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To include or not to include: Men and the Liberian Women's Peace hut Initiatives towards Transformational Justice

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Abstract

This paper discusses Liberian women's concerns about the inclusion of men in their peace hut activities in Monrovia, Liberia. Peace Huts were established in communities shortly after the end of the Liberian civil war to implement peace practices and transformative justice. As with different feminist standpoints, women are torn between 'inclusionists' and 'anti-inclusionists' perspectives. Inclusionists argue that the Peace Hut movement is not well resourced and should therefore embrace men. The anti-inclusionists, however fear that the movement, which is intended to be a women-only space will be appropriated by men and may consequently relegate women to the background. Contextualizing these concerns within the ongoing feminist discourse of male 'allyship' and 'male feminism', I seek to expand the discussion to an African context.

There is a rich body of scholarly literature on Liberian women's protest and grassroots activism during and after the country's fourteen-year of civil war (see, for example, Gboweh, 2009; Prash, 2015; Medie, 2013; Mama & Okazawa-Rey, 2012). Through maternal protest and activism which drew the attention of the international community, the war ended in 2003. Women continue to be involved in peace work and advocacy towards sustainable peace. Peace Huts were established after the civil war toward advancing gender equality and transformative justice. Modeled after the palava hut (a traditional conflict resolution space dominated by men), the peace hut is a safe space: where women share their trauma-related war experiences in a bid to heal from memories of the past; to resolve interpersonal and domestic conflicts; and to advocate for the advancement of women and girls' rights in Liberia.

Given the history of male dominance in most spheres of the Liberian life – social and economic – the question of whether or not to include men in the peace huts (a women's only space) has been a point of contention among peace hut members. While some women advocate for collaboration with men in advancing the vision of the movement, others fear the appropriation of their space by men. The question then is, what role should men play in women's post-conflict initiatives towards transformative justice? This paper explores this question in

relation to the current feminist discourses about the involvement of men in the feminist movements (e.g. bell hooks, 1984; Bryson, 1999; Digby, 2013; Luxton, 1993).

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