victim whom the report indicates to be physically disabled attests that: “It was about 5:30 a.m. I had woken up early to go to the church with my 18-year-old daughter ... two soldiers came inside the church. One took me by my hand and pulled me outside. I started crying.

¹⁵ She was a 46year old Wardress at the Bamenda (Capital of the Northwest region of Cameroon) Central Prison in the North West Region who was gruesomely murdered and beheaded on September 29, 2019 after she was abducted on her way from a funeral. A video showed seven men; four of whom were dragging her stark-naked with her legs wide apart and a rope on her neck for several meters after having raped her. Florence Ayafor was later beheaded, and her head deposited near her body.

My daughter was also crying. One of them removed my dress and raped me on the ground, in the grass. He abused me for over 15 minutes. He searched my clothes, took my phone and money, and left”.

Often, these women are abused to send a message across to the separatist fighters who are considered the enemies of the state and as a way of effecting punishment on them as they are labelled as wives of Amba boys (separatist fighter) or accused of harbouring them. Cynthia Cockburn confirms this when she says that ‘Sexual violence against women is endemic’ as it is used by different actors in war to punish women termed to be associating with the ‘wrong side’ (Cockburn, 2007, p.16). This also reiterates the point of Rydström (2015), Harcourt (2013) and Rehn & Sirleaf (2002) who argues that rape has often be used as a weapon of war to send across messages to the enemy of who holds the power and to plan the seed of trauma and stigma in the enemy’s community. These women become vulnerable and at risk of being infected with HIV/AIDs, other STDs, pelvic pain, vagina infection, and bleeding and seizures as indicated by the World Health Organisation (2021). The fact that they have limited access to health care makes the situation worse.

According to the northwest and southwest three months crisis’s situation report No 9 by OCHA (2019), out of the 74 rape cases recorded so far, only 13 were able to gain access to medical attention as the crisis has made access to health services more difficult in their communities. Also, 785 cases of GBV were reported in the same month of the report with indications that cases of rape and GBV will increase. The results of the research conducted by WILPF-Cameroon in 2019-2020 on the Gender Conflicts Analysis in Cameroon, specifically from the northwest and southwest shows that GBV was an overarching issue or impact of the crisis in different forms: from abuse of power (systemic violence), sexual and gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, emotional and phycological violence, rape as a weapon of war which goes unnoticed, disregarded and unaccountable for by the government (WILPF- Cameroon, 2020). It also indicated that the conflicts reinforce inequalities and further widen the gender gap since women are reported to be disproportionately affected by war which is attributed to the institutional and cultural practices that place them in disadvantaged positions. It also showed a shift in societal ‘order’ and a shift in gender roles as some women and girls take on different roles from head of households,

breadwinners to combatants, leading political movements, armed groups to peace groups (WILPF-Cameroon, 2020).

Furthermore, the impact of the conflict such as the reinforcement of social issues including poverty is not only felt by the conflict zone, but it triggers down to the communities and families hosting the IDPs and refugees:

I have a neighbour who came back from work one day and made this woman at his place who just came from the North west with her two children. He looked questionably at her and she asked, why are you looking at me? You think I should stay there and die because I do not have any relatives in Yaoundé?¹⁶ The man burst into tears because his house was already so populated. He feels the impact too because coupled with his own family, his house is full of IDPs, and then here is this woman with her children requesting to seek shelter in his house. The impacts are so deep, and you cannot begin to quantify, you cannot begin to imagine the social strain...not staying in your place for 2 to 3 years now, you cannot go home, you cannot do anything (Respondent 4).

The negative effects of forced displacement on the host communities cannot be ignored. It might lead to a strain in scarce economic resources, livelihood, and standard of living of the hosting families and communities (Jacobson, 2002). It can also give rise to insecurity issues with armed groups and government forces intruding into the communities; increase in crime wave and violence, and at the same time, IDPs and refugees might fall prey to perpetrators of human and sex trafficking, criminal and sexual abusers as they feed on their vulnerability (Jacobson, 2002). However, with the help of international humanitarian actions, and programs such as income-generating activities, capacity building and empowerment, improved security measures, availability of health services for psychologically traumatised victims, and urging host communities and local authorities to be supportive and more accommodating to displaced people, the positive impacts can outweigh the negative ones.

5.3. Armed conflict, Gender-based violence, and cultural ideology

The world is increasingly experiencing violent conflicts where facts seem to suggest that the effects of violence on the lives of women, their rights, and that of the girl child are increasingly becoming more severe (Davies & True 2018. p.3). This complement the work of Georgette Mulheir and

¹⁶ Yaoundé is one of the francophone regions in Cameroon and it is the political capital of the country.

Tracey O'Brien outlined in Cockburn (2007, p. 212) where it indicates that in conflict and after conflict, violence against women precedes and is more common as combatants, military, and men with weapons will use them to abuse and harass women within and outside their households. The abuse of women in times of conflict reflects on societal ideologies and how women are treated in peacetimes. It is the expression of the structure of power and androcentrism. It springs from patriarchal norms where men perceive the need to exercise control over women (Cockburn, 2007, p. 212). In conflict, Gender-Based Violence and other forms of violence are reinforced and common. It is often, used as a tool to exercise control, instil fear and intimidation in a group of people. According to some feminist scholars, Gender-based violence in times of war and peace is built on male dominance and the practice of masculine social constructs. The development and governance of militarisation, its rules, and how it should operate come from patriarchal expectations of manhood- aggressive, strong, conquerors, and vengeful (Mootz et. al., 2017, p. 369-370). R W Connell put forth the relationship between violence and different social powers arguing that military techniques and style of operations and weapon production are informed by such social powers as gender power relations. Actions of violence such as sexual abuse are not individually carried out but most at times involve complex institutional structures that perpetuate and enhance such acts. They are deeply rooted in social and power inequalities and ideologies of male supremacy that inform and enforce social order (Connell, 2013, P. 107).

Sometimes, the cultural normalisation of GBV is encouraged by women themselves. In Cameroon, according to the United Nations Population Fund (2021)¹⁷, 27.7percent of women between the ages of 15-24 years believe that wife-beating can be justified. Some cultures normalise and see the beating or violence against women as a way of passing punishment for 'misbehaving' or a tool of resolving conflict. This ideology highlights the way women are regarded within a given society and how that society is socially constructed such as influencing women into believing that they are subordinate to men and thus the men have the powers to treat, discipline, or punish them the way they deem fit even if it means being physically violent on them. These same practices influence the construction of institutions, systems, and structures such as militarisation that is mostly defined by patriarchy. Respondent 2 highlights that:

¹⁷ UNFPA. (2021)

Our African women have been trained to understand that the man is the head and therefore has dominion over them and so when a woman or a girl is abused, some women tend to blame and mock them saying they must have done something wrong to be abused and some will even influence the victims to stay silent to avoid shame, reproach, individual and family stigmatisation.

These traditions or patriarchal norms sometimes can be harmful to men as it scrutinises them and regards men who fall short of the definition of ‘maleness’ or manhood as not men enough. This societal ridicule pushes some men to stay within the societal checks and balances of masculinities even though it can cause them harm or abuse (Correia, & Bannon, 2006; Connell, 2005). Respondent 3 corroborates the argument made above by stating that:

(...) Young boys for example because they are boys are forced sometimes to join the armed groups. This is a very typical case of GBV that men, young boys have to suffer as part of this crisis. They are forced to join the armed groups and if they do not want to, either their parents or family at large will be threatened. And some families have to go to other cities to hide their children- their boys because they are afraid that they might abduct them. When they are kidnapped, they become ‘Amba’ boys.

According to OCHA (2020), most young men and teenagers are more at risk of unlawful arrest, torture, and execution or forced recruitment into the insurgent groups directly related to the anglophone conflict. Due to this, a lot of young boys have fled their communities to avoid being captured as child soldiers and abused physically and emotionally.

5.4. Combating gender-based violence

Statistically, it is estimated that 30 percent of women worldwide have been victims of either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (World Health Organisation, 2021). According to the United Nations during a general assembly on Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women held in 1993, violence against women refers to “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private. In Cameroon, a country

that is defined by androcentric norms, social inequalities (UNDP, 2020) just like most countries in Africa, intimate partner violence, sexual and GBV are some of the prominent issues that are silently promoted by its systems and structures. Reports indicate that about 56.4 percent of women in Cameroon have either experienced domestic violence, emotional and sexual violence (OCHA, 2020). These reports receive little or no attention as the perpetrators often go unpunished while society silences the victims and stigmatises them (OCHA 2020). In conflict, these acts are reinforced and gender-based violence is often being used as a weapon of war to defeat the opponent physically, psychologically by causing pain, humiliation, and stripping the victims of their self-esteem (Harcourt, 2013, p.109; Rydström 2015, p. 199). Respondent 6 affirms this by stating that:

(...) girls are used as weapons of war, some are used as cooks, some are used for sexual gratification, and all the rest.

Respondent 2:

(...) Then the other way in which they have been affected in is violence. The violence that is being perpetrated against women not only, but mostly by the Cameroon military where they rape women because if you look at wars, military and other front line fighters do use women as a tool -they use that as a weapon to weaken their opponents which is raping their wives, killing them, kidnapping them, thus, these women go through all of these things in the hands of the military. Then again, you have the separatist fighters, they take some of these women and they keep them in their camps, some are being raped, they cook for them, you know, they use them as tools. They do not have a say especially those who are on the ground.

As the ongoing armed conflict intensifies, violence and intimidation are being used to suppress the population. CSOs, feminist scholars, and organisations have been advocating and fighting to reduce, if not eradicate all forms of acts of violence perpetrated on women and children as well as men as they seek a nonviolent resolution to the socio-political conflict. Women's organisations based in and out of Cameroon have been mobilising, forming alliances, collaborating, exercising 'resistance' and 'agency' (Young 2003, p.3; Mahmood, 2006, p.36-37) as they are constantly advocating against the violence and insecurity they are facing in the face of the conflict. They hold

streets and non-street protests- ‘bodies in assembly’ as Butler (2015)¹⁸ puts it. According to her: “(...) what we are seeing when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or other public venues is the exercise- one might call it performative- of the right to appear, a bodily demand for a more livable set of lives”. She goes further to argue that when people come together on the streets, it means that they are seeking recognition and forming alliances as a group of people who have been deprived of a livable life (a life void of precariousness) and thus calling for justice to be enacted. Feminists scholars in Cameroon like Jackqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué (2018; 2019), Kaushal, T. (2020), Mbongulo-Wodien (2020), Ashu G.M (2020) have been creating awareness of women’s situation in the crisis through publications, while NGOs like the South West and North West Women’s Task Force (SNWOT)¹⁹, the ‘Tankumbeng’ women²⁰, the centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), WILPF-Cameroon and SCEW have in different and similar ways been vocal through campaigns, workshops, activism, organising marches, peaceful protest and protecting their communities as they call on the powers that be to initiate a sincere dialogue with all stakeholders present. These acts of agency portray African women in a different light rather than the essentialism that they are just poor docile victims waiting to be saved by white men from their brown men (Mohanty, 2003, Spivak, 1988), as they are constantly fighting and speaking truth to power. Through these acts, these women are saying that the Subaltern can indeed speak! but the question is are they heard? (Spivak, 1988). Mohanty (2003) also highlights that third-world women, often, are discussed as static entities that are only affected and changed by oppressive structures such as capitalism, colonialism and ignored as agents of change. In the context of Cameroon, the women are not only oppressed by structures of neo-colonialism or imperialism, neoliberalism but also by androcentrism that subjects the women to a subordinate position. However, using Foucault’s concept of ‘power’, although these women are oppressed, the women display a form of agency and resistance as ‘there are no relations of power without resistances ...’ (Foucault 1980, p. 142). According to Foucault, power is a circulating force that can be challenged or resisted in

¹⁸ I am aware that Butler is a post structuralist scholar, but I apply her body of knowledge here to strengthen my argument.

¹⁹ It is a coalition of women leaders & women-led organizations, with an objective of standing against the violence and have been at the forefront of using their platforms to rally women for marches and peaceful street protest and ensuring that the voices and participation of women are acknowledged in every negotiation.

²⁰ It is an organisation that has long existed before colonisation in the grass field of the northwest region of Cameroon with an objective of maintaining peace and order in the communities. The movement also has an objective to fight for equal rights and social justice. It is made up of mostly elderly women and its form of protest is naked protest.

social relations and can shift between different groups when conditions allow. As Foucault puts it, we can achieve to “refuse what we are” and what we have been made into as subjects (Foucault cited in Ells, 2003).

SCEW, humanitarian aid and women’s rights organisation created in 2017 purposely because of the anglophone crisis to fight and support women and children who have been affected by the conflict, focuses on providing basic needs for IDPs, prisoners especially female political prisoners in the cities of Buea and Yaoundé, people in the affected regions, other humanitarian work such as payment of hospital bills. They are also fighting for political prisoners to be reintegrated into society and providing legal counsel for women who were unlawfully arrested due to the crisis. Respondents 1,2 and 5 all spoke about SCEW’s project of providing basic needs and legal support for female detainees in the northwest and southwest as well as those held out of the conflict zone. Respondent 5 indicates that:

(...) So, we aim to help give these women support and to give them advice on what to do in certain situations. And we are providing a lot of care- we are basically, supplying the needs of the prisoners of conscience, the women prisoners of conscience who are in all the different prisons in Cameroon.

Respondent 1 elaborates that:

SCEW is in a position that is a bit difficult to effectively fight against GBV because we are out of the war zone, we are like fighting from outside because of security reasons so we can only send our representatives or partner organisations on the ground and grassroots for them to help us. With that limitation, we help cases that come to our notice like that of women being raped, violated in different ways and forms, we assist them by providing for them like their hospital bills for those who end up in the hospitals. Most of them are left in terrible conditions, so for their treatment, we take care of their treatment, providing also for women whose husbands have been killed or those who are left with the sole responsibility of providing for their families (situations like this make them more vulnerable). So, we try to provide basic needs but again, we only take care of a minimum because we are out here, so we really, do not know how many or to what extent of the women that we can help. We even engage in community projects that will empower the women, and will in turn help their families, and communities. It helps keep the community together and when the community is together, it protects the women.

The organisation is also active in the areas of mobilisation and networking with other organisations at the international and/or national level to protest the violence committed against women and the people of anglophone Cameroon in general. The organisation currently has an ongoing social media campaign- #EndAglophoneCrisis.

Respondent 1 highlights that:

In commemoration of women's day this year, we collaborated with a female organisation here in Germany, not only in Germany but is in several countries in Europe- it is called 'Cam²¹ Courage' in France and 'foreign courage in Germany', (this is an organisation that fights for the different rights of women). We work in collaboration with this organisation, our team members at up North (Northern Germany) went for the marching with this organisation and here, down South where we presented the situation of women in the conflict. We use this platform to talk about what our women are going through, especially the detained women.

SCEW also partner and join forces with other organisations on 'ground zero' (the conflict zone) and 'ground one' (refers to cities and areas in Cameroon outside the conflict zone) such as Lamplight Foundation, Heroes Foundation for most of its project execution since due to insecurity, government restriction and non-respect for freedom of expression, SCEW find it difficult to operate physically on the ground. The organisation also writes diplomatic letters to foreign governments and meets with these government representatives as well as female parliamentarians to push forth their nonviolent peace resolution agenda and for justice to be served for the affected. According to respondent 5:

There is a lot of background work that we do but we keep out of the media because we do not want our efforts to be sabotaged. So, what we are doing is meeting politicians of different countries, especially the female politicians, and explaining to them what is happening in the country. We are giving them pictures and videos and then we are continuing the 'women's campaign for justice and peace', we will contact the international community in situations we deem necessary, we will have meetings with politicians in Europe to put pressure on their governments especially female politicians. We have already had a conference with the female politicians in Germany, we are having

²¹ Cam stands for Cameroon.

one in Belgium, we are planning on having a face-to-face meeting (to create more impact) with EU parliamentarians and their representatives after the pandemic to talk to them and let them know that by sitting quiet, they are not helping the situation. We are also in contact with human rights organisations and lawyers who are helping us to do things the right way.

Respondent 2 adds that:

So we are active both on social media and off-social media. We also contact some international organisations and governments by writing diplomatic letters to them: some respond, some do not respond but it is very important to engage in all of these areas because some do not respond but we think that they do keep the letters somewhere, they see them, they read them and we know that at the right time all of these things will come out and it will help.

On the other hand, **WILPF-Cameroon**, aside from having carried out baseline research on GCA and reporting recommendations from the lived experiences of victims, has been very strategic and vocal in several ways. According to respondent 6, the organisation has been involved in activities like:

So far, all our work is centred around peace and security as I earlier mentioned, since the start of the conflict in the northwest and southwest regions, WILPF Cameroon has been able to carry out activities that target women and children especially so that the rate of violence can be reduced. One of the activities we engaged in was through research to come out with the challenges that IDPs face especially the women and the children in the city of Yaoundé (as the focal point) and in each community, we had informants who are IDPs and will inform us about the situation of IDPs and thereafter, we will provide basic needs and other things such as health kits and food.

The organisation is also involved in issues like getting information about women who have faced one form of violence or another through election observations (noting acts of violence and irregularities) and providing legal assistance to them. Respondent 4 highlights that:

Usually, WILPF promotes the WPS agenda during elections in particular through ‘the early warning women’s situation room’ program. We have a call centre and one of the objectives of the call centre is to counter violence especially to women and youths in pre, during, and post-elections. We worked on that in the 2018 presidential elections and the regional elections. In these elections, we had to receive calls from people on the ground (the conflict regions), we recorded the calls of

women who have been battered, and that of others who have been abused, including the locations where the calls came from for easy interventions. So, we got all that information and during that period, we had experts, we had legal experts, counsellors, gender experts who were responsible for working on the cases and providing legal assistance to the cases that needed it. and I think this also helped in fighting GBV.

Respondent 6 further indicates that:

We have a report, the Gender Conflict Analysis (GCA) which was published in 2020, it gives a comprehensive summary of the conflict, of what the people on the ground are going through, the experiences of victims on the ground and in this GCA and a documentary produced as part of the work, are testimonies and recommendations from those on the ground on better ways to manage the conflict. We realised too that sometimes, food and all the basic needs will not help enough so this GCA was for government authorities and all other partners to know the problems that women face. I think if they have a heart, they will effectively explore it, especially from the recommendations. They can explore it and be able to handle the situation better.

GBV is a public and human rights issue. Thus, challenging it requires the reformation of public institutions and structures such as schools, the judiciary, and the perception of masculinity and femininity. GBV in armed conflicts is not an independent factor but flows from systemic and societal practices that perceive women more like objects. Armed conflict reinforces these norms and for a sustainable solution to be put in place to eradicate GBV not just in conflict but in our everyday lives, these patriarchal structures that inform militarized masculinities and GBV in war must be questioned and deconstructed (Connell 2002). In Cameroon, socialisation and expectations that come with a particular gender is a big issue in the public and private sphere. It enhances gender and social inequalities and according to WILPF Cameroon president Sylvie Ndongmo, in line with the organisation's campaign against militarised masculinities, she emphasises the need for recognition of diversity and then creating documentaries on the implications of toxic masculinities, on women's experiences that speak to the heart of patriarchy and enable the questioning of masculinities. There is a need for more experts to be trained in combating sexual and GBV in different ways be it physical or psychological or implementing laws that effectively punish such crimes. Society needs to be informed about the dangers of GBV and its effects on the wellbeing of individuals, women, communities, and sustainable development. It needs more attention, it needs

more experts in that field, it needs more men to be involved, especially the younger boys that are growing up. They need to be trained and taught that normalising abuse against women is an abuse of women's rights and human rights.

5.4.1. Categorisation and inclusiveness

Intersectionality is a concept and a tool that should be acknowledged when analysing and seeking solutions to social issues (Collins, 2019), if the ultimate goal of operationalisation is to attain sustainable and transformative results or growth that leaves no one behind. Eradicating gender-based violence requires the recognition of different social categorisations (age, (dis)ability, location, culture, education, class, etc) of the affected groups and power dimensions (Collins and Bilge, 2016) that play a role in the circle of violence. Kimberlé Crenshaw speaking in the context of violence, harassment, and discrimination against women of colour reiterates the essentiality of intersectionality which should be considered as a feminist principle in the application of advocacy and activism at all levels with particular attention to remote communities and how responses to issues of violence are shaped and executed (Crenshaw, 1991). For CSO and their operations, the inclusion of intersectionality in their projects and activities has direct and indirect links to their results and achievements. Some CSOs understand and acknowledge the concept, however, when it comes to implementation, the case might be different due to different limiting factors which can be lack of resources such as funds, human resources, insecurity, shrinking civic space, or simply because they see a certain social group more wanting than others. It might also be because considering all the different intersections can be cumbersome and might lead to the poor realisation of results. In Cameroon, within the context of the case study, intersectionality plays a vital role in the projects and activities of WILPF-Cameroon and SCEW. Respondent 1 while acknowledging the need for inclusiveness states that:

We did not say it is a women's movement that will take care only of women, we were there for everybody. We did a lot of counselling when our people were shot, killed. I mean when the atrocities just started, we wanted to create the role of counselling, given that we were counselling the people who were victims, we will call on the phone and talk to them, we tried to mobilise funds for financial assistance for teachers who could not feed for themselves since they were on strike and their salaries were blocked (especially the ones in the private educational sector). What I am trying to say is that we tried to help everybody, but there is a particular group that we pay attention to -

female detainees. When we receive word on female detainees, we try to make sure we tackle it. If we have two requests coming in, one from male and the other one from female detainees, we will take the one for female detainees first. We are now embarking on a project called SCEW for women and children's rights. The reason is that, yes, we are fighting a global situation but most often, the women get missing in all the chaos, most often they are not mentioned, we are advocating and embarking on a journey of projecting the women more. We want to profit the women.

We get grassroots women involved in our projects in different ways. It is either we reach out to them or they reach out to us. We receive a lot of images (pictures and videos) for example, the women or the people have understood that to make your problem go viral, you can do a video and send it out. People will pick it up and come to your aid. On the other hand, I have been to Nigeria a few times, I have visited the refugees (anglophone refugees), I have seen the situation first-hand- what the people are going through, and there are many other people who have been to ground zero, see the situation and come back with first-hand information. We have a campaign that is running - a women's campaign for Justice, Peace, and Freedom and we have contacted women to join. Maybe I should also mention here that we have partner organisations on the ground that we work with. Whatever aid we are sending down, we send through partner organisations. We must work with partner organisations on the ground. This partner organisation might bring us information that we do not have as well (respondent 5).

Regarding the GCA project that we carried out in 2020, what we did was by going to meet the people directly affected by the conflict so that we hear from them because their voices are almost neglected when it comes to analysing the conflict, to understand what really happened. So, the first thing we considered was listening directly to the survivors of the conflict. We had to meet them in the cities where they are seeking refuge and in the affected communities such as Buea. So, we were engaged in a focus group discussion and in-depth interviews with the survivors also with CSOs leaders who are in the field or working with the communities (respondent 3).

5.5. Women's participation and Feminist peace

According to Harcourt (2013, p.113), building women's capacity to become peace leaders and part of peace negotiations has been the focus of many women peace movements or organisations to combat GBV and other forms of acts of violence against women. Through this initiative, the UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda came into existence in the year 2000. It seeks to demonstrate and address women's experiences in war, and how women can be more

inclusive in conflict prevention, and peace processes. The concept of feminist peace understands the need for diversity when it comes to conflict resolution and advocacy for lasting peace. SCEW and WILPF-Cameroon acknowledge the importance of this and that is why in their projects and advocacy, they talk not just of women's vitality in peace negotiations, building, and post-conflict reconstruction but the importance of full and meaningful representation of all stakeholders in such processes. Respondent 3 refers to feminist peace as:

a holistic approach to finding a peaceful resolution. Because in some cases, when we are talking about peacebuilding, we talk just about men, their needs, and contributions. For example, the DDR government initiative, the commission on bilingualism, and the Cameroon humanitarian program created to give support to the victims, at no time consider the needs of women, IDPs, people with disabilities, or elderly people. Feminist peace will analyse the situation in a way that addresses the needs of every specific group. So, when we talk of feminist peace, I understand that this is the way we seek justice and the causes of the conflict, and not only try to arrange the consequences because that is usually what is done. A feminist perspective of handling the issues is to go to the causes-why are people so angry? And when you find the answers to those questions, you can start providing adequate solutions to their needs.

It is essential to take into consideration the lived experiences of every category of people impacted by a crisis if such actions aim to obtain sustainability. As indicated by respondent 3, most at times, peace negotiations turn to be ineffective because it fails to take the form of an inclusive and participatory approach, considering the voices and standpoint of women and every affected group. The lens of intersectionality is an important aspect here in conflict resolutions, and in the fight against gender-based violence and establishing dialogue and solutions that are gender-sensitive. Most peace negotiations and dialogues lack a gender-sensitive approach, rather approaches are constructed with the lens of systemic patriarchal norms that claim to know more than women, more about gun trade than women. So, creating lasting peace requires questioning masculinities and understanding women and their experiences (Enloe, 2016). The need for understanding feminism is essential. It is essential for men, boys, and the public to be educated on what exactly is feminism and question how men in decision-making positions integrate a gender perspective in decisions and policies and their understanding of feminism. According to respondent 4:

feminist peace is of course the women's participation in peace processes. When women are more involved in peace processes, maybe the many voices of women might be heard. But as I said before, seeking peace especially in this context which we are, if there is more involvement of women at all levels of the nations, beginning from having female presidents, prime ministers as women, when women would have been sufficiently put in posts of responsibility, feminist peace can work. But for now, as our societies are still mainly patriarchal-painfully patriarchal feminist peace may reduce the crisis that we have but it cannot completely stop it except these patriarchal structures are completely deconstructed.

Cynthia Enloe argues that patriarchy is perpetuated because men and boys fear being called weak. Socialisation and patriarchal ideas associate maleness to aggressiveness and power over the 'other'. This perception reflects on the normalisation of sexual harassment in public and private institutions, the exclusion of most women and civil society organisations in international peace negotiations, and the fact that most top decision-making positions such as that of the United Nation Secretary General are still held by men (Enloe, 2017). It is therefore important to create awareness of the implications of patriarchy, cultural militarism that affects feminism while challenging every stereotype that hinders equality and justice (Enloe, 2016; 2017). Leymah Gbowee, a peace advocate from Liberia, in a webinar titled 'The urgent need for community-led Accountability in Africa'²² reiterates that patriarchy is at the centre of wars, policies, inequality, gender-based violence. She adds that, take away patriarchy and see reformation and transformation manifest. The assumptions, the powers, expectations, stereotypes, etc. will disappear.

In Cameroon, women's participation in peace processes is found wanting as the society and institutions identify women more as belonging to private sphere-minding the affairs of the home such as housekeeping and caregiving (McClintock, 2013), despite women's increased capabilities and involvement in public arenas. Women's political representation is slowly gaining ground with the percentage of women representatives at the national assembly has moved from 8.9% to 31.1% after the implementation of quotas. However, the general participation is still insignificant with just 8 percent of women holding positions as local councillors and 2% percent as political party leaders (UN Women, n.d.). A lot still needs to be done to increase women's political participation and representation in decision-making positions and in achieving the fifty-fifty gender equality

²² 26th January 2021

agenda (UN Women, 2019). This underrepresentation gives rise to a lot of questions such as the reason for the poor participation. Is it that women are not qualified to hold such positions or is it that they are qualified and capable but are not given the chance? The power structures that define women's position in the private sphere are the same that define them in the public and vice versa. These imbalances give birth to power struggles that are visible in all sectors of the society including conflict prevention, impacts, peace negotiations, and post-war settings (Moser & Clark, 2001).

5.5.1. (Mis)representation and Negotiations

The underrepresentation of women in political positions and other decision-making positions reflects on women's participation in peace and the unrecognizable roles they play in peace building. The intensification of the armed conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon or southern Cameroon as it is also called has only exacerbated the situation. The attempted peace talks that have been organised in Yaoundé have not taken into consideration the voices of women or their lived experiences. It is disheartening to see that part of the population that is most affected by the conflict, women, especially the southern Cameroon women have not been fully considered in peace dialogues. There have been attempts of peace talks to seek a lasting solution to the conflict to no avail. The major national dialogue that took place in Yaoundé, between 30th September and October 4th, 2019 aimed at resolving the conflict lacked transparency and effective representation of stakeholders. Some women representatives were present but the women who bear the brunt of the crisis in varying ways who are mostly anglophone women were not part of the dialogue. This exclusion signifies a lack of good governance and the systemic inequalities, perceptions, and repressions that define the Cameroon community (LSC ²³ 2020; WILPF Cameroon, 2019), despite the availability of a NAP for the implementation of the WPS agenda. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 is clear in its objective of inclusion and integration of women at all levels of decision making in conflict prevention, dialogue and peace negotiations, disarmament, and post-conflict talks on reintegration and construction (Harcourt, 2013, p. 112). Yet, as of 2018, women made up only about 3 percent of facilitators, 4 percent signatories, and only 13 percent of negotiators in major peace processes (CSPPS, 2020)²⁴. Respondents 3, 2, 4, and 5 talk about the

²³ Centre for Women Peace + Security

²⁴ Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding

importance of having a genuine national dialogue in response to the conflict where all actors are not just fully represented but represented by the right people:

(...) Many stakeholders called for a dialogue but the way the dialogue was organized, was not a dialogue at all because the parties concerned were not represented on the dialogue table. So, one solution is to organise a sincere dialogue with concerned parties and not only the government authorities between themselves and their allies and their friends (respondent 3).

We called for dialogue and dialogue came but from the moment they started putting the dialogue in place, I discovered it was not going to work. I told my colleague that it was not going to work because they want to exclude the main people. You cannot be holding a dialogue with a belligerent attitude and you say you will not discuss this. That is not how dialogue is held. So, I already knew from the beginning that it was not going to amount to anything (respondent 4).

Respondent 5 adds that:

Well, the thing is that women have always been pushed to the background. We are aware of that, but we are trying our best to make our voices heard. I will give you an example, when they were calling for people to attend the national dialogue, at least we received a letter at SCEW, and two members were invited. Even though we did not go, at least that means that we are being recognised.

Women might be recognised or allowed to speak in political and decision-making spaces but to what extent are their voices taken into consideration? Are they heard when they speak or the system just wants to show spectators and international bodies that their projects are gender-inclusive by just ‘adding women and steering’ as Hesse-Biber (2007, P. 48) puts it, without the intention of taking women’s perspectives, their lived experiences into consideration? In settings where women are fully and meaningfully represented in negotiation talks, it is likely for those peace processes to obtain better outcomes. According to research, women’s inclusion in peace talks is 64% unlikely to fail. Furthermore, such peace agreements are 35% more likely to last for a longer period (CSPPS, 2020).

5.5.2. Advocacy, Capacity Building, and Empowerment

When it comes to armed conflict and women, women are the most affected, yet their experiences and testimonies are most at times not taken into consideration in times of justice on war crimes,

even though after the conflict (where rape was widely used as a weapon of war) in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, GBV in the war was declared a crime against humanity (Banwell, 2014; Harcourt, 2013, p.113). There is a need for national and international bodies like the International Criminal Court (ICC) to be more effective in implementing laws that punish the perpetrators of sexual and GBV in war while ensuring that the reintegration of ex-combatants and women who have suffered different forms of abuse during armed conflict is fully realised. WILPF Cameroon has been vocal in pushing for feminist peace including influencing the government of Cameroon to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) where it can facilitate the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

Respondent 3 indicates that:

We started the process of having resolution 1325, implemented in Cameroon when we were not even yet in conflict. Seeing the conflicts happening in our neighbouring countries, we aimed to prevent the occurrence of conflict, and we advocated for women to be the main actors in conflict prevention. That was the main language at that moment but when things were not looking so good, the government started paying attention to resolution 1325. We had high-level meetings with the government and international partners in October 2014. We invited partners from DRC, from Mali who have experienced conflict and they came and shared their experiences, how conflict has affected women, affecting the communities and how women have mobilised to find solutions. WILPF Cameroon with the support of the government conducted a baseline study on the impact of conflict on women and girls and how resolution 1325 can help in finding solutions and preventing further conflict in Cameroon. The study was conducted from 2016 to February 2017 as the baseline for the NAP which was adopted in November 2017. However, despite its adoption, the NAP has witnessed a poor implementation process with little or no budget allocated to the project. The plan expired in December 2020 and we are evaluating to propose ways to the government on how they can adopt another action plan and adopt better strategies to implement it.

Although NGOs carry advocacy, awareness on the importance of having an effective NAP for the WPS agenda, push for change, lobby for peace and nonviolent conflict resolution, if they are not the ones to make the final decisions, or if the policy makers decide not to adhere to the suggestions of CSOs, it becomes difficult to effect change. It is therefore imperative for governments to be

more accommodating to CSOs by establishing more transparent partnerships and working in close collaborations with them for the better good of humanity.

For the better realisation of results, advocacy and activism should be carried out hand-in-hand with capacity building and empowering the communities and citizens economically because the root causes of war could be poverty and inequality or because a group of people feel oppressed. Workshops, training, and education on issues of peace and human rights and economic empowerment, and the need for efficient governmental institutions are important as strategies of conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Schirch, 2008; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Respondent 3 affirms this by stating that:

There is a project ongoing with the support of ForumCiv²⁵, WILPF Sweden on human and youth rights education which is about how men, women, and youths can understand their rights to better protect them or in other to better ask for justice. We create a call centre where people can call to denounce or to present any situation they are going through concerning their rights so that with the support of the team of legal experts, we can help them to go to court. In Cameroon, people are afraid of the courts and when they have a problem, they say there is nothing we can do, which is not correct. When you have a problem like your rights are violated, you need to seek justice but unfortunately in Cameroon, justice costs a lot of money which limits access to it. So, this project facilitates the legal process for victims and how they can seek justice. The training is always covered by the media to ensure wider coverage.

Another project that we are working on is about confronting masculinities, this is done in partnership with the international secretariat of WILPF. The campaign runs in four different countries: Cameroon, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Afghanistan. The main objective of the project is to identify the main causes of violent masculinities and establishing ways men and boys can also work together with women to bring a solution to the ongoing armed conflict. How men and boys can also be the key actors in implementing the peace and security agenda (respondent 3).

So right now, we are more focused on mobilising the international community, making our voice heard that these are women who are having a problem. While we are doing the advocacy, we do

²⁵It is a politically and religiously unaffiliated development cooperation organisation that works closely with other SCOs in the areas of human and civil rights while facilitating popular participation around the world.

write letters to peace institutes for intervention, this is part of the activities of the women's campaign for peace and freedom that has been running since April 2020. We also produce flyers, pictures, videos on social media²⁶ bearing information of the crisis and its impacts on different groups of people as part of sensitisation campaigns. We also print the flyers and distribute them at every conference, protest we organise or attend, and in our workshops (Respondent 1).

Lack of effective governance, democratic institutions, political will could have negative implications for peacebuilding and state-building (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Respondent 2 adds that they are projects they plan to carry out but faced a lot of limitations such as insecurity, government restrictions, bribery, corruption, and lack of funds:

one of the activities that SCEW will love to undertake is to organise free training programs for especially, not only, but especially for women and for youths in Cameroon how to be more engaging in issues of politics and sustainable peace. We also think that one of the issues that cause conflict is the fact that our youths and other groups feel oppressed, and they see no future for themselves. So, we plan to organise community projects that train them in the different areas to develop their capabilities and empower them financially to fund their activities or businesses so that they can be able to take care of themselves, they can be able to take care of their communities and build it up. This can reduce the occurrences of conflict; youths joining armed groups for financial gains and bring peace also to the communities.

Cockburn (2007, p. 15) affirms that poverty and lack of prospects and opportunities, fear, and the need to protect their families and loved ones, the belief of being protected by an armed group or the military pushes men, youths, and even children to become combatants and take sides in a conflict situation.

5.6. Collaboration and the power of Alliances

Feminist theorists and organisations have highlighted the role and of women and women's groups, alliances in peace, and transformative change. Collaboration, networking, solidarity, empowerment, and creating national and international alliances are important processes to be considered and acted upon when it comes to peacebuilding. Not until in the recent decades, CSOs

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/scewtaks>
<https://twitter.com/ScewTaks?s=08>

have been side-lined from official peace processes and in other development issues (Cockburn, 2007; World Health Organisation 2001). The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) being one of the major institutions that support women's NGOs across the globe, work in solidarity, partnership, and collaborations with organisations at grassroots, regional, national, and international levels to run advocacy campaigns for equality in different sectors including peace and the fight against GBV (Harcourt, 2013). This synergy can be a powerful tool in effecting and achieving more efficient results. Mohanty (2003) discourses the importance of solidarity-what she calls 'politics of solidarity' and aspects of strategic coalitions that foster bonds and strength across differences in the fight against repression and subordination. WILPF-Cameroon and SCEW although different organisations with similar but different objectives have a lot in common. They both focus on advocacy and understand the power of forming alliances and coalitions for better and efficient results. In most of their projects and activities, as can be observed above, they work in partnership with different women organisations at different levels. However, the issue of shrinking civic space acts as a barrier in achieving far-reaching results:

WILPF Cameroon is working to mobilise women across the country. To mobilise women for peacebuilding, to fight for social justice, social and economic justice and the mission is also to build a movement of women, and advocate for peacebuilding. (Respondent 3).

Cockburn (2012, p.1) affirms that "the fact that violence is a choice, it will mean that there is always a nonviolent alternative, a less violent thought, word, intention, policy, strategy, and action; that we can choose a part that leads to a less nonviolent society than the one we live in. For the idea to be accepted universally, there is a need for effective social movements or activism through networking and building alliances". Women's organisations can enhance at every level of conflict (pre, during, and post) by creating awareness to women and human rights violations, women's experiences, and challenges to being mediators, and creating a suitable environment for peace negotiations and peacebuilding works, including capacity building (Barnes, 2009). The capacity of SCOs to effect change is by collaborating with communities to enable a positive response to conflict and crisis since it is difficult for communities to effect sustainable peace on their own. These efforts need to be acknowledged by governments and intergovernmental institutions by promoting the feminist peace agenda. In situations of war where armed groups and government forces are backed by international allies such as nations (Barnes, 2009), for example, France

‘intervention’ in most of its former colonised territories in Africa, effective strategies to fight powerful forces may require coalition, solidarity, and partnership with civil actors and nations that fight against human right violation and for the proliferations for legal and illegal weapons.

5. 7. Shrinking Civic Space

A good number of the respondents from the two organisations raised the issues of limited funds and insecurity as a major challenge of carrying out effective and inclusive projects. They also mention the aspect of ‘shrinking space’ which is commonly used by CSOs to refer to risks they face due to the government's interference in their activities. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs), often used interchangeably, are increasingly finding it more difficult in some cases (depending on the kind of organisation, the time, and location) in carrying out their operations (Buyse, 2018 p. 970). ‘Shrinking civic space’ refers to acts of repression perpetuated against CSOs whereby governments used different strategies to restrict and regulate the activities of these organisations (Bustos, 2017). For this research, I used the concept of “Shrinking civic space not just to refer to government restrictions on CSOs but to encompass some other limitations faced by CSOs in the cause of their operations. Civil Society organisations play an essential role in protecting democratic space and ensuring the respect of women’s rights, human rights, freedom of expression, and association. They are also strategic partners and essential collaborations to be considered by governments and other institutions, for the betterment of humanity. In Cameroon, women’s organisations, and civil society organisations in general, are often faced with different constraints and limitations from the government (arbitrary arrest and false accusations), lack of resources such as funds and human resources, ineffective mobilisation, networking, and collaborations. In the cause of the interviews, document analysis, and other empirical data gathered from WILPF-Cameroon and SCEW, it is evident that most women are prevented from mobilizing or joining organisations to fight for their rights, peace, and freedom. Either they are intimidated by the government through threats and litigation, arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killings, and NGOs being accused of spying and conniving with international bodies to tarnish the image of the country while some of their activities are defined as illegal. According to respondent 3:

Apart from security challenges that we suffer as women right defenders, the government, sometimes, try to divide CSOs- making them inconsistent and this is good for the government because they regard SCOs and NGOs as opponents and when they find a way to divide, they do it. When they see that a movement is ongoing and taking a good form, they will try to use someone in this same group to dismantle the initiative. And in WILPF Cameroon we have suffered many direct attacks, either robbery in the office, attacks on persons and sometimes when they attack, they just take the computers, hard drives because they are looking for documents and from there, they can maybe destroy our initiative.

The first limitation we face is finance. Our members are suffering from donor fatigue because I am sure you know what it means to live in Europe. You are paying for your own house, you are taking care of yourself, then you have an additional responsibility. Some of us are putting money aside every month to make sure that we can carry out this humanitarian work So now we are looking at how we can get extra funding so that we can relieve the members. So, finance is one of the greatest limitations that we have because we will want to do more, we will want to empower more women, we will want to help more people, but we can only do with the finances that we have. (respondent 2).

The limitation is not only lack of resources but working with teams and how to balance work and family and. We have meetings every week! And do I take care of my child or do I concentrate on meetings? So, we make a lot of sacrifices because you attend one thousand and one meetings and then you have the same people who are dedicated to doing everything. So, it becomes overwhelming to the same people because some other women are concerned about their safety (respondent 5).

Respondent 1 adds that:

Most of us have not been able to go home. If we had the possibility of going home and not being arrested or killed, we would have gone home to carry out what we are carrying out. Remember at the very beginning I said that the women on the ground really cannot openly identify with us given the danger. So, if they could and if we had the possibility of going home and not being arrested or killed, we would have gone home because that is where our advocacy has the greatest impact. But given the rogue regime that neutralizes people, right now I strongly believe that if I step foot in Cameroon, that will be the end of me.

In some settings, mostly in countries where democracy is an act of window dressing, laws have been imposed to suppress some organisations and their works by limitation of registration, functioning, and day-to-day operations (Buyse, 2018; Kiven et., 2021). In situations like this, women organisations and other SCOs might be forced to cancel or adapt their activities in order not to attract too much attention and governments can feed on that to further exclude the critical voices of NGOs and reduce transparency in policy development and implementation.

6.0. Conclusion

Violence against women in conflict is a growing concern. Different armed groups and government forces continuously use violence to intimidate and control civilians who are often caught up in the middle. Women are mostly targeted and abused in different ways to punish and send a message of power and control to the opponents (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). The violation of women and their bodies is used as a weapon of war. With the use of empirical data, feminist theories, concepts, and epistemology, this study has explored the impacts of the socio-political armed conflict in Cameroon on women through the lens of women organisations. Deeply rooted and shaped by the country's colonial past, enhanced by imperialism and neoliberalism, and patriarchal norms the conflict continues to threaten the identity of the anglophone people. Women are constantly disproportionately affected by the crisis as a people of an oppressed and marginalised minority group or community and as women living in a male-dominated society with little or no rights. This research has analysed the different forms of violence, specifically GBV the women in the conflict zones (Northwest and southwest of Cameroon) and IDPs have been exposed to by generating data through in-depth interviews conducted with workers of women's organisations, documents, and other sources of data such as secondary sources. These organisations as mentioned in this research have an objective of fighting for women's rights, peace, not just in the Cameroon anglophone crisis but for peace and equality in general within and out of the framework of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. The study also highlights and analyses the strategies used by women non-governmental organisations or CSOs in combating GBV and advocating for feminist peace and women increased and meaningful participation and that of all key stakeholders in peace talks and process as they aimed for social justice, transformation, and sustainable peace.

The research findings show that the violence women are subject to in conflict is not an independent occurrence but springs forth from existing social conditions and norms in everyday life that have constantly made women more susceptible to violence. They also indicate that indeed, there is no doubt that conflict prevention and peace processes need strategic reconstruction that supports and takes into consideration women's representation and participation by promoting their engagement at all levels of peacebuilding.

From the research findings, it could also be deduced that WILPF Cameroon and SCEW organisations have the same overall objective which is to bring peace and fight for a socially equal society and transformative change. They might have different approaches, but they both have common goals. SCEW operates within and outside of Cameroon, targeting mostly international bodies and nations, female leaders, and lawmakers, sending out diplomatic letters as a way of creating awareness, seeking alliances and solidarity and international intervention, as well as partnering with local organisations to support female prisoners through humanitarian aid and legal assistance. While WILPF Cameroon does a lot of advocacy work in Cameroon such as conducting baseline research, operating a women's situation room to handle cases of GBV, the effective implementation of a National Action Plan (NAP) to push forth the WPS agenda. However, despite the active and vital role CSOs play, they are often faced with the challenge of shrinking civic space where their activities and projects are restricted by government bodies, insecurities, and limited access to resources. These limitations are likely to result in ineffective strategies, limited consideration, and inclusion of different social categories and intersections.

The implications of war are multidimensional and in whichever way it is regarded, it is an enormous burden on women. From violation of bodies, economic and financial vulnerabilities to nation-building or peace builders, and as combatants, women have stayed resilient and have exercised agency. It is important for women, being the most affected by conflicts and wars to be allowed to take part in decision-making, peace dialogues, and policies so that their positions and lived experiences can be taken into consideration. Cultural ideologies and patriarchal practices that reinforce inequalities and relegate women to the back while making them more prone to violence must be questioned and deconstructed. Institutions of governance and laws must be strengthened through the rebuilding of state security and legal systems to ensure effective policies and

implementation that takes women's security seriously both within the public and private sphere, in peace and in war times as most women are constantly subjected to the rule of aggression instead of that of law. For a sustainable solution to violence against women, the whole scenario must be reframed with men at the centre of it, being educated on the dangers of masculinities and aggression and international and national laws must be more effective in holding perpetrators of GBV accountable. On the other hand, women must continue to advocate for operation 50/50 (equal opportunities for all), cease more opportunities by getting more involved in capacity building, empowerment through increased feminist peace education that will train women peace mediators at all levels of the society. Women should grow more alliances and coalitions, continue to take up advocacy positions, and exercise agency as warriors of peace, as a group of people in charge of their own destiny, driving themselves to safety.

Furthermore, while this research has focused on women's organisations, their role in combating GBV and strategies for promoting feminist peace, there is a need for further research where researchers interact more directly with victims of GBV of the Southern Cameroon conflict and the dynamics that define the lives of refugees and internally displaced persons. I would have loved to travel to Cameroon and personally meet and talk directly with women who have experienced GBV due to the conflict but because of the restrictions of the COVID- 19 Pandemic and aspects of insecurities, that could not be possible. In future, I would like to explore and bring to light the challenges and positions of Cameroon refugees who fled the conflict to neighbouring Nigeria because there is limited literature in this area. It is estimated by OCHA (2021) that over 63,235 Cameroonians refugees- women, children, and men are registered in Akwa-Ibom, Benue, Cross River, and Taraba States in Nigeria. This amount is set to increase if the armed conflict persists. It is thus essential to investigate the lived experiences of these vulnerable groups, especially women who are more susceptible to different forms of violence and social inequalities.

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