

Mobilizing for Betterment. An Empirical Study of a Woman's Movement in West Point, Liberia

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Liberian women's movements raised international attention in mobilizing for peace during the conflict. After the war, the movement did not extinct; the topic of mobilization changed from peace to peace-building and the social problems of the aftermath.

This social anthropological contribution looks at a woman's movement in a Monrovia quarter that navigates flexibly as part of larger, coordinated women's movements, but also mobilizes within the community, and thirdly, towards state-actors. It depicts the role of women's movements in post-conflict Liberia and their strong position and impact on a community- and political level.

Monrovia is being reconstructed and hence constantly changing, but its quarter West Point lacks basic infrastructure and security for the ca. 70'000 inhabitants - and remains stigmatized. Sexual and gender based violence results from what inhabitants call the consequences of a "*loose society*". For this reason, ten women gathered in 2002 and decided to form an organization to make a change, aiming at improving the living condition of women and reducing gender based violence. The agency of the "West Point Women for Health and Development" is rooted in their social network in West Pointer. Up to today, their activities are financed by contributions of 150 members, and without external funding. The members represent women from various ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds. By counseling, mediating, advocating, educating activities in human rights, and collaboration with the police, gender based violence has dropped in West Point. In addition to their activities within the quarter, they organize marches and demonstrations of awareness, or participate in activities of other women's organizations which regularly fill the Monrovia streets. Lastly, the woman's group approach politicians directly, claiming the promises these made during the last elections.

This empirical study shows how a social movement of ordinary citizens can contribute to the (re-)configuration of social order in a setting of scarcity and fragile security of a post conflict society. These women are active in a negotiating process with state actors, in which they show physical presence and exercise their influence with political actors: these recognize the mobilization power of the group, hence the movement is not left unnoticed in the political landscape of Liberia.