WIDER Working Paper 2022/145

Civil wars and stumbling of patriarchal societies

The reconstruction of gender relations in post-conflict Liberia

Augustine T. Larmin[1] and Daniel K. Banini[2]

December 2022

United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research

wider.unu.edu

Abstract: This research project traces how women's participation in the Liberian civil wars, as combatants and peace agents, reconstructs gender relations in the post-civil war context. The current literature examines the role of women in the governance of rebel groups, emphasizing how women operate within the command structure. While there is a growing trend in assessing the role of women in organized armed groups, there are few accounts of how their participation in the conflict may undermine patriarchal norms that have long supported males' domination of women. This is an important mechanism because most post-conflict societies tend to mirror the scope of warring groups. Using in-depth interview data, we examine how women's wartime experiences weaken Liberia's patriarchal norms and the extent to which gender relations have been reconstructed after the conflict. We argue that women's engagement in Liberian civil wars as combatants and peace activists reconstituted gender norms and gender relations after the wars.

Key words: Liberia, civil war, rebel groups, women, gender, patriarchal norms

JEL classification: D74, J16, N47, P37

[1] School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA, email guslarmin@knights.ucf.edu; [2] Political Science Department, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL, USA, dbanini@knights.ucf.edu

1   Introduction

The first and the second Liberian civil wars have received considerable attention from conflict scholars. The causes of the second Liberian civil war were entrenched in the prior conflict between 1989 and 1996, which saw former rebel leader Charles Taylor emerge as the president. Many accounts have been given of the Liberian civil wars. However, these accounts are often preoccupied with the historical–political events that led to the wars, how natural resources played into the wars, and the recruitment of child soldiers, among other factors. Although women (as rebels and peace activists) participated in the Liberian civil wars and their activities shaped the conflict contexts, we know little about how their wartime experiences shaped post-conflict gender relations.

It is not surprising that women's participation in the Liberian civil wars has not received adequate attention because wars are typically reviewed and researched from the purview of men, with women often framed as a vulnerable population at the margins of war (Carpenter 2005). There are discernible differences between males and females in the use of and support for violence, with an overwhelming belief that women are less belligerent than men and are notably less likely to support war (Mueller 1994: 42–43; Page and Shapiro 1992: 295). The assumption is that gender plays a significant role in shaping militarism, with males more than women overwhelmingly participating in conflicts, including civil wars. Although women are less inclined than men to engage in armed conflict, there is still a dearth of studies examining the rationale behind the small number who participate and a scarcity of studies evaluating their influence on a post-conflict society.

In Liberia, women played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of the wars, their conclusion, and the post-conflict political landscape that emerged. For instance, Black Diamond, an incredible young woman, commanded the main rebel movement, the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy's (LURD) all Female Artillery Commandos (WAC) unit. The WAC, which comprised exclusively female combatants, was credited with recapturing the Free Port of Monrovia after an intense battle with the Anti-Terrorist Unit of the Charles Taylor regime in 2003. This all-female unit spearheaded the rebels' push into the heart of the capital city Monrovia during the climax of the second civil war. That triumph and the subsequent capture of Liberia's second-largest city by a smaller rebel group, in combination with other factors, led former president Charles Taylor to seek exile in Nigeria, which necessitated a peace pact shortly after. This all-female unit proved to be efficient and decisive warriors; they transformed into a fearful and sometimes aggressive unit, often executing looters. What became ironic was that their male counterparts even feared the female auxiliary of LURD. The WAC leader, Black Diamond, was called a 'no-nonsense commander'.

The story of WAC, commanded by Black Dimond, alongside other female fighters, marked a turning point in women's participation in Liberia's civil wars. The triumphant story of WAC is tied to another wartime story which propelled the election of Ellen Sirleaf Jonhson (ESJ) in 2005 as the first female president of Liberia. After ESJ's successful two terms, the 2017 national elections ushered in new leadership with another woman, Jewel Howard Taylor, as vice president. Separately but relatedly, Liberia's post-conflict landscape has experienced the appointment of numerous women to top political positions, including Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and Ministers of Finance, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Youths and Sports. Also, women have been elected to the upper and lower houses of the Liberian legislature. According to the Gender Inequality Index, in 1990, the Liberian legislature had 11.5 per cent female compared to 88.5 per cent male legislators, constituting a pre-war 75 per cent gender gap. By 2020, the gender gap had reduced to 49.3 per cent, increasing women's share of seats in the legislature to 24.5 per cent (United Nations 2022).

One might wonder whether women's elections and appointments to high political offices in Liberia are linked to their wartime experiences as combatants and peace activists. We argue that women's engagement in the Liberian civil wars as combatants and peace activists reconstituted gender norms after the wars ended. Using in-depth interview data, we examine how women's wartime experiences weakened Liberia's patriarchal norms and the extent to which gender relations have been reconstructed after the conflict. We focus on how women utilized their resentment against Liberia's patriarchal system, which had subjugated them for a long time, and how they transformed this into political power when the war ended. Women have become assertive and call for proper political representation and better socioeconomic rights, among others, stemming from their long frustrations with Liberia's patriarchal norms and the opportunities the civil wars presented to renegotiate gender norms.

This paper is organized into six sections. Section one is the introduction, which gives a synopsis of the overall role of women in the Liberian conflict. Section 2 discusses the literature, highlighting why women engage in armed conflict and why it is essential to focus on how women shape a post-conflict polity. Section 3 discusses the theoretical mechanisms and why civil wars likely induce a reconstruction of gender norms and relations. Section 4 outlines the research methodology, and section 5 analyses women's place in Liberia before, during, and after the wars. Section 6 concludes the study.

2   Women and their participation in civil war

There is no dearth of literature on why civil wars occur. The civil war literature can be summarized as falling into two broad categories: greed and grievance. The grievance literature argues that the motive for civil war is based on a sense of injustice in how a social group is treated, often with a solid historical dimension (Murshed 2002: 389). Collier and Hoeffler (2004) depict grievance as a mechanism that contains ethnic and religious divisions, political repression, and inequality. The grievance mechanism asserts that conflict occurs when there is enough motive: grievances are sufficiently acute to make people want to engage in violence (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). For instance, when elites promote exclusionary socioeconomic policies or one ethnic group over another, the excluded group resorts to violence because it has suffered persistent marginalization and exclusion. Grievance refers to socially or politically discriminated persons or groups based on several factors, including ethnic or religious groups. A grievance can be real or perceived, akin to an in-group/out-group situation where benefits flow to the in-group but not the out-group, creating hostility (Stanton and Marie 2008).

On the other hand, greed asserts that civil wars occur because of the desire to accumulate wealth for oneself or the group one represents. Greed has a monetary value perceived to translate into political power (Stanton and Marie 2008), which views conflict as a phenomenon of profit-seeking and looting behaviours where insurgents are distinguishable from bandits or pirates (Grossman 1999). It considers leaders of civil conflicts as being dependent on or motivated by revenue that a ruler can extract from resources and the factors applied to this revenue stream. These wars include primordial tribalism and grim opportunistic warlords who manipulate ethnic sentiments for opportunistic and selfish purposes. Greed and grievance played essential roles in the emergence and duration of the Liberian civil wars.

When it comes to the factors that push women to participate in organized armed violence, it is understandable that the broad civil war literature has shortcomings because the factors that drive males to take up arms may not necessarily be those that push females to join rebel groups. Thus, the broad greed and grievance literature provides little explanation for female involvement in

armed groups. However, scholars have started to pay attention to the gender elements of civil conflict participation, and some of these works now evaluate the role women play in organized armed groups. Some scholars address the broad question of why women join and fight in some organized armed groups but not all civil wars (e.g., Henshaw 2016; Thomas and Bond 2015; Thomas and Wood 2018; Wood and Thomas 2017). Others probe why some organized armed groups, but not others, intentionally and vigorously enlist women recruits, with many women conscripts willingly backing rebel movements when given the opportunity to do so (e.g. Coulter et al. 2008). Half of all rebel groups include women members, with about a third deploying female combatants (Henshaw 2016; Thomas and Bond 2015).

Some scholars argue that women's participation in rebel groups and their roles as combatants result from forceful recruitment; they lack agency in these groups (Mazurana et al. 2002). Studies also suggest that, even under certain conditions, women combatants are not merely passive victims of violence but retain a certain degree of agency and regularly exercise some authority within the groups they fight for (Coulter 2008; McKay 2005). Specifically, Cohen (2013) maintains that, just like men, women perpetrate wartime rape under certain conditions. Using original interview data with women combatants in Sierra Leone, Cohen (2013: 384) shows that women combatants perpetrated rape alongside their male counterparts and that Sierra Leonean women combatants fought violently and obtained a reputation for excessive use of force. Equally, using an original dataset of women combatants in civil wars from 1980 to 2009, Loken (2017) maintains that the presence of women fighters has little impact on constraining an armed group's propensity to rape because organizational factors drive violence in armed factions and encourage conformism regardless of individual characteristics. This finding contrasts with other studies which argue that female combatants can decrease the inclination of rebels to rape civilians or encourage rebel groups to resort to selective violence.

In recent years, scholars have also been examining the factors that push rebel groups to recruit women and those that drive women to join armed groups when allowed to do so. For instance, one study examines how women's prior professional experiences, such as their social, political, and economic activities, influence rebels' decisions to deploy them in combat roles and their desire to pursue such roles when made available (Thomas and Wood 2018). A few studies analyse the factors that push women to join organized armed groups (Alison 2004; Annan et al. 2011; Cohen 2013). For instance, Alison (2004) reveals a combination of motivations for women to join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Irish Republican Army. These include societal insecurities in an ethno-national community, individual perceptions of insecurity, and gendered vulnerabilities. Others include witnessing the killing of a loved one and the desire to revenge their death; observed or perceptions of repression at the hands of state security apparatus; disruption of their education; poverty; sexual violence; and female emancipatory ideologies (Alison 2004: 453). That women have developed a reputation for using violence as much as their male counterparts, as Cohen (2013) argues, can perhaps be explained by the need of women combatants to compete for status and recognition in a traditionally patriarchal context.

Beyond recruitment and propensity to use violence, the burgeoning literature also examines how the existence of women soldiers in rebel groups influences the behaviour of those groups and conflict dynamics more broadly. Rebel groups which women willingly join may be more enduring and less likely to be defeated in civil wars (Braithwaite and Ruiz 2018; Giri and Haer 2021; Wood and Allemang 2021). Using time-varying district-level data from the Nepalese civil war, Mehrl (2022) tests how women's presence in organized armed groups decreases rebels' civilian victimization and fighting effectiveness and finds a positive relationship where a more significant number of women diminishes civilian victimization and reduces the battleground effectiveness of the rebels.

Although there is a fair amount of scholarship on women's participation in organized armed conflict, it is relatively silent on what happens once a war is over. More specifically, we have some understanding of the role of women in armed conflict but not of how war and wartime experiences shape and reconstruct gender relations. We address this question by focusing on how women's experiences in the Liberian civil wars have influenced post-conflict polity.

3   Theoretical mechanisms

Gender dynamics influence social relations, obligations, and access to resources that are crucial for creating and preserving social capital (Caprioli 2000). Entrenched gender relations and structures can become a vehicle for resource mobilization and the basis for collective action. Deep-rooted gender inequality can condition structural inequalities of political authority and power, enabling women's subjugation and marginalization and diminishing their access to essential resources (Sims 2012: 5). Gender inequality can emerge from different socializations for men and women, leading to labour divisions. As well as giving men grandiose privileges, the prevailing gender stereotypes also induce deadly consequences for them, an issue that is rarely discussed.

More males than women are soldiers, fighters, and rebels. While the general notion is that women are targeted in conflicts because of their gender, more men than women fight wars and, intuitively, more men bear the brunt of battle-related deaths. The empirical evidence regarding conflict-related casualties suggests that men are more susceptible to death in conflicts than women (Eck and Hänni 2013). And, more importantly, men also become the subject of forced recruitment, with gender stereotypes being likened to one's sex and men in conflict environments being perceived as prospective combatants. At the same time, women's place in the category of civilians is infrequently questioned despite them being targets of conflict. This stereotypically gendered dichotomization can lead non-combatant males to be deprived of civilian status and subsequent protection. This can cause more men in conflict environments to die through the pre-emptive execution of non-combatant males of battle age. The immediate effect of male victimization and death during conflict can be witnessed in post-conflict geographies where the female population often outnumbered their male counterparts (as in Rwanda). Regarding gender differences, the effects of war deaths on males in the Soviet Union were most pronounced, with the Soviet male population declining from 94 million in 1941 to 74 million in 1946, while the female population fell from 102 million to 96 million (Bacon 1993; Haynes 2003).

While wars are more harmful to women than men, they can also serve unintended functions. In the absence of men in post-conflict contexts where many of them are killed, women can take on male responsibilities as providers and assume other roles that were exclusive to males. In this context, wars can displace men and supplant them with women. Battles can enhance women's agency by breaching gender boundaries and providing transformative social change. Feminist scholars maintain that women are not always the victims of war and that wars can also become agents of change and vehicles for the empowerment of women (Andrabi 2019; Asaf 2017; Hughes 2009; Tripp 2015; Yadav 2020). Anecdotal evidence points to the transformative potential of wars and their effects on gendered relations and social change in post-conflict contexts. Wars can induce small, localized changes, providing initial catalysts for broader social transformations (Yadav 2020).

In Nepal, the Maoist conflict enabled women to reorganize social and structural changes, which gave them access to responsibilities which had hitherto been exclusively for men. The battle transformed widowhood cultural practices which forbade women from remarrying after the death of their husbands (Yadav 2020). However, the deaths of men during the war created opportunities for women to challenge long-held cultural norms which prevented them from remarrying, leading

to social transformation after the war. Although the Maoist conflict did not fulfil its aim of gender equality, women benefited from it (Manchanda 2005). In other instances, women transformed their situation from being victims to being agents of change (Andrabi 2019), making it impossible to revert to previous societal structures in different pre-war contexts because of the changes that the conflict had brought about (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004).

Wars are transformative social conditions and not merely political struggles or organized violence (Lubkemann 2008). However, because of the focus on violence in war, the agency of war and its transformative effect receive little attention in the scholarly literature. For instance, Wood (2008: 540) observes the social processes inherent in conflict by examining the effects that wars have on the transformation of social actors and their impact on structural norms and practices at the local level in Peru, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, and Sierra Leone. She observes that these wars induce radical changes in the pace of existing processes and modify values with conceivably irrevocable effects. Evidence shows a positive link between war and the improved political participation of women (Tripp 2015: 3), with the most remarkable changes in women's political opportunities appearing in countries emerging from conflict. In Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the reconfiguration of gender relations and economic and cultural shifts only occurred in the aftermath of the wars (Berry 2018: 2). Thus, wars can lead to an increase in women's political agency, with their participation in combat roles providing an impetus for them to challenge gender stereotypes that increase the possibility of them taking part in politics at various levels (Berry 2018: 3). In Nepal, the Maoist conflict created political opportunities that had hitherto not existed, increasing the representation of women in political positions much more than it had been before the war started (Yadav 2020). The conflict became a vehicle for change for women, creating an empowering environment for them to exercise agency, even amid hardship and vulnerability (Yadav 2020: 459).

The most extensive changes concerning gender relations leading to women's empowerment in the social, economic, and political spheres have been triggered by the tragedy of civil war and state collapse. The South Sudanese civil wars (1983 and 2005) created opportunities for women. The conflicts put pressure on women regarding limited livelihood options, forcing them to enter paid employment. These crises brought contradictions in the material basis of patriarchal relations and launched opportunities for women to improve their intra-household bargaining positions (Grabska 2013: 1153). In the absence of men, women took on male responsibilities as providers and assumed roles exclusive to males (Grabska 2013: 1154). In Somalia, the patriarchal system only lessened due to the impact of the civil war and state collapse. Somali tradition and culture, which had historically excluded women from the centres of power, were only reversed to some degree by the war. Women, who had had no representation in the 1960s and quite limited representation under the 'revolutionary' regime until 1991, witnessed a modest breakthrough for women politicians in 2000 and afterwards (Ingiriis and Hoehne 2013: 327). The lasting effects of the genocide on gender roles in contemporary Rwanda have not gone unnoticed. While women bore the brunt of the genocide, they also spearheaded social and economic reconstruction and orchestrated the healing of a nation permeated by loss and despair (Hogg 2009: 39).

Exploring how the recent civil wars created opportunities that have benefited women in post-war Liberia is essential for two reasons. First, studies on the Liberian civil wars often probe the role of women in peace negotiations and non-violent peace movements. These studies highlight women's influence, framing them within the context of the peace agreements that ended the war. Thus, while women are acknowledged as crucial players in the peace processes that ended the war, these discussions often occur within the broader civil war literature on Liberia. Second, although a sizeable number of studies probe the role of women within the context of civil wars, few explore their impact on gender dynamics in Liberia. Highlighting the conflict's impact on gender relations will move the literature forward.

4   Methodology

As we seek to explain how the Liberian civil wars, and how women's participation in these wars have created opportunities for them to compete and rise to positions of influence that did not exist before the war, we require information on the opportunities available to women and their roles in society before, during, and after the war. We gathered information from secondary sources about women's roles and conditions before the war. We use secondary and primary interview data to explain the extent of women's participation in the conflict as combatants and peace activists and rely on this to determine how the wars created sociocultural and political opportunities for women that had hitherto not existed.

The study relies on 50 primary interviews with women who participated in the civil wars. Focusing only on female combatants may be seen as ignoring male voices in the study. However, the nature of the study justified our sampling approach. Also, studies with a similar focus limited their sampling to women. For instance, MacKenzie (2009) only used personal interviews with former women rebels in her analysis of female war victimhood and issues relating to their disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone. Alison (2004) also utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with only women combatants and ex-combatants in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland to show how women participate in conflict and the changes these induced.

Our respondents were drawn from communities in Montserrado County. Although much of Liberia experienced rebel activities and conflict, we focused on Montserrado County for two reasons. First, the county witnessed high levels of conflict events with a predictable concentration in the capital of Monrovia. Second, the focus of our study, which seeks to probe how the war undermined gender roles and created opportunities for women, means drawing respondents from an area with all the features that Montserrado County provides. Montserrado County is diverse and home to people from all over the country. It has a significant concentration of former female combatants compared to other parts of Liberia.

Our data collectors and enumerators team comprised five persons headed by the Director for Gender and Development at the Ministry of National Defence (MoD), Liberia. It was necessary to use the MoD team because of its access to participants, mainly former combatants. A threefold recruitment strategy was adopted. First, with the help of our data collectors and enumerators, we reached out to participants through a network of individuals and institutions coordinated by local contacts across Liberia. This pre-interview phase focused on scheduling a convenient date and time for the interview. Altogether, 33 respondents were recruited and interviewed in person at a pre-arranged location. Second, those willing to participate but who were busy due to conflicting schedules were interviewed using Zoom, Skype, or phone calls. This group of participants constituted 11 respondents. Finally, we asked participants already interviewed to recommend other potential subjects, suggesting those who had participated in the wars as combatants and played various roles in different rebel groups. We interviewed six more respondents in this category. The interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity. Each interview typically lasted about 90 minutes, with the overall process taking five months starting in September 2021 and ending in February 2022.

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Age range	Number of respondents	Percentage
30–39	8	16%
40–49	18	36%
50–59	22	44%
60+	2	4%
Total	50	100%

Source: authors' compilation.

As Table 1 shows, of the 50 respondents interviewed, 22 were aged between 50 and 59 years, 18 were aged between 40 and 49 years, and at least two were aged over 60 years. About 50 per cent of our respondents were aged between 24 and 34 when the war ended in 1996. The 50 respondents came from 14 different ethnic backgrounds, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Ethnic distribution of respondent

Ethnicity	Respondents
Lorma	4
Grebo	5
Gola	3
Kpelle	6
Mandigo	3
Vai	3
Gio	5
Kru	4
Bassa	5
Krahn	3
Mano	5
Kissi	2
Belleh	1
Gbandi	1
Total	50

Source: authors' compilation.

The study focuses on three periods: the pre-war period up to 1989, the war period from 1989 to 2003, and the post-war period from 2003 to 2020 when Liberia regained peace and transitioned to a multiple-party democracy (post-conflict Liberia). The interview questions focused on determining which role women played during the war and how their wartime experience created opportunities for women that had not previously existed. The questions were open-ended, which allowed for follow-up questions to be asked. Every effort was made to draw interviewees from the significant fighting factions and regimes.

5   Gender relations in historical and contemporary contexts in Liberia

5.1   Women's place in pre-war Liberia

Liberia is the oldest republic in Africa, with a population of 5.3 million. Women account for approximately 49 per cent of the population.[1] Liberia's history is replete with a conservative society and a patriarchal system that elevated the status of men over women (Aning 1998: 46). Liberia's patriarchal system prevented women and girls from accessing the opportunities available to their male counterparts. Historically, in some chiefdoms, a man's wealth was measured by the number of wives he had, with women treated as instruments of profit and exchanged for taxes and debts.[2] Chiefs parted way with their wives during extreme conditions to settle high-stake disputes, making women instruments of truce or peace deals.[3]

The conservative nature of the society, coupled with its patriarchal systems, created structural economic inequalities and political vulnerabilities of authority and power that subjugated and marginalized women and decreased the available resources needed for social capital (Sims 2012). For a long time, Liberia's economic production processes and the reproductive capacity of women were controlled by men through various sociocultural practices that encompassed levirate marriages. Through levirate marriages, the brother of a deceased man was required to marry the late brother's widow. Children born through the levirate marriage were considered to belong to the husband's lineage. Fuest (2008) shows that a woman who refused to comply with a levirate marriage would often lose access to her children and property accumulated during her marriage.

In the most recent history from the early 20th century, women's place in pre-war Liberia comprised nothing more than childbearing, farming, household chores, cooking, and caregiving. Even when women had the most significant input and owned a chunk of the food production processes, they were still not allowed to own property, including land. There was a strong preference for men in the process of granting land due to the belief that women were strangers to the communities into which they married, and, thus, tradition prevented them from inheriting land (Unruh 2008). This belief system assumes that women lose their informal right to land when they marry out of their ancestral homes. The constraints on women's economic production processes have led to most women's production activities being confined to a small radius. Even around the early 1980s, there were only a handful of female professional entrepreneurs across Liberia (Kaba 1982).

While Liberia's patriarchal society had enabled men to control and profit from the exploitation of women, ideologically, women were generally considered inferior to men. They were not supposed to speak out in public fora. The nature of the patriarchal society enabled men to assume political power from women's displeasure. Women took a back seat in the country's political development even though they played a significant part in this process. However, Liberian women achieved universal suffrage during the 1951 elections, in which indigenous Liberians who owned property and Americo-Liberian women were allowed to vote for the first time; before that period, only male descendants of Americo-Liberians had a political right or the right to vote (Guannu 2007). The 1951 election brought with it relatively increased political freedom, and the right to vote for Liberian women gradually improved. However, for several decades after that election, women were

---

[1] See Wordometers for more details: https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/liberia-population/

[2] An interview with NPFL former combatant in Bushro Island, Monrovia, 28 November 2021.

[3] An interview with NPFL former combatant in Bushro Island, Monrovia, 28 November 2021.

rarely included in national political decision-making processes, such as in cabinet-level positions and local governments.

Gender dynamics in Liberia in the historical context and periods preceding the first and second Liberian civil wars were skewed in favour of men (initially Americo-Liberians) and later indigenous males, with females not considered equal to their male counterparts in any shape or form. In other words, Liberia's political landscape was not only demanding but was also exclusively for men, with political leadership viewed as a male activity (Guannu 2004).

5.2   Women's place in Liberia's civil wars

Women participated in the first and second civil wars. They participated at two broad levels and performed different roles as members of rebel groups and as peaceful demonstrators. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), about 20 per cent of rebel fighters were women. Women were involved in all the rebel groups, although they were more active in some than others. According to Aning (1998: 47), women were instrumental during the formative stages of the Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). This rebel group sought to overthrow President Samuel K. Doe. Doe was subsequently captured and killed on 9 September 1990 by Prince Johnson and his Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway faction of Charles Taylor's NPFL.

Women were instrumental during the civil wars and provided the primary infrastructure for the resistance. Their support appeared in providing access to centrally placed regional political actors, courier services, and, in some instances, intelligence to assist the NPFL's early efforts. Women and men were placed in similar units and underwent the same training under the NPFL. One of the prominent female commanders within the NPFL was Martina Johnson. She was the commander of the heavy artillery unit of the NPFL (Boulet and Baetz 2014). Her role was acknowledged, including in an ongoing international investigation against her for a possible war crime for her participation in 'Operation Octopus'. One of our interviewees who fought under Martina Johnson said: 'Martina was rough, always active, and feared by many in and out of combat. She had a strong spirit and no mercy for people not on her side'. Failure to follow Martina's orders was punished by death, especially public-style execution.[4] She led a brigade composed of both men and women. Several other women, including Grace Minor and Victoria Reffel, held high ranks within this group.

Like the first civil war, the second civil war had women fighting forces within a women's artillery commando (WAC). The LURD was a crucial rebel movement with a brigade exclusively composed of women. Black Diamond headed the female company of the LURD. She narrated her story as told by the BBC. Her story is similar to the accounts of many female combatants who joined the rebellion for revenge or protection. She recounted that Charles Taylor's fighters had killed her parents and gang-raped her in Lofa County. She ran to the NPFL's combat rival, LURD, to join the revolution. Black Diamond joined LURD as a domestic worker and progressed to the women's unit as a combatant. She was asked to take over as commander of the women's auxiliary in LURD when its unit's leader was killed in an attack (Nilsson and Thapar-Björkert 2013). According to her, she either had to join the LURD or 'stay at home and get killed'. Women's decisions to join the war as rebels or volunteers resulted from a feeling of despair, hopelessness, and insecurity. Black Diamond rose to become commander of the female brigade. In 2003, this unit recaptured

---

[4] An interview with a former combatant of NPFL on the Old Road, Monrovia, 24 February 2022.

the Freeport of Monrovia after an intense battle with the regime's security forces.[5] She became a celebrity due to her combat strategy, which seized the primary port from the government forces. The Freeport of Monrovia is the gateway to the Liberian economy, so its capture compelled the regime to negotiate, which helped to reduce the frequency and intensity of the attacks. Black Dimond was so fierce that she executed looters and was called a 'no-nonsense commander'. The women's wing of the rebel movement played an instrumental role that led to a win for the LURD.

Equally, the INPFL, a unit that broke away from NPFL and was led by Prince Johnson, also maintained a women's wing of combatants 'with a fearsome reputation for efficiency and brutality' (Aning 1998: 18). These women took on various roles such as military duties, serving in the medical corps, and working in the INPFL propaganda section as journalists. Unlike most civil wars in Africa, where women are often relegated to the background and become the primary war targets, in Liberia, women played an active role in the process. Women fought alongside their male counterparts, and their involvement was critical in securing a win. Overall, women (including young girls) accounted for up to 40 per cent of the combatants in Liberia (Vastapuu 2018).

Women also shaped the war's outcome through their activism in peaceful protests and demonstrations. As the war intensified, various women-led groups emerged as peace brokers. The Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) emerged as the pace-setter in this area. Formed in January 1994 in response to the conflict, the LWI championed women's causes during the battle. The founder of LWI Mary Brownell, a retired teacher, resisted the intolerable condition women and children were subjected to and argued that it was unacceptable for women to be silent while the population suffered at the hands of a few warlords (Massaquoi 2007: 58). The overall death toll from the wars is about 250,000, with another half-million displaced. In reaction to the rising number of fatalities and displacements caused by the war, the LWI would later send a strongly worded recommendation to West African heads of state about the war and the role women ought to play. Its recommendations included a demand that women be included in all discussions about the welfare of Liberia. It stated that the non-representation of women in the peace process was tantamount to denying women their fundamental human rights: the rights to be seen, heard, and counted. This under-representation of women in the peace negotiations denied Liberia of 51 per cent per cent of the population's voices in resolving the war (Massaquoi 2007: 58). More importantly, a small group of LWI women flew to the peace talks in Accra (Ghana) and Abuja (Nigeria) to press the warring factions for peace (Press 2010: 26). In the peace conference in Abuja, an LWI woman read a statement to the delegates. On another occasion, in 2003, women resorted to civil disobedience by staging sit-ins at conferences to get the attention of male representatives. These spectacular events led to the chief peace negotiator storming out halfway through the negotiations, promising the delegates they would move faster toward an agreement (Press 2010: 27).

Although the women never gained proper places at the negotiating table, through skilful use of the media, they were allowed to attend as observers and were later consulted with heavily as the negotiations progressed. The formation of the LWI and its position was a bold and radical departure from previous eras, which had restricted women primarily to social welfare issues (Press 2010: 58). The LWI drafted a coherent position on the war and adopted 'disarmament before elections' as its theme. Its members engaged in networking and mediation activities with the sole goal of bringing the war to an end. They engaged senior diplomats, United Nations officials, rebel group leaders, and other stakeholders in Liberia and beyond. The LWI leadership and members used their contacts in civil society, religious organizations, and professional affiliations, including

---

[5] An interview with a former combatant of LURD in Via Town, Monrovia, 22 January 2022.

kinship ties, to build bridges to key stakeholders as a means of influencing the peace process (Massaquoi 2007: 58). The LWI also used contacts outside the country to push the warring factions to come to the negotiating table. It motivated the Liberian diaspora to use their networks and influence to promote peace and worked closely with international organizations interested in peace and development. Organizations such as International Alert, the Carter Center, and the Peace Initiative helped arranged seminars and conferences, including support in securing humanitarian assistance for the country (Massaquoi 2007: 61). The opposition of LWI to the war sparked interest from many women, leading to the formation of several organizations whose sole purpose was ending the war and securing peace.

The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign also directly engaged various rebel groups and regimes, including NPFL, INPFL, Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), and the Council of State of Liberia, which was the power-sharing government. The WIPNET, which emerged from the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, capitalized on the burgeoning women's peace activism to end the war and search for social justice (Massaquoi 2007: 76). Its members organized sit-ins, demonstrations, and mass protests. Led by Laymah Gbowee, women engaged in different disruptive activities, which included organized protests in rebel and regime strongholds. WIPNET became a prominent political actor among civil society organizations. Its protests compelled warlords to negotiate and sign peace deals. These women pressured belligerents, leading to a transient silencing of the guns. They were like foot soldiers who never gave up on peace until the guns were silenced for the first time in Liberia. Peace returned to Liberia for a while after Charles Taylor won the special presidential elections held in 1997 under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Charles Taylor, the prominent rebel leader during the first civil war, became President of Liberia. Liberians voted for Taylor, hoping peace and security would be restored to the war-ravaged country.

However, Charles Taylor's misrule and his continued support of rebels in Sierra Leone resulted in another round of fighting in 1999. Former warlords, especially Taylor's former enemies, regrouped into different rebel movements—the LURD and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). This led to the second civil war. By 2000, another round of fighting had started and, in response, the Women of Liberia Mass Actions for Peace, a collection of womens' groups, resumed another campaign to bring back peace. This group mobilized women, including Christians and Muslims, to stage non-violent protests for peace. The group campaigns included sex strikes, sit in-actions, and other advocacy activities (Molinaro 2020). According to one interviewee, these individuals resisted the war by sitting on the floor all day and sometimes refused to go home, sleeping on the streets to show that they needed peace. They 'sometimes threatened by asking God to punish the rebels if they refused to negotiate peace. They went on hunger strikes, took off their blouses, and sat in the sun or rain calling for peace in Liberia'.[6] The group's leaders travelled to Sierra Leone to convince the rebel leaders to have discussions with government officials, especially Charles Taylor. The Women of Liberia Mass Actions for Peace, together with WIPNET, brokered a deal between the rebel groups and President Charles Taylor and became a party to the formal peace talks in the peace talks in Ghana (Akosombo and Accra) in 2003 and Nigeria (Abuja I and Abuja II) (Gizelis 2011: 527). The women's role in the peace negotiations earned them a reputation as objective mediators.

The presence of several women's organizations which served different roles, including as mediators, was a contributing factor to restoring peace and security in Liberia. One female who participated in the negotiations stated: 'We fight for peace, and women on the other side also stand

---

[6] An interview with a campaigner for peace in Sinkor, Monrovia, 23 November 2021.

for peace'.[7] As the informal negotiations became formal, the women involved used their extensive social networks to seek a permanent and peaceful solution. Layman Gbowee and her collaboration with women's groups rallied support to end the second civil war in 2003. In 2014, Leyman Gbowee won the Nobel Prize for her role in ending the civil war. She is the Women Peace and Security Network Africa executive director in Ghana.

Women's representation in all rebel groups, constituting more than 40 per cent of the rebel forces, is significant. More than 30,000 women and girls were associated with the Liberian armed forces during the country's brutal civil wars. Based on our interviews, it emerged that women who participated in the battles as rebels did so due to perceived systemic injustices and security concerns, among other factors—the same applies to peace activists who sought an end to the war. Thus, one would expect women to become more engaged in post-war Liberia. The ensuing section discusses how women's wartime experiences influenced the polity that emerged in post-war Liberia.

5.3   Women's political representation in post-war Liberia

Despite the excruciating suffering women were exposed to, Liberia's conflict presented them with new opportunities that allowed them to shape the country's future and altered some of the deep-rooted gender imbalances that had historically favoured men politically, socially, and economically. As we seek to highlight the opportunities the war presented to women, our intent is not to deliberately whitewash the extreme suffering and hardship that most women and girls endured and still suffer in Liberia. Nevertheless, the war provided women with new prospects and opportunities, enabling them to help to shape the future trajectory of the nation's political, security, and economic landscapes, which men had previously dominated. The wars confined many rebel groups spatially. These restrictions placed on men during the conflict created avenues for women's active engagement in the war and shaped its outcome. Women participated in the conflict as rebels and agents of peace, taking on new roles that they were reluctant to cede after the battle had ended (Sims 2012).

Women's motivations for joining the rebel movements varied. Some joined the rebellion for genuine reasons, but others got involved in serving their parochial interests. For instance, evidence suggests that, in the early days of the conflict, some women maintained or amassed social capital in their role as agents of war and peace.[8] Women combatants joined new social units to be rewarded with social status and a means to earn a living or survive. Others also got involved because they wanted genuine change. Women's experiences during the conflict as rebels and peace negotiators helped them become aware of their potential power once the conflict ended. Their wartime experiences as rebels and peace activists helped to improve the conditions of their political power relative to men (Kellow 2010: 5).

Before the war, women's voices and representation were marginal. However, this changed after the war. Interviewees responded positively when asked if the war had introduced positive changes for women. Thirty-eight of the 50 respondents said women's political representation had been deficient but had increased significantly after the war. These respondents believed that women's representation would improve over time and that women's roles during the war partially accounted for their relatively better political representation.[9] The respondents also indicated that women now

---

[7] An interview with a former combatant of LURD on Broad Street, Monrovia, 28 November 2021.

[8] An interview with a former combatant of INPFL, Somalia Drive, Monrovia, 30 September 2021.

[9] Interview data general trends.

play more roles in shaping society.[10] As evidence of this, most alluded to the emergence of ESJ as the country's duly elected first female president. They spoke enthusiastically about the demonstrative effect of ESJ's election to the highest office in the country and its implications for gender relations. EJS has been described as Liberia's iron lady or political Maradona. She began her political life as Liberia's finance minister in 1979 and later won an election as the senator for Montserrado County. However, she declined to serve because she believed the military regime had rigged the election. She criticized the administration and was subsequently charged with treason. After a failed coup against the Doe government by Thomas Quiwonkpa on 12 November 1985, EJS was detained and imprisoned again on 13 November by Doe's forces. Despite refusing to take her seat in the Senate, she was freed in July 1986. When released, she initially supported Charles Taylor's rebellion, but they later fell out over policy differences. As the standard-bearer of the Unity Party, she contested the presidential election of 1997 but lost to Charles Taylor. Taylor later charged her with treason, and she was exiled from Liberia. In 2003, EJS returned to Liberia and served as Chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission. She resigned to contest the presidential elections in 2005, won a six-year term, and assumed office in January 2006. She was re-elected for another term, which she served until January 2018.

The election of EJS appeared to be a significant factor for Liberia's women, and most respondents discussed its impact on the country's politics and representation of women. Once in office, EJS appointed women to sensitive positions and as heads of institutions. In 2005, a 30 per cent gender quota was set for women in the candidate lists of political parties, requiring each political party to ensure that 30 per cent of the candidates on their election lists were women (UNDP 2022). Although the threshold was not achieved, it introduced crucial changes that increased women's political representation. Women played enhanced roles in the National Transitional Government of Liberia, and their representation increased after the war.

Unlike in pre-war Liberia, women headed sensitive institutions after the war. For instance, the National Elections Commission, which organized the first elections after the war, was led by Frances Johnson-Morris—the first time a woman had ever occupied that position in the country's history. In 2005, Morris supervised the first post-war elections in Liberia which produced the first democratically elected female president of Liberia and Africa. This election was significant in many ways. Most significantly, it marked Liberia's transition to democracy and stability after 14 years of civil wars. EJS is credited with sustaining Liberia's fragile peace and is referred to as the one who moved the country towards a feminist society.[11]

Women's overwhelming support for the country's first female presidential candidate was instrumental and is noted to have played an essential role in shifting the political influence men had wielded over women in post-war Liberia. About 80 per cent of Liberian women voted for ESJ to be president on a continent that for centuries had been the world's most patriarchal (Cooper 2017). The wartime atrocities that men perpetrated on all fronts had overwhelmed Liberian women, and they came to view ESJ not as the better of the presidential contenders but as the only alternative to putting a man back in power in a place where men had just run aground. Prominent female voices such as Jowel Howard Taylor, Etweda Cooper, and Varbah Gayflor led political campaigns encouraging women to register to vote. The women developed slogans that united them irrespective of their political allegiance. Their main slogan was 'women, oh women'. On political campaign platforms, they would shout, 'women, oh women', and the crowd would respond,

---

[10] The responses to questions: 14) What is your perception of change in post-conflict Liberia? 15) What are your thoughts on the representation of women in politics before and after the war? 16) Knowing what you know now, did you see anything that met your expectation about the role of women during and after the conflict in Liberia?

[11] An interview with a former combatant of MODEL in Congo Town, Monrovia, 16 November 2021.

'women'.[12] The feminization of the political campaigns after the war led to higher levels of women's voter registration and turnout. Some women turned out because they needed to vote for a female candidate. One of our respondents had this to say regarding the role gender played in the election process: 'Since my ma born me, I have not voted because I don't like politics, but in 2005, I voted only because of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf'.[13] Another claimed: 'I am from a different political party, but I voted for Ellen in 2005. The women were confident with a female candidate, and their campaign strategies successfully produced Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf'.[14]

The government of EJS garnered political commitment and a legislative framework to address the unequal power relations between males and females. It led to the development of gender mainstreaming strategies within most branches of government, promoting women's rights and significantly minimizing most forms of violence against women within Liberia. The president developed policies to redress gender inequalities. One such policy was gender quotas for women's representation in sectors and institutions traditionally controlled by males. Specifically, women were encouraged to run for elected lower- and upper-house legislative positions, which resulted in more than 100 females seeking national elected office in the first post-war elections (Sims 2012: 3).

Once women found themselves in positions of power and influence, they targeted Liberia's laws that had hitherto promoted men's causes and patriarchy. Among them was the passage of the Liberia's Women's Legislative Caucus and the Gender Equality Act.[15] This act was meant to address the historical under-representation of women in politics. A vital component of the act is that it targets cabinet positions as a mechanism to stimulate leadership opportunities for women in the executive branch of the government. The president reformed the executive branch by appointing females to top positions as cabinet ministers, ambassadors, local government officials, and heads of security institutions. At the cabinet level, women were under-represented, with three out of 19 cabinet-level positions held by women. However, women received higher representation within the ministries, holding 24.5 per cent of the deputy ministerial positions and 25.9 per cent of the assistant ministerial positions. Altogether, women held 25.4 per cent of the deputy and assistant ministerial positions (Sims 2012: 12). In 2016, Liberia also passed the Equal Representation and Participation Act, creating 'special constituencies' to represent the interests of women, the youth, and disabled. The act initially proposed the creation of 21 'special legislative constituencies', with 15 seats reserved entirely for women and three seats each for the youth population and people with disabilities, with at least one seat earmarked for female representatives within each group. The Senate and the House of Representatives enacted this law with support from women's groups, especially the Women Legislative Caucus and the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. A watered-down version of this bill was passed, establishing seven 'special constituencies', of which five seats go to women and one each to the youth and the disabled.[16]

Beyond representation in the executive and legislature, women made the most significant inroads and changes into the judiciary sector. More than half of our respondents mentioned the judiciary

---

[12] An interview with a former combatant of LPC on Lynch Street, Monrovia, 14 December 2021.

[13] An interview with a former AFL soldier on the United Nations Drive, 17 September 2021.

[14] An interview with a former combatant of NPLF in Mamba Point, Monrovia, 25 October 2021.

[15] An interview with a former combatant of UNLIMO in Garnesville, Monrovia, 10 December 2021.

[16] See UN Women (2016b).

as the area with the most impactful changes.[17] Evidence suggests that the president reformed the supreme court of Liberia by nominating more females as associate justices. She strengthened the court systems and the rule of law institutions, especially police, immigration, and the drug enforcement agency. Liberia's relative progress mirrors similar levels of women's empowerment in sub-Saharan African countries such as Ghana and Kenya, revealing that women have more representation in the judiciary (Sims 2012: 12).

In addition to political representation, there were changes in the country's security sector. Before the war, women were severely under-represented in the security sector (most notably in the military and police). Shortly after taking office in 2006, ESJ appointed Beatrice Munah Sieh as Liberia's first female inspector general (the top rank) of the Liberian National Police (LNP). The following year, the president appointed Asatu Bah-Kenneth, another woman, as the LNP's deputy inspector general. Asatu Bah-Kenneth was a Liberian activist and founder of the Liberian Muslim Women's Organization, whose activism helped end the second Liberian civil war in 2003 (Bacon 2015). The LNP leadership worked to increase gender mainstreaming and representation in the LNP force. Within three years, the LNP leadership increased female representation by adopting gender-sensitive approaches. In March 2009, Liberia adopted a National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (Griffiths 2011).

Due to low levels of literacy among women, attributable to the wars and the country's history of patriarchy, a Special Education Support Programme was established, which fast-tracked women aged between 18 and 35 who had finished at least ninth grade to earn a high-school degree and enter police training. This programme enabled approximately 300 women to join LNP training classes, increasing female enrolment from 5 per cent to 12 per cent between 2007 and 2008 (Bacon 2015). The LNP assigned female officers to each police station across the country. By 2014, the government had increased the number of female police officers by 15 per cent, increasing steadily since then, with 20 per cent female representation being within reach. The United Nations set the same 20 per cent female representation target in security agencies, including its peacekeeping missions. Overall, 23 women held senior positions as heads of divisions and sections and commanders of police stations during ESJ's tenure.

Although the LNP reforms were not replicated in the military, it also has a 30 per cent quota as a minimum representation of women. In 2011, only 74 out of 2,017 AFL personnel were women, constituting less than 4 per cent of the total strength. However, there has been an uptick in this number with the recruitment and training of additional females who volunteered to join the AFL. This peak in the number of female officers portrays a good image for the AFL, which is usually referred to as 'a force for good'. The AFL has rebuilt its image by allowing women to participate in operations at home and abroad, especially on peacekeeping missions across Africa. In line with Liberia's National Gender Policy, the MoD appointed gender focus personnel to help coordinate and mainstream the government's gender policies. These gender focus personnel ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into the design, preparation, monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of military missions, operations, and strategies. They enable gender equality within the command structure and leadership, and promotion within the military. Despite the gender gap, a female general of the AFL was appointed, making her Liberia's first female general to become Deputy Chief of Staff of the AFL. The security sector reform spearheaded under ESJ's regime led to the restructuring of security institutions and to females heading other security agencies, such as the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, beyond changes in the police and military.

---

[17] An interview with a former combatant of NPFL in Paynesville, Monrovia, 10 January 2022.

Although Liberian women have not reached parity with their male counterparts regarding gender representation politically and in security agencies, the limited gains are noteworthy.

5.4   Women's social and economic changes after the war

It is paramount to note that women and children suffered disproportionally in the Liberian conflicts. Women were purposely targeted and raped during the war. Many former rebels we talked to mentioned that they had directly engaged in the war because of abuse suffered at the hands of the rebels and regime forces. This abuse took the form of rape and the killing of the victims' parents. About two-thirds of the interviewees indicated that their motive for engaging in rebel activities was predicated on the desire to survive and protect friends, relatives, and immediate family members.[18]

For instance, one woman said that she had joined the rebels because her parents had been executed in her presence and that the rebels had killed her 'ma and pa' in front of her. According to this woman, 'when the rebels reached our area, they put everyone outside under the heavy rain and asked people to point out the government forces.[19] Some people pointed at my father, who was the town chief. The rebel tied him up, rolled him in the dirty water, and shot him in the head'. The woman, who was becoming emotional, explained further:

> ...my ma and I began crying, and the other people were crying too. The rebels told my ma to shut up, or she would be killed, but my ma could not bear the pain of seeing my pa lying cold-blooded. We continued to cry, and another rebel shot my ma in the head.[20] When the rebels left, I laid over my mother's dead body, screamed for the longest, and became unconscious. When I woke up, I saw myself in my mother's friend's house, who told me to be calm and that everything would be okay. But I didn't understand how everything could be okay without my father and mother. The only thing that came to mind was joining the rebellion and avenging my parents' death. I joined and started to fight and defend people in our village. I helped secure the release of several persons taken from our town. I only regret that I never saw the men that shot my parents since I joined the rebel movement. I was hunting for them, but I heard they died in an attack the following day after my parents were killed.[21]

Another interviewee said she had joined a rebel group after being repeatedly raped by two fighters and was only 14 years old when the war started. In her account, she said she was on her way, alongside other family members, to Côte d'Ivoire to seek refuge when rebels fired in the air, leading them to scatter and later get lost in the forest. She explained that while looking for those she was travelling with, two men wielding guns (rebels) grabbed her by the hand, took her to the deepest part of the forest, and raped her. She said she cried every day but didn't know what to do or where to go because, 'They showed me the bodies of three girls who attempted to escape and were killed. One day, they left me in the bush helplessly, and I later saw two women with guns and told them

---

[18] General trends in interview responses to interview questionnaire #3) What was the rationale, if applicable, for your recruitment into rebellion, and how were you recruited?

[19] An interview with a female victim on Benson Street, Monrovia, 2 February 2021.

[20] An interview with a female victim on Benson Street, Monrovia, 2 February 2021.

[21] An interview with a female victim on Benson Street, Monrovia, 2 February 2021.

my story. One of them asked me to follow her. I went with the lady who later gave me her weapon. From that day, I began my soldier life'.[22]

Regarding social and economic opportunities, the Liberian legislature adopted the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998 at the end of the first civil war. This act promotes and protects women's rights regarding customary marriages. It calls for the wife's human rights to be respected after marriage, granting the customary wife equal rights before the law. Before the war, customary marriages were characterized by three levels of gender-based violence. The first aspect was that customary marriage was ingrained with hard labour for women, who were required to work long hours on farms for their husbands. Women laboured in vain because, as wives, they were not allowed to own or share the property with their husbands. Second, under-age girls were forced into marriages without their consent. Third, widows were bestowed on or forced to marry their deceased husband's kin.

Following the end of the second civil war in 2003, the Equal Rights Act was revised to grant women the right to own or share property with their male counterparts within the customary marriage system. This inheritance law prohibits females under the age of 16 from being given in customary marriage to a man and protects widows from engaging in restricted marriages to deceased kin. In her first year in office, EJS signed the violence against women legislation into law (UN Women 2016a). The sexual violence legislation or anti-rape law requires ten-years' or lifetime imprisonment, depending on the severity of the rape. The government also established a special fast-track court to prosecute perpetrators of gender-based violence. Liberia has emerged as having Africa's most comprehensive gender-based violence legislation. Like the increasing political representation for women, changes in these areas are also attributable to Liberia's wars and women's role in shaping their outcome.

6   Conclusion

The evidence from this study indicates that Liberia was one of the most patriarchal societies in Africa, leading up to the first and second civil wars. This patriarchal system repressed women in all spheres of life. However, women capitalized on the conflict in the 1990s and early 2000s to shape a post-conflict society that is more sympathetic to women's causes. Considering the entrenched nature of males' domination of the political processes and the subjugation of women in economic production processes, the changes that appeared in the aftermath of the war are not coincidental but are attributable to the ability of women to find their voice and discover their locus during the conflict. The first and second civil wars constrained men's ability to continue to define the political agenda, constraining them spatially to their rebel camps while concurrently presenting opportunities to women to redefine gender roles during the conflict and later shape the post-conflict polity.

Today, more women hold appointed political decision-making roles in Liberia than at any other time in the country's history. Liberia also has the most all-encompassing gender-based violence legislation in Africa. Thus, changes in the relative increase of political representation for women along with various gender-sensitive legislations and policies are partially attributable to Liberia's wars and the role women played in shaping their outcome. Despite all the positive gains women

---

[22] An interview with INPFL former combatant in Caldwell, Montserrado County, 15 March 2022.

have made in the past decade, gender discrimination persists across Liberia, and it will require a consistent effort and many years of hard work to bring women closer to gender parity with men.

References

Alison, M. (2004). 'Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security'. *Security Dialogue*, 35(4): 447–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010604049522

Andrabi, S. (2019). 'New Wars, New Victimhood, and New Ways of Overcoming It'. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 8(1): 1–12. http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.665

Aning, K.E. (1998). 'Women and Civil Conflict: Liberia and Sierra Leone'. *African Journal of International Affairs*, 1(2): 45–58. http://doi.org/10.4314/ajia.v1i2.27248

Annan, J., C. Blattman, D. Mazurana, and K. Carlson (2011). 'Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda'. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(6): 877–908. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002711408013

Asaf, Y. (2017). 'Syrian Women and the Refugee Crisis: Surviving the Conflict, Building Peace, and Taking New Gender Roles'. *Social Sciences*, 6(110): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6030110

Bacon, E. (1993). 'Soviet Military Losses in World War II'. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 6(4): 613–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049308430120

Bacon, L. (2015). 'Liberia's Gender Sensitive Police Reform: Improving Representation and Responsiveness in a Post Conflict Setting'. *International Peacekeeping*, 22(4): 372–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2015.1059285

Berry, M.E. (2018). *War, Women, and Power: From Violence to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108236003

Boulet, R.C., and J. Baetz (2014). 'Belgium Arrests Liberia Ex-rebel Commander'. *AP News*, 18 September Available at: https://apnews.com/article/748abb0ce6044fa0a722ae880ab776c0 (accessed 10 March 2022).

Braithwaite A., and L.B. Ruiz (2018). 'Female Combatants, Forced Recruitment, and Civil Conflict Outcome'. *Research & Politics*, 5(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168018770559

Caprioli, M. (2000). 'Gendered Conflict'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(1): 53–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343300037001003.

Carpenter, C. (2005). 'Women, Children, and Other Vulnerable Groups: Strategic Frames and the Projection of Civilians as Transnational Issue'. *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(2): 295–334. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3693516 (accessed 20 November 2022).

Cohen, D.K. (2013). 'Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in Sierra Leone Civil War'. *World Politics*, 65(3): 383–415. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887113000105

Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler (2004). 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War'. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 54(4): 563–595. https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064

Cooper, H. (2017). 'How Liberian Women Delivered Africa's First Female President'. *The New York Times*, 5 March. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/05/world/africa/liberia-president-ellen-johnson-sirleaf-women-voters.html (accessed 20 November 2022).

Coulter, C. (2008). 'Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions. *Feminist Review*, 88 (April): 54–73. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400385

Eck, K., and O.V. Hänni (2013). *Male Victimhood in Armed Conflict.* Political Violence at a Glance. Available at: https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2013/07/11/male-victimhood-in-armed-conflict/ (accessed 22 November 2022).

Fuest, V. (2008). '"This is the Time to Get in Front": Changing Roles and Opportunities for Women in Liberia'. *African Affairs*, 107(427): 201–24. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn003

Giri, K., and R. Haer (2021). 'Female Combatants and Durability of Civil War'. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1980982

Gizelis, T.-I. (2011). 'A Country of their Own: Women and Peacebuilding'. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 28(5): 522–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894211418412

Grabska, K. (2013). 'The Return of Displaced Nuer in Southern Sudan: Women Becoming Men?'. *Development and Change*, 44(5): 1135–1157. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12051

Griffiths, C. (2011). *Mapping Study on Gender and Security Sector Reform: Actors and Activities in Liberia*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

Grossman, H. (1999). 'Kleptocracy and Revolution'. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 51: 267–83. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3488614 (accessed 20 November 2022).

Guannu, J. S. (2004). *Liberian Civics*. Monrovia: Herald Publishing.

Guannu, J.S. (2007). 'Recurring Patterns in Liberian Politics During the First Republic'. *Liberian Studies Journal,* 32(1): 102.

Haynes, M. (2003). 'Counting Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55(2): 303–09. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966813032000055895

Henshaw, A. (2016). 'Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990-200'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 18(1): 39–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1007729

Hogg, C.L. (2009). 'Women's Political Representation in Post-Conflict Rwanda: A Politics of Inclusion or Exclusion?'. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(3): 34–55.

Hughes, M.M. (2009). 'Armed Conflict, International Linkages, and Women's Parliamentary Representation in Developing Nations'. *Social Problems*, 56(1): 174–204. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2009.56.1.174

Ingiriis, M.H., and M.V. Hoehne (2013). 'The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women: A Blessing in Disguise'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7(2): 314–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2013.776281

Kaba, B.D. (1982). *Profile of Liberian Women in Marketing*. Monrovia: University of Monrovia.

Kellow, T. (2010). *Women, Elections and Violence in West Africa: Assessing women's political participation in Liberia and Sierra Leone*. International Alert. Available at: https://www.international-alert.org/publications/women-elections-and-violence-west-africa/ (accessed 22 November 2022).

Loken, M. (2017). 'Rethinking Rape: The Role of Women in Wartime Violence'. *Security Studies*, 26(1): 60–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243915

Lubkemann, S. (2008). *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of Social Condition in War*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

MacKenzie, M. (2009). 'Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone'. *Security Studies*, 18(2): 241–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900061

Manchanda, R. (2005). 'Women's Agency in Peace Building: Gender Relations in Post-conflict Reconstruction'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(44/45): 4737–45.

Massaquoi, W.N. (2007). 'Women and Post-conflict Development: A Case Study on Liberia'. Master's dissertqtion. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mazurana, D.E., S.A. McKay, K.C. Carlson, and J.C. Kasper (2002). 'Girls Fighting Forces and Groups: Their Recruitment, Participation, Demobilization, and Reintegration'. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 8(2): 97–123. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327949PAC0802_01

McKay, S. (2005). 'Girls as "Weapons of Terror" in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces'. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28(5): 385–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180253

Mehrl, M. (2022). 'Female Combatants and Rebel Group Behaviour: Evidence from Nepal'. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/07388942221082234

Molinaro, A. (2020). 'Women's Peace Movement of Liberia'. *My Hero*. Available at: https://myhero.com/womens_peace_movement_liberia_08 (accessed 22 November 2022).

Mueller, J. (1994). *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Murshed, M. (2002). 'Conflict, Civil War and Underdevelopment: An Introduction'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 39(4): 387–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343302039004001

Nilsson, J., and S. Thapar-Björkert (2013). 'People Constantly Remind Me of My Past … and Make Me Look Like a Monster'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 15(1): 110–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2012.755350

Page, B.I., and R.Y. Shapiro (1992). *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trend in American's Policy Preferences*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226644806.001.0001

Press, R.M. (2010). '"Guided by the Hand of God": Liberian Women Peacemakers and Civil War'. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 8(1): 23–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570271003707648

Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (2004). 'Between Reality and Representation: Women's Agency in War and Post-conflict Sri Lanka'. *Cultural Dynamics,* 16(2–3): 141–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374004047741

Sims, B.M. (2012). *Women in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Women's Civic and Political Participation in Liberia*. Cape Town: Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (IDASA).

Stanton, S., and J. Marie (2008). 'Renewable vs. Non-Renewable Resources as Causes of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, A Time-series Analysis: 1970-2000'. American Political Science Association Annual Meeting. Boston: APSA.

Tripp, A.M. (2015). *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316336014

Thomas, J., and K. Bond (2015). 'Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations'. *American Political Science Review*, 109(3): 488–506. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313

Thomas, J.L., and R.M. Wood (2018). 'The Social Origins of Female Combatants'. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 35(3): 215–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894217695524

UNDP (2022). *United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report (HDI), Liberia Gender Inequality Index, 2022*. Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII (accessed 22 November 2022).

Unruh, J.D. (2008). 'Catalyzing the Socio-Legal Space for Armed Conflict: Land and Legal Pluralism in Pre-War Liberia'. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 40(58): 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2008.10756622

UN Women (2016a). 'Global Database on Violence Against Women'. Available at: https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/africa/liberia (accessed 20 November 2022).

UN Women (2016b). 'Signaling a Boost for Gender Equality, Liberia Passes the "Affirmative Action Bill". Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/10/liberia-passes-the-affirmative-action-bill (accessed 20 November 2022).

Vastapuu, L. (2018). *Liberia's Women Veterans: War, Roles and Reintegration*. London: Zed Books. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350221123

Wood, E.J. (2008). 'The Social Processes of Civil Wars: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks'. *The Annual Review of Political Science,* 11: 539–61. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104832

Wood, R.M, and L. Allemang (2021). 'Female Fighters and the Fates of Rebellions: How Mobilizing Women Influences Conflict Duration'. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/07388942211034746.

Wood, R.M., and J.L. Thomas (2017). 'Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 54(1): 31–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316675025

Yadav, P. (2020). 'Can Women Benefit from War? Women's Agency in Conflict and Post-conflict Societies'. *Journal of Peace Research*, 58(3): 449–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320905619