

From Bush Wife to Combatant: Exploring the Changing Role of African Women and Girls In Armed Conflict

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the changing role of African women and girls engaged in armed conflict. The shifting role from bush wife (synonymous with sex slave) to female combatant has been influenced by the introduction and increasing use of small firearms in combat. Recruited into militias through voluntary and involuntary means, partially as a way to replenish the dwindling male combat population, it is proposed that these women and girls have become “villainous victims” as combatants, adding an unjust dimension to an already precarious situation. This exacerbating shift in combat responsibility continues to perpetuate the endangerment of females in modern war, and contributes to an ever increasing threat to human security. Regardless of the type of victimization employed by militias against women and girls, enforcement of international humanitarian law at the domestic level—with largely female participation—is imperative in the real protection of females in wartime and post-conflict.

Keywords: fragility and resistance, gender, human rights, peace and security, small firearms