Voice, Space, and Structure: Women's Agency and Peacebuilding in Ghana and Sierra Leone

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Abstract

The involvement of women in peacebuilding is broadly linked to agency-building for inclusive and sustained peace. However, there is limited insight into how women's agency is framed and pursued in different conflict contexts and the impact on various peacebuilding processes and outcomes. This book project employs a comparative and interdisciplinary approach to study women's peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ghana and the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone, using the African-feminist and relational analytic approaches. Drawing on field interviews and relevant institutional and published documents, it unpacks various framings of and avenues for developing women's agency through peacebuilding processes, and examines how they affect the potential for sustained peace. Informed by preliminary analysis of the data, the book will theorise women's agency as influential 'voices' and 'spaces', rooted in sociocultural constructs and positionality, and facilitated through the principle of inclusive peacebuilding and development efforts. The presentation will underscore significant patterns of ambivalence in the structural, procedural, and outcome-related dynamics of the varied contexts of women's peacebuilding processes. These contradictions manifest in the innovative navigation of complex and recalibrating sociopolitical barriers by peacebuilding actors to enable women's contributions to sustained peace. Thus, the analysis reveals important complexities in structural transitions within the related peacebuilding processes, offering a more nuanced scholarly and policy perspective on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and associated development issues. This contributes to a contextually diverse understanding of the broader limited success of bottom-up peacebuilding and development approaches throughout Africa and similar Global South contexts.

Keywords: women's agency, peacebuilding, structural resilience, sustainable peace, Africa