Is the Motherist Approach More Helpful in Obtaining Women's Rights than a Feminist Approach? A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Liberia

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IS THE MOTHERIST APPROACH MORE HELPFUL IN OBTAINING WOMEN’S RIGHTS THAN A FEMINIST APPROACH? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LEBANON AND LIBERIA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT


The theory that women gain rights during the social upheaval of war has not held universally. While the debate has traditionally centered over women’s participation in fighting and entry into the workforce this paper explores the topic from the form of mobilization, motherist or feminist, that women’s organizing takes during war through the use of a longitudinal, comparative study of Lebanon and Liberia. Lebanese women’s organizations overwhelmingly employed motherist mobilization and tackled practical gender interests that made no attempt to end women’s subordination. In contrast, during the Liberian civil war women’s groups were more apt to focus on strategic gender interests which acknowledged hierarchical gender relations. This paper addresses whether a motherist approach allows women a culturally acceptable space from which to make demands or if, in fact, the motherist approach limits opportunities to increase women’s rights.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFELL Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
AFL Armed Forces of Liberia
CPA Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation
ECOMOG Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States
FAS Femmes Africa Solidarité
FGC female genital cutting
HTP harmful traditional practice
IDP internally displaced person
IECOM Independent Electoral Commission
IGNU Interim Government of National Unity
INPFL Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
IRIN Integrated Regional Information Networks
Isis-WICCE Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange
LFPA Lebanese Family Planning Association
LIWORP Liberian Women for Reconciliation and Peace International
LNTG Liberian National Transitional Government
LPC Liberian Peace Council
LURD Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MARWOPNET Mano River Women’s Peace Network
MDD major depressive disorder
MODEL Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MOJA Movement for Justice in Africa
NGO non-governmental organization
NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NTGL National Transitional Government of Liberia
OAU Organization of African Unity
PAL Progressive Alliance of Liberia
PGIs practical gender interests
PLO Palestinian Liberation Organization
PPP Progressive People’s Party
PRC People’s Redemption Council
PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAA Rape Amendment Act
RUF Revolutionary United Front
SELF Special Emergency Life Food Programme
SIGI Sisterhood is Global Institute
SIGI Social Institutions and Gender Index
SLA Southern Lebanese Army
SGIs strategic gender interests
SSNP Syrian Social Nationalist Party
SWAPO South West African's People Organization
TGF traumatic gynecologic fistula
TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWP True Whig Party
UAR United Arab Republic
ULIMO United Liberation Movement of Liberia
UNAID Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNIFIL United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIL United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOMIL United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
WANEP West African Network for Peace-building
WILL Women in Liberian Liberty
WILPF World International League for Peace and Freedom
WIPNET Women in Peacebuilding Network
WLUMIL Women Living under Muslim Laws
YWCA Young Women's Christian Association
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Introduction

Scholars have long debated whether war and its aftermath bring an opportunity to further women’s equality in political, economic, and social standing (Bop, 2002; Meintjes, 2002; Turshen, 2002). Within the camp that argues that wars do bring changes which hasten female liberation, the debate has centered over whether it is due to women’s direct participation in fighting, or whether such progress is due to women entering the workforce (Enloe, 1993). This thesis seeks to add to this debate by considering motherist and feminist movements, in order to determine whether the approach of mobilization affects women’s rights following wars.

1.1 The Research Question and Sub-Questions

Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, Alice Mungwa, and Aili Mari Tripp insist that postwar situations in several countries, including Liberia, have opened up new opportunities for women (Casimiro, Kwesiga, Mungwa, and Tripp, 2009). Indeed, Funmi Olonishakin began stressing as early as 1995 the positive changes to the status of Liberian women due to the civil war (Olonishakin, 1995). Liberia has received ample media attention for its postwar president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa’s first democratically elected female head of state. Her election to the presidency is chiefly credited to her large female base which campaigned on her behalf (Adams, 2008). Furthermore, Liberian women continue to experience positive changes in the postwar milieu (Bhatia, 2011). Yet Lebanese women did not achieve the same level of success as their Liberian counterparts immediately following the end of Lebanon’s civil war in 1990.

This thesis seeks to understand why Lebanese women failed to make significant gains towards equality directly following the Lebanese civil war in which women’s groups were active. The Lebanese case will be analyzed alongside Liberia to ask: Is a largely motherist approach more helpful in obtaining women’s rights than a mainly feminist approach? The sub-questions
will be: Which approach did each case study generally follow, motherist, feminist, or hybrid? Does a motherist approach allow women a more culturally acceptable space from which to make demands? Can a motherist approach actually limit calls for gender equality? Or, can a feminist approach backfire and actually increase resistance to women’s rights?

1.2 Literature Review

A rich literature covers the role of women in political movements. It is not possible to cover all aspects of women’s activism due to the brevity of this thesis. Therefore, this literature review will summarize motherist movements, feminist movements, hybrid motherist-feminist movements, and practical and strategic gender interests.

In most parts of the world, women have not been political elites, and in fact have been viewed by the state as peripheral actors or weak players in need of the state’s protection (Anderlini, 2007; Bahar, 1996). Historically and near universally, governments and cultural norms have dissuaded or refused females direct participation as members of parliament or cabinet officials. Additionally, in many countries today women are routinely denied leadership roles in political parties and in non-state organizations (Anderlini, 2007).

Yet women have been actively involved in various political movements. Women’s groups run the gambit of the political spectrum, ranging from far left wing to far right wing (Anderlini, 2007). Filomina Steady argues that many women’s groups are concerned with development issues and often orient their agendas toward improving society as a whole rather than focusing solely on “women’s issues” (Steady, 2006).

According to Janet Saltzman Chafetz, Anthony Gary Dworkin, and Stephanie Swanson, women have long been involved in political and social movements but the concept of women’s only movements, or those movements focused specifically on women, did not arise until the
early nineteenth century (Chafetz, Dworkin, and Swanson, 1990). As Amrita Basu has noted, Western feminists have long been aware of the struggle for women’s rights in the United States and Europe but often lack an appreciation for the long history of women fighting for better treatment in the Middle East, South America, Asia, and Africa. Many Western feminists wrongly believe that the West has been the sole source of inspiration for women’s movements around the world, but Basu’s book *The Challenge of Local Feminisms* documents the local origins of several women’s rights campaigns across the non-West (Basu, 1995).

Women’s movements, however, are not always feminist movements. For example, in Latin America, feminism is often associated with bourgeois elitism and is thus rejected by many activists in countries with a large proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged women such as Nicaragua (Chinchilla, 1994). Women can be mobilized into political action on the basis of many identities and causes but this thesis will focus on the debate over motherist versus feminist women’s movements. This first section will summarize motherist movements, outline feminist criticisms of motherist movements, describe hybrid motherist-feminist movements, and finally, consider feminist critiques of these movements.

*Motherist Movements*

Motherist movements inspire women to act based on their maternal identities. Linda Rennie Forcey describes mothering as a socially constructed role which revolves around nurturing and caring for others (Forcey, 1991). Annelise Orleck notes that the varied types of motherist movements, which cover the political spectrum, include environmental, subsistence, anti-militarist, nationalist, anti-colonial, and even racist movements (Orleck, 1997).

Simona Sharoni argues that what these motherist movements have in common is that those involved appear to adhere to traditional gender roles since they embrace their maternal
identities (Sharoni, 1997). As a result, women’s political actions can be entirely masked when they are acting as mothers (Neuman, 2004). Cynthia Edmonds-Cady observes that motherhood can be a difficult concept from which to unite women as it is not simply a shared experience but varies considerably by markers of social location such as class or race (Edmonds-Cady, 2009). However, motherist movements do benefit from being seemingly unthreatening to traditional society (Sharoni, 1997). Dorothea Hilhorst and Mathijs van Leeuwen confirm that women politically mobilized as mothers receive ample media attention for their causes because of their non-threatening status and because it is more difficult for adversaries to attack them (Hilhorst and van Leeuwen, 2007). Additionally, it can be easier to attract large numbers of women to motherist movements than to feminist movements since women find it less problematic to gain approval or permission for their political activism when it is based on motherhood rather than on feminism (Hewitt, 2006).

The critiques of motherist activism are leveled mainly by feminists. Judy El-Bushra insists that motherist movements cannot bring women power because in their role as mothers, women’s position of authority derives, ironically, from their powerlessness. According to El-Bushra, the very weakness which from which mothers speak out ultimately means that they cannot be taken seriously as political players (El-Bushra, 2007). Rema Hammami observes that for some women, being mothers who serve everyone else’s needs is the only way for them to advocate for their own right to resources. This implies how undervalued women are in many places since society looks down on women who advocate for themselves (Hammami, 1997).

Nevertheless, Anderlini postulates that even women’s groups formed on the basis of their identities as mothers can break social barriers by using motherhood as a political tool (Anderlini, 2007). Moreover, Orleck argues that although motherhood may appear apolitical, it has often
served as a springboard for activism. For instance, mothers can connect caring for their children to caring for the future which galvanizes them into action (Orleck, 1997). Additionally, Sharoni notes that many mother activists use their motherhood subversively. This has, in some cases, led to a blurring of the distinctions between motherist and feminist movements (Sharoni, 1997).

For example, Diana Taylor chronicles the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. These women used the concept of traditional motherhood, which includes suffering, irrationality, self-sacrifice, passivity, and powerlessness, to bring attention to their missing children known as the “disappeareds,” who were kidnapped and either killed or abused by the state during the Dirty War. While the Argentine military junta had originally promoted mothers as sacred, once the women gained attention for protesting the regime’s actions, the military began cracking down on them. Taylor points out that this eventually led the women to redefine motherhood as not a biological but a political concept, which thus arguably transformed them into a feminist movement. This transformation is important because these women realized that mere motherhood was not enough to make the changes they sought, and instead they needed the politicization of motherhood (Taylor, 1997). Lynn Stephen documents the same phenomenon in El Salvador where motherist activists became feminist over time. As feminists, these Salvadorian women were able to achieve new laws against domestic violence, draw attention to the state’s human rights abuses, and educate women about their political rights (Stephen, 1995). In both cases, women re-appropriated the image of motherhood and used it as a strategy toward achieving their goals.

Feminist Movements

In contrast to motherist movements which are rooted in maternalism and may or may not address issues of gender equality, women’s rights always play a central role in feminist
movements. Furthermore, while many schools of feminism exist, most are generally united by the basic ideology that gender plays an integral role in the structuring of social organization. Most schools of feminism hold that in the majority of known cultures women are deemed to be of lower status and less importance than men, and that additionally, women receive fewer opportunities and reduced access to resources as compared to men. Feminists also regard gender inequality as socially produced rather than biologically determined, thus believing that gender inequality can be eliminated (Sapiro, 1986). This section provides an overview of the tensions between motherist and feminist movements, the backlash feminists fear motherist movements justify, and finally feminists’ issue with essentialism.

Sharoni concedes that many motherist movements will avoid any association with feminism since feminism threatens the known social order (Sharoni, 1997). In fact, Heather Hewett argues that precisely because feminist movements wish to shake up social norms, many motherist movements avoid any connection to feminism in order to attract more people to the cause. She points out that there is often strong tension between feminist and motherist movements (Hewett, 2006).

Sara Ruddick discerns that many feminists are reluctant to support motherist causes because they view such political mobilization as a backlash intended to restrict women to traditional gender roles (Ruddick, 1997). Within feminism, there is a history of criticizing motherhood as an oppressive institution to women. Feminists have also blamed motherist movements for essentializing women because such movements imply a conflation of mother and woman as one in the same (DiQuinzio, 1993). According to Elizabeth Grosz, essentialism refers to defining a woman’s fundamental essence as strictly her biological capabilities, such as childbirth. Grosz goes on to say this is often associated with naturalism, or what is viewed as
God-given or immutable characteristics, that may or may not take on physical forms. An example would be the belief that women naturally should take care of children or cook all the meals. In addition, essentialism also refers to the idea that women universally experience the same things (Grosz, 1990). This latter idea is prominent in motherist movements as they view all women as understanding motherhood.

The majority of feminists consider essentialism the most problematic aspect of motherist movements. They fear the reduction of women to their identities as mothers because this implies women’s only role in life can be a domestic one, which thus limits women’s opportunities. Additionally, it implies that all women are natural mothers. Most feminists are uncomfortable with the biologically determinist characterization of such reductions as they feel culture plays a much larger role in differences between the sexes (Moore, 2008; de Beauvoir, 2009). As mentioned above, the collapsing of woman into mother is also viewed as not only erroneous since not all women become mothers, but feminists also consider it dangerous as it prescriptively implies all women should become mothers (DiQuinzio, 1993).

Overall, the tensions between motherist and feminist movements are strong as many feminists fear that motherist movements justify forcing women to adhere to traditional gender roles. Feminists also take issue with the essentialism rooted in the motherhood identity as they believe it reduces women’s opportunities. Yet there are feminists who have embraced many of the ideals espoused by motherist movements.

Hybrid Movements

Beginning in the 1970s, certain feminists were questioning feminism’s animosity to motherhood. Scholars such as Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan embraced essentialist arguments by insisting that women and men are indeed fundamentally different from one
another, just as male supremacist ideology claims. The divergence in their assertions lay in that these feminists maintained that women are superior to men. They believe this superiority arises due to the fact women are, according to them, more empathetic, kind, caring, and accommodating than men (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Following the same line of thinking, by the 1980s, some feminists were trying to reclaim motherhood as a feminist concept. These scholars included Sara Ruddick, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Betty Reardon (Dietz, 1985).

For instance, Elshtain created the idea of “social feminism” which is a movement that seeks to re-create the private sphere in the public sphere. According to Elshtain, the family is the most important aspect of all human life as she considers the family morally superior to public life. This opinion mirrors conservative ideology that emphasizes the family as the building blocks of human civilization. Much as Gilligan and Chodorow emphasize women’s superiority to men, Elshtain emphasizes the superiority of the private realm over the public realm. She believes that mothers should be the focus of feminism because according to her, family is where women’s support systems thrive. Elshtain criticizes feminists for demeaning what she views as women’s very identities, by calling motherhood oppressive (Elshtain, 1979; Elshtain, 1981; Elshtain, 1982). However, other feminists, such as bell hooks, argue that views like Elshtain’s romanticize and idealize motherhood, and even reinforce patriarchal attitudes by narrowly focusing on women’s biological capacities (hooks, 1985).

This debate between feminists continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s where many mother-centered pacifist and environmentalist feminist movements remained popular but continued to receive criticism from other feminists. During this period Sarah Ruddick claimed that since women are the sex which give birth and thus are the “life givers,” they are nearly incapable of being violent (Ruddick, 1983). Similarly, Betty Friedan made the argument that if
militaries simply included more women in their ranks, the military would be less violent since women, according to her, have a less violent nature than men (Friedan, 1981). Environmentalist feminist movements rooted in motherist traditions viewed women as “moral mothers” with a primary connection to Mother Nature which these feminists claimed naturally led them to oppose violence and war (Bromley, 1982).

The concept of moral mothers remains popular today. It has inspired Muslim women activists in Iran, both feminists and non-feminists alike. There women’s groups call attention to the contradictions in the Islamic republic’s praise of mothers as the guardians of culture and moral values while simultaneously denying women many rights. Female Iranian activists argue that women as mothers are valuable to society and yet are not given the respect, in the form of legal rights, which they deserve (Gheytanchi, 2001). In fact, throughout much of the non-Western world, motherhood is often central to women’s activism in both feminist and non-feminist contexts (Oyewùmí, 2003). According to Haleh Afshar, in many Muslim countries, feminist activists often reject the typical focus of Western feminism’s push for equality in the workforce. Instead, they emphasize the honor and importance women have as mothers and wives. Afshar argues that Muslim women often choose domesticity and marriage in order to more effectively seek resources for themselves and their children. Afshar also notes that Muslim activists feel that their Western counterparts look down on them for being mother-oriented (Afshar, 1996).

Traditionally, Muslim women have been encouraged to be mothers. Aliah Schleifer emphasizes that Islamic scriptures place mothers in a highly venerated position where their duties include caring for a husband’s household and his children. Marriage is considered necessary for women, as is bearing and rearing children. This is because in Islam being pregnant,
giving birth, nursing, and raising children are all considered spiritual acts for women. In conventional Islamic teachings, it is actually considered part of a woman’s religious duty to marry and bear children. Although Islam has historically permitted women to be scholars, artisans, merchants, and even soldiers, their primary role has traditionally been defined as being mothers (Schleifer, 1986).

Despite this historical emphasis on a woman’s duty to be a mother, there have been many Muslim feminists working to expand women’s rights in the Islamic world. During the anti-colonial period of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the women's movement was active across the Middle East, frequently in tandem with the nationalist movement (Baron, 2005). Elizabeth Baron observes this phenomenon in Egypt where the nation was often symbolically represented as a woman. One of Egypt's most famous sculptures created during its struggle for independence depicts a woman defiantly removing her veil as she poses next to a sphinx. This statue, Nahdat Misr, or the Awakening of Egypt, came to represent Egyptians’ desire to overthrow British colonial rule. However, the statue also suggests women's desire to assert their rights (Baron, 1997). According to Baron, Egyptians in the early women's movement argued that the only way that the nation could progress was by increasing women's access to education. This was a strategy to gain women rights by emphasizing that women were the “Mothers of the Nation” who if educated, would be knowledgeable enough to raise their sons to be devoted to the nation (Baron, 2005).

Similarly, Elizabeth Thompson discusses the techniques used by women's rights supporters in Syria and Lebanon during the same period, where activists embraced a concept known as “patriotic motherhood” as way to obtain greater rights for females. Originally, women in Syria and Lebanon had openly advocated for women's suffrage, rights to equal inheritance,
and an end to polygamy, among other demands. But by the 1930s, they began promoting the idea of women as dedicated patriots who would raise their children to be devoted citizens. Women's rights activists foresaw this patriotic duty as a mechanism which overtime would earn them a justified position from which to demand political rights. Women's groups also hoped that the motherist approach would appeal to more women and be less controversial in order that the movement would attract greater numbers (Thompson, 2000).

Scholars such as Baron and Thompson have closely documented the work done by women's rights activists in the Islamic world during this period of nationalism. Motherist tactics were often employed as Muslim women across the Middle East organized boycotts, rallies, protests, debates, and demonstrations which demanded both independence from colonial rule as well as greater rights for women (Baron, 2005). Moreover, female activists gave speeches and wrote editorials arguing for everything from outright equal rights between men and women, to the freedom to choose whether or not to veil, to the right to vote (Thompson, 2000; Khater, 2004).

In more recent times, Muslim feminists have continued to advocate for women’s rights. Fatima Mernissi is one of the most internationally well known of these feminists. In her book *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, she suggests that imams and politicians created misogynistic traditions that have distorted what the Prophet Muhammad originally intended. She argues that women were never meant to be subservient to men in Islam but that men incorrectly interpreting Islamic texts have misled the Muslim community (Mernissi, 1991). Roxanne Marcotte explains that many Muslim feminists have followed Mernissi’s example by claiming the right to *ijtihad*, which is the practice of interpreting the *Qur’an* or other Islamic works. *Ijtihad* has traditionally been performed by educated, upper-class males. Many
Muslim feminists now perform their own readings of Islamic texts that view women positively and claim that women deserve improved rights (Marcotte, 2010). For example, Asma Barlas has reinterpreted the Qur’an in a manner that seeks to prove that Islam provides men and women with equal rights. According to Barlas, it has been misinformed traditions which have prevented women from enjoying their full rights under Islam (Barlas, 2002). Marcotte argues that Muslim feminists such as Mernissi and Barlas are challenging patriarchy by contesting traditional authority figures in the Muslim world (Marcotte, 2010).

In addition to these Muslim feminist scholars who focus on the reinterpretation of Islamic scriptures, there are Muslim feminists who work toward bettering women’s rights through transnational networks. Valentine M. Moghadam discusses the many feminist networks which exist in the Muslim world, including the two most famous of these: Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and the Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI). Women Living under Muslim Laws and the Sisterhood is Global Institute each began in 1984 and connect both Muslim and secular feminists living in the Muslim world to one another as well as to feminists around the world. Activists with Women Living under Muslim Laws work to bring attention to violations of women’s rights in the Muslim world by sending out “action alerts” to members concerning specific cases of human rights abuses. Those with the organization also catalog the general treatment of women and the family code in each Muslim country. Similarly, individuals with the Sisterhood is Global Institute seek to educate women in Muslim countries about their rights through both publications and workshops (Moghadam, 2005).

Overall, among many Muslim women activists exists a deep identification with motherhood. Similarly, Casimiro, Kwesiga, Mungwa, and Tripp note that it is common in much of Africa for both non-feminists and feminists alike, to characterize women as mothers because
mothers are seen as nurturing and caring, traits that are considered natural to females, as well as positively rated. For example, in political campaigns, the few African women who do run for office often campaign as caregivers and play up their role as mother. Nevertheless, there are also African feminists who feel that this feeds stereotypes and limits women’s possibilities in politics and social movements (Casimiro et al, 2009).

Nonetheless, as Linda Rennie Forcey notes, valorizing a feeling of difference in an oppressed group can be an effective consciousness-raising tool (Forcey, 1991). As Gheytanchi notes in her study, many Iranian women feel that as the guardians of moral values, they deserve better treatment by the state because their work as mothers preserves Iranian culture. Female activists praise women’s role as mothers for being different from fathers’ roles. This technique is used to inspire women to demand rights from the government (Gheytanchi, 2001). Nevertheless, many feminists reject the above arguments as pure biological determinism (Mason, 2005).

For example, these feminists consider Francis Fukuyama’s 1998 article “Women and the Evolution of World Politics” as a case in point. In this piece he argues that feminists pay too much attention to culture and not enough to biology. According to his research, women are biologically more peaceful than men. Here Fukuyama is in agreement with many environmentalist and pacifist feminists. Yet Fukuyama regards this natural peacefulness as a liability since the world in which we live is, according to him, masculinized. He believes that in order to protect ourselves from masculinized men elsewhere, masculine defense policies are required. This means that most women, whom he believes the majority to be “feminine” and therefore by nature peaceful, will be incapable of providing the necessary defense policies. Thus he insinuates that women should remain out of politics. Yet Fukuyama also contends that even if every society in the world were entirely run by women this would ultimately lead to violence
because there would be no outlets for male aggression except war (Fukuyama, 1998). According to Hilary Charlesworth, Fukuyama is following the same line of thinking as many environmentalist feminists and pacifist feminists but he comes to a far less appealing conclusion. From Charlesworth’s view, declaring an innate connection between women and peace or women and nature ultimately winds up keeping women in a subordinated position (Charlesworth, 2008).

In conclusion, it must be noted that despite the many feminist criticisms made against motherist movements, this has not prevented hybrid motherist-feminist movements from emerging, especially in the non-Western world. Debates also continue over the essentialist label, as to whether essentialism should be avoided or embraced as a method of consciousness-raising.

*Practical versus Strategic Gender Interests*

Another divide in the literature on women’s movements is in the type of goals pursued by women’s groups. In the mid-1980s, Maxine Molyneux created two concepts, one called strategic gender interests (SGIs) and the other practical gender interests (PGIs). According to Molyneux, the former encompass interests that seek to alleviate women’s subordinate status. The latter are interests of urgent need which usually do not entail immediate female emancipation or gender equality. Essentially, strategic gender interests directly challenge patriarchy while practical gender interests do not immediately do so, but may overtime (Molyneux, 1985). Georgina Waylen explains that practical gender interests often epitomize economic survival whereas strategic gender interests usually revolve around feminism (Waylen, 1994). Since Molyneux first employed this concept, the tool has had a far-reaching effect all the way to the present. Today many scholars continue to believe that only when practical gender interests are met can strategic gender interests be addressed (Easton, Miles, and Monkman, 2007).
Yet Lynn Stephen has criticized Molyneux’s typology for reinforcing what she considers the false Western assumption of a public/private divide (Stephen, 1997). For example, Karina Barker, in her study on Argentine women involved in the Piquetero movement, argues that although the movement reproduced patriarchy it actually allowed women to gain strategic gender interests, at least within in the home. The Piquetero movement revolved around notions of traditional gender norms and family life while working to end economic hardships for both sexes. The movement has long been credited with helping women’s practical gender interests by alleviating problems due to poverty through the procurement of temporary minimum wage jobs and food aid. However, Barker insists that since these women became involved in an activity outside the home, it also increased their bargaining power within the home and hence gained them strategic gender interests as well (Barker, 2007). Scholars remain divided over the use of Molyneux’s tool of gender interests but this study will employ these concepts on the grounds that they do provide insight into the women’s movements in Lebanon and Liberia by helping to determine if they were overtly feminist.

Conclusion

The debate between motherist and feminist activism is not a new one. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nationalism was on the rise throughout the non-Western world as people began to openly advocate for the end of colonialism. Across Asia and Africa, women's rights movements sprang up alongside and within nationalist movements. As Baron observes, in Egypt, male nationalists made excellent use of women's efforts in the struggle for independence, but once these men controlled state institutions, they kept women from running for office, joining political parties, and voting (Baron, 2005). A similar situation occurred in Lebanon and Syria. There female activists expected the male nationalists that they helped buoy
into power to in turn provide women with increased rights. Instead these activists were dismayed to find that male nationalists formed political coalitions with religious groups intent on keeping women from participating in civic life (Thompson, 2000).

Likewise, Algerian women played a decisive role in the war of independence from France through their armed resistance, including participation in suicide bombings, as well as through their support of combatants' efforts. Yet, despite women's proven bravery and abilities, they were expected to return to their former roles of strictly being wives and mothers and staying out of public life (Benallègue, 1983). This pattern is not limited to the Middle East, but repeats itself across different societies. For example, in Namibia's war of liberation, women provided not only food and shelter for fighters, but also took political initiatives by organizing protests and demonstrations against the South African regime, and additionally were involved in actual warfare. The main movement against the colonial oppressor was the South West African's People Organization (SWAPO) which claimed to support gender equity during the years of the war, but did not in fact implement such rhetoric into policy once in power (Soiri, 1996). In fact, according to Heike Becker, the South West African's People Organization party leaders made alliances with traditional chiefs who regarded women's place as in the home and out of the realm of politics (Becker, 2006).

This thesis ultimately seeks to understand why some progress towards equality has been made in Liberia directly following its recent civil war while it remained relatively elusive in Lebanon's immediate postwar climate. In order to do this, it is important to analyze the use of motherist and feminist movements, as well as practical and strategic interests, and the context in which they were operating, as other factors are likely to come into play. It appears that Lebanese women’s activism was overall mainly rooted in maternalism, while Liberian women’s organizing
was predicated on a combination of feminism and motherism, thus seeming to hint that feminism could play a role in partially explaining why Liberian women have made more progress in women’s rights in the postconflict context as compared to Lebanese women (Shehadeh, 1999a; Ward, 2009; “The Right Livelihood Awards 1984,” 2012; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; Ekiyoy and Gbowee, 2005). It is hoped that the findings of this study will offer lessons that benefit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which seek to promote women’s rights, and help women in postconflict situations reap all the gains to which they are entitled as citizens.

1.3 Procedure

Variables and Operationalization

Is a more motherist approach better than a more feminist approach in promoting women’s rights? The hypothesis is that a simply motherist approach limits gender equality. The sub-questions are: (1) does a motherist approach allow women a culturally acceptable space from which to make demands? and (2) can a feminist approach backfire and actually increase resistance to women’s rights?

The dependent variable, women’s rights, will be measured based on five indicators: female literacy rates, the availability of birth control, the rate of maternal mortality, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code. These indicators were selected because of their status as widely accepted measures of equality (Issan, 2010; Lovenduski and Norris, 2003; Pezzini, 2005; Bianco and Moore, 2012).

Research Design

This paper will consist of a longitudinal, comparative study of the two cases, Lebanon and Liberia, for a period of five years prior to their civil wars, during their civil wars, and five
years following their civil wars (for Lebanon 1970-1995 and Liberia 1984-2008). This will result in a total of 25 years for Lebanon and 24 years for Liberia.

Following John Stuart Mill’s guidelines for the method of difference, Liberia and Lebanon are useful cases for comparison. Both experienced civil wars of nearly the same duration, and are additionally each defined by ethnic cleavages, postcolonial histories, and consistent women’s activism during wartime. The only major point of difference lies in the rights for women gained directly following their respective civil wars and the overall approach taken by the women’s movements in Lebanon and Liberia during the war period (Van Evera, 1997).

Although Lebanon and Liberia may not appear to be a ready comparison, the two countries in fact share many similarities, despite one being situated in the Middle East and the other in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most significantly, both Lebanon and Liberia experienced colonialism, albeit in different ways, that resulted in one ethnic group dominating the political and economic institutions of each country. In Lebanon, as a result of French rule, Maronite Christians gained the upper hand in government and in business (Cleveland, 2004; Khalidi, 1979). Likewise, for most of the period in which the state of Liberia has existed, black immigrants from the U.S. essentially controlled the government and economic assets in the country (Kieh, 1989; Kieh, 1992). Thus, ethnic conflict has been viewed as a defining factor in the civil wars of each case (Cleveland, 2004; Kieh, 1992). Moreover, both Lebanon and Liberia witnessed large numbers of organizing women throughout their respective civil war periods. In Lebanon, female activists with the Lebanese Women’s Council, the Renaissance Women’s Gathering, and other women’s associations were engaged during the war (Ward, 2009; Wehbi, 2002; Shehadeh, 1999a). Similarly, in Liberia, activists associated with the Liberian Women’s Initiative, the Women in Peacebuilding Network, and other women’s groups participated in

Through Bennett and Geroge’s method of process-tracing, connections between the causes and observed outcomes can be mapped in order to determine whether a motherist or feminist approach to women’s mobilization existed in Liberia and Lebanon. This will then be used to decipher which independent variable, a motherist or a feminist approach, had an effect on the dependent variable, women’s rights, in the two cases (Bennett and George, 2005).

Organization

This paper will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction and literature review and sets the stage for the debate over motherist versus feminist movements. The second chapter will provide context by discussing Lebanon’s civil war, and will also explain the actions taken by women’s groups during the civil war, including an analysis of the form of mobilization. The third chapter will describe Liberia’s civil war as well as the women’s activism during the war and will be followed by an analysis of their mobilization. Finally, the concluding chapter will provide an analysis of the respective gains made by the Lebanese and Liberian’s women’s groups since the war, as well as what can be learned from their mistakes and successes.

Sources

Although primary sources will be used wherever possible, secondary sources will provide the main information for this paper. This will be a traditionally researched paper relying heavily on newspapers, periodicals, journals, and reports. To review women’s activism in Lebanon, the women’s magazine Al-Raida will be used to document women’s work and their forms of mobilization during and after the years of the civil war. In the case of Liberia, accounts from the
United Nations will be used including “Best Practices in Peace Building and Non-Violent Conflict Resolution: Some Documented African Women’s Peace Initiatives,” a document jointly published by UNHCR, UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNIFEM. Additionally, the documentary film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* along with Liberian newspapers, such as the *Daily Observer*, will also provide information on Liberian women’s activism.

The information for this paper’s indicators will be obtained from various sources, including from Bahia Hariri’s study “Women and Education in Lebanon” which will provide literacy rates (Hariri, 1996), and the World Bank’s data catalog which will cover contraceptive, maternal mortality, and female literacy rates. In addition, the United Nations report “The Situation of Children and Women in Lebanon, 1995” (“The Situation of Children and Women,” 1995) will provide both maternal mortality and birth control usage rates. The Global Health Observatory Data Repository will cover maternal mortality rates, the Inter Parliamentary Union will provide the data for the numbers of female members in parliament, and UNICEF will provide maternal mortality and birth control usage rates. Additionally the gender-related development index (GDI) will be used where applicable.
Chapter 2: Women's Activism during Lebanon's Civil War

2.1 Introduction

In the majority of literature concerning Lebanon's fifteen year civil war, there is little mention of the work performed by female activists who were in fact highly involved in organizing throughout the war. This chapter will chronicle women's activism as well as provide an analysis of women's organizing based on Maxine Molyneux's typology of gender interests. To understand the context in which Lebanese women acted, this chapter will furthermore provide background information on Lebanon, a summary of the civil war, and finally, a description of women's experiences both prior to, and during, the civil war.

2.2 Background on Lebanon

To understand how the civil war began, the importance of Lebanon's unique history must be stressed. Lebanon is a small country with a population of about 4,100,000, located at a crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa ("Lebanon, World Factbook," 2012; Meo, 1965). What is today Lebanon was formerly part of the Ottoman Empire. On April 25, 1920, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, the colonial French government was awarded a mandate by the League of Nations over the area of what was known as Greater Syria (Cummings and Held, 2011; Odeh, 1985). Greater Syria, also called “historic Syria,” was a term that for over 2,000 years referred to the geographical area which encompasses present day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the western portion of Iraq, and Israeli-occupied sections of Palestine (Cummings and Held, 2011). Mount Lebanon, an area lying within Greater Syria, contained an historic community of Maronite Christians that had since 1860 been run autonomously under the Ottoman Empire. This was due to pressure from European governments who sought reassurances that the Maronite community would be singled out for protection after a war between the
Maronites and the Druzes in 1860 resulted in heavy sectarian violence on both sides (Safa, 2006; Makdisi, 2002). After gaining the League of Nations mandate in 1920, France affixed other sections of Greater Syria to Mount Lebanon in order to create the new country of Lebanon (Cummings and Held, 2011).

According to John Thomas Cummings and Colbert C. Held, Lebanon is often associated with cultural diversity and pluralism (Cummings and Held, 2011). Eighteen confessional, or religious, groups are officially recognized by the state, including Shi'a Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Druze, Isma'ilis, Alawites, Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Copts, Protestants, and Jews (“Background Note: Lebanon,” 2011; Payne and Salamey, 2008). Nevertheless, Cummings and Held point out that Lebanon from its inception has been characterized by a Christian-Muslim divide (Cummings and Held, 2011).

Scholars such as Walid Khalidi and William L. Cleveland have suggested that France created Lebanon for the sole purpose of protecting the Maronite Christians who were concentrated in Mount Lebanon. The sections of Greater Syria which France attached to Mount Lebanon contained small portions of Sunni-dominated areas and Shi'a-dominated areas which allowed the Maronites to be the numerical majority (Khalidi, 1979; Cleveland, 2004). According to Leila M. T. Meo, many Christians were fearful that the Muslim population would institute a Muslim theocratic state if given the opportunity, and therefore Christians, especially Maronite Christians, embraced France's intervention in the region (Meo, 1965).

Even prior to the French mandate period, outside involvement in the area was evident. As previously mentioned, several European powers, including the governments of England, France, Prussia, Russia, and Austria, had pressured the Ottoman government into allowing Mount
Lebanon to be run autonomously after the outbreak of violence between the Maronite and Druze communities in 1860. These European powers insisted that Mount Lebanon be overseen by a European, Christian governor. According to Latif Abul-Husn, the governor was supported by an appointed administrative council which was meant to represent all the communities living in the area, according to a confessional formula. This confessional form of representation would later be solidified under the French mandate period beginning in 1920 (Abul-Husn, 1998; Dekmejian, 1978).

Abul-Husn explains that while the administrative council was dissolved following the declaration of the new state of Lebanon on September 1, 1920, the French mandate government next created a new council which was elected but nonetheless maintained confessional requirements (Abul-Husn, 1998). According to Imad Harb, confessionalism is a system of governance which distributes political power proportionally according to each religious community living in the state (Harb, 2006). Confessionalism is actually a form of consociationalism, which is a type of democracy designed to help plural societies protect minority groups. Consociationalism functions on the basis of electing elites from each ethnic or religious group to be representatives of their respective communities. These elites then cooperate and compromise with the elected elites from the other communities, while simultaneously working toward the interests of their own particular group (Jabara and Jabara, 2001; Lijphart, 1977).

William L. Cleveland describes Lebanon's independence as a process. The government of France considered it a duty to protect Christians in the Levant, particularly the Maronite community. The Maronites were the largest sectarian group in Lebanon but constituted only thirty percent of the population. Cleveland argues that this was by design so that a French
presence in Lebanon would be championed by the Maronites and other Christian groups who would seek protection from a perceived threat of Muslim domination. The French mandate government created a constitution in 1926 which arranged for a single chamber parliament that would then elect a president whose duties would include appointing a prime minister and cabinet. In 1943, the Lebanese achieved independence from France and established the National Pact which would have long-lasting effects on Lebanese politics (Cleveland, 2004).

Sami G. Hajjar describes the National Pact as an unwritten agreement which established a confessional form of power-sharing among the eighteen recognized religious communities of Lebanon (Hajjar, 2009). Nevertheless, as Richard Dekmejian notes, the confessional system had already been institutionalized during the French mandate period (Dekmejian, 1978). The National Pact, however, would take confessionalism much further. Based on the 1932 census which showed Christians constituting the numerical majority of Lebanese, the National Pact declared that the parliament would always contain a ratio of six Christians for every five Muslims. The National Pact also guaranteed that the president, the most powerful position in Lebanon, would be filled by a Maronite Christian. Additionally, the agreement stipulated that the prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of the house a Shi’a Muslim. In fact, every high office was accorded a religious community requirement. For example, the deputy prime minister was always to be a Greek Orthodox Christian and the army commander was to always be a Maronite Christian (Hajjar, 2009). By its very design, the National Pact made elections based on religious identification.

One other significance of the National Pact was that it offered a compromise between the Christian and Muslim communities regarding the national identity of Lebanon. According to Cleveland, the agreement specified that Lebanon was an independent, Arab nation. This was a
sacrifice for both Muslims and Christians. Many Muslims felt that Lebanon should never have been separated from Syria, while many Christians preferred to think of Lebanon as a Mediterranean, rather than an Arab, state. The National Pact assured Christians that Lebanon would remain independent from Syria while it simultaneously guaranteed Muslims that Lebanon was a part of the Arab world (Cleveland, 2004).

In the early years of its independence and well through the 1960s, Lebanon was a source of hope in the Middle East as it experienced both economic growth and political stability (Hudson, 1997b; Safa, 2006). Often referred to as “the Switzerland of the Middle East,” while its capital Beirut was known as “the Paris of the Middle East,” Lebanon was a middle-income country on par with Portugal (Safa, 2006: 25; Stewart, 1996: 489). However, as alluded to above, the underlying conflict over the identity of the nation continued to create problems.

2.3 Lebanon's Conflict over Identity

While scholars such as Cummings and Held note that Lebanon's many confessional groups experienced conflict with one another, including Maronites versus Greek Orthodox and Sunnis versus Shi’as, they have also insisted that Lebanon can be broken down into a simple Christian-Muslim divide (Cummings and Held, 2011). Scholars such as Kamal Salibi have explained that this Christian-Muslim split led to two opposed political ideologies concerning the identity of Lebanon. The first was an ethno-nationalist Christian identity which insisted that Lebanon should be considered a Mediterranean or European state, while also seeking to promote a pro-Western political agenda. The opposing ideology, known as the Arab nationalist thesis, held that Lebanon was part of the Arab world and thus should become actively involved in the politics of the Middle East (Salibi, 1988).
According to Walid Phares, the nationalistic Christian point of view regarded Lebanese Christians as having entirely different ethnic, linguistic, and historical roots than those of Lebanese Muslims. Essentially, nationalist Christians held that they were fundamentally not Arab. These Christians believed that they were non-Arabs based on the fact that their ancestors used to speak Aramaic, and thus they often considered themselves to be ethnically Aramaean (Phares, 1995). In other instances, many Christians regarded themselves as either ethnically Phoenician or Byzantine (Cummings and Held, 2011). These Christian ethno-nationalists believed that Lebanon’s purpose was to serve as a homeland for Christians. According to Phares, in this worldview all Muslims were considered non-indigenous as they were deemed to be invaders from the Arabian Peninsula (Phares, 1995).

Salibi considers this phenomenon of identifying as non-Arab as part of the pro-Western view of nationalist Christians, who believed that they were integrally connected to the Western world as opposed to the Arab world and the larger Middle East. Although Christians in Lebanon had been speaking Arabic and identifying as Arabs for centuries, Salibi argues that their repositioning as non-Arabs was a recent development which occurred only under European involvement in the Levant (Salibi, 1988). Albert Hourani has described this same Christian nationalist position as the “ideology of the mountains” since it was held mainly by the Maronites who were located predominantly on Mount Lebanon, and who viewed themselves as a distinct community from the rest of the historical Greater Syria (Hourani, 1976).

The belief system in direct contrast to Christian nationalism was that of Arab nationalism. Salibi ironically notes that it was in fact a Christian who originated the idea of Arab nationalism, and also concedes that there were indeed some Arab nationalist Christians as many Christians throughout Lebanon considered themselves Arab. Arab nationalists agreed that the height of
Arab culture occurred under Islam so that Islam and Arab nationalism were deeply intertwined and could not be understood apart from one another. Salibi indicates that most Arab nationalists in Lebanon were Muslim and that for these Arab nationalists, it was integral to orient Lebanon toward the Arab world (Salibi, 1988). Hourani refers to this position as the “ideology of the cities,” as most adherents were Sunnis who lived mainly in Beirut and other coastal towns (Hourani, 1976).

The conflict between the two dichotomous positions of Christian nationalism and Arab nationalism manifested itself early on in Lebanon. For example, many nationalist Christians resisted learning Arab history and literature, and preferred to speak French or English rather than Arabic. Meanwhile, Arab nationalists pushed for Arab history and literature courses to be taught in schools (Salibi, 1988; Phares, 1995). In 1958, Lebanon appeared to experience violent conflict between followers of these two opposed ideologies. According to Hajjar, when the governments of Egypt and Syria joined as the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.), the majority of Lebanese Muslims indicated their wish for Lebanon to politically join with the United Arab Republic as well. Meanwhile, most Lebanese Christians virulently resisted such a move, as did President Camille Chamoun who requested U.S. troops to help quash the internal revolt. The Eisenhower administration indeed sent U.S. troops to keep the pro-Western government in power (Hajjar, 2009). Kamal Salibi counters, however, that this may not have been as much about Christian-Muslim conflict as it originally appeared. Most Muslims, and even many Christians, were more outraged by Chamoun’s intent on extending his presidency, and much of the violence and protest associated with this period is more attributable to Chamoun’s unpopularity and excesses (Salibi, 1965). Nevertheless, Michael C. Hudson notes that the subtext surrounding the 1958 crisis was the pronounced Muslim-Christian divide (Hudson, 1997b). In the end, the head of the army,
General Emir Fu’ad Shihab was elected president since he remained neutral during the crisis (Salibi, 1965). This ominous event in 1958 certainly foreshadowed the civil war which would come less than two decades later.

2.4 Summary of Lebanon's Civil War

According to Khalidi, it was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war which truly began to polarize most Maronite Christians against the majority of Muslims. The two sides' divisions centered over the Palestinian issue (Khalidi, 1979). As Lamia Rustum Shehadeh points out, Palestinians had been a presence in Lebanon since their expulsion from Palestine, which occurred with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Palestinian intellectuals such as lawyers and doctors were attracted to Lebanon's free society and business opportunities. Yet those Palestinians who did not have high levels of education were crowded into fifteen refugee camps around the country which were located on the outskirts of major cities (Shehadeh, 1999a). The Lebanese government granted about 3,000 Christian Palestinians Lebanese citizenship but the majority of Palestinians, who were mainly Sunnis, were denied citizenship as the Lebanese government feared that their numbers would tip Lebanon's population in favor of the Muslims (Hudson, 1997a; Shehadeh, 1999a). The 1969 Cairo Agreement, which allowed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to legally function out of the Arqub region of Lebanon, as well as be supplied militarily by the Syrian government, stoked the fear of many Maronites who worried that the Palestinians were forming a state within a state (Shehadeh, 1999a).

In retrospect, the large presence of Palestinians divided the Lebanese and became the foremost political issue in the lead up to the outbreak of war. Lebanon’s fifteen year civil war is best understood in three stages: the initial two year war from 1975-1976, the Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982, and the final stage of the late 1980s which culminated in the 1990 Ta’if Accord.
With the signing of the Cairo Agreement, many Maronites began forming militias as they feared the increase of Muslims due to the rising number of Palestinian refugees. Tensions grew during the early 1970s until April 13, 1975 when a shooting outside of a Maronite church led to a retaliatory shooting of Palestinians, the event which is usually cited as the war’s official beginning (Khalidi, 1979; Phares, 1995). By 1976, as violence erupted across Lebanon, President Suleiman Franjieh called on Syria's president Hafiz al-Asad, requesting Syrian troops to help restore order. Many scholars such as Khalidi have viewed the request for these troops as a way to return complete Maronite power over Lebanon (Khalidi, 1979). According to the scholars with the MERIP reports, Syria's government had strategic reasons for wanting to become involved in Lebanon's conflict. Asad hoped to usurp Egyptian political dominance of the Arab world, but he felt that this required appeasing the Israeli government by ensuring Maronite political control of Lebanon. Indeed, if Lebanon were ruled by pro-Palestinian factions, they would likely have aligned themselves with the government of Iraq, thus hurting Asad's efforts to be leader of the Arab world (MERIP, 1976).

Shehadeh argues that by the late 1970s, two political blocs had clearly emerged. The first was the right-wing Lebanese Front which included political parties and militias such as the Phalangist or Kataib Party, the National Liberal Party, the Guardians of the Cedars, the Maronite Monastic Orders, and the National Bloc. The opposing leftist bloc consisted of the Progressive Socialist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Baath Party, the Communist Party, the Organization of Communist Action, and the Independent Nassirite Movement, among others. Additionally, Beirut became a divided city with a Christian East and a Muslim West, separated by the so-called “green line” (Shehadeh, 1999a).
The arrival of the Syrians on June 1, 1976 quickly led to more outside involvement which took the war into its second phase. Hajjar notes that the Syrians eventually occupied Lebanon north of the Litani River. This was subsequently followed by a second foreign occupation which began on March 14, 1978 when Israeli troops entered Lebanon to control land south of the Litani River, an area which the Israelis soon referred to as Free Lebanon. The Israelis left southern Lebanon in the care of Major Sa’ad Haddad, a Christian Lebanese, on April 18, 1979. Haddad commanded what became known as the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA). Composed mainly of southern Christian militiamen, with some Shi’a militiamen as well, the Southern Lebanese Army was a proxy, funded and armed by the Israeli government (Hajjar, 2009). The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) arrived in Lebanon on March 23, 1978 during the first Israeli invasion. Its mandate, given under UN Resolution 425 on March 19, 1978, was to evacuate Israeli troops from Lebanon, although the UNIFIL operation ultimately failed to do so (Shehadeh, 1999a; Fisk, 2002; “Resolution 425 (1978) of 19 March,” 1978).

Israeli troops returned to Lebanon in full force on June 6, 1982 (Odeh, 1985). According to Robert Fisk, the Israeli military was ultimately able to drive the Palestinian guerrillas out of the country, but only after causing tremendous suffering to the Lebanese civilians of West Beirut. Fisk also emphasizes the significance of the 1982 massacre of women, children, and unarmed men at the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila which occurred at the hands of the Phalangist militiamen, along with the complicity of the Israeli military and government. For Fisk and many other scholars, it was one of the most horrific incidents in a war full of horror (Fisk, 2002).

Additionally, the 1980s also witnessed the rise of Hizballah, or the Party of God, which was a Shi’a organization. Judith Palmer Harik notes that Hizballah focused expressly on ridding
Lebanon of an Israeli presence and establishing a theocratic Islamic state. Hizballah members often clashed with adherents of another Shi'a organization, Amal (Harik, 1996). According to Shehadeh, Amal formed just prior to the outbreak of the civil war as a protest movement which demanded more government services for the Shi'a in the south (Shehadeh, 1999a). However, after Amal's founder Musa al-Sadr disappeared on a visit to Libya in 1978, Hizballah began to attempt to usurp Amal's position as leader of the Shi'a. As the war progressed, adherents of both groups fought each other as often as they did Israeli troops, Palestinian guerrillas, and Druze militiamen (Harik, 1996; Fisk, 2002).

Fighting between militias with their constantly shifting alliances continued throughout the remainder of the 1980s, as did Israeli and Syrian involvement. The final phase of the civil war began in 1988. According to Robert Fisk, Army Chief of Staff Michel Aoun and former Prime Minister Selim al-Hoss, backed by Syria's government, each formed their own Lebanese government on separate sides of Beirut. Fighting between the forces representing each government began in 1989 and ended only when Aoun was pressured by Western governments into a cease-fire brokered by the Arab League. This then led to what became known as the Ta’if Accord (Fisk, 2002).

The Ta’if Accord took form when the Saudi government invited the Lebanese parliament to Ta’if, Saudi Arabia in 1989. There, on 22 October, parliament members voted to replace the National Pact with a new power-sharing doctrine known as the Coexistence Pact (Shehadeh, 1999a; Hanf, 1993). However, in early 1990, Michel Aoun, who had rejected the Ta’if Accord, commanded the Lebanese army against the Christian Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea. Fighting dragged on between the two sides in intra-communal warfare until the Vatican brokered a peace
deal in late May 1990, thus bringing a close to the fifteen year Lebanese civil war (Shehadeh, 1999a).

Scholars such as Fisk and Oren Barak have been critical of the Ta’if Accord. As Barak notes, although the agreement stipulated for the need to end political sectarianism, it in fact continued the same confessional power-sharing formula that had always existed in Lebanon, which essentially enshrines sectarianism (Barak, 2002). Moreover, despite the Ta’if Accord’s increase in the number of Muslim representatives in parliament as well as the increase in the executive powers of the prime minister, Fisk criticized the agreement for continuing Shi’a under-representation in government (Fisk, 2002; Payne and Salamey, 2008). Additionally, Fisk felt it was unfair that a Muslim could still never become president or that a Christian could never become prime minister as confessional requirements remained intact (Fisk, 2002). Yet, Joseph Maila points out that the Ta’if Accord did limit the powers of the presidency to ensure that this was no longer an office which would control the government. Instead, the president’s new role was to ensure that the constitution was properly adhered to and to strengthen Lebanon’s governing institutions (Maila, 1994). Overall, however, most scholars have found much to be wanting in the Accord mainly due to its strengthening of sectarianism. Hajjar too has been critical of the Ta’if Accord but for different reasons, instead viewing the agreement as inappropriately giving Syria too much influence in Lebanon. Indeed, in 1991, the Lebanese and Syrian governments signed a treaty which obligated Syrian troops to enter Lebanon for any perceived security threat, and vice versa (Hajjar, 2009).

Therefore, the Ta’if Accord brought an end to the long civil war which had resulted in the destruction of Lebanon’s economy as well as the downtown area of Beirut. Additionally, thousands of homes as well as many hospitals, governmental buildings, and even the water and
electricity supplies were completely destroyed as a result of the fighting (Shehadeh, 1999a).

While the events of Lebanon's civil war can be simplified into three phases, including the initial two year war from 1975-1976, the two Israeli invasions, and the final events of the late 1980s, the causes of the war are far more convoluted.

2.5 The Causes of Lebanon's Civil War

Despite Lebanon's small size, it is a vastly complex country composed of disparate communities of people who have often sought to implement incompatible visions for Lebanon. Additionally, the political and social institutions within Lebanon are also complicated (Cummings and Held, 2011). The majority of scholars have suggested that the origins of Lebanon's civil war lies in ethno-religious conflict, a confessional system of political rule, in economic inequalities, the corruption of the political elite, in an influx of Palestinian refugees, and in external interference.

One of the most obvious causes of the conflict revolves around differing views of Lebanon's identity, which has already been addressed. During the war, the differing perceptions of the Christian nationalists and Arab nationalists were striking. For example, although everyone agreed that the killing of a Christian on April 13, 1975 officially began the civil war, the manner in which this incident has been described by opposing sides is significant. In Walid Khalidi’s telling, an unknown individual fired at a Maronite church in the suburb of Ain el-Remmane, killing one person. This then led to a retaliation killing spree by a Maronite militia who murdered twenty-eight passengers on a bus, most of whom were Palestinian (Khalidi, 1979). The disparity between this Palestinian scholar’s rendition and the Christian Lebanese scholar Walid Phares is noteworthy. According to Phares, four Palestinians murdered a Christian standing in front of a Maronite church and in retaliation for the murder, militiamen ambushed a bus carrying
Palestinian Liberation Organization guerrillas (Phares, 1995). Differences over the interpretation of this event set the tone for the war. For example, Fisk documented in his book *Pity the Nation* the various radio stations run by each faction who spun the news to suit their side throughout the war (Fisk, 2002). The cause of this Christian-Muslim split, however, is often traced to confessionalism.

In fact, the majority of scholars suggest that it was largely confessionalism which led to the war. Joseph G. and Nancy W. Jabbra insist that confessionalism allowed Lebanon’s political elites to further their own interests rather than the interests of their particular communities. The Jabbras point out that this system also over-empowered Christians by ensuring that for every five Muslims in government there were six Christians which thus resulted in a consistent Christian majority. Furthermore, Lebanon’s confessional system unfairly guaranteed that the presidency, the most powerful position in Lebanon, was always filled by a Maronite Christian (Jabra and Jabbra, 2001). Michael C. Hudson believes that Lebanon could have withstood the arrival of Palestinian refugees and even Syria’s subsequent invasion if the Lebanese had been able to present a united front. He too blames confessionalism for entrenching divisions among the Lebanese (Hudson, 1997b). Florian Bieber similarly accuses sub-state nationalism due to confessionalism as ultimately advancing Lebanon’s descent into civil war (Bieber, 2000).

Likewise, Oren Barak blames confessionalism for Lebanon’s civil war which he cites as increasing intra-ethnic conflict. According to Barak, confessionalism led those from the same ethnic communities to vie with one another to represent the group at the national level. This intra-communal fighting eventually led to inter-ethnic conflict as political candidates tried to outbid one another by initially promoting the primacy of their own community over other communities. Over time, however, this progressed into a practice where politicians advanced
negative or hateful messages about other religious communities in order to gain voters’ support (Barak, 2002).

Scholars have also labeled economic or class issues as a contributing cause of the war. The Jabbras note that economic issues were salient because Christians prospered more so than Muslims, causing immense friction between the two groups. The Jabbras have also highlighted the differences in development between rural and urban areas, with the countryside being largely neglected. It was mainly the Shi'a who lived in rural areas and who were the most economically disadvantaged (Jabbra and Jabbra, 2001).

Patronage systems have also been attributed as a cause of the war. Crawford Young argues that the dominant pattern of resource allocation in Lebanon was through patronage networks (Young, 1976). According to Samir Khalaf, leading political figures gave resources to their followers in return for political support. This pattern developed from particular feudal conditions and affected every confession in Lebanon, including Christian, Muslim, and Druze communities (Khalaf, 1977). As Barak points out, it became paramount for those wishing to remain in power that they win elections in order to maintain their access to resources. These resources would allow them to keep their supporters happy which would in turn give them prestige and honor within their communities (Barak, 2002).

Yet the majority of scholars agree that the Palestinians were a significant cause of the Lebanese civil war. Fabiola Azar and Etienne Mullet largely attribute the civil war to the 150,000 Palestinian refugees that Lebanon received in the years between 1948 and 1971 (Azar and Mullet, 2002). The Jabbras discuss how the Palestinian issue divided along confessional lines with Sunnis, the Shi'a, and the Druze largely allying themselves with the Palestinians while most of the various Christian groups aligned themselves against the Palestinians (Jabbra and
Jabbar, 2001). Scholars such as Oussama Safa conclude that had the Palestinians not entered Lebanon in such large numbers, the confessional system would have survived. He believes that since most Palestinians were Sunni, their presence upset the religious balance in Lebanon by numerically over-empowering Muslims (Safa, 2006).

Finally, Lebanon's civil war involved many outside actors which scholars argue exacerbated the conflict. Marwan Buheiry insists that Lebanon has never experienced an internal conflict that was not aided by external forces, and concludes that Lebanon's civil war was no different (Buheiry, 1990). Moreover, Robert Fisk has chronicled both Syria and Israel’s infamous interventions into Lebanon, including Israel’s proxy militia, the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA). He has also recounted the presence of the U.S., France, and Italy as well as the strong Iranian involvement during the war. Fisk concludes that these external interferences destabilized and exacerbated the situation (Fisk, 2002).

Therefore, scholars have attributed many causes to Lebanon's civil war. Overall, however, Lebanon’s ethno-religious conflict, its confessional system of political rule, economic inequalities, patterns of corruption, an influx of Palestinian refugees, and external interference are all considered major contributors to the civil war. The fifteen years of war were noted for their brutality, and the citizens and residents of Lebanon suffered greatly. This chapter's focus is ultimately concerned with Lebanese women's wartime experiences. Women, as a group, is a demographic which scholars such as Julinda Abu Nassr have noted suffered particularly harshly during the war (Abu Nassr, 1996). However, to understand the context of women's wartime experience, an appreciation of Lebanese women's general experiences prior to the war is also necessary.
2.6 Women in Lebanese Society

Like women in virtually all societies, Lebanese women have been historically oppressed by many forms of patriarchy. According to Gerda Lerner, patriarchy is the institutionalization of male dominance over women and children both within the family as well as in larger society (Lerner, 1987). In order to understand the context of women's experiences during the war, the patriarchal parameters of women's lives in Lebanon must be analyzed. Regardless of confessional affiliation, Lebanese women have had their lives defined by the structure of the family, a distinct public/private divide, the cultural notion of honor, and finally by the personal status codes of Lebanese law (Hijab, 1988; Van Dusen, 1976; Shehadeh, 2010; Accad, 1990; Tucker, 1993).

As Kamal Salibi asserts, despite Christian nationalists’ insistence that they are not Arab, members of the Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and other Lebanese Christian communities are in fact Arab. Members of these groups have historically spoken Arabic as well as adhered to Arab customs. As mentioned earlier, it was only with the advent of European colonialism that any Christians began to argue that they were not Arab (Salibi, 1988). Therefore, regardless of confessional membership, all Lebanese women have similar experiences, including the structure of the family. In particular, Nadia Hijab emphasizes that the family has historically been the most important social structure in Arab societies. Arab families have traditionally been large but extended families have not necessarily lived together in the same household, although close connections to aunts, uncles, and cousins have been strong. Family has been the main social security net for the elderly, the sick, and those facing difficult circumstances. An Arab man has been expected to provide financially for his wife and their children together, as well as for any of his female relatives in need. Within the family, the man is seen as the final decision-
maker and head of the household, but the woman of the house, in most cases the wife, runs the
day-to-day business of the household. Moreover, within the family, women have been expected
to provide informal religious and cultural education to the next generation (Hijab, 1988).
Additionally, Roxann A. Van Dusen asserts that Lebanese women, like most women in the Arab
world, have traditionally been considered the legal and social charges of either their fathers or
their husbands (Van Dusen, 1976).

However, Judith E. Tucker, cautions that the Arab family cannot be viewed as an
ahistoric structure. She defines the family in Arab societies as consisting of specific economic,
social, and political considerations that have fluctuated throughout history. For example, Tucker
notes that socioeconomic status has played a role in defining the structure of the family. Among
elites, Arab women have had fewer rights than those women from less economically advantaged
families as far as being able to choose one’s husband or requesting divorce. Tucker also warns
that while the family has often limited women’s choices in both upper and lower class contexts,
Arab women cannot be viewed simply as victims of the family structure since families have also
provided emotional and financial support to women (Tucker, 1993).

A second defining aspect of women's lives in Lebanon is the public/private divide which
runs along gender lines. Men have historically been regarded as the public actors of the labor
force and political arena while the private sphere of the home is considered women's domain.
However, Van Dusen points out that there is a distinction between urban and rural settings within
Lebanon. In rural locations, women conventionally have not been as secluded from public life as
their female city-dwelling counterparts. This is due to the fact that rural women's labor has been
necessary for agricultural production (Van Dusen, 1976). Furthermore, even in urban settings,
women from families of lower socioeconomic status have had greater access to the public
sphere. In fact, as Tucker points out, the very perpetuation of female seclusion as practiced mainly by upper class Arab families depended on the work of female seamstresses and entertainers who attended to secluded women (Tucker, 1993).

Nevertheless, Charles W. Churchill points out that while some Lebanese women have had greater access to public spaces, these women have not necessarily had that many more freedoms than women who remained confined to the home. He describes both Muslim and Christian women in rural Lebanon as having to perform several hours of planting, digging, or harvesting each day, on top of their responsibilities of managing the home (Churchill, 1968). Additionally, as Malek Hassan Abisaab notes, even as late as 1970, Lebanese women involved in agricultural work labored mainly on their families’ farms, either for their parents or for their husbands, and thus did not earn a wage. Certainly some wage-earning women existed in the agricultural sector, but even so, their earnings went mainly to supporting their families (Abisaab, 2001). This was also the case for women involved in the industrial sectors as well as for those women who worked as domestics in the homes of the elites (Abisaab, 2001; Jureidini, 2009).

Finally, Nadia Haggag Youssef points out that Lebanese factory women were traditionally stigmatized on a social level for working in such close proximity to men (Youssef, 1976).

This last point, that working alongside men can harm a woman’s reputation, indicates another way in which women's lives in Lebanon have been shaped, which is by codes of honor. Hijab notes that the family has historically defined one's status in Arab society thus explaining why family honor has been of the utmost importance (Hijab, 1988). Evelyne Accad states that sharaf, or honor, is a code of the Arab tribes, and is essentially tied to a young girl's virginity (Accad, 1990). Honor is a state which can be lost, and once lost it is seen by society as bringing shame on that person and their entire family. As Pernilla Ouis observes, actions such as
promiscuity or any sort of behavior that is viewed by society as “loose” can cause a girl or woman to lose her honor. This honor is considered to be saved only if the actions are not discovered by those outside the family, or if they have been made public, then honor is seen to be restored through certain processes. This restoration in extreme cases results in so-called honor killings, but other forms of violence, as well as social exclusion and/or confinement to the home are more common and also regarded as restoring family honor (Ouis, 2009).

Specifically, Amir H. Jafri notes that although honor killings are often associated with Islam, the practice has also existed historically in non-Muslim societies. He indicates that the notions of honor which lead to the killings are a part of tribal cultures. Most importantly, Jafri emphasizes that honor killings are not an Islamic ritual (Jafri, 2008). For example, Robert Fisk observes that, per capita, the Jordanian Christian community is responsible for more honor killings than the Jordanian Muslim population (Fisk, 2010). Jafri explains that honor killings are common in tribal societies regardless of religious factors (Jafri, 2008). In Lebanon, statistics are difficult to come by, but according to Kim Gattas, an estimated one Lebanese woman per month is murdered in an honor killing (Gattas, 2001). Researchers at the U.S. Department of State estimate that it is more likely that there are two to three Lebanese women killed each month in honor killings (“Lebanon: Country Reports on Human,” 2003). There is no breakdown by confession available, but it appears that every Lebanese woman is affected by honor killings regardless of religious affiliation. Lebanese Christian sects are often portrayed as more open and Western-oriented than Muslim and Druze sects (Phares, 1995). However, single mothers in Lebanese Christian communities are at a high risk of becoming victims of honor crimes, including honor killings (“Lebanon: Risks for Single Christian,” 2004). In all, honor killings have traditionally defined Lebanese women’s lives regardless of their confessional background.
Lastly, Lebanese women's lives have been defined by the personal status codes. While there are national laws which cover penal code, labor law, citizenship, and contract obligations, any laws concerning individual status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are decided at a confessional level by religious authorities (Shehadeh, 2010; Accad, 1990). As Lamia Rustum Shehadeh notes, because personal status codes vary by religious community, Lebanese women are held at varying standards regarding their rights (Shehadeh, 2010).

According to Evelyne Accad, the personal status codes attempt to control women and keep them exclusively for the men of their communities. For example, if two Lebanese citizens of differing confessions wished to marry, there is no civil marriage within Lebanon, which means that one or the other would have to convert to another religion. In practice this has contributed to people generally not marrying outside of their confessional community (Accad, 1990).

In conclusion, patriarchy is present in all societies at some level. Mirna Lattouf asserts that Lebanese women of all religious and socioeconomic backgrounds share much in common (Lattouf, 2004). Overall, Lebanese women have felt the presence of patriarchy most strongly in the structure of the family, a distinct public/private divide, the cultural notion of honor, and the personal status codes of Lebanese law. These institutions generally affected how Lebanese women experienced their lives during the civil war, and knowledge of these four institutions will aid in understanding women's groups’ activism.

2.7 Lebanese Women's Experiences during the War Years

Women’s wartime experiences during the Lebanese civil conflict were diverse. However, Julinda Abu Nassr maintains that in general, women suffered psychologically, economically, politically, and socially as a result of the war (Abu Nassr, 1996). Obviously, regardless of gender, sect, or ethnicity, anyone living in Lebanon during the war suffered tremendously.
According to Edgar O’Ballance, all Christian and Muslim militias targeted civilians of opposing religions and each confessional group suffered massacres at the hands of other militias. Undoubtedly, the Palestinians, a group largely not discussed here due to the narrow topic of this thesis, suffered the most of any group as they bore the brunt of Israeli raids, bombardments, and massacres. However, the Shi’a also experienced tremendous suffering at the hands of the Israelis in a protracted occupation and in constant Israeli attacks. And while Christians in East Beirut experienced some heavy bombing at the hands of the Syrians, it was West Beirut, with its majority of Muslims, which was targeted by Israel with more frequent bombardments (O’Ballance, 1998).

Overall, as in any wartime situation, daily living conditions were harsh on all Lebanese citizens. However, Abu Nasser insists conditions were especially difficult for women (Abu Nassr, 1996). Women’s direct involvement in war activities will be discussed in another section. This section will highlight women’s responsibilities for the day-to-day survival of the family during the war which resulted in women's increased visibility in the labor force, in higher education, and in utilizing women's rights.

Abu Nassr calls women the “basic managers” of Lebanese domestic and family affairs (Abu Nassr, 1996). Regardless of women’s confessional affiliation or socioeconomic position, Lebanese society views it as women’s responsibility to manage the private sphere of the home (Hijab, 1988; Lattouf, 2004). Therefore, according to Jean Said Makdisi, it fell mainly on women to obtain the daily necessities of candles, blankets, food, and water which were scarce throughout the war years (Makdisi, 1997). Maha Samara describes women as risking their lives to run out in lulls of fighting to the bakery, well, and supermarket to gather supplies (Samara, 1987a). Sending children to school was another daily difficulty. In fact, schools across the nation had shut down
after the initial fighting in April 1975. However, as the result of the efforts of female teachers, schools stayed open after November 1975 which enabled children to continue their education (Abu Nassr, 1996). Makdisi also describes women as providing emotional, psychological, and physical comfort to their families during the war (Makdisi, 1997). In fact, women were burdened by much care-taking. For example, it was women's responsibility to care for those who suffered from disabilities and injuries as result of the war, along with the elderly and sick, and of course their own children (Osseiran, 1995; Samara, 1987a). Additionally, many women also experienced dislocation from their homes as internally displaced persons (IDPs) which only added to their daily suffering (Ghanem and Makhoul, 2009).

Several major changes for women manifested as a result of the war, and were mainly due to the daily challenges women faced as described above. According to Ilham Kallab, many Lebanese women became defacto heads of household and breadwinners. Men were killed a result of the fighting, but large numbers of men also emigrated overseas to find work in order to support their families. This left women in charge and led to an increased female presence in the labor force\(^1\) (“Ilham Kallab: Women and War,” 1984). In fact, even when men were with their families, women often still sought work due to financial difficulties. According to Abu Nassr, inflation in Lebanon was at 300 percent in the mid-1980s, and by 1992 it was at 1000 percent. The urban cities saw a dramatic increase in the female work force as women sought jobs out of dire economic need (Abu Nassr, 1996). Women worked chiefly as teachers, clerks, secretaries, telephone operators, hospital orderlies, factory workers, and sales associates. As Samara emphasizes, many women were entering the field of paid labor for the first time. Although

\[^{1}\text{No mention in the available literature was found concerning the subject of elderly men who, presumably, were not fighting in the war.\text{}}\]
women often worked menial jobs, the income which they earned supported their families (Samara, 1987a).

Although neither Ilham Kallab nor Julinda Abu Nassr qualify in their above arguments that it was in fact middle and upper class women who were turning to paid work for the first time, this can be inferred from the research done by Malek Hassan Abisaab. According to Abisaab, socioeconomically disadvantaged Lebanese women had been working for wages for decades. He chronicles the course of female laborers in Lebanon who began working in the silk industry in the mid-nineteenth century through women’s later involvement in the tobacco industry beginning in the early twentieth century. In fact, many women continued to work in the tobacco industry throughout the civil war period. Working class Maronite, Shi’a, and Druze women were involved in both the earlier silk industry as well as in tobacco production where they mainly labored in factories but at times in the fields. Certainly for economically disadvantaged Lebanese women, working outside of the home was not a development of the war (Abisaab, 2001).

A second major change as a result of the war was an increase in women’s education. Samara notes that numerous women went to night school to learn secretarial, computer, and advertising skills in order to qualify for desperately needed jobs (Samara, 1987a). Abu Nassr observes that in rural villages young women who reached the age of marriage often had no viable suitors as most men were either fighting or had been killed. As a consequence of this, many women who otherwise would have ended their schooling to become stay-at-home wives and mothers instead pursued their education (Abu Nassr, 1996). According to Aisha Harb Zureik, education was seen as a way to obtain economic security since many parents feared that their daughters would be unable to marry and would likely have to support themselves (“The Effects
of the War on University,” 1991). Additionally, Valentine M. Moghadam emphasizes that the war created a new interest in female university education. She believes that the economic crisis caused by the war made parents of girls view a university education as a good investment. Parents saw that such an education could help their daughter to attract a more financially well-off husband and additionally viewed a college degree as a safety net should their daughter be unable to marry, or become divorced or widowed (Moghadam, 2003).

Nevertheless, Samih Boustani and Nada Mufarrej reveal that most Lebanese women who obtained a university education during the civil war studied mainly conventional feminine disciplines, such as the arts. According to Boustani and Mufarrej, jobs traditionally available to Lebanese women with a secondary education were limited to secretary and elementary school teacher, both of which were low paying. However, during the war, even highly educated women studied lower-paying fields such as nursing, midwifery, teaching, and social work. Nonetheless, between 1975 and 1990, the percentage of women with a college degree who worked tripled from 3.3 percent to 9.3 percent (Boustani and Mufarrej, 1995). Overall, Lebanese women went from comprising 20.45 percent of the total working population in 1975, to composing 27.80 percent of the working population in 1990 (“World Demographic Estimates and Projections,” 1988). According to Mona Khalaf, official statistics reveal that most of the female population worked in Beirut, with more than half of the female labor force concentrated in mid-level positions in the public and service sectors. However, Khalaf cautions that much of the female labor force from this time period has been underestimated as the agricultural work performed by women for their families was largely unaccounted for. Finally, Khalaf stresses, as previously noted, that it was economic need which pushed most women into the labor force during the war (Khalaf, 1993).
However, despite the increase in women’s education and women in the labor force, the literature concerning women’s rights during and after the war reveals that Lebanese women largely did not make long-term gains in equality as a result of the war. Nonetheless, Kirsten Schulze maintains that women’s opportunities did open up during the war even if only temporarily (Schulze, 1998). Makdisi echoes this sentiment by agreeing that although women gained independence during the war as they navigated the many crises created by the fighting on their own, this independence ultimately did not translate into new rights after the war. Makdisi asserts that since women were never a part of the power structures of the various militias that ran Lebanon during the war, new rights could not be secured. Therefore, initially, the war did cause most Lebanese women to take on new roles in which they shouldered greater responsibility, thus increasing their self-confidence and independence. However, daily survival took precedence to demands for equality, which Makdisi argues were largely suspended during the war (Sabbagh, 1996). Hala Maksoud asserts that this narrative continued after the war. According to Maksoud, there was so much destruction as a result of the fighting that women were preoccupied with repairing their lives and had little time to focus on issues of gender equality (Maksoud, 1996).

Yet there have been scholars such as Abu Nassr who has pointed out that the civil war did produce some favorable results for women such as the already noted increased enrollment in education at all levels and an upsurge in the female work force (Abu Nassr, 1996). Additionally, Samara argues that the war allowed many women to prove to themselves that they could overcome hardships as well as work outside the home (Samara, 1987a). Nevertheless, a UNICEF report confirms that Lebanese women were still left out of political leadership roles and in high-level political decision-making even five years after the civil war (“The Situation of Children and Women,” 1995).
Overall, the civil war led to increased female visibility in the labor force, in higher education, and in women's rights. These positive results of the war must be tempered with the more negative aspects of war. Even though many women took on new responsibilities which allowed them to grow, the war also wrought violence on women’s lives.

2.8 Wartime Violence against Lebanese Women

During the war years, Lebanese women both witnessed and experienced profound episodes of violence. According to Nelda LaTeef, approximately 150,000 people were killed as a result of the war, while about 425,000 were wounded. LaTeef also asserts that an estimated 875,000 Lebanese left the country to become refugees in order to avoid the fighting (LaTeef, 1997). Another nearly 1,000,000 became internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Lebanon, mainly in Beirut, in an attempt to flee the fighting in their villages or towns (LaTeef, 1997; Ghanem and Makhoul, 2009). The prominent themes which surround wartime gendered violence in Lebanon include a denial of female rape victims, evidence to suggest that there were indeed women raped, and finally, the fact that there was a great deal of general wartime violence which women experienced.

It is unknown how the above statistics on those killed and wounded during the war break down along gender lines. In fact, as scholars such as Lamia Rustum Shehadeh emphasize, there are no official records of those killed or injured as a result of the war, making it unclear exactly how many suffered (Shehadeh, 1999a). However, according to Laure Moghaizel, in a war where kidnappings by militia fighters for ransom were commonplace, female kidnapping victims were a rarity (Osseiran, 1995). More importantly, Adnan Houballah contends that women were seldom rape victims. According to Houballah, the various militias of Lebanon made a tacit pact with one another to refrain from targeting women (Sfeir, 2003). It is striking to note how rarely
rape is mentioned in the majority of literature concerning Lebanese women’s wartime experiences. Even in the volume *Women and War in Lebanon* edited by Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, one of the most comprehensive collections on the subject, rape is never once addressed (Shehadeh, 1999a).

Moghaziel suggests that the main reason that women were seen off limits was due to their status as *harim*, by which she means “protected” or “forbidden” (Osseiran, 1995: 16). As Sheila K. Webster notes, when an Arabic speaker uses the term *harim*, he or she may be referring to the portion of the home which is reserved for women only, the house itself, or the female members of a family. Webster asserts that Arab societies have historically viewed women, embodied as either wife or mother, as a man’s refuge from the outside world in much the same way that a home serves as a haven from the public sphere (Webster, 1984). Thus, Moghaizel believes that women were largely seen as off-limits to the fighters because they embodied this traditional concept of a man’s sanctuary. Moghaizel has also proposed that Lebanese females were not targeted due to the issues surrounding women and honor (Osseiran, 1995). As previously noted, family honor in Lebanon is tied to an unmarried woman’s virginity as well as to the fidelity of married women (Accad, 1990; Ouis, 2009). Jean Said Makdisi views this association of women with honor as bestowing a special status on females which she argues helped to protect women from rape during the war (Makdisi, 1997).

Nonetheless, Makdisi also admits that throughout the war, rumors of women being raped by militiamen abounded. She notes that the rape of a man’s female relative would be considered the ultimate humiliation to him as it would reveal his inability to protect “his” women (Makdisi, 1997). Cynthia Enloe points out that when a man fails to defend “his” women from being raped by men of other ethnic or religious communities, it often causes him to feel intensely
emasculated (Enloe, 2000a). Additionally, within the context of Lebanon, a man who failed to protect his female relatives from rape would be considered by the larger society to have lost his family honor (Accad, 1990). All of this together would likely have provided ample motivation for militia fighters to target women from other sects. Incidentally, Samantha Wehbi’s research also suggests that Lebanese women are hesitant to report rape. In a society where rape can result in honor killings or loss of reputation, it would make sense that many rapes, if not most, would go unreported (Wehbi, 2002). Finally, there is an extensive scholarly literature which links the general concepts of rape and war (Enloe, 2000b; Farwell, 2004; Zurbriggen, 2010). Based on this combined evidence, it is probable that rape was not unheard of during Lebanon’s civil war.

The last major point in women’s experience with wartime violence acknowledges the extremity of the fighting. In general, the violence which gripped Lebanon over the course of the war resulted in hundreds of kidnappings and massacres. According to Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, after 1982, car bombings and the use of explosives also became commonplace. Car bombings were noted for killing far more innocents than intended targets. Shehadeh observes that women expressly suffered the most in the explosions that militias set off, as such explosions were usually detonated near supermarkets and timed to explode when the markets would be the busiest. Since it was mainly women who did the shopping, women were the most likely to die or become injured in these blasts (Shehadeh, 1999a). Finally, Beiruti women in particular saw an incredible amount of street fighting, usually involving extensive machine gun battles, between various militias. Females living in Beirut also experienced long periods of bombardment, especially at the hands of the Israeli military (Bryce, Ghorayeb, Kanj, and Walker, 1988).

In conclusion, gendered wartime violence during Lebanon’s civil war was defined by denial of female rape victims, convincing signs that women were in fact likely raped, and finally
by the general violence of war which affected women. Wartime violence caused profound hardships for women in which suffering occurred at many levels (Abu Nassr, 1996). Women dealt with these hardships in varying ways.

2.9 Lebanese Women's Coping Mechanisms

A study by Elie G. Karam, Sabah Saliba, and Rima Al Atrash confirms that women experienced tremendous psychological suffering due to the war, and that they were one-and-a-half times more likely to be clinically depressed than their male counterparts. Although both men and women experienced depression, insomnia, changes in appetite, fatigue, the inability to concentrate, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, and/or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the war, women often experienced different symptoms than men (Al Atrash, Karam, and Saliba, 1993). For example, Leila Farhood reveals that women were more likely than men to endure headaches, dizziness, nausea, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Additionally, more women experienced increased instances of crying, a greater loss of interest and pleasure, and more feelings of sadness and loneliness than did most men. Women also had more difficulties concentrating and making decisions than did the majority of men (Farhood, 1999). Women primarily dealt with these psychological issues in three ways: by writing, by using drugs, and by finding solace in religion (Accad, 1990; Cooke, 1988; Sfeir, 2003; Chami et al, 1999; Holt, 1999).

Scholars Evelyne Accad and Miriam Cooke have documented the prolific literature published by Lebanese female novelists during the war. Accad claims that writing became a healing process for many women, such as the renowned novelists Hanan al-Shaykh and Etel Adnan. Accad believes that women wrote mainly as a way to deal with the trauma of war (Accad, 1990). According to Cooke, the war allowed women to break out of their silence
(Cooke, 1988). This is disputed by Hala Maksoud who maintains that many Lebanese women were writing and organizing prior to the war (Maksoud, 1996). Ultimately, Samara concludes that prior to the war, female writers focused on issues of gender emancipation but that during the war, they turned to issues of suffering among the larger population (Samara, 1987b). Additionally, many women wrote memoirs about their wartime experiences including Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir* and Soha Bechara's *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon*. However, as Mona Takieddine Amyuni observes, it was not only principally middle class and upper class women who wrote about their war experiences, but it was also mainly urban women, located almost exclusively in Beirut (Amyuni, 1993).

A second way in which some Lebanese women dealt with the war was through the use of tranquilizers and other drugs. According to Adnan Houballah, women's consumption of tranquilizers, alcohol, sleeping pills, and antidepressant pills can be attributed to their desire to find calm within the stress and turmoil of war (Sfeir, 2003). Subsequent research in the postwar period has revealed that the number of female drug users during the war was much higher than originally suspected. Nevertheless, men were more likely than their female counterparts to use illicit drugs, as women mainly used tranquilizers and barbiturates. During the war, tranquilizers were available without prescription, giving women easy access to them (Chami et al., 1999).

Lastly, another coping mechanism utilized by Lebanese women was turning to their religion as a refuge. Houballah noted that women who had never veiled before began to do so during the war. He attributes this use of the *hijab* as both a way of deflecting possible rape as well as a way for women to find solace in their religion. For example, many who had never before covered would do so if a family member was killed as a result of the fighting (Sfeir, 2003). Maria Holt attributes the larger numbers of women choosing modest dress to a surge in
religious faith. Her research chronicles the rise of religious fervor among Shi’a women. As previously noted, Amal and Hizballah were popular movements among the Shi’a during the war years, and inspired significant religious activism. Shi’a women enthusiastically embraced forms of dress, behavior, and attitudes that conformed to strict interpretations of the *Qur’an* (Holt, 1999).

However, these rigid religious interpretations did not prohibit women’s activism. For example, in Bouthaina Shaaban’s research, she discovered that many Shi’a women believed that it was their religious duty to engage in activities outside of the home. To be true Muslim women, they believed that they had the responsibility to care not only for their own families but also for other members of Lebanese society. To complete their activities, many Shi’a women even depended on their husbands to shoulder some of the cooking and child care. Nevertheless, these women followed strict religious guidelines which prohibited mixing with the opposite sex and also required them to cover their bodies so that only their faces, hands, and feet were visible (Shaaban, 1988). Maria Holt surmises that the Lebanese Shia sought order and safety in strict interpretation of religion as the war turned their lives into chaos (Holt, 1999).

Overall, the civil war caused unimaginable pain, stress, and trauma on all residents and citizens of Lebanon. Women primarily dealt with these issues through writing, the use of drugs, and in religion. These coping mechanisms often influenced the kind of roles women took on during the war years.

### 2.10 Lebanese Women's Roles in the War

As previously alluded to, during the fifteen year war, most women fulfilled duties as wives and mothers. The tasks accomplished by wives and mothers focused on providing for the emotional, physical, and economic needs of their families. In addition to these roles, many
Lebanese women also engaged in combat, served in logistical and other supporting positions in militias and armies, and/or took part in humanitarian endeavors.

Although a wide segment of the literature maintains that Lebanese women did not serve in combat roles and advocated only non-violence, there were in fact a small number of women who did serve in militias (Al Atrash et al., 1993). According to Darine Al-Omari, regardless of confessional or political association, women faced similar obstacles and shared similar goals as militia personnel. For many women, the choice to fight was not only a way to preserve one's community or to advance a political cause, but also allowed them to rebel against traditionally prescribed female roles. Yet most parents did not want their daughters to serve in militias as it created suspicion about them in the larger society. Rumors often circulated about young militiawomen's sexual impurity, and militiawomen faced additional criticism for not adhering to traditional gender roles (Al-Omari, 2003).

According to Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, more Christian women served as combatants than any other religious group as they were already largely involved in activities outside of the home. Most females found themselves in artillery and infantry positions as heavy weaponry was reserved for male usage only. Moreover, those women who did fight still often found themselves performing most of the sewing, cooking, and cleaning tasks. Shehadeh observes that most female fighters, regardless of confession, saw their work as temporary and essentially “defensive.” Additionally, Shehadeh emphasizes that no Lebanese militias ever encouraged women's rights or pushed for equality between the sexes (Shehadeh, 1999c).

Another function which many women fulfilled during the war years came in providing services of support to various militias. Women would often prepare food, sew sheets, knit sweaters, and give first aid to fighters (Shehadeh, 1999c). Maria Holt reports that female non-
combatants would also aid militias by hiding weapons on their person and smuggling these arms across checkpoints to fighters (Holt, 1999). Some women have even admitted to concealing militia fighters’ weapons in their vegetable gardens (Karamé, 1999). Additionally, among the Shi’a, women frequently gathered in groups on hilltops and the balconies of buildings to supply male fighters with intelligence on Israeli troops’ locations. There were also times when Shi’a women would help militiamen escape from Israeli forces by setting tires afire in order to block streets and thus prevent the Israelis from following Shi’a fighters. Moreover, some women encouraged their husbands and sons to fight (Holt, 1999). As a final point, Kari H. Karamé argues that many women, such as East Beirut's famous Maman Aida, in addition to housing combatants, gave emotional and moral support to many fighters (Karamé, 1999).

The last area in which women were often involved during the war was in humanitarian endeavors. Julinda Abu Nassr describes women as especially involved in basic medical first aid to civilians. Women across Lebanon volunteered their time in the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Red Cross, the Family Planning Association, the Child Welfare Association, Catholic Relief Services, the Near East School of Theology, Terre des Hommes, and the United Nations Development Program (Abu Nassr, 1996; Accad, 1989). Additionally, many women gathered food, blankets, clothes, and medicines which they would donate to refugee and displaced families (Abu Nassr, 1996). Rima Zankoul notes that women comprised the majority of the staff at the Lebanese Red Cross, even at higher levels of administration. This was due to the fact that its staff was composed primarily of volunteers, and women were generally those most able to volunteer their time as men were expected to provide financially for their families (Zankoul, 1991).
While women's primary roles were emphasized as being wives and mothers, women nevertheless fulfilled other functions during the civil war. Lebanese women engaged in combat, served in logistical and other supporting roles in militias and armies, and/or took part in humanitarian endeavors. Yet one of the most overlooked roles of women during the war was their involvement in women's groups’ activism.

2.11 History of Women’s Activism in Lebanon

As noted above, there is a long history of women's groups' activism in Lebanon. Women of all confessions have been organizing around anti-colonial, nationalist, and/or women's rights movements since at least the time of Ottoman rule (Maksoud, 1996). It is important to understand that the activism performed by women during the civil war was not without precedence as scholars such as Miriam Cooke have implied (Cooke, 1988). In general, women's groups' activism in Lebanon has been noted for its female-oriented magazines, the promotion of women's access to public life through charity work, women’s labor organizing, and finally by the advent of the Lebanese Women's Council.

The first major avenue of activism pursued by Lebanese women was in the form of female-focused magazines. Bouthaina Shaaban has documented two journals founded in 1912 and 1914 respectively, by Lebanese women which focused on women's rights. According to Shaaban, these magazines called upon its readers to learn from Western women's experiences in fighting for rights while at the same time maintaining the positive attributes of Arab culture (Shaaban, 1993). Elizabeth Thompson notes that after World War I, Lebanese women continued to establish magazines focused on the suffrage movement, and which also highlighted indigenous female Arab role models from both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras (Thompson, 2000). However, Malek Hassan Abisaab emphasizes that women’s magazines
served a literate female elite and thus dealt with issues which pertained exclusively to upper and middle class women. Additionally, he points out that the majority of women’s magazines were begun by and catered to Christians, although many Muslim and Druze women did contribute articles to Christian journals (Abisaab, 2001). According to Shaaban, overall, these women’s magazines urged women to “fight for their rights” (Shaaban, 1993: 76). The focus was indeed political, and no other demand revealed that more so than the advocating for female suffrage which was a major emphasis of the female-focused magazines of this time period around World War I (Thompson, 2000).

Throughout 1920s Lebanon, there were various protests against the wearing of the veil. A young, educated Muslim woman named Nazira Zayn al-Din published a book in 1928 called *Unveiling and Veiling* in which she described the face veil as against the spirit of Islam, which she believed promoted basic equality between the sexes. Another important moment in Lebanese women's activism occurred in 1928 when the Lebanese Women's Union held its first major conference (Thompson, 2000). According to Rita Stephan, the Lebanese Women's Union began in 1920 and united both Arab nationalists and leftist parties, and thus was composed of mainly Muslim women (Stephan, 2010). Although members of the Lebanese Women’s Union had initially advocated for female suffrage, by 1928 their platform focused largely on social issues such as increasing the minimum age of marriage to seventeen, ending polygamy, guaranteeing women equal inheritance rights, and obtaining greater power for women to initiate divorce (Thompson, 2000).

This change in demands was the result of a strategy based on a concept Thompson calls “patriotic motherhood” which sought to promote women's involvement in the public arena without being controversial. From this point on, women's activism shifted toward demanding
civil and social rights that would allow women to perform charity work in order to become better mothers. Charity work was proclaimed a patriotic service to the nation which would allow women to prove their loyalty to Lebanon (Thompson, 2000). According to Haneefa al-Khatib, since the early 1800s, Lebanese women had been active in charity organizing (al-Khatib, 1984; Hijab, 1988). Nadia Hijab maintains that although it had not always been overtly political in nature, being involved in charity programs certainly increased women's presence in the public eye (Hijab, 1988). Stephan maintains that charity work allowed women an avenue into public life that did not violate social norms since it reflected women's traditional caring role. Ultimately, however, Stephan argues that the push for charity work was a feminist act since it focused on expanding women’s role into the public sphere (Stephan, 2010).

Although Rita Stephan, Haneefa al-Khatib, Nadia Hijab, and Elizabeth Thompson do not specifically address the issue of class or education in their analyses, Maleek Hassan Abisaab notes that the push for charity organizing was promoted by elite Lebanese women who have historically been the most outspoken of Lebanese female activists. Abisaab explains that elite women lived in financial comfort, and that in addition to pushing for charity work, such women also focused on gaining access to education. These were issues that economically disadvantaged women had little time to consider as they barely made enough to eke out a living. Abisaab argues that elite women lacked a clear understanding of the lives of the less financially well-off. Essentially, two forms of female activism arose, with elite women seeking avenues which would increase their authority within the home while economically disadvantaged women sought to elevate their status in the work place (Abisaab, 2001).

In fact, according to Abissab, working class women specifically sought increased bargaining power within the work place in order to gain access to better wages. Indeed, working
women often had difficulties even preserving their jobs. Many industries practiced temporary hiring measures in which women would be hired for a few months, only to be let go. This allowed employers more control of their female workforce as the women were constantly new and thus more vulnerable. Women became involved in several labor strikes which began taking place after 1945. During such strikes, some women were central leaders in the movements. Female laborers, both Muslim and Christian, focused particularly on the issues of equal pay for equal work and job permanency. During the labor protests which occurred from 1946-1967, many women were killed or permanently injured by the police sent to break the strikes up. Working women’s greatest achievement came in 1967 when they gained the right to equal pay for equal work and were finally awarded the minimum wage that their male counterparts had always received (Abisaab, 2001).

Overall, Abisaab’s research indicates that issues of class have historically divided Lebanese women significantly more so than religious issues. Socioeconomically disadvantaged women often united across sectarian divides to work together on issues that would increase their bargaining power within the workplace while, as mentioned above, elite women largely ignored the plight of lower class women who regularly faced challenges in feeding and sheltering themselves and their families. In general, class differences explain more about the divides in the Lebanese women’s movement than do sectarian considerations (Abisaab, 2001).

Finally, another major phase of Lebanese women's activism prior to the civil war occurred in the 1950s. In 1952, seven activists formed a committee composed of members from the Lebanese Women's Union and the only other major women's organization, the Christian Women Solidarity Association, which sought to unite both Muslim and Christian elite female activists. The committee members created a permanent joint organization called the Lebanese
Women's Council which was an umbrella group for the country's women's organizations. Once formed, the members of the Lebanese Women's Council pressured the government until universal women's suffrage was declared in 1953. Additionally, the Lebanese Women's Council achieved other successes through its members' activism, including the right of Lebanese women to travel without their husband's written consent (Stephan, 2010). It can be inferred that these issues largely concerned an upper class female constituency, especially since a majority of their efforts related to charity work (Shehadeh, 1999b). As previously noted, working class women put their energy mainly into organizing for labor rights (Abisaab, 2001).

Lamia Rustum Shehadeh contends that while the Lebanese Women’s Council came to represent hundreds of women’s groups throughout the country and included as members of its organization women of multifarious religious backgrounds, the Lebanese Women’s Council was nevertheless not feminist and did not contribute to a national women’s movement. After acquiring female suffrage for Lebanese women, the membership of the Lebanese Women’s Council turned to social matters such as public relations efforts, holding receptions, and focusing on the transference of cooking, sewing, and knitting skills to women. According to Shehadeh, there was an insignificant amount of organizing done by members of the Lebanese Women’s Council to improve women’s lower status. Furthermore, Shehadeh maintains that there has historically been no functioning national women’s movement in Lebanon (Shehadeh, 1999b).

However, there are many scholars who disagree with Lamia Rustum Shehadeh’s assessment that Lebanon does not have a history of women’s organizing. Rita Stephan counters that Lebanon has indeed had a vibrant women’s movement with deep roots. In fact, she contradicts Shehadeh’s argument that the Lebanese Women’s Council was simply about charity work. According to Stephan, the formation of the Lebanese Women’s Council was the start of a
shift from charity work to political activism in Lebanon’s women movement (Stephan, 2010).

Similarly, Bouthaina Shaaban insists that feminism in Lebanon can be traced back to 1912 when women’s magazines promoting suffrage and other rights for women began being produced (Shaaban, 1993).

Amrita Basu distinguishes between women’s movements and feminist movements on the basis that the former encompass any social movement that is organized and performed by women and which tackles any number of goals, while the latter includes movements in which those participating work specifically to end gender inequality (Basu, 2010). This analysis closely echoes Maxine Molyneux’s gender typology of practical gender interests and strategic gender interests. This typology is used to assess whether the activism undertaken by women’s groups addresses women’s immediate needs or whether such activism directly challenges patriarchy. Molyneux views practical gender interests as addressing women's urgent needs in way that female emancipation or gender equality is not necessarily required, whereas strategic gender interests seek to alleviate women’s subordinate status (Molyneux, 1985). Basu’s distinction between women’s movements and feminist movements embraces this same line of thinking as she notes that certain actions which challenge gender inequality are what distinguish feminist movements from general women’s movements (Basu, 2010).

Based on Basu’s definition, Lebanon has indeed had a women’s movement as evidenced by the female-oriented magazines from the period around World War I, the promotion of women's access to public life through charity work beginning in the 1800s, women’s labor organizing which started in 1945, and the advent of the Lebanese Women’s Council in 1952 (Shaaban, 1993; Abisaab, 2001; al-Khatib, 1984; Hijab, 1988; Stephan, 2010). It is obvious that there were many organizing women involved in these various stages of Lebanese history.
Arguably, the women’s magazines from the period around World War I do qualify as seeking to promote women’s strategic gender interests since these magazine authors sought to promote women’s suffrage (Shaaban, 1993; Thompson, 2010).

However, once activists adopted the tactic of “patriotic motherhood” which sought to increase women’s involvement in the public sphere through charity work, practical gender interests took the forefront as they turned increasingly to social issues. Nevertheless, gaining access to the public sphere certainly did challenge gender inequality, although, as Elizabeth Thompson points out, women’s groups were no longer calling for female suffrage by the late 1920s (Thompson, 2000). Additionally, the labor organizing performed by working class women also promoted practical gender interests as these women sought improvement in their daily lives in the workplace (Abisaab, 2001). Finally, as Lamia Rustum Shehadeh contends, while members of the Lebanese Women’s Council did pressure the government into granting female suffrage along with other achievements, overall, the focus was on practical gender interests since the Council’s activism did not extensively focus on ending gender inequality (Shehadeh, 1999b; Stephan, 2010). Therefore, while Lebanon does boast a women’s movement with deep roots, it has not, however, been overtly feminist or even arguably feminist the majority of the time.

Thus, prior to the civil war, women’s activism in Lebanon was defined by women’s magazines, charity work as an avenue to public involvement, female labor organizing, and finally by the advent of the Lebanese Women’s Council in the 1950s which led to women’s suffrage. While the progress of the women’s movement was slowed as a result of the civil war, women’s groups nonetheless did not fade from the scene. In fact, several women’s groups emerged during the war years. The wartime activism of women developed from a clear history of female organizing in Lebanon.
2.12 Lebanese Women's Activism during the War

As noted, Lebanese women were active during the civil war although this has not always been acknowledged. Three main events define women's activism during the war: the demands made by members of the Lebanese Women's Council in 1975, the first national Lebanese women's conference during the war in 1983, and the 1984 march for peace in Beirut. The second portion of this section will describe two highly active women's groups, the Women's Renaissance Gathering and a disability rights group. Lastly, the final third of this section will address some of the criticism faced by female activists.

*Major Events in Women's Wartime Organizing*

The first activist stance taken by women's groups was under the aegis of the Lebanese Women's Council. According to Haneefa al-Khatib, on May 31, 1975, a ten-woman delegation from the Lebanese Women's Council presented a request to the prime minister-designate Rashid Karamé. The women demanded that the Lebanese government condemn violence as an acceptable form of political action, impose security measures, and form a new cabinet with members noted for their morality and scholarship who could then perform a study to seek the causes of the violence which began on April 13, 1975. Members of the Lebanese Women's Council followed this action with a series of demonstrations calling for peace which were held throughout Lebanon. From September through October of 1975, the Lebanese Women's Council hosted rallies in Beirut, Zahlé, Baalbeck, Tripoli, and Aley calling for an end to the fighting (al-Khatib, 1984; Shehadeh, 1999a). While this series of activists’ stands taken by the Lebanese Women’s Council was neither successful in ending the violence nor overtly feminist, these actions did involve a great deal of women’s organizing.
The second major event in the realm of women’s wartime organizing occurred in April of 1983 when the Lebanese Women's Council hosted a national conference entitled the “Role of Women in the Save Lebanon Campaign,” which focused on many feminist issues (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983: 9). According to Rose Ghurayyib and Wafa Stephan, more than 1,000 women attended the event, hailing from diverse political, literary, and diplomatic fields, who were clearly privileged professionals belonging to elite organizations. At the conference, the women of the Council cited their commitment to national unity as well as to the dedication of their services to the Lebanese government in order to ensure female integration into government policies, and specifically into the reconstruction process (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

The recommendations which came out of the 1983 Lebanese Women's Council's conference can be divided into two categories. The first category consisted of feminist demands for the integration of women into the political and social fabric of Lebanon, while the latter focused on more general demands for peace and national unity. The first recommendation under the category of female integration was a request for the creation of an official committee which would oversee the involvement of women in planning governmental policy and which would work in cooperation with various women's organizations. Additionally, another request called for a new policy to govern Lebanon which would consider women’s issues. As part of this demand, the attendants of the conference noted that the needs of elderly, rural, single, and widowed women should be of particular concern to the government (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

Furthermore, the conference attendees stressed the need for a policy which would eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In particular, they highlighted the need for the mass media to be required to portray women in a more positive light in order to help society, and women themselves, to view women more positively. The conference attendees also
demanded amendments to the penal code and civil law which would end discrimination against
women in all legal fields, as well as in the labor force. Additionally, scholars and activists at the
conference called for actions that would help women to acquire the training and education
needed to allow them to participate in leadership roles in both the public and private labor
sectors. Lastly, as part of their feminist demands, the Lebanese Women's Council recommended
a policy which would end female illiteracy while simultaneously build up female legal literacy so
that women would be aware of their rights (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

In the latter category of demands for national unity and peace, the attendants of the
Council's conference advocated for the adoption of a national system of education which they
hoped would end sub-state loyalties to confessional groups. Rather than allowing confessional
histories be taught in schools, these women urged a teaching of the history of Lebanon which
would include an account of all Lebanese groups. Additionally, the female conference attendees
also requested a unified personal status code which they believed would be a step toward true
national unity (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983). This was seen as necessary because different laws
existed regarding a woman’s ability to divorce or obtain child custody. Additionally, there
existed variances concerning women’s inheritance rights as well as the age of marriage. Such
laws were all dependent on a woman’s confessional affiliation (Accad, 1990). Attendees of the
conference felt that the Lebanese could not view themselves as a unified people if different laws
existed for different people (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

These issues surrounding the personal status laws in Lebanon have long been a
mobilizing call for feminists (Accad, 1990; Khouri, 2004). Ghada Khouri points out the inherent
unfairness of the personal status laws as discussed above, in which, for example, Christian,
Druze, and Shi’a Muslim women are able to receive the same portion of inheritance as their male
relatives, while Sunni Muslim women receive half the portion of their male counterparts (Khouri, 2004; El-Cheikh, 2001). Najla Hamadeh observes that the government’s insistence on allowing religious courts to control family law has undermined the state’s authority to ensure the equal treatment of all Lebanese citizens. Furthermore, Suad Joseph argues that the confessional system allows patriarchy to flourish as male religious authorities ensure male-dominance in the home life of most Lebanese women (Khouri, 2004). Thus, conservative elements of society want to keep the religious courts in place, and often put tremendous pressure on any initiatives that seek to take power from them (El-Cheikh, 2001).

According to Elias Muhanna, efforts to end confessionalism have long been an integral part of Lebanon’s civil society (Muhanna, 2010). However, as already noted, one of the major causes of the civil war was confessionalism (Jababra and Jabbra, 2001). Hilal Khashan reports that most Lebanese believe that their own sect deserves a special status as compared to other groups. Moreover, he also argues that because the civil war caused people to be isolated from those outside of their own communities, the war further entrenched confessionalism (Khashan, 1992). Ghurayyib and Stephan only record one concrete action that the participants of the Lebanese Women’s Council’s conference recommended to end confessionalism which was to promote the teaching of a shared history of Lebanon (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983). This alone clearly would not have been enough to end confessionalism which the war only further cemented, and there also would have been widespread opposition to such a policy by more conservative religious elements of society (Khashan, 1992; Khouri, 2004).

A second recommendation to come out of the 1983 Lebanese Women’s Council’s conference in the category of peace and unity was a nationalist call for the evacuation of all foreign troops from Lebanon. This demand came as the women looked for ways to end the
fighting, which as previously noted was exacerbated by foreign interventions (Fisk, 2002).

Overall, the Lebanese Women's Council’s conference the “Role of Women in the Save Lebanon Campaign,” was an opportunity for women's groups across the country to reconnect with one another. According to Ghurayyib and Stephan, attendees shared mixed feelings concerning the outcome of the conference. More progressive women had hoped that a plan of action would have resulted from the conference. However, the list of recommendations was simply a reiteration of what the Lebanese Women’s Council had demanded in the past. Nevertheless, the conference was deemed a success by many of the participants as it was the first time members of several women’s groups had had a successful dialogue since the beginning of the war (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

Although this conference appears to have been off the mainstream radar, feminist activism in Lebanon generally faces criticism. For example, even as recently as 2009, Jean Said Makdisi indicated that many Lebanese women were hesitant to refer to themselves as feminists due to the stigma attached to the term. She also notes that Lebanese women labeled as feminists are often accused of siding with Western imperialists or are denunciated as sell-outs to their culture or nation. While Makdisi points out that this only goes to show the paternalistic attitudes of their accusers who think that women have no minds of their own, it can nonetheless make Lebanese women wary of identifying with feminism. Additionally, Makdisi argues that feminists in Lebanon are often faulted for trying to destroy the family or for attempting to turn women against men (Mahdawi, 2009). While there is no evidence of what the reaction was to the Lebanese Women's Council's 1983 conference, it was likely ignored, mocked, or denigrated by
much of the rest of the Lebanese media as most feminist activism in Lebanon has been and continues to be.²

The third major event of women’s wartime activism was the 1984 demonstration for peace held in Beirut. Feminist activist Laure Moghaizel described the May 6, 1984 peace march as a united front composed of women and men of multiple confessional backgrounds, coming from across Lebanon to demonstrate together. The peace rally took place on the campus of Beirut University College, since renamed the Lebanese American University. Activists from labor unions also joined the rally (Osseiran, 1995). The peace march was the brainchild of Iman Khaliefeh, who was a kindergarten teacher as well as a researcher at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at Beirut University College. Khaliefeh, who studied how the war affected the lives of children, was writing poetry in the days leading up to the ninth anniversary of the start of the war. One of her poems ended with the lines, “Let us walk out of our silence and scream in one voice.../No to the war... No to the 10th year” (“No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984: 4). This poem inspired her to devise a plan for a mass demonstration against the war. The slogan for the march would be “No to War.” Khaliefeh called her contacts in Beirut to inform them of her planned demonstration which she envisioned as cutting through the political boundaries of Beirut's East/West division (“No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984; “Participation of Women in Politics during,” 1990).

The event was organized by a nonpartisan committee comprised of both Muslims and Christians. The planning committee envisioned the peace rally as a silent demonstration in which concerned citizens from both sides of Beirut would march toward one another. Since Beirut was divided by the so-called “green line” which separated Christian East Beirut from Muslim West

² Despite a thorough review of the literature available in English, there was no indication of what the mainstream reaction to this conference was.
Beirut, the demonstration was to show the symbolic union of the two sides as both Christians and Muslims would demand the disarmament of Lebanon’s many militias (“No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984; Aghacy, 1998; Friedman, 1984). Unfortunately, the march was brought to an end by shelling from unidentified militia fighters which caused at least twenty-two civilian deaths and wounded approximately 130 civilians (Accad, 1989; Friedman, 1984). Reportedly, the organizers believed that thousands of Beirut’s citizens of all confessions and ages, and women as well as men, were expected to join together alongside one another in the march. In fact, approximately 50 committees associated with local high schools, universities, and hospitals were formed in the lead up to the march in order to provide transportation (“No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984; Friedman, 1984; Osseiran, 1995).

While the peace march was canceled, the rally did conclude with a successful sit-in in front of the parliament building in order to make the government aware of activists' demands for peace (Osseiran, 1995). The events of May 6, 1984 were intended to be as much of an indictment of the militias as of the politicians. Both ordinary citizens and activists held politicians equally responsible for Lebanon’s long war (Friedman, 1984). Additionally, many activists plastered the infamous “green line,” which divided Beirut, with posters demanding peace. Moreover, a circulated petition begun by Khalifeh produced over 70,000 signatures from ordinary women and men of all confessional backgrounds calling for peace (Osseiran, 1995). While Khalifeh never specified precisely what she meant in her call for peace as embodied by her slogan, “No to War,” it is obvious that she meant at a bare minimum the disarmament of all militias as well as a concerted effort by the politicians to compromise with one another in order to bring an end to the fighting (Osseiran, 1995; Friedman, 1984).
In a speech made by Khalifeh in December of 1984, she indicated that her inspiration for designing the peace march centered on her concern for children. She stated, “The war robbed these children [of] their childhood as it robbed many others like myself [of] the chance to plan for a future” (“The Right Livelihood Awards 1984,” 2012). Khalifeh cited that what ultimately moved her to compose her poem “No to War” was witnessing one particular instance when some children on a playground were carried to safety by their parents during an outbreak of fighting (“The Right Livelihood Awards 1984,” 2012). Based on this speech, it is evident that maternalism played a role in Khalifeh’s activism. However, it remains unclear how many women were also inspired based on their identities as mothers to join in the demonstration.

While the three major women’s activist events of the war were the demands made to the government by the Lebanese Women’s Council delegation in 1975, the first national women's groups' conference during the war which occurred in 1983, and lastly, the 1984 march for peace in Beirut, women nevertheless participated in other public events. For example, Wafa Stephan notes that female activists held a press conference in August of 1983 as participants of a coalition of various women's organizations in order to call for the re-establishment of the Lebanese League of Human Rights (Stephan, 1984). Additionally, Evelyne Accad has documented the many international conferences in which elite Muslim and Christian women participated. In particular, female professionals and activists attended the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen, the Twenty-first Triennial Congress of the World International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Connecticut, and the Seventeenth Congress of the International Board on Books for Young People in Prague (Accad, 1989). Attendees of the International Board on Books for Young People conference in Prague included Rose Ghurayyib, a novelist and researcher, as well as Julinda Abu Nassr, then director of the
Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (Accad, 1989; Ashour, Ghazoul, Reda-Mekdashi, 2008; “Long-Time Colleague Nuha,” 2008). Likewise, attendees of the Decade for Women conference in Copenhagen were also privileged scholars and activists (Zinsser, 2002).

Additionally, Maha Samara observes that fifteen well-known professional women attended a conference in Paris on October 22, 1987 in which these academics and activists described women’s wartime experiences to an international audience. Specific attendees of the Paris conference included Illham Kallab, a professor whose research focused on education; May Hazzaz, a professor of social work; Laure Moghaizel, the celebrated feminist activist; and Marie-Thérèse Khair-Badawi, a professor of psychology (Samara, 1987b; “Ilham Kallab, Arab Thought,” 2009; Stephan, 2010; “May Hazaz, Who Is,” 2012). While Mona Takieddine Amyuni points out that May Hazzaz’s presentation at the conference focused on women of lower socioeconomic status, specifically on their particular experiences during the war, the conference was only attended by educated women of privilege (Amyuni, 1993; Samara, 1987b).

Case Studies

The second portion of this section on women’s organizing during the civil war will provide a detailed account of two highly active women's associations that were created during the war years, which were the Women's Renaissance Gathering and a disability rights group. Abir Ward describes the women's group known as Tajamu’ al-Nahda al-Nisa’iya (Women’s Renaissance Gathering), as forming in 1979 in Beirut, where it continued to function throughout the remainder of the civil war. It was an inter-ethnic organization that eventually established chapters throughout Lebanon, all of which worked in coordination with the main branch in Beirut. The Women's Renaissance Gathering sought to help women and their children find
normalcy in war, promote efforts to end the war, and advocate for women's rights through social, economic, and educational activities (Ward, 2009).

Although the Women's Renaissance Gathering was created by a group of female members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), most of its membership hailed from outside the party. Moreover, the Women's Renaissance Gathering members belonged to various confessional sects, and although founded by elite women, its members came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Specifically, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering was composed of female socialites, farmers, and artisans, as well as Christian, Muslim, and Druze women. In order to overcome the many social divisions which separated them, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering required that all members perform the same work so that no one was viewed as receiving special treatment (Ward, 2009).

One of the main tenets of the organization was to help Lebanese children. Members of the Women's Renaissance Gathering believed that the war was forcing children to grow up too quickly, and that children were experiencing negative effects due to the war's violence. For example, the Baakleen chapter of the organization turned a small building into the House of the Child where women hoped to give their children respite from the war by offering music, art, and martial arts classes, as well as a scout's club. Members wanted to provide their children with some sense of stability despite the chaos of the war. Branches of the Women's Renaissance Gathering throughout Lebanon offered activities for mothers to do with their children, including attending carnivals, theatrical performances, and poetry readings (Ward, 2009).

Another aspect of the Women's Renaissance Gathering's mission was to help their communities. Members generally viewed such service to their communities as exemplifying their roles as mothers, sisters, and daughters. The Women's Renaissance Gathering branches would
often partner with local humanitarian and social organizations to help bridge divides in their
towns and villages. In the Baakleen chapter, one of the better known chapters of the group
because it published a magazine which chronicled its activities, members realized that many
women were facing financial difficulties as a result of the war. Therefore, the organization
instituted a project which trained women to make handicrafts which the Women's Renaissance
Gathering then helped bring to market. Another manner in which women served their
communities was during the Israeli invasion when the Baakleen chapter's membership wanted to
resist the assault on their community without resorting to violence. Women's activism thus took
the form of a community kitchen where women prepared food for the men of their town who
spent long shifts guarding the borders from Israeli attack (Ward, 2009).

The final major area of the Women's Renaissance Gathering's activism related to
women's rights. Part of their mission statement was “to elevate the educational, occupational,
and social stature of women, as well as to defend and protect her rights in all domains” (Ward,
2009: 389). One way in which the Women's Renaissance Gathering worked toward this goal was
by changing the way that Lebanese women usually defined themselves, which was almost
strictly in relation to men, as their wives, mothers, and/or daughters. According to Ward, a
Lebanese woman is usually known by the term *Um* (mother) followed by the name of her eldest
son. In fact, a common saying in Lebanon relates that a woman without a man, exemplified as
father, husband, or son, is “like an insignificant bark of wood which does not belong to a tree”
(Ward, 2009: 390). The Women’s Renaissance Gathering tried to challenge the practice of
women deriving their identity only terms of their relationships to men by turning one of the
group’s main focuses to women. They did this by holding meetings in which they analyzed
women's social status in order to raise awareness of this issue as well as to encourage women to
look beyond their roles as housewives and mothers. For example, the group pushed women to be leaders in their communities. By advocating working outside the home, especially in positions such as vendors and bank tellers which opened up during the war, but also through volunteer work such as associated with the Women’s Renaissance Group, the organization tried to push women to the center of Lebanese society (Ward, 2009).

Another way in which the Women’s Renaissance Gathering promoted women’s rights was through its magazine which showcased the organization’s efforts. As previously mentioned, the Baakleen branch of the Women's Renaissance Gathering published a magazine which was sent to the other chapters, and which was also sold in local bookstores and mini-markets across Lebanon. The magazine was entitled Abeer (fragrance) and featured articles describing the activities of the group as well as poems and short stories written by members. Since it was a multi-author platform open to all members of the Women’s Renaissance Gathering, it was an opportunity for women to write as a way to both vent and reflect on their wartime experiences. In addition, Abeer included interviews with local leaders of the Baakleen community, as well as with the leadership of the Women's Renaissance Gathering. Articles on music and art were also prominent in the magazine. Overall, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering organized to provide women and their children with some normalcy during the war, promote efforts to end the war, and advocate for women's rights (Ward, 2009).

Likewise, another highly active group that also began during the war was one dedicated to women living with disabilities. Unlike the Women’s Renaissance Gathering which concentrated on not only women but also children, and particularly women’s relationships to their own children, this organization was more narrowly focused on women’s issues, specifically women with disabilities. Samantha Wehbi’s study on this unnamed grassroots disability rights
organization, which was founded in 1981, reveals that women with disabilities were involved in activism during the war (Wehbi, 2010).

In fact, according to Wehbi, these women with disabilities were active in front-line emergency medical relief services across Lebanon, at which time they went into areas being shelled in order to ensure that those with disabilities were properly evacuated. In the terror and panic of a bombing, able-bodied people often left their family members with disabilities in the house. Therefore, the disability rights groups’ members would enter such locations to ensure that everyone was safely vacated from targeted areas. Moreover, these female disability rights activists distributed supplies to those living in displacement centers. Through their medical relief services, the group also ensured that those with disabilities in the displacement camps were both being respected as well as having their needs met. Interestingly, no other organization in Lebanon focused on individuals with disabilities during the civil war period. Lastly, in addition to helping those on the ground, female members also helped to raise awareness around disability rights issues through not only their active participation in the organization, but also by using the war's many victims to demonstrate the difficulties faced by those living with disabilities (Wehbi, 2010).

In Wehbi's study of this unnamed organization advocating for disability rights, she describes the group as dedicated to on an on-going analysis of the intersections of disability, gender, and neocolonialism. Only those women living with disabilities could become official members of the organization, although women without disabilities were allowed to be either staff members or volunteers. Additionally, membership included women from across Lebanon, from various religious affiliations, and also from multiple socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, Wehbi argues that this particular group helped its female members to realize that as women
living with disabilities, they had many options and were not reduced to staying at home. In interviews which Wehbi conducted with members, many women reported that prior to joining this organization they were resigned to their homes. This group helped Lebanese women with disabilities to find an outlet. For example, a member named Laila indicated that after she received a permanent war-time injury as a young woman, she felt that she could no longer attend college or become employed, believing she was homebound. However, upon joining the organization, she realized that she was capable of organizing, working, and helping others. Members learned self-reliance through their activism which was especially significant because mainstream Lebanese society viewed women with disabilities as unable to take care of themselves, much less capable of active involvement in society (Wehbi, 2010).

The two associations, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering and the unnamed disability rights group which Samantha Wehbi chronicled, provide excellent examples of what women’s activism was like during the war years. The organizations were similar in many ways, yet also quite different from one another. A conspicuous note of divergence between the Women’s Renaissance Gathering and the disability rights group, as alluded to above, is that the latter did not concern itself with the issue of children, whereas the former devoted a substantial amount of its time and resources to children’s interests. However, some members of the disability rights group did express that their motivation for activism was rooted in motherhood. The issue of motherhood will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, but as Wehbi notes, motherhood is an important part of many Lebanese women’s lives (Wehbi, 2010). Another difference between the two organizations was in their approach to women’s activism. Clearly members of the Women’s Renaissance Gathering seemed concerned that they not portray themselves as overly feminist. For example, member Hitaf Narsh promoted the idea that phrases
such as “women’s rights” and “women’s liberation” lacked objectivity. She campaigned for improving the status of women in Lebanese society, but carefully avoided language that might be considered provocative or controversial (Narsh, 1981; Ward, 2009). In contrast, the disability rights group’s members used the term “patriarchy” frequently in describing their lives and analyzing their treatment in society (Wehbi, 2010). This usage of the term indicates these women’s familiarity with feminism as well as their embracing of feminism.

Overall, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering and the disability rights group shared much in common, such as their desire to help women become more active in the outside world and in their efforts to increase women’s social status. Additionally, the membership of both groups was diverse, with women hailing from multiple confessional and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, there were significant differences in their approaches such as the Women’s Renaissance Gathering’s efforts to downplay controversial stands while the disability rights group was more willing to openly confront sexism by using such terminology as patriarchy.

**Societal Reactions to Women’s Organizing**

The final portion of this section on women’s wartime activism will address some of the criticism faced by female activists. In addition to the Lebanese Women’s Council which sent the ten-member delegation to the government in 1975 to make demands for peace and which also held the major conference in 1983, as well as Ilham Khalifeh’s 1984 peace march, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering, and the disability rights group, there were many smaller women’s groups whose membership was also highly involved in activism throughout the civil war period. For example, according to Ghena Ismail, a committee of the Islamic Orphanage helped war widows to support themselves by training them to sew. Although this epitomized traditional gender roles, it nevertheless provided much needed skills to women so that they could financially support
themselves. For example, following their completion of the program, a lunch would be hosted in honor of each woman. Those attending the lunch were required to pay a fee which was in turn used to purchase a sewing machine for each graduate in order to ensure a greater probability of her economic success. Other organizations such as the Social Reconstruction Center in Burj El-Barajneh provided female activists with the means to help other women find access to family planning. Additionally, the activists at the Center also helped to end female illiteracy through its class offerings (Ismail, 1996).

Furthermore, Julinda Abu Nassr describes the work performed by activists at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World as helping other women to obtain access to the labor force as well as to balance their workload at home. Women at the Institute provided training in embroidery, knitting, and operating machinery, along with workshops on home management, child care, family planning, health, and nutrition. Importantly, the Institute also offered workshops on women's legal rights. Abu Nassr estimates that between 500 and 1,000 women benefited from the offerings of the Institute during the war (“The Effects of the War on University,” 1992). Such efforts on the part of the Institute included a mix of both more traditional roles for women, as well as ways for women to transcend such stereotypical gender roles.

In contrast to the more traditional methods of helping women, such as training in sewing or embroidery, services such as the Social Reconstruction Center’s family planning offerings likely faced criticism from more conservative elements of society. Certainly, the debate surrounding birth control in Lebanon has been controversial, and it is due to two main reasons. The first is a fear based on the falling population rates of one’s community, and the second is patriarchal notions of a woman’s place. As the Lebanese Family Planning Association (LFPA)
indicates on its website, from the organization’s inception in 1969 it has had to defend its existence by explaining that family planning includes more than simply contraception. In addition to the usual patriarchal concerns, controlling, or limiting, the rate of births is contentious in Lebanon because of the sectarian nature of society. In every confessional community, there are those who fear being overtaken by other communities if they fall behind in population rates (“About Us: History and Studies,” 2013).

The second reason for the controversial nature of birth control relates to traditional notions of a woman’s ability to control her life. According to Roxann A. Van Dusen, in her 1973 study of rural Lebanese Muslim and Christian women, her subjects were either afraid to inquire about contraceptives due to the stigma attached to it, or had no idea such technology was available. For those women who were aware of modern birth control, they believed that their husbands would disapprove of them using modern contraceptives (Van Dusen, 1973). Certainly, fears of being viewed as “loose” made women leery of utilizing birth control as it could compromise society’s view of their honor (Sikimic, 2010; Ouis, 2009).

Nevertheless, Nazy Roudi argues that traditional teachings of Islam do not view contraception as immoral. However, Roudi admits that it is the subordinate status of women in Islamic societies which prevents them from fully using family planning services such as birth control. Additionally, Roudi points out that traditional Christian teachings do label contraception as immoral (Roudi, 1988). While both the using and selling of birth control were legalized in 1983 with the overturning of articles 537 and 538 of the Lebanese penal code, even more recently, women are still socially stigmatized for using the birth control pill (“About Us: History and Studies,” 2013; Stephan, 2010; Sikimic, 2010). According to Simona Sikimic, even in 2010, only about fifteen percent of Lebanese women use the pill, and even usage rates for all forms of
modern birth control is only at thirty-seven percent. Messages about how the pill promotes promiscuity are widely circulated and thus most women feel too ashamed to take it (Sikimic, 2010).

While activists have had to deal with societal resistance against family planning, there has been less resistance to the promotion of female literacy. According to the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Lebanon presently has one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab world, including female literacy rates. Although both in the past and currently, women have been and still are more likely to be illiterate than males, female illiteracy is more prominent in the poverty-stricken areas of Lebanon such as the Bekaa Valley and Nabatieh where people often leave school at an early age in order to work to help support, and/or aid in raising, their families. Not surprisingly, there is a strong connection between illiteracy and poverty (“Lebanon Fight against Illiteracy,” 2006). Anita Nassar points out that when parents are financially capable of educating only some of their children, they choose their sons over their daughters. Nassar believes that this is due to the patriarchal nature of Lebanese society. Since it is the men who are expected to provide financially for their families, males are seen as needing education more so than females (Galey, 2009; Hijab, 1988). Even in 2009, Lebanese activists were still working against such patriarchal attitudes. For example, Nassar explains that more conservative elements of society have feared that female literacy is about women’s empowerment over men. Nassar, as assistant director of the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World, has had to defend the Institute’s program to combat female illiteracy by emphasizing that the literacy program is meant to provide for the partnership of women and men rather than the elevation of women over men (“Empowering Women through Literacy,” 2009).
In fact, during the civil war, women’s literacy rates continued to rise (“The Situation of Children and Women,” 1995). Thus, female literacy is less controversial in Lebanon than family planning.

Lastly, in general, Lebanese female activists faced criticism for their work, whether it was overtly feminist or not. Hitaf Narsh, a leader in the Women’s Renaissance Gathering, wrote in an essay that the group’s work should stay within the Lebanese context when it came to women’s rights. According to Narsh, it was a false dilemma to propose either women’s liberation or the confinement of women to traditional roles. Instead, she believed that women and men should work together as equal partners to address problems in society, whether that was in efforts to end the war or working for the betterment of women’s lives (Narsh, 1981; Ward, 2009). Implied in her argument is the idea that the subject of women’s rights is a controversial topic which could bring about significant resistance from the general public. Narsh’s opinions are a clear attempt to defend against any critics who would find fault if women’s activism became aggressive. As previously mentioned, Jean Said Makdisi observes that feminists in Lebanon are frequently accused by mainstream society of trying to destroy the family, attempting to turn women against men, and/or of siding with Western imperialists (Mahdawi, 2009).

Female activists surely faced criticism and particular groups more than others, depending on how far the group pushed the boundaries of acceptability. As Anita Nassar has noted, many mainstream Lebanese fear that if women gain rights they will seek to control or rule over men (“Empowering Women through Literacy,” 2009). This is why during the war many activists such as Hitaf Narsh played down the phrases “women’s rights” or “women’s liberation,” focusing instead on discussions of the need for men and women to cooperate and work together (Narsh, 1981; Ward, 2009).
Nevertheless, despite the disapproval of many of the projects undertaken by women’s groups, it must be stressed that women's organizing was prolific throughout the Lebanese civil war. The three defining activist events put on by members of women's groups during the war made demands of the government in 1975 to end the violence, reiterated requests for female inclusion in the government as well as an end to the fighting during a 1983 conference, and in 1984, made an unprecedented demand to end the fighting which was so harmful to women and the rest of society. Additionally, this section highlighted two highly engaged groups, the Women's Renaissance Gathering and a disability rights group, and also discussed some of the criticisms faced by the women involved in organizing. The following section will provide an analysis of the general form of women's groups' activism during the civil war based on Maxine Molyneux's typology of gender interests.

To briefly reiterate, in 1985, Maxine Molyneux developed a tool of analysis that sought to define the form that gender interests take in women's activism. Molyneux defines gender interests as those interests which derive from a person's social standing as it relates to their gender. According to Molyneux, gender interests break down into two categories which are strategic gender interests (SGIs) and practical gender interests (PGIs). Strategic gender interests seek to alleviate women’s subordinate status while practical gender interests address women's urgent needs which usually do not entail immediate female emancipation or gender equality. Molyneux cites strategic gender interests as those issues and actions which are deemed by many feminists as the most legitimate form of women's interests as they immediately and directly challenge patriarchy (Molyneux, 1985).
2.13 Gender Interests Typology

This next section will analyze the form of activism taken by Lebanese women during the civil war, through the use of Maxine Molyneux's gender interest typology. This tool will help to determine whether the overall form of women's activism during the civil war was overtly feminist on the basis that strategic gender interests directly challenge patriarchy and are thus distinctively feminist. Since the ultimate goal is to understand whether it is the form of women's groups' activism, motherist or feminist, which affects gains in women's rights, it is important to clearly define what is feminist in the work performed by Lebanese female activists. Obviously, the organizing performed by such individuals during the war was diverse. However, the two main goals of almost all those involved in women's groups was to end the fighting between the various militias in order to end the war, and the other was to increase women's involvement in public life. A third goal of many was to improve the status of women both socially and politically.

By approaching the prime minister-designate Rashid Karamé to demand that the government end the violence which had broken out across Lebanon, members of the Lebanese Women’s Council were addressing women's practical gender interests. These activists were concerned with the increasing levels of violence and thus held peace rallies in several cities calling for an end to the fighting. Through their plea to prime minister-delegate Karamé, members of the Lebanese Women’s Council demanded that the government end the violence. However, these actions did not directly address female subordination to men. Specifically, the women were not protesting particular forms of violence against women such as intimate partner violence or the targeting of women for rape. Nevertheless, an end to the general militia violence
would have dramatically improved women's lives, along with the rest of the Lebanese population.

This initial call for peace taken by the Lebanese Women's Council's delegation would be echoed in the activism taken by women's groups throughout the rest of the war. Attendees of the 1983 Lebanese Women's Council's conference also demanded an end to the fighting among the militias as well as the targeting of civilians by various armed groups. So too did the protestors in the 1984 peace march as called for by Iman Khalifeh. These appeals for peace were also apparent in the Women's Renaissance Gathering's work where members attempted to bring peace to their communities through children's activities as well as in art and poetry events. Similarly, the disabilities rights group's humanitarian efforts were also an extension of bringing peace to the community. In each of these examples of activism, female subordination was not directly challenged. Of course, an end to the fighting would have benefited women, along with the rest of society. Nonetheless, peace was ultimately grounded in practical gender interests.

The second major goal of Lebanese women activists during the war was helping to insert a female presence into public spaces. Whether in demonstrations for peace or other public events such as conferences, poetry readings, or in areas of shelling to provide civilians with medical attention, Lebanese women were making their presence felt. For example, members of the Women's Renaissance Gathering cooked meals in a communal kitchen which enabled them to be involved in public life, even if they were performing a traditionally female task. Likewise, women involved in humanitarian medical relief services to civilians, as well as those who provided training in sewing or other handicrafts, still encouraged women to be active outside of their homes. This type of activism may not have overtly challenged women's subordination to men, but it did lead Lebanese women to view themselves in a different light. As Lori Hartmann-
Mahmud and Gerard Huiskamp have argued, furthering women's practical gender interests have indeed empowered women and helped them to become self-actualized (Hartmann-Mahmud and Huiskamp, 2006). Yet, the above examples of women’s activism did not openly challenge women's subservient position to men and thus the promotion of women in public spaces only qualifies as addressing practical gender interests.

The third major goal of many, although not all of, Lebanese female activists during the war, was to improve the social and political status of women. This is most evident in the Lebanese Women's Council's 1983 conference which produced a series of demands that openly acknowledged female oppression in Lebanon and also made specific recommendations to combat the situation. Attendees of the conference specifically cited the need to address the discrimination that women faced in the labor force and in political spaces. Participants in the conference called for a governmental policy that would challenge patriarchy by calling for an end to the male privilege which precluded women from many employment opportunities as well as a prominent voice in government. Additionally, women at this conference focused on improving female legal literacy so that women were aware of their rights. According to Molyneux's analysis typology, actions such as these are a way of addressing women's strategic gender interests because they not only highlight women's inferior status to men, they furthermore seek to change this status.

In addition to the Lebanese Women’s Council’s 1983 conference, the Women's Renaissance Gathering also focused on women's strategic gender interests. The Women’s Renaissance Gathering’s members were noted for holding book clubs and workshops in which they analyzed the position of women in Lebanese society. For example, Hitaf Narsh, a leader in the Women’s Renaissance Gathering, voiced her belief that Lebanese women should work
alongside men to address the problems of society, particularly the violence of war, but also women’s rights (Narsh, 1981; Ward, 2009). Narsh’s proposition that women work alongside men as their partners to address problems that lay outside the private sphere suggests that the Women’s Renaissance Gathering sought a dramatic improvement in the social and political status of women. This group advocated for women to not only have opinions on political issues such as human rights, but also proclaimed that women were the equals of men and should be making decisions and policies alongside them. While Narsh clearly tried to tone down her rhetoric by declaring that phrases like “women’s rights” and “women’s liberation” lack objectivity, it is obvious from her recommendation that women and men should work together that Narsh sought to dramatically improve the social and political standing of women and openly challenged women’s subordinate position (Narsh, 1981; Ward, 2009).

Overall, according to Abir Ward, the Women’s Renaissance Gathering promoted a message about improving women’s status by bringing women from the margins of society to its center. The group put the category of woman at the heart of all discussion topics and also promoted the idea of women transgressing traditional gender roles. Specifically, the Women’s Renaissance Group encouraged all women to work outside the home, whether there was a financial need or not, as well as to take the lead in educating society about women’s issues and other issues which they found important. Taken as a whole, these actions show that the Women’s Renaissance Gathering urged women to stake a claim in Lebanese society, and not to remain at its margins, by working alongside men as equals (Ward, 2009). Following Molyneux’s guidelines, these actions are feminist since they sought to challenge women’s less valued social status.
Furthermore, since the grassroots disability rights group studied by Samantha Wehbi led women to consider their position in society based on both gender and abilities, it too promoted women’s strategic gender interests. During interviews conducted by Wehbi with several associates of the disability rights group, Wehbi discovered that the women were well-aware of the term patriarchy and used it with ease. In fact, it featured heavily in the analyses that group members gave of their lives and their work. For example, members mentioned their frustration when they were praised for their emergency medical relief efforts by being called a “sister of men” (Wehbi, 2010: 459). According to Wehbi, the Arabic expression “sisters of men” is used to describe women who perform tasks well or who gain important achievements. Wehbi argues that it is a way of associating any great feat, even when performed by a woman, with masculinity and men. Clearly, women in the group found such an expression to be problematic since it downplayed women’s achievements. The organization’s members fully believed that as women living with disabilities, they were as capable as any man or able-bodied person (Wehbi, 2010). The disability rights group fostered a direct challenge to patriarchy by disagreeing with the notion that women were less worthy or less capable than men.

Nonetheless, despite all such efforts, including the Lebanese Women's Council's recommendations of increasing women’s role in the government and the workforce, and the Women’s Renaissance Gathering and the disability rights group’s analyses of women’s social and political position, the total effect of the majority of the activism organized by Lebanese women's groups during the civil war was aimed at addressing practical gender interests. As Hala Maksoud argues, Lebanese women were naturally concerned about their own survival and that of their loved ones during the war. Maksoud notes that the majority of women did not coalesce
around a politically conscious agenda but instead spent most of their time demonstrating for an end to the fighting because the need for survival outweighed all other concerns (Maksoud, 1996).

The primary goals of almost all female activists were to end the fighting between the various militias in order to end the war and to increase women's involvement in public life. A third goal of some activists was to improve the status of women both socially and politically. While it must be acknowledged that several women's groups did focus on strategic gender interests, the majority of female activism took the form of work which addressed women's most urgent needs, mainly concerning the desire to bring an end to the war which was causing women physical, financial, emotional, and psychological suffering. Overall, Lebanese women's groups' activism focused on practical gender interests which would improve women's lives by ending the violence of war.

In conclusion, Maxine Molyneux developed the gender interests typology in order to assess whether activism undertaken by women’s groups was directly challenging patriarchy or whether it was addressing women’s immediate needs. Molyneux views strategic gender interests as seeking to alleviate women’s subordinate status while she considers practical gender interests as addressing women's urgent needs in way that female emancipation or gender equality is not necessarily required (Molyneux, 1985). Certainly, as Karina Barker, as well as Lori Hartmann-Mahmud and Gerard Huiskamp have noted, activism centered on practical gender interests does not preclude the empowerment of the women involved in organizing (Barker 2007; Hartmann-Mahmud et al., 2006). Nevertheless, Molyneux’s typology is helpful in identifying exactly what actions taken by Lebanese women during the 1975-1990 civil war were undeniably feminist. The Lebanese Women's Council's 1983 conference the “Role of Women in the Save Lebanon Campaign” produced an analysis of what forms of oppression Lebanese women faced as well as
a series of policy demands which addressed female subordination and discrimination. Additionally, both the Women’s Renaissance Gathering and the disability rights group focused on female gender equality. In each of these cases, it is apparent that some feminist activism was occurring during the war period. However, it is equally apparent that overall, the majority of the efforts of women’s groups’ organizing in the Lebanese civil war was focused on ending the fighting between the various militias in order to end the war, and on increasing women’s general involvement in public life. In both cases, this type of activism addressed mainly practical gender interests. The following table (Table 1) illustrates this point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Gender Interests</th>
<th>Women’s Actions</th>
<th>Practical Gender Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sought to integrate women into the public sphere and pushed to increase female literacy and legal literacy</td>
<td><em>Lebanese Women’s Council</em></td>
<td>Demanded government officials end militia fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td><em>1984 Peace March</em></td>
<td>Demanded an end to the fighting from both militias themselves and the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted book clubs and workshops which addressed women’s inferior status in society and encouraged women to work outside the home</td>
<td><em>Women’s Renaissance Gathering</em></td>
<td>Held poetry readings, plays, and other events to provide a sense of normalcy to the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught feminist concepts such as the meaning of patriarchy and analyzing women’s inferior status</td>
<td><em>Disability Rights Group</em></td>
<td>Provided emergency medical relief services to civilians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, defining what counted as feminist activism is important. However, female Lebanese wartime activism must also be analyzed to determine whether it was overtly motherist. The final section will highlight any women’s organizing based on maternalism.
2.14 Motherhood as Mobilization for Activism

As previously mentioned, it was common for many Lebanese women to become politically mobilized based on their maternal identity. Motherhood is an important concept in Lebanon. According to Hussain Hamzah, a woman’s role as mother embodies the highest ideal of female perfection in Arab societies. Hamzah argues that in contrast to the word “woman,” the term “mother” has no negative connotations in Arabic, and is instead purely positive. When an Arab woman becomes a mother, she is awarded a certain level of legitimacy by society. This form of legitimacy bestowed upon women by men is significant in male-dominated cultures such as those found in Arab societies (Hamzah, 2009). In fact, the importance of motherhood is so ingrained in Lebanese women that during Roxann A. Van Dusen’s interviews with Muslim and Christian women in rural Lebanon, she discovered that the women could not distinguish any differences between the duties of a wife and a mother. To the women, wife and mother were one in and the same, as any married woman was fully expected to become a mother. The naturalness of motherhood went unquestioned (Van Dusen, 1973). Moreover, Mirna Lattouf notes that regardless of religious affiliation or of socioeconomic class, Lebanese women are socialized to believe that the primary role of a woman is to be a wife and mother. According to Lattouf, in Lebanon, women are valued strictly for their “biological and sexual services to men” (Lattouf; 2004: 134).

In fact, both Mona Khauli and Jean Said Makdisi argue that it was women’s status as mothers which often protected women from many horrors during the war. Khauli asserts that she remained safe throughout the war even as a Christian living in Muslim-controlled West Beirut because she was respected by the young Muslim militiamen as a mother figure. According to Khauli, she would even scold the fighters without being “talk[ed] back to” or, more importantly,
endangering her own safety (King-Irani, 1995:27). Similarly, Jean Said Makdisi concludes that she was able to save both herself and her son from an uncertain fate when they were stopped at a roadblock by a heavily armed young militiaman. Makdisi claims that she spoke to the fighter using the title *hajjeh* (my son) and that the fighter felt uncomfortable insulting an older woman and thus let Makdisi and her son go (Makdisi, 1997). Instances such as these highlight the importance of mothering in Lebanon.

During the civil war, it was obvious that many women were motivated to become activists based on their maternal identity. As previously noted, Elizabeth Thomas has documented the long history of motherist mobilization which has existed in Lebanon (Thompson, 2000). This pattern continued throughout the civil war period. For example, in the Women’s Renaissance Gathering, members felt that they were serving their communities as mothers. This was especially apparent as the Women’s Renaissance Gathering devoted at least of third of its platform to children. The women sought to lessen children’s pain, fear, and the disruption of their childhood due to the war through various activities and projects such as the House of the Child. Members of the Women’s Renaissance Gathering devoted significant resources to ensuring that mothers and children would be able to spend time doing activities together, such as attending poetry and theater events. Thus, even as the organization encouraged women to view themselves beyond their roles as wives and mothers, motherhood nevertheless remained a central aspect of the women’s mobilization (Ward, 2009).

Likewise, several female activists in the disability rights group emphasized the importance of motherhood in their activism. For instance, one member, Samah, reported that her decision to become an activist was based on her experiences as a mother. Samah believes that only as a mother was she able to fully comprehend the cruelty and danger associated with war. It
was these unique feelings of a mother wanting to help deal with the violence of war which ultimately pushed her into activism. Additionally, Samah indicated that although she had been an activist for years, she felt that her most memorable time in organizing was when she served as a team leader to a group of younger women as part of her work in the disability rights organization. According to Samah, she felt that she was like a mother to these young women, and that she had tried to do everything within her power to protect them when they were under her care (Wehbi, 2010). In addition, Iman Khalifeh, who developed the 1984 Peace March, indicated that her activism was rooted in concern for children, clearly of maternal origin ("The Right Livelihood Awards 1984," 2013).

In fact, in Lebanon, even declared feminists such as Laure Moghaizel are celebrated for being wonderful mothers. An article by Samira Aghacy which discusses Moghaizel’s life documents not only her feminist activism but also highlights her achievements serving as a mother to her children. Tellingly, Aghacy writes that Moghaizel was as devoted to her role as a mother as she was to her activism (Aghacy, 1998). This example serves to emphasize the point that a woman can be both motherist and feminist at the same time. As noted in chapter one, this is a common occurrence in much of the non-Western world (Oyewùmí, 2003).

Nevertheless, in general, Lebanese motherists are critical of feminists. According to Mirna Lattouf, Lebanese women who seek to expand their rights are made to feel guilty, usually by being accused of abandoning their duties to their children (Lattouf, 2004). Zeina Zaatari notes that most Lebanese women who attempt to break free from the idea that a woman’s value is based solely on her mothering capabilities, a typical feminist tenet, run into conflict with motherhood discourses from the media, as well as from neighbors, friends, and relatives (Zaatari, 2006). Additionally, Bouthaina Shaaban has conducted several interviews with female Amal...
members whose activism is rooted in motherhood. They promoted the idea that women play a substantial role in raising their children to be responsible citizens, but also have a duty to serve the larger community. The wife of an Amal leader explained that women should not simply stay at home but become active in organizing. However, she stated, “…though I believe, of course, that every woman has a duty towards her home and children” (Shaaban, 1988: 102). Women mobilized based on their maternal identity praise women for being activists who expand their maternal duties outside of the home, but who also continue to fulfill the traditional duties associated with motherhood. Motherists are critical of women who neglect what they consider the duties of motherhood, which feminists are routinely accused of (Lattouf, 2004; Mahdawi, 2009).

Overall, this section sought to highlight the motherist mobilization in Lebanese women’s groups’ wartime activism. Motherhood is an immensely valued concept in Lebanon where women even receive admiration from men for their work as mothers. Many women were inspired to become activists during the civil war based on maternal feelings of wanting to protect and nurture. Within Lebanon, feminists are celebrated not only for their push for women’s rights, but also for their roles as mothers. Finally, motherists, like most of Lebanese society, are generally critical of feminists.

In general, the activism performed by women’s groups during the civil war period in Lebanon was not overtly feminist. Additionally, this section provides evidence that much of the activism during the war was motherist. These are two of the most important inferences to be drawn from this chapter which will be crucial factors in the process-tracing. The other crucial piece to draw from this chapter is an understanding of the gains toward equality made by women in the aftermath of the civil war.
The final portion of this chapter will measure the changes in the dependent variable, women’s rights, as a result of the war. To do so, five indicators that are widely accepted measures of equality are employed: female literacy rates, the availability of birth control, the rate of maternal mortality, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code (Issan, 2010; Lovenduski and Norris, 2003; Pezzini, 2005; Bianco and Moore, 2012).

As described in chapter one, the dependent variable will be explored five years prior to the war and five years following the war in each country in order to ascertain whether women’s rights increased following each war. Thus, in the case of Lebanon, the years 1970 to 1975 will be compared against the years 1990 to 1995. The first indicator, the rate of female literacy, is difficult to determine in Lebanon in both the prewar and postwar years due to the lack of systemic data. However, according to Bahia Hariri, in 1970, Lebanon had a female literacy rate of 56.7 percent that by 1995 jumped to 82.2 percent (Hariri, 1996).

In fact, Lebanese women have some of the highest rates of literacy in the Arab world and the Middle East. The worldwide female literacy rate stood at 69 percent in 1990, but within the Arab world, the average rate was 41 percent. In comparison to the entire Middle East and North African region in 1990, which had an overall female literacy rate of 46 percent, Lebanon had a female literacy rate that was over 10 percent higher even in 1970 (“Data, World Bank,” 2013). Thus, while female illiteracy is higher than male illiteracy in Lebanon, significant progress was made during the war years, which was mainly attributable to girls and women’s greater access to education which expanded significantly during the course of the war (Abu Nassr, 1996; Moghadam, 2003).

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3 Hariri has numbers for only one year in each time frame (Hariri, 1996).
As far as the second indicator, the availability of birth control, according to the World Bank, contraception\(^4\) was utilized by 53 percent of the Lebanese population between the ages of 15 and 49 in 1971 ("Data, World Bank," 2013). As previously mentioned, both the use and sale of birth control was officially illegal until 1983 with the overturn of Articles 537 and 538 of the Lebanese penal code ("About Us: History and Studies," 2013). However, George Dib notes that despite legal prohibitions against contraception, several methods including the pill, condoms, and vaginal aspos were sold in pharmacies throughout the country before legalization in 1983 (Dib, 1977). After the war, by year 1996\(^5\), the rate of contraception use rose to 61.1 percent among the Lebanese ages 15 to 49 ("Data, World Bank," 2013). It is important to note that there remains, even today, a societal stigma against women using birth control (Sikimic, 2010).

In comparison to the rest of the Middle East and North Africa, Lebanese women appear to have had high rates of contraceptive use throughout the 1970s and the 1990s. On average, 36 percent of all women across the Arab world were using contraception in 1990 and 43 percent of women used birth control in the entire Middle East and North African region in 1990, while even in 1971 over 50 percent of Lebanese women were.\(^6\) Yet, worldwide, rates for Lebanese women were lower than for women in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other developed countries. In 1995, U.S. and U.K. women used birth control at a rate of 76 and 82 percent respectively to Lebanese women’s 61.1 percent rate.\(^7\) The world average for contraceptive use stood at 69 percent in 1990, which was nearly 8 percent greater than Lebanese women’s usage of birth control even in 1996 ("Data, World Bank," 2013).

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\(^4\) Contraception is defined as any method which attempts to prevent pregnancy ("Contraception Prevalence, World Bank," 2013).
\(^5\) Due to lack of data for the years 1990 to 1995, the year 1996 was used instead.
\(^6\) Data for Lebanese women’s use of birth control in 1990 unavailable as were for Arab women and the Middle East and North Africa for the year 1971.
\(^7\) Data for 1971 unavailable.
The Lebanese Family Planning Association, the first organization dedicated to the idea of family planning, was founded in 1969 by health experts and policymakers who saw a need for increasing Lebanese women’s access to contraception and maternal healthcare (el-Kak, 2012). Thus, it appears that much of the move toward greater access to birth control was largely top-down. However, many female activists, such as Laure Moghaizel, became involved in the Lebanese Association for Human Rights, which, established in 1985, advocated for legal changes to improve women’s lives, particularly the legalization of birth control (Stephen, 2010).

As is the case with the other indicators, maternal mortality rates are not available for most of the years under review. However, according to a study produced by the American University of Beirut Hospital, from 1971 to 1981, the maternal mortality rate in Lebanon stood at 128 deaths for every 100,000 live deliveries (“The Situation of Children and Women,” 1995). Yet, as reported by the World Health Organization, by 1990, there was an average of only 52 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. By 1995, that rate had dropped to an average of only 46 per 100,000 live births (“Global Health Observatory Data,” 2013).

Certainly, while only 12 out 100,000 women died in childbirth on average in North America in 1990, worldwide the maternal mortality rate stood at 400 per 100,000 women. Thus, Lebanon, even in 1971, had a much lower maternal mortality rate than the world average for 1990. Likewise, Lebanon’s 1990 level of 52 deaths per 100,000 births was far lower than the Arab world’s average of 360 deaths per 100,000 live births and the Middle East and North African region’s 200 deaths per 100,000 live births (“Data, World Bank,” 2013). While the public health sector was fragmented and weakened by the war, the private sector did expand which helped those who could afford it (el-Kak, 2012). Following the war’s conclusion, the Ministry of Public Health resumed health services provided prior to 1975, such as running
government hospitals, which helped to lower the national maternal mortality rate in the postwar period (“Health during the Postwar Period,” 2013).

Concerning our fourth indicator, Nijmeh Hajjar notes that it was not until 1992 that women were elected to the Lebanese parliament, despite women being legally permitted to run since 1953 (Hajjar, 2003; “Lebanon: Majlis Al-Nuwwab,” 2013). The first postwar general elections held in 1992 elections in accordance with the Ta’if Agreement, resulted in the election of three women out of 128 seats in parliament (“Lebanon: Parliamentary Chamber Majlis…1992,” 2013). Although Farid el Khazen argues that new voting districts were drawn too late for those running to have adequate time to campaign and thus were disadvantageous to newcomers, even in 1996, only three women served as members of parliament (Khazen, 1994; “Lebanon: Parliamentary Chamber Majlis…1996,” 2013). All three women who won in 1992 came from politically connected families or had politically connected male relatives, and the same was true of the 1996 elections (al-Rahbani, 2009). In fact, a common saying in Lebanon goes, “The only woman you’ll see in parliament is the one wearing black, mourning for the death of her husband or brother, whose political mantle she has inherited” (“Lebanon: Women Non-Lebanese Children,” 2008). Likewise, even now, politics through kinship remains the standard method for Lebanese women’s entrance into politics (Stamadianou, 2012).

Despite the fact that Lebanese women were the first Arab women to receive the right to vote, they actually have some of the lowest political participation rates in the Middle East (Stamadianou, 2012). As evidenced in the discussion of Lebanese women’s wartime activism, most of their focus was on practical gender interests, mainly in striving toward regional security. Thus, issues of strategic gender interest, such as securing greater numbers of women in

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8 Between 1952 and 1962, two women had served as members of parliament to finish out the respective terms of their deceased male relatives (“Participation of Women in Politics,” 1990; “Lebanon: Women Non-Lebanese Children,” 2008).
parliament, were not prioritized. Even in more recent years, little progress has been made in increasing women’s political participation (Stamadianou, 2012; al-Rahbani, 2009).

The final indicator used in this study is the rate of changes to the family code which benefited women. In Lebanon, two sets of laws exist. The first set includes civil and secular laws which cover everything except matters relating to the family. The other set of laws are called the personal status code and address issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the custody of children. Laws for these various family issues differ according to each religious community and are governed by religious authorities in each of the officially recognized sects (Shehadeh, 2010; Accad, 1990). Nisrine Mansour argues that these courts interpret religion to uphold patriarchy through the melding of government bureaucracy to sectarian networks based on kinship. Judges claim to follow a religious mandate that is then backed up by the powers of the state (Mansour, 2005). Thus, this religious mandate makes it incredibly difficult to change the personal status laws as they supposedly derive from sacred texts (Hamadeh, 2005/2006).

Nevertheless, changes to the family code did occur throughout the war and in the five year period following the war. One of the most important modifications to the law has already been mentioned, and this was the 1983 decision to legalize birth control. Another major change occurred in 1987, which was the raising of the retirement age for women from age 54 to 64, the same retirement age as men (Shehadeh, 2010). As far as the five year period following the war, several beneficial changes occurred. In 1993, there were two major alterations to the family code. First, the law was amended to count the testimony of men and women in court equally. Prior to this, testimony from two women was needed to match the quality of one man’s testimony (Suad, 1997). Another improvement was that women were deemed legally competent enough to testify in court in real estate matters, something they were previously prohibited from
doing (Shehadeh, 2010). In 1994, the law was amended to permit women to go into business without the need to first secure their husband’s permission to do so. In 1995, the last year that this paper will address, two more significant changes took place regarding the status of women. The first allowed female diplomats to continue working if they married non-Lebanese men. The second and far more noteworthy change was that women no longer fell under the legal categorization of “incompetent” and “underage” (Shehadeh, 2010; Lattouf, 2004).

According to Mirna Lattouf, those in women’s associations and other human rights groups had been advocating for all these changes to the family code and further changes, especially around the issue of citizenship, which will be addressed below (Lattouf, 2004). Rita Stephan directly attributes the changes in the family code that benefited women to the demands of activists in the Lebanese Association for Human Rights, many of whom were women (Stephan, 2010). However, the government implemented these changes only to bolster Lebanon’s standing with the international community. As Lattouf notes, despite the existence of the laws, they were not always followed. For example, judges, even in 1996, three years after the law was updated to give men and women’s court testimony equal weight, would not even permit women to testify because they deemed women too incompetent to be trusted. There were no penalties for ignoring the law (Lattouf, 2004).

Furthermore, despite these changes, Lebanon’s family code continued to maintain many laws which were disadvantageous to women. One of the most discriminatory was that of citizenship. The Lebanese government recognizes citizenship strictly through the male bloodline. Thus, if a Lebanese woman marries a non-Lebanese, he is not permitted to become a Lebanese citizen through the marriage, nor any children as a result of the union (Abou-Habib, 2003). However, in 1994, the law was altered so that those born to Lebanese women and non-Lebanese
men were allowed to secure Lebanese citizenship after reaching adulthood on the condition that they married a Lebanese citizen (“Lebanon: Women, Non-Lebanese Children,” 2008). The majority of those in the government justify differing citizenship laws based on gender by arguing that if women could pass their citizenship onto their spouses and children it would upset the confessional balance. However, men already do so, rendering such an argument invalid (Abou-Habib, 2003). The citizenship law has been and remains a longstanding feminist issue in Lebanon (Livingstone, 1992; Accad, 1990; Azzi, 2008).

Other discriminatory issues in the family code which continued after the war were inheritance laws, polygamy, and divorce. Within the Sunni code, women were only allowed to inherit half of what their brothers inherited. Additionally, both the Sunni and Shia communities allow polygamy and, furthermore, divorce was unobtainable for Catholic women. Finally, Sunni and Shi’a women were still vulnerable to divorces that did not have to be performed in court, but instead could occur through repudiation rituals (Livingstone, 1992). Additionally, in cases of divorce where children were affected, women were awarded custody only when the children were young. For example, in Muslim sects women must renounce custody once a child is two years old and in Christian sects, women must renounce custody when a child turns seven years old (Thomas, 2013).

Overall, Nijmeh Hajjar argues that the very language of the Lebanese constitution precludes women by using only male pronouns, which she believes was a purposeful attempt to exclude women as the Arabic language provides ways to include references to women. In general, Hajjar maintains that those in politics have traditionally been more focused on ensuring equality among the various religious sects rather than equality between the sexes (Hajjar, 2003). Thus, the Lebanese family code, or personal status laws, remain biased against women.
By comparing the five indicators of female literacy rates, the availability of birth control, the rate of maternal mortality, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code, in both the prewar and postwar contexts, it is clear that there were improvements in women’s rights following the Lebanese civil war. Female literacy and maternal deaths saw a drastic improvement with the former increasing by 44.9 percent and the latter decreasing by 64.1 percent. Likewise, it was certainly positive that birth control was legalized and that its use increased by 15.3 percent. Nevertheless, contraception was still a controversial issue in Lebanon in the aftermath of the war (Sikimic, 2010). Likewise, even after the war, the number of women in parliament did not jump substantially, only by 2.3 percent and although some changes occurred in the family code to benefit women, women still faced many discriminatory laws, such as polygamy, inheritance rights, and divorce, and were at the mercy of religious judges, often quite patriarchal (Mansour, 2005; Livingstone, 1992).

In conclusion, Lebanese women’s wartime activism, with its focus on practical strategic interests and use of maternalism, did lead to improvements in women’s access to birth control, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code that benefited women. However, the rise in female literacy is likely due to the effects of the war which led to increases in women’s education (Abu Nassr, 1996; Moghadam, 2003). Likewise, in the case of decreased maternal mortality rates, it appears to have been the result of top-down efforts by policymakers and other professionals. For example, the Lebanese Family Planning Association was begun by health experts and policymakers who believed that women needed better access to maternal healthcare, which was further improved due to efforts by the Ministry of Health (el-Kak, 2012; “Health during the Postwar Period,” 2013).
Nevertheless, women’s groups such as the Lebanese Women’s Council and civil society groups like the Lebanese Association for Human Rights, in which many women were active, advocated for such improvements to female literacy and women’s maternal healthcare. Similarly, these activists attempted to influence those in government to legalize contraception and to make changes to the family code that benefited women, such as obtaining laws which raised the retirement age for women from age 54 to 64, gave equal weight to men and women’s testimony in court, allowed women to testify in real estate matters, allowed women to work in business without their husband’s permission, allowed female diplomats to maintain Lebanese citizenship upon marrying a non-Lebanese, and recognized women as a separate legal category from the “incompetent” or “underaged” (Stephan, 2010; Lattouf, 2004; “Achievements and Implementation Methods,” 2013).

2.16 Conclusion

Thus, in conclusion, this chapter provided a description of women's groups' activism during Lebanon's civil war as well as an assessment of whether this activism was overtly feminist through the use of Maxine Molyneux's gender interest typology. In order to understand the context in which women's groups acted during the war years, this chapter provided background information on Lebanon, a summary of its civil war, and finally, a depiction of Lebanese women's experiences both prior to and during the war. Overall, women's groups were active during Lebanon's civil war for several reasons. Some women sought to improve the general status of women in society, while others organized strictly for humanitarian efforts such as giving medical aid to those in need or by protesting fighting between the militias. Other women were active in all these areas. While some women’s groups sought certain measures to improve women’s strategic gender interests, overall, women’s groups focused their efforts on
mainly practical gender interests. Even many feminists focused their energies on activities that did not directly challenge patriarchy as the majority of women found themselves busy simply trying to endure the fighting between the militias, and the lack of food and other resources. Daily living was a struggle and thus many women put aside their political agendas in order to focus on mere survival (Maksoud, 1996). Additionally, Lebanese women were often mobilized into organizing based on their maternal identities. Thus the two most significant conclusions to be taken from this chapter are that the majority of Lebanese women’s groups’ wartime activism was not overtly feminist, and that there was a significant amount of activist mobilization based on motherhood. These two conclusions will prove crucial in chapter four.
Chapter 3: Women's Activism during Liberia’s Civil War

3.1 Introduction

In stark contrast to Lebanon’s postwar appraisal, since the Liberian civil war, there has been a dominant refrain in the literature declaring the significant strides made in women’s rights (Steady, 2011; Casimiro, et al., 2009; Fuest, 2008). For example, Veronika Fuest documents women’s gains in government, education, and the economic sphere since the war (Fuest, 2008). In addition, in 2005, Liberians elected Africa’s first female head of state which is a major achievement in a country where women have historically been second class citizens (Adams, 2008; Fuest, 2008). Moreover, one of the first postwar projects undertaken by the Liberian Ministry of Gender and Development was to partner with the United Nations Development Programme for the “Giving Women a Voice and Leadership Role in Decision-Making and Peacebuilding in Liberia” initiative. This project is part of Liberia’s larger goal of mainstreaming of women’s empowerment (“Joint Press Release: Gender,” 2007). Likewise, news reports continue to document women’s gains in Liberia in the postconflict period (Bhatia, 2011; Golakeh, 2011).

Certainly, gains for Liberian women have not been as extensive as those documented in other postwar sub-Saharan African countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, and South Africa (Steady, 2011). Furthermore, the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), a country by country ranking of gendered discrimination within social institutions, indicates that postwar Liberian society is discriminatory against women. The Index takes into account the prevalence of early marriage, violence against women, women’s access to land and credit, inheritance, son preference, and how restricted women are from public spaces (“What Is the Social Institutions,” 2013). In 2009, Liberia ranked 87 out of 102 countries in the Social Institutions and Gender
Index ("Liberia, Social Institution and Gender Index,” 2013). However, Liberian women in comparison to Lebanese women came farther much faster in the aftermath of their civil war.

3.2 Background on Liberia

To fully understand the civil war and progress in women’s right since then, the context of the unique history of Liberia is first necessary. Liberia is a country in West Africa, along the coast of Atlantic Ocean, with a population of about 3,900,000 ("Liberia, World Factbook,” 2012). Founded on April 25, 1822 as a colony for emancipated slaves and free blacks from the United States, Liberia was established by a body known as the American Colonization Society (ACS) on land that was already occupied (Akpan, 1973; Barnes, 2004). The majority of the population living in what would become Liberia belonged to sixteen major ethnic groups including the Kpelle, Bassa, Grebo, Gio, Mano, Kru, Loma, Kissi, Gola, Dey, Belle, Gbandi, Krahn, Mandingo, Mende, and Vai (Boas, 2005). According to Amos Sawyer, these sixteen groups fall under three main ethnolinguistic categories known as the Mel, Mande, and Kwa groups. Included in the Mel-speaking group are the Gola and Kissi while the Mande-speaking group consists of the Vai, Mende, Mandingo, Gbandi, Kpelle, Loma, Mano, and Gio. The Dey, Belle, Bassa, Kru, Krahn, and Grebo groups are Kwa-speakers. In general, the Mel and Mande groups were concentrated in the densely populated west and northwest of what is today Liberia, while the Kwa groups predominated in the more sparsely populated east and southeast. There is a history of intermarriage between the subgroups falling under each ethnolinguistic category as well as a long history of contact and interaction between the three ethnolinguistic groups (Sawyer, 1992).

SIGI was developed only in 2009 and thus is not applicable to the Lebanese case study ("What Is the Social Institutions,” 2013).
Sawyer argues that the area which would become Liberia was already highly complex prior to the arrival of U.S. black settlers, and only became more so with the influx of those involved in the back-to-Africa movement. Before colonization, the terrain, mainly rainforest, was just beyond the periphery of such major West African empires as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai (Sawyer, 1992). The oldest inhabitants of the area were the Gola, Kpelle, Mende, Mano, Loma, and Gbandi, who began settling the area as far back as 6000 B.C.E. (Olukoju, 2006). Later Mande-speakers, likely beginning with the Vai, began arriving in the rainforest regions in the fifteenth century, and these Mande groups would eventually become the largest of the three ethnolinguistic groups. Likewise, although Kwa-speakers were already present in the area, further waves of Kwa groups settled in the region beginning in the fifteenth century. Around this same period, the western coastal region, as well as inland area just north of it, became a nexus for trade as individuals from the three ethnolinguistic groups interacted frequently. Later, in the sixteenth century, Europeans began arriving in the area and also engaged in trading. Trade initially centered on kola nuts and salt, but after the arrival of European traders, gold, camwood, handmade cloth, ivory, and slaves took over (Sawyer, 1992).

Traditionally, in all three ethnolinguistic groups, the household, made up a man, his wives, their children, other relatives, and non-kin dependents, was the starting block of society. Each household had at least one farm which was used to produce enough food for all members of the household. Often, each wife had her own farm which she and her children would cultivate. Typically, the man and older male children, and any male dependents in the household would clear the land for planting. In addition, males would also hunt to supplement the household’s food supply while women fished in inland streams. However, among coastal Kwa groups, men would fish the oceans, which provided a major source of food (Sawyer, 1992).
Households formed units labeled by anthropologists as quarters, which were often based on blood ties or other distinctive social categories such as strangers, distant relatives, or servants. Quarters that became too large would split off and form a half-town, which was a satellite to a village. If a portion of the quarter was even larger, it could become its own village. Amos Sawyer stresses that the quarter was the most important political and social unit for Mel, Mande, and Kwa groups. Similarly, for all three groups, the eldest male of the quarter, who was the closest relation of the founder of the quarter, was the leader of the quarter and governed in consultation with other senior men. Each village or town was affiliated with other villages to form confederacies, which often shared larger real or fictive patrilineal ties. Such affiliations were not always based on shared territory, but rather shared history (Sawyer, 1992).

Mel and Mande-speakers were more similar to one another than Kwa-speakers were to either group. Most Mel and Mande groups were patrilineal, and both the social and political hierarchy in these groups derived from association to the founding ancestor. For example, a quarter’s influence in a confederacy depended on its relationship to ancestral lineage (Sawyer, 1992). Clarence E. Zamba Liberty notes that although it was Mel-speakers who originated the *Poro* and *Sande* secret societies, which provided for economic, political, and social needs in the community, these institutions were adopted by most Mande-speakers, although never Kwa-speakers (Liberty, 2002; Ellis, 2006). Sawyer explains that *Poro* was for men and *Sande* for women, and that it was members of the *Poro* who sat on the village councils and selected secular leaders. Notably, the *Poro* of various villages kept in contact with one another, often working to resolve inter-ethnic interests. If a decision within the quarter could not be reached by consensus with the quarter’s leader and council of male elders, then it was sent to the *Poro* and decided there (Sawyer, 1992).
Kwa-speaking settlements were typically smaller than Mel or Mande ones. Kwa-speakers also differed from these other groups because many settled along the coast and thus were seafaring. Additionally, in contrast to Mel and Mande groups who defined social and political life through a founding ancestor, Kwa-speakers, who did acknowledge family lineage, instead used membership in age-sets to define political and social hierarchies. Thus, political matters rested with a council of elders, and age determined economic and political roles and as well as hierarchies of social relationships with the more senior individual having the most authority and status. Another difference between Mel and Mande groups, Kwa groups, which certainly employed a council of male elders, also involved women and children in decision-making, although wars were never the prerogative of anyone but men (Sawyer, 1992).

In all three major ethnonlinguistic categories, lineage, which was patrilineal, was an important but flexible concept which allowed individuals to claim ties to several households at once. These connections created multiple avenues of support and also allowed ample paths to opportunity for young men. For example, a young man just starting out frequently left his natal village to find better opportunities by relying on connections to male relatives in other towns and villages, such as an uncle or older brother. People sometimes even adopted another person’s ethnicity in order to create stronger bonds between them. Thus, historically, ethnicity was fluid rather than rigid (Sawyer, 1992).

The social landscape of what would one day become Liberia was in constant flux prior to the arrival of African-American settlers. Political communities would form, merge with other communities, or dissolve such unions. Notably, most villages and towns were multiethnic and multilingual, especially in the populated west and northwest where Mel and Mande groups dominated, as Kwa political communities tended to be much more homogenous. Thus, what
would be described as say a Vai village would be a village that traced its foundation to a Vai ancestor. However, inhabitants could be from a number of ethnic groups, not simply Vai. Likewise, households often contained members from different ethnic groups who were dependents or client (Sawyer, 1992).

The arrival of African-Americans in what would become Liberia began with the American Colonization Society. According to Kenneth C. Barnes, in 1816, Virginian state legislators called on the U.S. Congress to create a territory in Africa for former slaves and free blacks. These bigoted whites, who feared that free blacks would threaten the U.S. system of slavery based on racial identity, were supported by a subset of white and black antislavery activists who envisioned an African colony as a refuge for blacks. Together these diametrically opposing proponents formed the American Colonization Society in order to purchase land for a colony on the West African coast. The name of the colony, Liberia, derived from the Latin word *liber*, meaning “free man” (Barnes, 2004: 4). Members of the American Colonization Society, a private organization, appointed white American governors who oversaw the colony until 1841 when the settlers, those former slaves and free blacks, took control of the governorship. Later, on July 26, 1847, the settlers declared Liberia an officially independent nation (Akpan, 1973; Barnes, 2004).

Yet while Liberia became independent in 1847, what physically constituted the new state was not immediately clear. According to Yekutiel Gershoni, none of Liberia’s earliest constitutions defined its borders (Gershoni, 1987). From the original settlement of Monrovia along the coast, the settler population slowly expanded their control toward the interior. However, the hinterland’s thick rainforests, as well as the risk of malaria, initially kept the settlers in Monrovia until they became aware of both the British and French governments’ desire
for territory in the region (Akpan, 1973; Waugh, 2011). Gershoni explains that settler officials then made treaties with indigenous leaders who conceded land rights to the Liberian government. Following the Berlin Conference in 1884, Liberian state officials became increasingly concerned as European governments began to solidify their political control of African territory (Gershoni, 1987).

Indeed, the governments of both Britain and France took control of several areas to which the Liberian government had laid claim. Ever since arriving in Africa, the settlers had been experiencing resistance to their authority from indigenous groups. However, by the early twentieth century, the Liberian government could no longer effectively deal with both indigenous peoples’ revolts as well as the encroachment of European forces. Thus, in 1909, the Liberian government requested aid from the U.S. which was provided as military expertise to the Liberian army as well as loans to the government (Clegg, 1996). However, since the 1820s, the U.S. government had made it clear that Liberia was not a U.S. territory, and neither did the U.S. government consider Liberia’s survival its responsibility (Richardson, 1959; Gifford, 1993).

Nevertheless, M.B. Akpan notes that the settlers modeled the government of Liberia on the example of the U.S. by establishing an elected president and a legislative branch composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Significantly, however, the Liberian Constitution of 1841 did not grant citizenship to any indigenous Africans, only to the settlers. Akpan argues that without the franchise or access to government jobs, indigenous people were de facto subjects of the settlers. Indeed, indigenous people were only able to obtain an abysmal form of representation in the legislative branch through a government-appointed delegate, or in some cases two delegates, to represent each ethnic group. However, each delegate was required to pay a fee for the privilege of representing his ethnic community. These delegates, who could
not vote, were only permitted to speak on issues directly concerning their particular ethnic group. While the delegates tried to influence the government to build more schools and to provide for other social and economic needs for their communities, their voices went largely unheeded by the settler-dominated government (Akpan, 1973).

Similar to the heterogeneous groups which made up the indigenous population, the settler community was likewise varied in composition. Overall, however, the blacks comprising the settler class came mainly from the U.S. (Barnes, 2004). According to George Klay Kieh, Jr., the initial hierarchy of the Liberian settler social order was made up of three groups: lighter-skinned blacks, darker-skinned blacks, and Congoes (Kieh, 1989). Colin M. Waugh points out that the settlers included a majority of mulattoes who usually had light skin color. Typically the children of white slave-owning fathers and black female slaves, mulattoes often received their freedom (Waugh, 2011). These lighter-skinned African-Americans were, in general, educated and thus ranked in the upper tier of the settler class. Some were lawyers and doctors while others served as high-ranking state officials, but there was also a significant middle class who made their living as merchants or junior level state bureaucrats. The lower tier of the settler community was composed of darker-skinned African-Americans who were often self-employed farmers or artisans. Just below these blacks in the social hierarchy were the Congoes (Kieh, 1989).

This term “Congo” was originally applied to any African recaptured from slave-traders who was then released in Liberia (Kieh, 1989). According to William E. Allen, approximately 6,000 Africans were repatriated to Liberia by British and U.S. navy patrols which targeted slave-carrying ships after the banning of the slave trade in 1807 in Britain and in 1808 in the U.S. (Allen, 2004). However, over time, the term Congo was purposefully used in a derogatory manner by indigenous people to refer to any non-native individual. Many of the U.S. settlers
found it insulting to be called by a name which referenced Africa as the immigrants and their descendants highly valued their past association with the U.S. (Waugh, 2011).

Akpan notes that most of the recaptured Africans arrived in Liberia between 1845 and 1862. Because these Africans were so far from their homelands, and despite discrimination against them, they were largely assimilated into settler society (Akpan, 1973). According to Amos Sawyer, with funding provided by the U.S. government, nearly every individual recaptured from slavers was sent to live with a settler family during which time they were given room and board, taught a trade, and encouraged to adopt settler customs and cultural norms (Sawyer, 1992). Thus the majority of Congoes became Christians, spoke English, wore the settlers’ style of dress, and participated in monogamous marriages. Moreover, they were granted the same rights as the settlers, including the right to vote. Congoes lived either in settler towns or in towns directly next to settler towns. Akpan surmises that the repatriated Africans were small enough in number that they did not threaten the privileges of the settlers and in fact initially provided a buffer between the settler and indigenous communities (Akpan, 1973). However, as Waugh points out, with time, the settlers and recaptured Africans became largely indistinguishable from one another and thus the term “Congo” came to refer to any person whose ancestors were not indigenous to Liberia (Waugh, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, the relationship between the settlers and the indigenous groups in Liberia was contentious from the beginning. The land which became the first settlement of Liberia, Monrovia, was in fact purchased only at gunpoint from the king of the indigenous group the Dey. This first major interaction between the arriving settlers and indigenous groups set the tone for future settler-indigenous relations. Waugh argues that the descendants of the freed slaves, as the new elite rulers of Liberia following independence in 1847, eventually put into place an
apartheid society in which the indigenous ethnic groups were exploited by the settlers (Waugh, 2011).

First, however, the Liberian government actually adopted a policy of assimilation. According to Akpan, the government had hoped to encourage Africans to embrace settler ideas and values through the use of formal schooling of indigenous youths, expanded settler towns into the interior regions, and apprenticeship programs in which indigenous children would be sent to work in the homes of settler families. However, in practice such assimilationist policies remained largely unimplemented as the Liberian government lacked funding. Even at the end of the 1890s, the only sustained contact settlers had with any indigenous groups were those located on the coasts, such as with the Kru, Vai, Dey, Bassa, and Grebo. Thus, at that point in the 1890s, members of the government followed the examples of some European colonial powers and implemented a system of indirect rule (Akpan, 1973).

Waugh explains that the Liberian government divided the hinterland into provinces and then sub-divided each province into several districts which were run by provincial and district commissioners. These commissioners were all settlers or descendants of settlers and thus were essentially colonial administrators who enforced the laws of the Liberian government by relying on local chiefs to deal with the day-to-day business of each district (Waugh, 2011). Akpan notes that the indigenous groups suffered many injustices under this system of colonialism. In particular, the Liberian government required an onerous hut tax, which applied only to indigenous people, that constituted a large portion of the state’s revenue. Moreover, indigenous groups were required to supply free labor for government projects, and district commissioners and their aides often abused their power by levying illegal fees, taxes, and fines on indigenous communities. According to Akpan, indigenous Liberians were given little in return as far as
schools or hospitals. Unsurprisingly, frequent and bloody indigenous rebellions broke out periodically against colonial forces, but such rebellions were always suppressed by government forces that had superior weaponry, often supplied by the U.S. (Akpan, 1973).

3.3 Liberia’s Conflict over Identity

As clearly evidenced, people living in Liberia were conflicted over who constituted a Liberian. Similar to Lebanon’s Christian-Muslim divide, Liberia’s historical debate over national identity centered on the settler-indigenous division. According to Morten Boas, the settlers designed a classic in-group/out-group system in which the indigenous population fell squarely into the out-group. Additionally, the Liberian constitution institutionalized this system by bestowing citizenship only on the settlers and their descendants. By denying anyone native to the region the same rights as the settlers and their descendants, a pernicious alienation between the two groups arose (Boas, 2005). Akpan describes the most telling sign of the divide between the two populations as the low rate of intermarriage. Although settler men often engaged in sexual relations with indigenous women, such relationships were never validated with marriage, which indigenous Africans found offensive (Akpan, 1973).

According to Akpan, the settlers viewed the U.S. as their homeland and were also culturally American in both their manner of dress and food preferences, as well as in the construction of their houses which were often modeled on the plantations of the American South (Boas, 2005; Akpan, 1973). Moreover, Akpan notes that the settlers spoke English and practiced Christianity, and additionally adhered to monogamous marriages as well as the right of individuals to own land. Viewing themselves as “civilized” as opposed to the indigenous people living in Liberia whom they considered “barbarous,” the settlers saw their role as providing a
model of “civilization” to the rest of Africa, especially through the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity (Akpan, 1973).

Similar to the settlers’ view of the Africans, indigenous people likewise considered the settlers to be unworthy, looking down on them for being former slaves. Unquestionably, the indigenous Africans in Liberia differed culturally from these settlers, but also from one community to another. As Akpan points out, for example, each ethnic group spoke its own language (Akpan, 1973). Nonetheless, in general, almost all indigenous groups lived in homes furnished of clay or mud with roofs of thatch or grass. In addition, almost all African groups held land communally, and their cuisine included local foodstuffs such as cassava, plantain, yams, and palm-oil, which many settlers avoided eating (Richardson, 1959; Akpan, 1973). Moreover, Africans were either Muslims or Animists, and almost every ethnic group had age-group organizations and/or secret societies, such as the most well-known, the Poro and Sande, which provided for economic, political, and social needs in each ethnic community (Ellis, 2006).

Boas aptly describes the settler community as essentially transplanting the U.S. system of plantations found in the Deep South to the colony of Liberia. The settlers placed themselves at the top of the social hierarchy where both they and their descendants openly exploited the indigenous population (Boas, 2005). In fact, by 1979, a mere four percent of Liberia’s population controlled approximately sixty percent of its wealth. Unsurprisingly, it was the descendants of the settlers who had access to markets, education, and technology. Meanwhile, the patronage system run by the Liberian government co-opted local leaders in the countryside by enticing them with various state resources in return for keeping the rest of the indigenous population from gaining access to skilled jobs and education (Waugh, 2011). Akpan notes that indigenous individuals appointed to collect taxes were actually removed if they did not extort the population,
and were replaced by others, even if these new men did not have traditional claim to political power. To maintain their power, such individuals were happy to represent the state’s wishes (Akpan, 1973). A wide gulf existed between the general life experience of most indigenous Liberians and those Liberians who were descendants of the settlers (Waugh, 2011).

In time, the descendants of the settlers became known as Americo-Liberians (Ajibewa, 1999). As previously mentioned, the black immigrants were proud of their connection to the U.S., and the term Americo-Liberian perfectly captures that association. Yet, over time, even the term Congo, initially viewed as offensive by the settlers, was adopted by Americo-Liberians as they and the original Congoes, the recaptured slaves, became closely socially intertwined as the ruling class (Waugh, 2011; Williams, 2013). However, according to Helen Cooper, Americo-Liberians applied the term Country People to indigenous persons (which they intended to be a slur) (Cooper, 2008). Elizabeth Tonkin explains that the term Country Person sought to emphasize the general Americo-Liberian view of the so-called “backwardness” of indigenous groups and connate the inferiority of indigenous people (Tonkin, 2010). Boas refers to the divisive mentality that permeated Liberian society as an “us versus them” syndrome (Boas, 2005: 76).

Nevertheless, while indigenous Liberian cultures were largely ignored by the settlers and their early descendants, over time some local cultural practices were adopted by Americo-Liberians. For example, Allen argues that Americo-Liberians began to eat many food dishes that were part of the traditional cuisine of some indigenous groups (Allen, 2004). Moreover, Americo-Liberians, like most indigenous people, began to practice multiple forms of spirituality which drew upon Western Christian traditions as well as many spiritual practices native to Liberia (Waugh, 2011). For example, Stephen Ellis argues that secret societies such as the Poro
were so integral to much of rural Liberian society that many Americo-Liberian politicians practiced *Poro* rituals alongside Christianity in order to cultivate and maintain political power (Ellis, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the adoptions of some indigenous practices, overall, most Americo-Liberians did not endeavor to learn extensively about indigenous cultures. Pointedly, few attempted to learn any indigenous languages, much less indigenous customs or traditions (Waugh, 2011).

Thus, as far back as 1947, a civil war in Liberia was viewed as inevitable (Kupah, 1999). One incidence in particular foreshadowed what would eventually become the fourteen year war. On April 12, 1980, a Krahn by the name of Samuel Doe overthrew then President William Tolbert, in a move that was largely celebrated by indigenous groups (Boas, 2005; Waugh, 2011). Morten Boas indicates that since 1870 and until the 1980 coup, Liberia had been subjected to one-party rule by the True Whig Party (TWP) (Boas, 2005). Although only between three and five percent of the Americo-Liberian community ever ruled Liberia through the True Whig Party, Colin M. Waugh points out that its leading membership was composed solely of settlers and their descendants (Boas, 2005; Waugh, 2011). Moreover, the indigenous population grew increasingly resentful of the Americo-Liberians in the decade prior to the 1980 overthrow of Tolbert even as his administration had begun including more indigenous people in government positions, and education was made more widely available to non-Amerio-Liberians. It was too late for such gradual reform (Waugh, 2011). Julius Emeka Okolo points out that it was the Tolbert regime’s repression of an increasingly organized political opposition that played a major role in triggering the coup (Okolo, 1987). For example, the student-dominated movements the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), born in the University of Liberia, and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) were growing increasingly popular. When PAL founded the
Progressive People’s Party (PPP) as an official opposition party in 1979, it was banned by the Tolbert government, leading to rumors of a military coup as popular anger increased (Ellis, 2006). Helen Cooper concludes that the 1979 government decision to raise the price of rice by fifty percent, the most basic of food staples for the economically disadvantaged, pushed anti-Americo-Liberian sentiment among the indigenous population to the breaking point (Cooper, 2008).

Immediately following the coup, the indigenous population embraced Doe’s regime, celebrating one the “true” sons of Liberia finally coming to power. Doe was swift to abolish the hut tax, and to raise the salaries of soldiers, two moves that were popular with indigenous groups (Boas, 2005). In fact, Colin M. Waugh notes that the announcement of the overthrow of the True Whig Party regime led to street celebrations in Monrovia (Waugh, 2011). However, the partying was short-lived. Doe made it clear to Thomas Quiwonkpa, a sergeant in the Liberian army who played a role in Doe’s ruling junta, the People’s Redemption Council (PRC), that he intended on winning in a civilian election. Quiwonkpa feared that his own position in power would end as it depended on continued military rule. Thus, when Doe rigged the 1985 election in his favor, Quiwonkpa attempted a coup over Doe as leader of a rebel movement known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Although Quiwonkpa’s rebellion was foiled, Doe began to favor those of his own Krahn ethnicity with power and resources (Kieh, 1992; Boas, 1997; Boas, 2001; Ellis, 2006). According to Mary H. Moran, Doe believed that by placing fellow Krahns in his inner circle, he could protect himself from potential usurpers, such as Quiwonkpa, who wished to overthrow the government as he himself had done. As a consequence of Doe’s promotion of the Krahn, other indigenous groups responded accordingly by also turning to ethnonationalism (Moran, 1996). In fact, Boas argues that it was under Doe that inter-ethnic
hostilities between indigenous groups became an issue. Prior to this, it had simply been the
division between the settlers and their descendants versus indigenous groups (Boas, 1997; Boas,
2001). It is important to note that despite the killing of Tolbert and thirteen men from his
presidential cabinet, Doe did not persecute Americo-Liberians, and, in fact, eventually employed
many Americo-Liberian officials from both Tubman and Tolbert’s regimes in his own
government. Essentially, Americo-Liberian dominance remained in addition to a new group,
Krahns, who were also awarded power and resources (Giffords, 1993; Ellis, 2006).

Although the U.S. had largely ignored Liberia until the twentieth century, since World
War II, the U.S. had increasingly viewed Liberia as an ally (Giffords, 1993). This relationship
was especially important to the U.S. government during the Cold War. In fact, the main base for
U.S. Cold War intelligence in West Africa was located in Liberia, which included a satellite-
tracking system and C.I.A. station (Ellis, 2006). Paul Giffords notes that U.S. presidents and
vice-presidents had praised the Liberian government under the Americo-Liberian rule of both
Tubman and Tolbert. The U.S. government believed that in the context of the post-World War II
world, with many newly independent African states leaning toward socialism and Soviet support,
an ally like Liberia could promote U.S. interests, such as capitalism, in Africa. Nevertheless,
toward the end of Tolbert’s last ruling years, he had begun increasing contacts with U.S.S.R.
officials. When Doe took over in 1980, he realized that to ensure his position, he needed to
increase and reaffirm Liberia’s connection to the U.S. Thus, he decreased Liberian-Soviet
relations, and in return, received increased levels of military and civil aid from the U.S. Even in
1979, when Tolbert was still in control, Liberia received $20 million in aid from the U.S. By the
year 1985-1986, the U.S. gave Doe $90 million worth of aid, the highest that any African nation
received from the U.S. Yet this massive aid to Doe went to buy a faithful ally rather than to
develop democracy (Giffords, 1993). Overall, most Liberians, even indigenous Liberians, felt that they were no better off under Doe than prior to his coup, largely because he rigged elections and favored the Krahs in the same way that the previous Americo-Liberian administrations had favored Americo-Liberians (Kieh, 1992). This violent coup of 1980 was the first sign of the impending Liberian civil war.

3.4 Summary of Liberia’s Civil War

In all, Liberia’s complex fourteen year civil war caused the deaths of approximately 200,000 Liberians and displaced about one million, mainly to Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea, but also to Sierra Leone, Ghana, and the U.S. (Long, 2008; Waugh, 2011). The war can best be understood in three phases: the period from 1989 to 1997 in which Doe was overthrown and killed, the period from 1997 to 1999 in which Charles Taylor was elected president, and finally, the period from 1999 to 2003 which resulted in further factional fighting, but culminated with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

On December 24, 1989, a Liberian named Charles Taylor led a small group of armed men into Liberia from across the border in Côte d’Ivoire. Taylor, who had once served under Doe, now led what was once Quiwonkpa’s rebel movement, the NPFL (Boas, 2001). According to Stephen Ellis, the NPFL under Quiwonkpa had not been a structured organization (Ellis, 2006). Essentially, a group of men who had defected from the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), the state military force, had fled to Burkina Faso and adopted the name NPFL. Following Quiwonkpa’s death by Doe’s forces in 1985, several figures in the NPFL movement vied for leadership. Through Taylor’s many personal connections, especially to Muammar Gaddafi who provided training and funds to NPFL fighters, he convinced the majority of NPFL members that he was best suited to take over. Likewise, Taylor manipulated many Americo-Liberians into
believing that the NPFL would help restore the True Whig Party’s control of Liberia and thus he also received financial backing from them. Yet, Taylor truly only wanted the power of controlling Liberia for himself, especially the associated wealth that this control would bring (Ajibewa, 1999; Ellis, 2006).

Taylor’s preliminary force of 100 lightly armed NPFL men gradually swelled by September of 1990 to include about 10,000 fighters (Boas, 2001). George Klay Kieh, Jr. notes that Taylor enticed Liberian civilians, especially from the Gio and Mano groups, to join his militia with promises of jobs, money, and plunder. However, in July of 1990, another member of the NPFL, Prince Johnson, railed at Taylor’s leadership and split off to form the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) (Kieh, 1992; Ajibewa, 1999). On September 10, 1990, Johnson led his fighters, who controlled the majority of Monrovia, to murder Doe. By this point, Taylor and his fighters controlled about ninety-five percent of the country, all of which, however, lay outside of Monrovia (Ellis, 2006; Harris, 1999).

Meanwhile, on August 24, 1990, representatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) voted to intervene in the Liberian conflict by using a force which would become known as the Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Ellis, 2006). George Klay Kieh, Jr. believes that the leader of Nigeria, dictator Ibrahim Babangida, pushed for the ECOMOG force as he feared Taylor could inspire others to mount similar insurrections against regional governments in a domino effect (Kieh, 1992). Max A. Sesay argues that likewise, the leaders of Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, and Guinea agreed to an intervention fearing that their own regimes could possibly be overthrown by copycats if Taylor or Johnson were able to depose Doe (Sesay, 1996). Although the leaders of ECOMOG had installed an interim government in Monrovia known as the Interim
Government of National Unity (IGNU) on August 7, 1990, it was little more than a puppet regime which Liberians often referred to as the “Imported Government of No Use” (Waugh, 2011: 5, 145-6; Harris, 1999; Ellis, 2006). Around the same time, Taylor, who still controlled over ninety percent of the country, set up a parallel government which he called Greater Liberia (Ellis, 2006).

Fighting continued between various armed factions throughout the mid-1990s. In fact, members of ECOMOG actually became embroiled in the conflict themselves by openly opposing Taylor, in addition to being guilty of looting from civilians and even delving into arms dealing (Sesay, 1996; Waugh, 2011). Moreover, other groups such as the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO), composed mainly of Doe’s former Armed Forces of Liberia soldiers who had fled to Sierra Leone, and the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), comprised of mainly Krahns, formed and began fighting as well (Ajibewa, 1999; Harris, 1999). Then, on September 22, 1993, representatives of the United Nations Security Council sent the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) to assist ECOMOG in the disarmament and demobilization of combatants during one of the many ceasefires that was eventually broken (Sesay, 1996; “Liberia—UNOMIL Background,” 2013). In fact, a series of unsuccessful ceasefires and peace talks occurred throughout the early to mid-1990s (Harris, 1999). Adding further to the confusion, in April of 1994, the United Liberation Movement of Liberia split into two factions, known as ULIMO-K, and ULIMO-J, based on ethnic divisions with the former Mandingo-dominated, and the latter composed mainly of Krahns (Ellis, 2006).

Yet on August 19, 1995, an agreement known as the first Abuja Accord held for long enough that the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) formed. When fighting broke out in Monrovia on April 6, 1996, it was resolved with the second Abuja Accord which
implemented a ceasefire beginning August 31, 1996. The second Abuja Accord established the Independent Electoral Commission (IECOM) whose aim was to see that free and fair elections would be held. Additionally, the Accord set a timetable for disarmament of the various armed groups (Harris, 1999; “Liberia—UNIOMIL Background,” 2013; Bekoe, 2008).

While elections did take place on July 19, 1997, the civil war was by no means over, but had only entered its second phase which lasted from 1997 to 1999. In a relatively free and fair election, Charles Taylor won the presidency. According to Harris, the reason that the majority of the population voted for him was largely out of fear. Taylor’s personal army, the NPFL, remained mobilized and armed throughout the electoral process as the second Abuja Accord, which called for demobilization, failed to be fully implemented. Additionally, ECOMOG forces had only a tenuous grip on security matters. Harris argues that the Liberian population voted for the best alternative possible, a secure Liberia, as most reasoned that Taylor would never cease fighting until he controlled the country. By having Taylor officially elected president, many Liberians hoped that basic stability could be restored (Harris, 1999).

When ECOMOG forces were withdrawn earlier than planned in 1999, the state’s Armed Forces of Liberia had not been fully retrained and restructured by ECOMOG (Aboagye, 1999). Thus, Taylor took to using his NPFL fighters to handle national security concerns. This practice, coupled with the failure of disarmament and demobilization, led to the continuation of the war (Birikorang, 2003/2004; Jaye, 2003). As George Klay Kieh, Jr. observes, the peace-building project in Liberia was an abysmal failure (Kieh, 2009a). Outright combat among the various armed groups may have halted for two years, but as soon as ECOMOG forces left the country, fighting among armed factions resumed (Jaye, 2003).
Thus, the final phase of the Liberian civil war began when a new militia, called the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), launched an attack on southeastern Liberia from across the border in Guinea on April 21, 1999 (Kieh, 2009a). Emma Birikorang notes that this force was composed mainly of Mandingo and Krahn combatants who had fought before as part of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia. The sole aim of this armed force was to unseat Taylor (Birikorang, 2003/2004). By this time, already an estimated 150,000 Liberians had been killed. At the end of the fourteen year war, approximately 200,000 to 250,000 Liberians were dead as a result of the fighting, and another 200,000 were believed to be wounded. Likewise, at least 700,000 people had fled Liberia for safety by the end of the first portion of the war in 1997. But by the end of the war, at least 1 million are believed to have become refugees and another 1.4 million had become internally displaced persons (IDP) within Liberia (Waugh, 2011; “Liberia—First Civil War,” 2013; “Liberia: Consequences of Liberian Civil,” 2012).

Fighting between LURD and Taylor’s NPFL continued from April 1999 throughout 2002 as peace talks came and went, but nothing substantial was accomplished. In April of 2003, a group of Krahn fighters splintered from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy in order to form the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). This division, based once again on ethnic lines, rendered LURD Mandingo-dominated and MODEL primarily composed of Krahns. Beginning June 4, 2003, representatives of ECOWAS were able to mediate between Charles Taylor’s forces, LURD, and MODEL. The talks, which took place in Accra, Ghana, also included representatives of all Liberian political parties (Birikorang, 2003/2004). On August 18, 2003, the leaders of the three armed factions and political parties signed the “Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia (GOL) and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and
Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and the Political Parties” in which all signatories committed to the disarmament and demobilization of all armed forces, as well as the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants into society (“Liberia: Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” 2003). Additionally, the peace treaty, which became known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), set up a transitional government, known as the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), and outlined plans for elections to be held in October of 2005 (Jennings, 2007; Sawyer, 2008).

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, on October 1, 2003, United Nations troops entered Liberia, as part of the second United Nations endeavor into Liberia’s civil war, known as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in order to assist with peacekeeping operations (“UNMIL United Nations Mission,” 2012). Kathleen M. Jennings contends that the peacekeeping mission outlined in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement did not successfully reintegrate ex-combatants into society or lead to complete disarmament (Jennings, 2007). In fact, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement did not deal with the root causes of the war, nor did it create a tribunal to prosecute war crimes. The negotiators at Accra believed securing a ceasefire as soon as possible was more important than trying to force a system of retributive justice on the leaders of the warring factions (Waugh, 2011). Moreover, Amos Sawyer argues that those in the National Transitional Government of Liberia largely used their positions to further participate in the plundering of resources, rather than helping to move the country forward. Nevertheless, Sawyer contends that the 2005 elections were satisfactory overall, especially for a society coming out of a devastating war. Although many political parties did not promote an all-inclusive society, there were positive signs, including a resurgence in indigenous institutions as well as a high rate of female participation (Sawyer, 2008).
Lastly, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia, which, unique to truth commissions, held public hearings in fifteen countries so that many of the Liberians living in diaspora were also able to participate in the process (Long, 2008). Nevertheless, the commission was criticized for poor methodological standards that would never hold up in judicial review which inevitably invalidated its findings (Steinberg, 2009). Another problem with the truth commission was that many militia leaders openly bragged about their horrific misdeeds, blatantly denied committing any atrocities, and/or accused their enemies of various offenses during the proceedings, none of which promoted the healing of Liberian society. Finally, the assumption had been that the commission guaranteed amnesty to those who participated. Thus, when the commissioners released their recommendations, which included banning those guilty of war transgressions from public office for upwards of thirty years, Liberian political elites, many of whom were former militia leaders, were outraged (Waugh, 2011; Steinberg, 2009). Despite both Liberian politicians and the international community ignoring the report, including its recommendations, the majority of the Liberian public embraced the findings as a way to recognize the everyday suffering caused by the war (Hayner, 2011; Steinberg, 2009).

Overall, the fourteen year war resulted in horrific conditions for the average Liberian. Most of the war was waged against non-combatants and millions of dollars of property was destroyed due to the fighting (Waugh, 2011; Thompson, 2008). The three phases of this destructive civil war can be broken down into Doe’s overthrow and the factional fighting which lasted from 1989 to 1997, Charles Taylor’s rule from 1997 to 1999, and finally, the period of violence between armed forces from 1999 to 2003 which was resolved through the
Comprehensive Peace Agreement. While the narrative of the war is complex, so too were the many causes of the war.

3.5 The Causes of Liberia’s Civil War

Even more multifaceted than the actors and events are the causes of Liberia’s fourteen year civil war. Primordialist scholars, or those that believe ethnicity to be an immutable characteristic, most frequently cite ethnic conflict rooted in the separate origins of the Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians as the catalyst of the war (Ajibewa, 1999; Akpan, 1973; Boas, 2005; Dolo, 2010; Pham, 2004; Jesse and Williams, 2011). Others argue that more instrumentalist factors deriving from militia leaders’ youth manipulation and external interferences are to blame for the civil war (Boas, 2005; Boas, 2001; Ellis, 1995; Kieh, 2009b; Utas, 2008). Instrumentalist interpretations of ethnic conflict focus on how elites can obtain support by rallying masses around ethnicity (Jesse and Williams, 2011). This appears to be the case of the Liberian civil war.

Many have argued that the cause of the civil war is ethnic conflict specifically based on the differing origins of Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians (Ajibewa, 1999; Akpan, 1973; Boas, 2005; Dolo, 2010; Pham, 2004). According to Morten Boas, identity in Liberia was produced through the positioning of one’s group in relation to other groups. It was an “us versus them” identification that did not expressly view others as enemies, but did make those falling outside one’s group “strangers” (Boas, 2001: 701). While Colin M. Waugh acknowledges that the last two Americo-Liberian presidents instituted reforms intended to ensure better treatment of indigenous citizens, it was not enough to prevent Doe’s coup d’état, nor his initial widespread support from indigenous groups (Waugh, 2011). After the outbreak of the civil war, ethnic conflict continued, although it shifted from being between Americo-Liberians and indigenous
groups to being an intra-indigenous ethnic conflict with Mandingos and Krahs aligned against Gios and Manos. This was mainly the result of Doe’s preferential treatment of both Krahs and Mandingos which Taylor took advantage of by playing up ethnic divisions and pushing many Gio and Mano citizens to join his militia (Kieh, 2009b; Boas, 1997).

Relatedly, some scholars have argued that a religious divide further entrenched conflict in Liberia. From the beginning of their migration to Liberia, Americo-Liberians had looked down on indigenous groups’ religions with the exception of Islam, which most Americo-Liberians viewed as deserving of some respect (d’Azevedo, 1994; Ellis, 2010). However, Paul Gifford argues that with the arrival of U.S. Christian fundamentalist missionaries in the 1980s, there was increased animosity between Christians and Muslims in Liberia due to American missionaries’ teachings. Furthermore, because many immigrant Lebanese Muslims and most of the largely Muslim Mandingo population were successful economically, tensions further grew between Christians and Muslims (Giffords, 1993). Moreover, according to Augustine Konneh, the Mandingos were particularly disliked by other indigenous groups and labeled as “foreigners,” despite having resided in Liberia since the eighteenth century. Due mainly to the Mandingos’ relationship with the True Whig Party which had granted them special economic privileges, but also because of their Muslim faith which prevented them from utilizing indigenous religious institutions such as the Poro and the Sande, other indigenous groups largely rejected their presence (Konneh, 1996).

Indeed, Stephen Ellis notes that a large part of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia’s membership included those formerly affiliated with the Movement for the Redemption of Liberian Muslims, a militia created by Alhaji Kromah in 1991 specifically for Mandingos, which eventually merged with Albert Karpeh’s Liberian United Defense Force to form the
United Liberation Movement of Liberia. Kromah promoted the image of the NPFL as being anti-Muslim since it targeted Mandingos. Ellis argues that it is quite possible that because of the widespread anti-Mandingo sentiment in Liberia, over time there grew to be an anti-Islam bias among many non-Muslim Liberians (Ellis, 1995).

Nevertheless, George Klay Kieh, Jr., argues that a simple ethnic or religious conflict thesis fails to provide adequate motivation for the civil war and also unfairly homogenizes the various social groups (Kieh, 2009b). Kieh qualifies that a major factor in the conflict between Americo-Liberians and indigenous groups was the existence of severe economic inequalities which caused an enormous class divide. Prior to Doe’s coup, the ruling cohort of Americo-Liberians in the True Whig Party, who made up only approximately four percent of the population, controlled over sixty-five percent of the wealth in Liberia (Kieh, 1992). Furthermore, there was a distinct class division between those living in urban milieus versus rural areas, with the average urban family, usually Americo-Liberian, out-earning their rural counterparts, generally indigenous, by about nine times (Kieh, 1992; Waugh, 2011).

Thus, militia leaders such as Taylor and Kromah promoted ethnic conflict in instrumentalist ways such as through youth manipulation in order to inspire Liberians to fight. The youth, long deprived of the economic means to support themselves due to the government’s mismanagement of the economy, were ripe for conscription into militias which provided them looting opportunities to make up for what they financially lacked (Kieh, 2009b; Keen, 1998; Utas, 2008). Morten Boas argues that the leaders of the various armed forces fiercely fought for control of resources. Economic motivation was of prime importance during the war with militia leaders fighting for political control in order to obtain diamonds, gold, rubber, palm oil, timber, marijuana, and looted goods (Boas, 2001). In fact, David Harris believes that one reason for the
multiplying militias was the opportunity for commercial profits (Harris, 1999). Furthermore, an empirical study by Havard Hegre, Gudrun Ostby, and Clionadh Raleigh confirms that the majority of the fighting during the war occurred in areas which allowed for quick profits. For example, in more urban spaces, shopping districts where made battle sites, whereas in the rural areas mines and forests were targeted in order to obtain raw goods (Hegre, Ostby, and Raleigh, 2009).

This passion for greed is often traced to the nepotism which was rampant throughout Liberia. Indeed, the leaders of the True Whig Party, all Americo-Liberians, maintained control through a system of nepotism in which they, as patrons, made alliances with local indigenous chiefs through the awarding of various resources (Boas, 2001; Waugh, 2011). Kieh also notes that in addition to bribery, government officials treated state resources as personal property (Kieh, 2009b). This mode of corruption was extended by Doe who in fact increased the role of patronage under his regime, and was similarly continued later under Taylor (Waugh, 2011; Gifford, 1993). Thus, when militia leaders promised young fighters the chance to loot, the youth, long kept from accumulating any wealth, responded with gusto (Keen, 1998; Utas, 2008)

One of the most disturbing aspects of youth manipulation in the Liberian civil war was the ubiquitous use of child soldiers. Although an exact number cannot be given, an estimated 5,000 to 38,000 children served (Pan, 2003; Veney, 2006). Researchers at Human Rights Watch observe that child soldiers were used mainly due to the fact that most children are obedient, as well as easily manipulated. Many youths voluntarily joined militias in order to survive after losing their caretakers. However, there is also clear evidence that many were forced into soldiering, often by being drugged and/or kidnapped (“Easy Prey: Child Soldiers,” 1994). After the war, former child soldiers were largely stigmatized by mainstream Liberian society, being
viewed as violent and untrustworthy (Holland and Kamara-Umunna, 2011). Moreover, Ruthie Ackerman argues that the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation (DDRR) programs for ex-combatants were largely inadequate, leaving most former child soldiers living on the streets (Ackerman, 2009).

Lastly, the role of external interventions provides another way that ethnic tensions were exploited by militia leaders of the NPFL, LURD, and others. Although the involvement by ECOWAS, especially through the Nigerian government, has already been discussed, there were other outside actors involved in the conflict which helped to foment and prolong the war. Notably, the leaders of Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Libya all provided training, money, and/or weapons to Charles Taylor (Sesay, 1996). Likewise, initially, the U.S. government supported Doe in the form of military advisors. Following Doe’s murder, the U.S. government lent support to Johnson, and then ECOMOG (Kieh, 1992). Nonetheless, as Max A. Sesay observes, the U.S. government, despite the historical connection between the U.S. and Liberia, largely ignored the worsening humanitarian situation in Liberia, as it was of no strategic importance in the post-Cold War world (Sesay, 1996). In fact, after the U.S. invaded Iraq in 1991, the U.S. government’s attention to Liberia largely evaporated. Yet, many analysts, including some in the U.S. Department, believe that the fighting could have ended in 1990 if the U.S. had sent even a small contingent into Liberia. Later, in 2003, the U.S. government did indicate its wish for Taylor to step down, but again there were no troops deployed to help end the fighting, despite the calls of many Liberians requesting U.S. intervention (Waugh, 2011). Thus, the involvement of the governments of Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Libya, and the U.S. in Liberia, as well as the government of Guinea which also contributed to the war by supplying the
Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy militia with arms, helped militia leaders to inspire ordinary Liberians to fight one another (Smith, 2006).

Interestingly, one Liberian armed faction made its own intrusion across national borders. In 1991, Taylor helped foment a proxy army in Sierra Leone called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), whose adherents murdered thousands of Sierra Leonean citizens and enslaved many others in the mining of diamonds. These diamonds, which were exchanged with Taylor for weapons, became known as “blood diamonds” (Petrou, 2009; Waugh, 2011). Later, in April of 2012, years after the Liberian civil war ended in 2003, Taylor was charged by the Special Court for Sierra Leone with eleven counts of war crimes including such acts as terrorizing civilians, unlawful killing, crimes of sexual and physical violence, using child soldiers, and abducting people for the purpose of forced labor. In May 2012, Taylor was sentenced by the Court to 50 years in jail. He is currently serving out his sentence in Britain, although he is appealing his case (Summers, 2012; Sesay, 2013; “Charles Taylor Trial: Investigator,” 2013; “The Accused, Special Court,” 2012).

To conclude, the Liberian civil war was a drawn-out conflict that destroyed many people’s lives and left many struggling to survive (“Africa Women and Peace Support,” 2004). While many scholars cite ethnic conflict as the main catalyst of the war, for reasons associated with differences in origin, the civil war is more attributable to the ethnic instrumentalism of militia leaders who manipulated the youth and received support from external actors (Ajibewa, 1999; Boas, 2005; Boas, 2001; Ellis, 1995; Kieh, 2009b; Utas, 2008). Yet, while the context of the war is important to the understanding of Liberian women’s wartime experiences, the ultimate focus of this chapter, it is also crucial to appreciate Liberian’s women’s general experiences prior to the start of the war.
3.6 Women in Liberian Society

As with women in virtually all societies, Liberian women have historically faced multiple forms of patriarchy, the institutionalization of male dominance over women and children within the family and larger society (Lerner, 1987). Regardless of ethnicity, racial background, class, or religion, Liberian women have had their lives structured by the patriarchal institutions of the family, economy, and religion. A major form of patriarchy which has defined Liberian women’s lives is the institution of the family. Historically, there were differences among the many indigenous communities as well as in comparison with the Americo-Liberian community, but overall marriage has been limiting for all Liberian women. According to Ayodeji Olukoju, Liberian women have traditionally rendered many services within the home, such as cooking, cleaning, and raising children, as part of their wifely duties (Olukoju, 2006).

Americo-Liberian women could file claims in court since their marriages were recognized by governmental law, while indigenous women in traditional marriages, which were based on customary law, did not have access to due process (Olukoju, 2006). As Kristina Scurry Baehr and Chi Mgbako point out, the goal of customary law in marriage disputes was reconciliation. Thus, women who brought their cases before a chief, who heard cases in the customary tradition, were instructed to work out marital problems rather than divorce (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011). However, despite the fact that Americo-Liberian women had the right to file for divorce, historically, divorce was rarely granted. Santosh C. Saha notes that judges also sought to preserve statutory marriages by promoting reconciliation between husbands and wives (Saha, 1998).

Another aspect of the patriarchal institution of the family is childbearing which has been considered particularly important for all Liberian women, regardless of social location.
Even urban professional women have traditionally maintained high fertility rates (Kollehehlon, 1984). The role of motherhood will be discussed in a later section. However, it is important to note that nearly all scholars on the subject contend that motherhood is an extremely significant concept in Liberia (Steady, 2011; Casimiro et al., 2009). Finally, another factor which affected both Americo-Liberian and indigenous women within the institution of the family was the role that men played as the final decision-makers within the household (Omanyondo, 2005). Linda Lacey and Irit Sinai confirm that across all strata of Liberian society, males have traditionally been viewed as the heads of household, although there have always been some female-headed households which were at clear financial and social disadvantages (Lacey and Sinai, 1996).

The second major patriarchal institution in the lives of Liberian women is the system of income generation within the household. In Liberia, most indigenous societies’ gender division of labor differs drastically from the concept of a separate female private sphere and public male sphere (Sudarkasa, 1986). Indigenous groups have practiced a gendered division of labor in which women have, in addition to performing household chores as well as bearing and raising children, helped economically support their husbands through farming and/or generating income in a market setting (Olukoju, 2006). According to Niara Sudarkasa, the traditional role of West African women in the economic sphere, whether through farming, trade, or artisan craft production, was viewed as complementary to men’s work (Sudarkasa, 1986). Mary H. Moran notes that in the southeast of Liberia, where women have traditionally performed most of the farm labor, women had exclusive control over what they produced, and that any money earned from selling surplus produce was theirs to keep (Moran, 1988). Nevertheless, such examples of Liberian women’s involvement in public spaces have been construed as part of women’s
responsibilities originating in the private sphere. For instance, Judith Van Allen notes that the public/private divide in sub-Saharan Africa functions in a less overtly divisional way than in the Western world. Throughout the region, women’s activities on the farm, in the factory, and/or in professional settings are generally viewed as an extension of female reproductive activities, as it is women’s economic labor which enables children to eat and obtain other necessities (Van Allen, 2000; Casimiro et al., 2009).

In contrast, the Americo-Liberian community has held more closely to the Western division of a female private sphere and a male public sphere. Unlike most indigenous women who were expected to engage in economic activities, Americo-Liberian women have traditionally relied on men for financial support (Blyden, 2002). The historic ability of Americo-Liberian women to abstain from paid labor was due to their class privilege as the Americo-Liberian community dominated the country’s economy and formed its aristocracy (Ellis, 2006; Kieh, 2009b). Yet, despite this tradition of being supported by their husbands, some Americo-Liberian women have also worked outside the home, although mainly in such feminized fields such as teaching and administrative labor. However, beginning in 1950s, Americo-Liberian women began to serve in some government positions. Yet Veronika Fuest contends that their participation was meant to prevent indigenous men from obtaining high level positions in the government, with the ultimate intended purpose being to ensure that the Americo-Liberian community’s hold on political power remained strong (Fuest, 2008).

One particularly interesting gendered division of labor phenomenon developed in Liberia based on the Americo-Liberian social practice of women not working outside the home. According to Mary H. Moran, this tradition, in addition to the influence of missionaries and Europeans, led to the development of a concept called “civilized.” Being civilized referred to
anyone living a so-called “Western” lifestyle. Moran explains that civilized status was earned through both formal education and religious instruction as well as through the style of one’s dress and household management. However, patriarchal notions dictated that civilized women could lose their status if they engaged in market work or subsistence farming, the traditional purview of indigenous women. Moran contends that most civilized women maintained their status by being economically supported by men. When this was not possible, women of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian background have felt pressured to fulfill the civilized lifestyle. The burden has been especially great on single women but even married women underwent many difficulties to avoid engaging in marketing or farming, or at least to give the appearance of doing so (Moran, 1988). Clearly, this practice in which Liberian women sought to portray themselves as well-off enough to not work is rooted in class-based ideals associated with the traditions of the Americo-Liberian aristocracy (Ellis, 2006).

In addition to the structure of the family and systems of income generation, religion is yet another traditionally patriarchal institution in Liberian women’s lives. Most scholars believe that about 40 percent of Liberians identify as Christian and 20 percent as Muslim, while approximately 40 percent of Liberians follow a form of an indigenous Animist religion (Olukoju, 2006). Other estimates have suggested that as much as 75 percent of the population practice indigenous faiths while only 15 percent practice Christianity and 10 percent Islam (“Liberia, World Factbook” 2012; Olukoju, 2006; Waugh, 2011). The reason that the religious breakdown is so unclear is that the majority of Liberian Christians, regardless of class or ethnicity, have combined indigenous religious practices with Christianity, especially through simultaneous membership in Poro or Sande and a church (Ellis, 2006; Olukoju, 2006). Likewise, Islam began to spread widely throughout Liberia in the nineteenth century by way of Mandingo traders. It
was mainly Vai and Loma converts in the beginning, but later many within the Bassa, Mano, and Gio communities converted as well. Yet, like Christians, most Liberian Muslims have also continued to maintain many indigenous religious practices such as divination and ancestor veneration although not membership in secret societies like *Poro* or *Sande* (Olukoju, 2006; Waugh, 2011). While Muslim Vai, Mandingo, Gbande, and Mende girls were traditionally at a high risk for early marriage, which typically occurred between the ages of 12 and 15, Marietta Williams notes that interpretations of Islam within Liberia have historically been moderate and Muslim women were permitted to join associations and activities outside of the home (Steady, 2011; “Women’s Rights in Liberia,” 2005).

Other religious traditions, such as the “secret societies” in the north/northwestern part of the country, an indigenous religious institution based on age-groups served to initiate and welcome men and women as adults into society. However, Stephen Ellis points out that the term secret society is often a misnomer as nearly every adult would have been initiated into such societies where they existed. The most well-known of these secret societies are the *Poro* and *Sande*, for men and women respectively, connected adherents to the spirit world (Ellis, 2006; Akpan, 1973). During *Sande* induction, female initiates were taught farming techniques and household skills, as well as strategies to raise children and how to properly use medicine (Bledsoe, 1980). Scholars such as Mark Hanna Watkins believe that secret societies were “bush schools” which prepared girls for their future roles as wives and mothers (Watkins, 1943: 674).

Nevertheless, Caroline H. Bledsoe maintains that *Sande* initiation only symbolically marked a young girl’s transition into adulthood, pointing out that *Sande* and secret societies were actually a way to reinforce adherence to traditional authorities, especially to the leadership of secret societies. According to Bledsoe, central to most traditional African systems of hierarchy
was the control of women. Men and the elderly have historically had rights over women and children, and have manipulated women’s reproductive capacities and labor production in order to build relationships with young men based on debt obligation. While Bledsoe notes that some senior women in the upper echelons of the leadership of secret societies were able to become powerful through their control of younger women, they never held secular, political control within their communities. Nevertheless, through their leadership roles in Sande, women were able to influence the behavior of men (Bledsoe, 1980). Sande and similar institutions were also important for the bonds of solidary created among women within the community which ultimately provided a system of support for women (Little, 1949). As part of Sande initiation, females underwent clitoridectomies or labiadectomies, also known as female genital cutting (FGC) which is labeled by the United Nations as a harmful traditional practice (HTP) (“Liberia: Report on Female Genital,” 2001; Bledsoe, 1980; “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence,” 1993). According to officials of the U.S. Department of State, the exact number of Liberian females who have undergone genital cutting is unknown, but they estimate that prior to the war, in some rural areas approximately half of the female population was circumcised. However, in general, this is not a tradition for Muslim women as well as Americo-Liberian, Krahn, Grebo, and Kru women. Instead, it has mainly affected the female population living in Mande-speaking areas (“Liberia: Report on Female Genital,” 2001).

Although Americo-Liberian women did not participate in Sande and female genital cutting practices, they nevertheless also experienced patriarchy through their religion. Nemata Blyden explains that the Americo-Liberian community centered on the “Christian values of the West” (Blyden, 2002: 32). As Stephen Ellis notes, the forms of Christianity practiced by
Americo-Liberian were based on the nineteenth century Christian interpretations of the U.S. slave population. Ellis argues that theologically, in the majority of Americo-Liberian churches God was viewed as a paternalistic master who punished individuals for their personal failings (Ellis, 2006). Scholars such as Joanne Carlson Brown, Rebecca Parker, and Karen L. Bloomquist explain that traditional Christian teachings have often tacitly encouraged both physical and sexual violence specifically against women by promoting themes of suffering and atonement (Brown and Parker, 1989; Bloomquist, 1989). Domestic violence has been a problem for Americo-Liberian women, as it has been for Liberian women of all ethnic groups (Horton, 2013). Likewise, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that much of Christian theology teaches that women are inferior to men and consequently those in control of Christian institutions have limited women’s political, social, and reproductive capacities (Ruether, 1989).

Nevertheless, like Sande, the Christian churches of the Americo-Liberian community did provide women with a system of female support as well as an avenue to engage in activities outside of the home. A few Americo-Liberian women became involved in missionary work, although very marginally, while many more participated in regular church activities, especially church associations (Blyden, 2002). Interestingly, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Patricia A. Schechter argue that Americo-Liberian women’s participation in the church came full circle in Liberia and can actually be traced back to what Kamene Okonjo calls “the dual-sex political system” common to many African societies (Moran, 1989: 443, 455; Okonjo, 1976: 45; Schechter, 2012; Gilkes, 2001). In contrast to the northern and western portion of Liberia, eastern Liberia has historically lacked institutions like the Poro and Sande. Secret societies did exist in the east, but membership was not universal (Moran, 2008). Instead, the dual-sex system served many of the same social and political purposes as the secret societies of the north and
northwest (Moran, 1989). Emblematic of many African societies, the dual-sex system was a set of two village councils, one run by women and one run by men, through which each sex managed its own affairs (Okonjo, 1976).

Moran recognizes this institution at play in eastern Liberia and traces its foundations to the widespread belief in the region that men cannot adequately represent women, and women cannot adequately represent men (Moran, 1989). For example, traditionally among the Grebo, a council of female elders existed to represent the interests of the women within the village. The council was typically composed of the female members of the village’s patrilineal clans and its leader was called the blo nyene, which is usually rendered “the women’s president” (Moran, 1989: 453). The women of the council conferred with the men’s council on many matters, but also had duties which they performed without men’s influences, mainly consisting of those issues specifically affecting women (Moran, 2008).

Importantly, the women’s council did wield some political power in the past. For example, historically, the women from the council were able to prevent war when it suited them as the blo nyene had veto power over the men’s council. Moran notes that in addition to the Grebo, many other ethnic groups throughout the southeastern portion of Liberia made use of the dual-sex system (Moran, 2008). Although not viewed as the political or social equals men, Moran believes that women in the female councils did hold some political power, although the typical woman did not, and, moreover, what power the elders of the female council did hold was limited (Moran, 2008; Moran, 1989). In general, Liberian women were historically limited by their religion, whether it was a form of Animism, Christianity, or Islam. Ann Jones explains that whether a Liberian man follows Christianity, Islam, or an indigenous religion, he was likely to believe that God put men in charge of women (Jones, 2010).
In conclusion, patriarchy is present in all societies at some level. Funmi Olonishakin and others such as Veronika Fuest argue that overall, Liberian women have historically had a low profile both within indigenous communities and in the Americo-Liberian community. While Olonishakin and Fuest contend that there were a few prominent women, the vast majority of both Americo-Liberian and indigenous Liberian women were not involved in politics (Olonishakin, 1995; Fuest, 2008). Liberian women, regardless of their ethnicity, class, or religion were considered to be socially inferior to men (Fuest, 2008). Generally, Liberian women have felt the presence of patriarchy most strongly in the family, economics, and religious traditions. These three institutions certainly affected how Liberian women experienced their lives during the civil war.

3.7 Liberian Women’s Experiences during the War Years

While the individual experiences of Liberian women during the civil war were diverse, there are nevertheless common themes in women’s general wartime experiences. Overall, women dealt with tremendous difficulties brought on by the displacement of resources and the high levels of violence that were a result of the war (Danuweli, et al., 2011). This section will highlight the growth of female headed households because of the war, the effects of the war on women’s access to education, and the war’s economic consequences for women.

The effects of the civil war took a toll on the entire Liberian population. Throughout 1990, those in the east, in Nimba County, suffered the most. However, by 1991 and 1992, those residing in the counties of Grand Gedeh in the southeast, and Lofa and Grande Cape Mount in the north and northeast felt the brunt of the fighting. Residents of the capital, Monrovia, had initially witnessed fighting, including a civilian massacre of women and children by Doe’s AFL troops at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, but saw little additional violence until an attack in October
1992. Known as “Operation Octopus,” the NPFL launched an assault against ECOMOG, at least 6,000 civilians in the city perished in a matter of a few weeks. From 1993 to 1995, those in Monrovia as well as the more rural counties of Lofa and Bong in the north and Maryland in the south endured heavy fighting. In 1996, both Monrovia and surrounding rural areas, including all the way into the next county, Bomi County, suffered the most violence. A lull in major fighting between armed groups ceased until 2000 when LURD began attacking large numbers of civilians in the north in Lofa County. Civilians throughout the countryside, especially near Tubmanburg in Gomi County but also those in Nimba County, suffered tremendously from attacks by LURD and MODEL from 2000 throughout most of 2003. Those in Monrovia also experienced intense fighting beginning in early 2003, lasting until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended the fighting that August. As Colin M. Waugh points out, no Liberian throughout the fourteen years of war was unaffected. Everyone had a relative or friend who died, disappeared, fled, or suffered an injury as a direct result of the war (Waugh, 2011).

On the whole, Liberian women were under a heavy burden during the war. Their workloads and family responsibilities increased even as their access to food, land, medical care, water, and employment opportunities drastically decreased due to the conflict (Veney, 2006). Thelma Aremiebi Ekiyor and Leymah Roberta Gbowee assert that in particular, Liberian women’s duties of caring for both children and the elderly were made difficult by wartime constraints (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). Additionally, Liberian women frequently took in extended family members and others rendered homeless by the war (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). The heavy burden placed on women was in part due to the widespread wartime phenomenon of men leaving relationships in order to avoid responsibilities. This, in addition to the many men gone to fight and men who had been killed during the war, meant that there were
increased numbers of widowed, separated, divorced, and/or single women as a result of the war. Thus, one major consequence of the war was the increase in the number of female headed households (Danuweli, et al., 2011).

Linda Lacey and Irit Sinai point out that even prior to the outbreak of war, female headed households were much more likely to struggle due to having less access to resources than male headed households (Lacey and Sinai, 1996). Therefore, the economic devastation wrought by the war made circumstances even more challenging for women in charge of households. In fact, during the war, even in households with a male breadwinner, women frequently had to work outside of the home in order to bring in additional income (Nwogu, 2010; Danuweli et al., 2011).

According to Molly Kinder and Emily Stranger, the civil war led to an 18 percent increase in the number of urban female headed households. Additionally, on average, six family members lived in each urban, female headed household, which put a tremendous strain on the women who had to support such a large number of people (Kinder and Stranger, 2008).

Nevertheless, as heads of households, women did experience some benefits. For example, women discovered that they no longer needed to ask their husbands for permission to buy something (Olonishakin, 1995). However, according to Victoria Ijeoma Nwogu, Liberian women did not have access to the same resources, such as property, land, and capital, as men did, which made it difficult for them to obtain what they and their families needed to survive (Nwogu, 2010). Thus, the lack of employment opportunities was particularly difficult, often forcing women and girls into either early marriages or sex work (Danuweli et al., 2011).

A major reason for the high number of female headed households was how the war dramatically affected Liberian women’s access to education. Scholars with the non-

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10 Kinder and Stranger also note that because of the two decades of war, census data is largely unavailable for the 1989-2003 time period (Kinder and Stranger, 2008). A thorough review of the literature did not provide any further statistics concerning the exact number of female headed households in Liberia either during or after the war.
governmental organization Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) and officials within the government’s Gender and Development Ministry believe that the large scale phenomenon of school closures during the war left women and girls unable to continue with their educations (Danuweli et al., 2011; “A Situation Analysis of the Women,” 2008). Additionally, widespread wartime rape, which will be discussed more fully below in a following section, also contributed to young girls’ inability to complete school when these rapes resulted in pregnancy. Moreover, girls dropped out if they lived far from school since it was often too dangerous to make the journey (Omanyondo, 2005).

In addition to affecting women’s access to education, the civil war also prevented many women from carrying out their previous economic activities, which primarily consisted of petty marketing in the informal sector (Danuweli et al., 2011). Thus, Funmi Olonishakin points out that during the war, women would work any odd job that they could find in order to support themselves and their families (Olonishakin, 1995). In fact, it was this very economic vulnerability which often pushed women into sex work and/or into sexually exploitable situations in which they bartered their bodies in order to obtain goods and services from businessmen, teachers, and officers at checkpoints. Rural women, who often had to flee their farms, their very means of subsistence, were particularly financially disadvantaged and were thus the most easily exploited during the war (Omanyondo, 2005). Additionally, Elizabeth Ferris points out that trading sex for food and/or medicine was particularly prominent within refugee camps when rations were not enough. Often, some humanitarian workers purposely withheld rations in order pressure women and young girls for sex (Ferris, 2007).

Nevertheless, while many scholars have emphasized the negative impact of the war on women’s economic status, Veronika Fuest argues that some market women actually benefited
financially despite the war. Many women, unlike men, were able to expand their businesses across areas where fighting was taking place due the very fact that they were women. Men often had to flee or go into hiding if fighting broke out, as they were more likely to be targeted by combatants. Women from different areas of the country would meet with one another to exchange goods, and additionally network, often relaying information concerning important events and even teaching one another different business skills (Fuest, 2008). Emmanuel Kwesi Aning adds that these market women who went behind enemy lines to engage in what Paul Richards defines as “attack trade,” often helped reduce harmful stereotypes about ethnic groups and populations that fell into areas under the control of opposing militias (Aning, 1998; Richards, 1996: xxvii). Historically, Mandingo men had dominated trade in Liberia, but due to the war in which fighters frequently targeted Mandingos, many had fled the country (Fuest, 2008; Kieh, 2009b; Boas, 1997). Thus, throughout towns and villages in Liberia, women from other ethnic groups began to fill the trading void that the Mandingo men left (Fuest, 2008). Indeed, many Liberian women opened small shops and businesses during the war in order to support themselves and their families (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

While it is debatable how beneficial the war was for women as far as increasing female autonomy and business opportunities, Veronika Fuest’s interview with an educated Liberian woman in August of 2005 sheds light on the overall situation. The woman is quoted as saying, “What has helped women to see has been the war… The lady had to be the breadwinner of the family, while the man got nothing to do. They [women] cannot see themselves as going back to what was before the war” (Fuest, 2008: 209). This theme will be returned to later. In conclusion, this section sought to elaborate on women’s wartime experiences by considering women’s roles as heads of households, women’s access to education, and both the financial constraints and
opportunities women encountered during Liberia’s civil war ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004). Obviously, individual’s experiences were diverse and unique. Yet there were common themes in women’s experiences, especially in the tremendous difficulties brought on by the scarcity of resources and the high levels of violence that were a result of the war (Danuweli, et al., 2011). The next section will expand on the particular forms of violence which affected women during the war.

3.8 Wartime Violence against Liberian Women

Although both men and women endured wartime violence, women in particular suffered unique forms of gender violence simply because they were women. By far, sexual assault was the biggest issue which affected women. However, other forms of gender based violence, general wartime atrocities, and the particular injuries endured by women living in internally displaced encampments are also major forms of wartime violence which women experienced (Ackerman, 2009; AFELL, Turshen, and Twagiramariya, 1998; Aryee, et. al, 1998; Danuweli et al., 2011; Veney, 2006). Sexual assault is one of the most well-known features of the Liberian civil war (Wiltz, 2010; Gross, 2009; Chandler, 2010). However, rape is extremely taboo in Liberia. In 1994, researchers with The Journal of the American Medical Association discovered that within Liberian society there was not even a commonly understood word to describe rape. Instead, researchers had to ask women if they had ever been forced physically to engage in sex. In fact, in Liberia, any kind of violence directed specifically at women has been considered socially off-limits (Aryee et. al, 1998; Thompson, 2008).

Thus, throughout the war, rape often went unreported due to the shame that women felt, but also because women feared that they would be rejected by their families and communities for being raped (Danuweli et al., 2011). This was particularly true in rural areas which were more
conservative than the cities. There, many husbands who discovered that their wives had been raped would often reject them, meaning that both the women and their children lost the husbands’ financial support. Yet, Funmi Olonishakin contends that even a raped woman whose husband did not reject her often blamed herself for the rape and would end up separating from her husband out of guilt and shame (Olonishakin, 1995). Thus, although nothing in the literature is discussed in terms of “male honor,” it does appear that many Liberian men held such notions as they did frequently repudiate their wives if they had been sexually assaulted, and because women feared rejection by their communities if their status became known.

Additionally, lawyers with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) note that older women were particularly traumatized and ashamed when they were raped by the young fighters. This was mainly due to the fact that in Liberia, older women view all young men as their sons. Thus, when an older woman was raped by a younger man, she experienced it as being raped by her son (AFELL et al., 1998). According to researchers at Amnesty International, Liberian fighters used rape to terrorize the civilian population and instill fear. Additionally, much of the rape during the war appeared to have been ethnically motivated (“Document—Liberia: No Impunity,” 2004). Even by 1992 it was well documented that rape was a systemic problem (Nowrojee and Swiss, 1992). Researchers from The Journal of the American Medical Association surveyed a diverse group of 205 Liberian women about their experiences of sexual violence during the first five years of the war, from 1989 to 1994. The sample included women from many age groups, religious affiliations, levels of education, economic statuses, and ethnicities, and additionally included both rural and urban women. Within their sample, 49 percent of women had experienced at least one act of physical or sexual violence and 14 percent of the women acknowledged that they had undergone more than one act of violence. In
particular, 15 percent reported being raped or experiencing an attempted rape. Younger women, typically age 25 and under, were more likely than women over age 25 to have undergone sexual assault or attempted sexual assault (Aryee et. al, 1998).

This pattern of sexual violence directed at women continued throughout the remainder of the war. In a 2008 cross-sectional study of 1,666 Liberian adults, researchers found that overall, 9.2 percent of noncombatant women, versus 7.4 percent of the noncombatant male population, experienced at least one form of sexual violence during the war. For the portion of the population involved in combatant operations, the same pattern held with more women than men affected: 42.3 percent versus 32.6 percent. It is significant to note that combatants were at a much higher risk of sexual violence than the rest of the population (Asher et al., 2008). In a study performed by Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) and Liberia’s Gender and Development Ministry, even higher levels of sexual assault were discovered. It was determined that half of their sample, all female, had suffered from sexual torture (Danuweli et al., 2011).

According to a study by the World Health Organization, in their sample of Liberian women located in Loma, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Grand Bassa Counties, 81.6 percent endured some form of physical or sexual violence during the war (Omanyondo, 2005). These counties did experience the brunt of the fighting over the course of the war which is one possible explanation for the high proportion in the sample (Waugh, 2011). Moreover, the World Health Organization survey included those who had suffered physical assault in addition to sexual assault whereas the other studies mainly only looked at sexual violence.

On the whole, rape appears to have been particularly high during the Liberian civil war (Chandler, 2010). It is useful to compare the prevalence of rape in Liberia, in which an estimated 60 to 90 percent of the female population, or about 1.2 to 1.8 million women out of a population
of 3.9 million, were raped, to other recent conflicts (Toral, 2012). In contrast, during the Bosnian war, approximately 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped between 1992 and 1995 out of a population of over 23 million (Cerkez, 2013; “Yugoslavia: Population,” 1990). During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women out of a population of approximately 12 million were raped in the 100 days the genocide lasted (“Rwanda: ‘Marked for Death,’ Rape,” 2004; “Rwanda, World Factbook,” 2013). Sierra Leone’s civil war from 1991 to 2002 resulted in a widespread rape epidemic. Like Liberia, there are no official numbers, but some estimates have been as high as 275,000 out of a population of about 5 million (“Sexual Violence within the Sierra Leone,” 2001; “TRC Sierra Leone,” 2008; “Sierra Leone, World Factbook,” 2013). Estimates of rapes in the Congo crisis thus far have ranged from 1 million to as high as 1.80 million out of a population of about 70 million (Bredenkamp, Palermo, and Peterman, 2011). Thus, Liberia’s rape epidemic was exceptionally high compared to other recent conflicts.

Overall, the state did not adequately protect women’s rights, and additionally failed to provide women with access to adequate services to deal with the medical issues associated with sexual assault (Nwogu, 2010; Danuweli et al., 2011). In fact, Ruthie Ackerman reports that women were commonly afraid to file rape charges at their local police stations as they feared that police officers were in fact involved in raping and sexually assaulting women (Ackerman, 2009). According to Ann Jones, many judges, magistrates, and police officers took advantage of female rape victims who attempted to bring the crimes committed against them to court. At best, police officers and magistrates treated rape and sexual assaults as unimportant. However, widespread victim-blaming occurred, and many in law enforcement even demanded sexual services in exchange for a hearing (Jones, 2010). Moreover, as mentioned above, shame of the rape often
kept women from seeking justice. Additionally, accusing a man of rape was considered an offense against the man’s family (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011). Thus, Ann Jones observes that women were frequently concerned with negatively impacting a rapists’ future by bringing a case against him or by offending his family (Jones, 2010).

Naturally, many women suffered from serious gynecological problems due to the violence which they experienced, especially violence associated rape. In one study, the most common reproductive issues cited by women were abnormal vaginal bleeding and/or discharge, infertility, leaking urine, and chronic abdominal pain. In more extreme cases, such as when women underwent gang rape, women suffered from urinary and/or fecal fistula as well as genital prolapse (Danuweli et al., 2011). Robin M. Chandler notes that fistula, known specifically as traumatic gynecologic fistula (TGF), is the most horrific result of gender based violence, and effectively renders the woman, or girl, incontinent, constantly leaking urine and/or feces (Chandler, 2010). It was mainly young women under the age of 24 who suffered the most from gynecological issues, although it is unclear exactly how many Liberian women experienced these serious medical issues (Danuweli et al., 2011).

Although sexual violence during the civil war was horrific, even the general violence which overtook Liberia during the fourteen year war is renowned for its brutality. As Colin M. Waugh points out, most of the violence of the combatants was directed at civilians (Waugh, 2011). Terrorizing civilians was a part of the militias’ daily routine. For example, civilians were forced to witness the murders of their own children, often while being commanded to applaud or laugh. If they cried out, then they themselves would be killed (AFELL et al., 1998). In fact, many atrocities were committed including the severing of hands, arms, legs, and feet (Ackerman, 2009). Both women and men experienced many others forms of general violence including being
beaten, tied up, strip searched, and/or physically detained (Aryee et. al, 1998). A particularly brutal tactic used by fighters was ramming the butt of a rifle into a person’s back. Not only incredibly painful, it usually resulted in permanently paralyzing the person’s legs (Jones, 2010).

The final aspect of wartime violence against women is what occurred to women living in encampments for internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to Cassandra Veney, in these displacement centers, women faced certain gender based acts of violence, such as abduction, rape and/or other acts of physical and sexual violence. Furthermore, women were subjected to strip searches, beatings, and killings. At these camps, women lacked basic necessities such as food and clean drinking water, but also went without access to birth control, school, health care, and economic opportunities. Additionally, they were often separated from family members and thus rendered more vulnerable. In fact, internally displaced persons were in a more disadvantageous position than refugees who were at least entitled to international protections and some assistance (Veney, 2006). Moreover, many women and girls in both refugee and internally displaced persons camps also underwent forced marriages and forced pregnancies. This, in addition to the already mentioned lack of health care and birth control within in these displacement centers, increased women’s risk to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Danuweli et al., 2011).

In conclusion, women experienced several forms of violence throughout the war period. However, rape and other forms of sexual violence were especially problematic. Yet even the general violence which both men and women experienced during the war was brutal. Finally, women living in displacement centers endured particular forms of violence associated with their limited circumstances (Ackerman, 2009; AFELL et al., 1998; Aryee, et. al, 1998; Danuweli et
al., 2011; Veney, 2006). In general, women sought to deal with the onslaught of wartime violence in several ways, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.9 Liberian Women’s Coping Mechanisms

During the fourteen year civil war, besides the physical destruction, Liberia as a society suffered as well. The widespread killings, abductions, and sexual assaults, combined with the extensive use of forced labor, torture, and recruitment of child soldiers exacted a heavy toll on the Liberian population. As a result, both men and women experienced mental and emotional trauma (Danuweli et al., 2011). Researchers with The American Medical Association Journal estimate that approximately 800,000 Liberians suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 750,000 Liberians experienced major depressive disorder (MDD) as a result of the war. Additionally, in the Journal’s study, another 205,000 Liberians were discovered to have contemplated suicide during the war while 112,000 had actually attempted suicide. Pointedly, the researchers note that those who had experienced sexual violence were more likely to experience these disorders and thoughts of suicide (Asher et al., 2008).

Yet, while both men and women suffered as a result of the war, women in particular experienced more backaches, pains in the joints, and swelling than did men. On the other hand, men more frequently attempted suicide. Nonetheless, women with serious medical problems, usually as a result of rape, also had more psychological trauma which led them to have attempted suicide and abused drugs more than women who had not endured such serious gender based violence (Danuweli et al., 2011). Overall, women dealt with war trauma in a variety of ways, including by becoming involved in humanitarian work, finding solace through creating art, seeking comfort in their religion, and some by turning to drugs (Danuweli et al., 2011; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Moran et al., 2004; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).
Many Liberian women dealt with the difficulties and trauma of war by engaging in community work. Overall, women involved in such endeavors were principally focused on providing food relief, as food remained in short supply throughout the war. In fact, former President Amos Sawyer declared that Liberian women sustained life on an unprecedented level through their volunteer work. Some women provided relief to those in need as individuals, but many others served through well-known organizations such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). In addition to these international groups, women also joined local organizations such as the Special Emergency Life Food Programme (SELF). As mentioned, food relief was a top priority, but other humanitarian activities included caring for displaced children, providing shelter to those who had lost their homes, offering trauma counseling, and even hosting mediation and conflict resolution courses (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

One well-known humanitarian effort was the brainchild of a collective of Monrovian women who opened a shelter for homeless teenagers and children, especially those who had become involved in sex work. The women called their organization Our Sister’s Place. In addition to providing shelter, those with Our Sister’s Place also offered assistance to those who were dealing with trauma caused by war, most notably with those who had served as fighters and/or those who had been raped (Aning, 1998). Members of the Women in Liberian Liberty (WILL), led by Myrtle Gibson and Mona Wureh, sought to provide trauma services for citizens, as well as food aid (Badmus, 2009). Women with other groups such as the non-profit the Liberian Women for Reconciliation and Peace International (LIWORP) focused on providing vocational training to women and their children to help them find a way to eke out a living during the difficult war years (Aning, 1998).
Such vocational training most often took the form of traditionally feminine trades such as sewing, knitting, and baking. Income earned from small scale sewing and baking was not enough to help women prosper, but the intention was to provide women with enough skills to enable survival for themselves and their families (Harman, 2002; Moran and Pitcher, 2004). For example, Johnetta Massaquoi opened the Wise Center in 1998 in order to help train women and girls to sew skirts and dresses, hoping to provide women an alternative to sex work (Harman, 2002). Overall, these programs were largely ineffective as what often occurred was a market oversaturated with those trained in tie-dye and similar tasks. Furthermore, the programs did not reach very many women, thus those helped were so few in number that the programs have also viewed as ineffective for this reason (Moran and Pitcher, 2004).

Another way that some Liberian women attempted to cope with the effects of the war was by engaging in creative endeavors. One woman wrote a wartime cookbook entitled Liberian Civil War Recipes which sought to provide women with ideas for making meals with limited access to most ingredients, and particularly how to cook using ingredients associated with food aid such as bulgur wheat and corn soy milk. In addition, the cookbook provided information on the location of food relief centers. Most importantly, however, the cookbook was meant to serve as a souvenir of the war years for Liberian women (Moran and Pitcher, 2004; Porte, 1991). Likewise, during the postwar years women such as Agnes Fallah Kamara-Umunna and Leymah Gbowee documented their wartime experiences in memoirs, And Still Peace Did Not Come: A Memoir of Reconciliation and Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War, respectively, in which they sought to find healing by working through their ordeals in writing (Holland and Kamara-Umunna, 2011; Gbowee and Mithers, 2011).
In other instances, many Liberian women turned to their religion as a way to deal with the hardships of war. Stephen Ellis notes that throughout Liberia during the war, the importance of religion was frequently emphasized. In particular, there was a widespread belief among both religious leaders and laypeople that Liberians’ disregard for God was a major cause of the war. However, Liberians were divided into two major camps concerning the cause of this. The first viewed the general Liberian population’s straying from indigenous religious practices, especially *Poro*, as the root of the war, which incidentally, did lead to a revival of *Poro* and other indigenous practices. On the other side were evangelical Christians who believed that many of those practicing Christianity were causing spiritual discord by mixing indigenous religious practices in their Christian worship. Evangelicals viewed any traditions deriving from indigenous religions as being associated with the “devil” and thus causing the war (Ellis, 2006). According to Paul Gifford, Liberians had been turning increasingly to religion, particularly U.S. fundamentalist Christian teachings, but also to Islam, as a way to deal with the economic and social decline that most experienced under Doe’s administration in the 1980s (Gifford, 1993). Thus, many women found comfort in turning to religious leaders and various religious practices during the war. Like the revival of the institution of *Poro* mentioned above, many *Sande* societies throughout northwestern Liberia regained prominence as members associated with its leadership sought to reach out to young girls who lost their parents or caretakers (Moran et al., 2004). Likewise, the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* depicts the comfort both Christian and Muslim women found in their churches and mosques (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

Finally, drug usage during the war was a method some women used to cope with stress and trauma, largely as a form of escape. As a consequence, the abuse of drugs and alcohol became widespread and a serious societal issue. Although hard numbers are difficult to come by,
scholars with the non-governmental organization Isis-Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) and officials within the government’s Gender and Development Ministry note that women and girls most often turned to tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, opium, and cocaine to manage war-related stress (Danuweli et al., 2011). In conclusion, while individuals experienced and coped with the war differently, in general, Liberian women most frequently sought to manage war-related problems through humanitarian work, creating art, and/or by finding solace in their religion, and some by turning to drugs (Danuweli et al., 2011; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Moran and Pitcher, 2004; “Pray the Devil Back.” 2008).

Such coping mechanisms often influenced the kind of roles women took on during the war years and reflected the status of women prior to the war.

3.10 Liberian Women’s Roles in the War

Liberian women were affected by and participated in the war in different ways. While most Liberian women were mothers, they also served in other capacities. The primary roles that the vast majority of women filled were serving as fighters and/or the wives or girlfriends of fighters who provided both sexual services and domestic work to men the militias, either by choice or by force (Veney, 2006; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

As many scholars note, Western journalists were generally fascinated by Liberian female fighters, particularly their often feminine attire which they wore even during battle. Yet, this was not a glamorous role (Utas, 2005). Irma Specht reports that most women became fighters out of necessity, in order to protect to themselves as it was either “kill or be killed” (Specht, 2005: 9). Ruthie Ackerman asserts that simply being female in Liberian society made women and girls a target of sexual violence. She believes that this pushed women to serve as combatants in an attempt to protect themselves from rape (Ackerman, 2009). Yet there were other reasons women
chose to fight. Like many men, some women joined factions out of a sincere belief in what the militia was fighting for or for purposes of financial gain (Olonishakin, 1995; Utas, 2005). Importantly, the women who cleaned, cooked, transported equipment, and/or served messengers for fighters were not generally recognized as being combatants but in fact through these roles women and girls also served militia causes (Ackerman, 2009; “Document—Liberia: No Impunity,” 2004).

Isiaka Alani Badmus notes that, in particular, women were prominent in the NPFL, with many women rising to the higher echelons of authority. For example, Grace Minor and Reffel Victoria both made important decisions in the militia’s war strategy, with Reffel instrumental in supporting Charles Taylor’s interactions with ECOWAS representatives (Badmus, 2009). Mats Utas also describes another reason women became fighters: it simply made them feel empowered to wield a weapon (Utas, 2005). However, it is important to note that many women and girls were kidnapped and forced to serve in militias as well (Veney, 2006; Badmus, 2009). Utas notes that some female fighters, such as Julia Rambo, Martina Johnson, Agnes Taylor, Ruth “Attila” Milton, and Black Diamond, became quite famous. Utas contends that these women were often viewed as role models by other Liberian girls and women because they appeared self-sufficient and in control of their own lives (Utas, 2005). According to Funmi Olonishakin, female fighters were noted for being particularly fierce, and reportedly did not take pity on civilians. People often said women combatants were more likely to get angry and more likely to kill than their male counterparts. This was likely do to the fact that women felt that they needed to prove their toughness, due to traditional perceptions that women were weak, in order to be taken seriously (Olonishakin, 1995).
Yet, according to Ruthie Ackerman, female fighters were under a triple burden. As mentioned, women in general were prime targets of sexual violence for simply being women. When they sought to become militia fighters to protect themselves from rape, they discovered, however, that rape and violence were as frequent on the frontlines as off the battlefield. Moreover, female fighters were stigmatized by larger society which failed to recognize them as the equals of their male counterparts, both as citizens and combatants (Ackerman, 2009). Thus, despite Liberian women serving prominently in various militias, female fighters were generally discriminated against for engaging in acts which mainstream Liberian society viewed as “unfeminine” or unbecoming of women (Danuweli et al., 2011).

Another prominent role women held during the war was being a girlfriend or lover of a male fighter. Many women were abducted by militia fighters and forced to be their “bush wife” (Veney, 2006: 211). While Mats Uta’s argues that some women willingly sought to engage in romantic relationships with male fighters, who often engaged in looting, due to the perceived financial benefits, other scholars, such as Cassandra Veney, point out that many only “willingly” chose to become a fighter or wife in order to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. Thus, it may not have been much of a choice at all (Utas, 2005; Veney, 2006). Overall, Liberian women’s roles during wartime covered a broad range that included serving, often by force, as fighters, providing militias support through cooking and cleaning, and/or by carrying out romantic relationships with fighters (Veney, 2006; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). This knowledge of women’s wartime roles will aid in understanding women’s organizing during the war. Yet the context from which this activism arose must first be highlighted.
3.11 History of Women’s Activism in Liberia

The roots of Liberian women’s wartime activism are not tied to a widespread women’s movement. Scholars instead suggest that a tradition of female leadership, the Nigerian women’s uprising against the British colonial government in 1929, and past instances of collective female action contributed to Liberian women’s wartime organizing (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; Moran, 1989; Casimiro et al., 2009; Steady, 2011; Fuest, 2008). A history of some individual women in leadership positions is often cited by many scholars in relation to women’s activism (Steady, 2011; Fuest, 2008; Adams, 2008). One of the most famous female Liberians to be in a position of influence was Nye Suakoko who was born sometime in the 1880s. Suakoko, an important zoe (priest) in the Sande, was the first woman to be a paramount chief and was well-known for her efforts to end the fighting between the settlers and indigenous groups. Through the female council of elders or by working within the top echelon of the Sande’s hierarchy, some Liberian women, such as Suakoko, were able to build alliances by arranging marriages and thus gaining some distinction in society (Steady, 2011).

Likewise, within the Americo-Liberian community, women such as Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, the first female president of any African university, and female senators and legislators such as Elizabeth Collins and Catherine Collins have existed alongside women like Mary Brownell, the founder of the Liberian Women’s Institute and Angie Brooks who was the second woman and first African female president of the United Nations General Assembly (Moran and Pitcher, 2004; Steady, 2011). Clearly, these women, in addition to indigenous women like Suakoko, were privileged with a great access to resources while the majority of Liberian women have not historically wielded power in society (Steady, 2011; Olonishakin, 1995). Nevertheless, scholars such as Filomina Steady and Veronika Fuest argue that such
examples of influential women were resources which Liberian women drew on for inspiration during the civil war (Steady, 2011; Fuest, 2008).

Similarly, Liberian activists Thelma Aremiebi Ekiyor and Leymah Roberta Gbowee view the 1929 women’s uprising in Aba, located in eastern Nigeria, as the foundation for Liberian women’s groups’ activism (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). This event, which would become known as the Women’s War, began in October of 1929 as Ibo and Ibibio women in eastern Nigeria began to fear that the British colonial government intended to place a tax on them at a time when the palm produce market, in which women dominated, had bottomed out due to the worldwide economic recession. Rumors of a possible tax began when warrant chiefs, which were those men appointed by the government to carry out colonial law, began taking a census of men, women, and their property in September of 1929. In 1926, following a census of local men, the government had instituted a tax on each man counted. Thus, the women began to meet to discuss what could be done as they believed that since they were being counted that they too would be made to pay a personal tax (Ifeka-Moller, 1975). By that November, women from the region of Aba joined with one another to protest against any new taxes. At its highest point, an estimated ten thousand women were involved in the uprising (Van Allen, 1976). During demonstrations, women attacked the native courts of the British colonial system, as well as European-owned factories, and even the warrant chiefs who worked in the native courts (Ifeka-Moller, 1975; Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; Hanna, 1981-1982).

In addition to the attacks on the courts and the looting of the factories, another primary tactic employed by Nigerian women during the riot was a practice which predated colonialism, known as “sitting on a man” or “making war on a man” (Van Allen, 1976: 61). This occurred when a group of women gathered outside of the home of a man who had offended them in order
to sing songs and dance “lewdly” in the hopes of both shaming the individual and preventing him
from sleeping or resting (Hanna, 1981-1982; Ifeka-Moller, 1975). Indeed, during the Liberian
civil war, many activists in women’s groups engaged in songs and dance as part of their protests
(“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). The government response to the Aba protests of 1929 was quite
violent. In particular, in the town of Opobo, colonial police forces opened fire on protesting
women which resulted in the deaths of 32 women and left another 31 wounded (Hanna, 1981-
1982). Although smaller and more isolated protests continued through early 1930, the British
eventually deployed enough soldiers and police to put a stop to the violence after a couple
months (Van Allen, 1976).

Nonetheless, the rioting women did end the rule of the warrant chiefs, which was the
system of indirect colonial rule, even securing some positions in the courts for women (Eikiyor
and Gbowee, 2005; Afigbo, 1972). However, Judith Van Allen argues that the violent repression
used by the British, along with the influence of Christian missionaries which sought to downplay
indigenous institutions as antithetical to Christianity as well as “uncivilized,” diminished
women’s collective agency in Aba and took away Ibo and Ibibio women’s major form of
political power (Van Allen, 1976). Nevertheless, the legacy of the Aba women’s war remains
strong and is often interpreted by scholars, such as Caroline Ifeka-Moller, as a feminist protest
(Ifeka-Moller, 1975).

According to Mary H. Moran, incidents similar to the Women’s War of 1929 occurred
frequently in the past throughout West African villages and towns (Moran, 1989). For example,
during Moran’s anthropological fieldwork in Maryland County, Liberia, she witnessed one of
these typical collective actions. It was staged by Grebo women who, like their Ibo and Ibibio
counterparts of the Aba riots, were concerned about taxes. During the 1983 event, Moran was
informed that Grebo women typically organized when they felt they had been insulted or treated unjustly. Moran was told a story, which had occurred in the recent past, about a woman accused of witchcraft by a prominent chief. However, all the women in the village were upset by the chief’s accusation and thus collectively relocated to a neighboring village. This left all the men in the village to cook and carry water, among women’s many other tasks, in addition to their own work. The offending chief had to beg the women to return by apologizing and presenting them with gifts (Moran, 1989; Moran, 2008). Thus, although the grievances were not always obviously political in nature, Liberian women have historically engaged in collective action.

However, in 1983, Grebo women engaged in an overtly political act. That year Doe had instituted a new tax that required every household to pay $10 for each resident between the ages of 15 and 60. Since Doe had gained power, his administration had confiscated land in the southeast in order to give it to government-funded companies and private corporations which used the land to grow sugar, rubber, and oil palms for commercial use. While such ventures had initially provided local men with jobs, the worldwide recession of the early 1980s meant that most of the companies had let workers go, leaving many Grebo men without jobs. Furthermore, now less land was available for women to grow their crops, which were the main source of food in the area. Grebo women viewed the new tax as an additional burden on them, rather than men, as they foresaw that women would need to grow more food in order to sell the surplus for money to pay the new tax (Moran, 1989).

In the summer of 1983, approximately 240 Grebo women from interior villages gathered over the course of a week and began trekking, single file, toward Harper City, where the seat of the local administrative center in Maryland County lay. The president of each village’s female council was present and as the women walked, they rang hand bells and blew whistles, which
were the traditional instruments of the council of female elders in the Grebo community. The Maryland County superintendent was out of town, but the mayor of Harper City met with the women. When the leaders of the group stated their position, that the new tax was overly burdensome on women in particular, they were informed by the mayor that they were violating the government’s ban on political activities. He stated that he could have had them all arrested. Rather than do so, however, the mayor told the women that they should return to their homes and devise a way to pay the tax (Moran, 2008; Moran, 1989). Thus, while the effort was ultimately ineffective in removing the new tax, this collective action of 1983 shows an important precedent in Liberian women’s organizing prior to the civil war. Many Liberian women have historically sought to address what they viewed as women’s issues by uniting and collectively seeking to take action in order to attempt to make changes that would benefit them. Moran’s documentation of the 1983 gathering of Grebo women who sought to make changes to a new tax policy which they felt unfairly burdened women is an excellent example of such an event (Moran, 1989).

To conclude, Liberian women’s wartime organizing can be traced to the examples set by significant individual women in Liberian history, the 1929 uprising by Nigerian women against the British colonial government, and collective actions such as the 1983 Grebo women’s protest (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; Moran, 1989; Casimiro et al., 2009; Steady, 2011). Overall, there was no coherent women’s movement in Liberia prior to the civil war although women have clearly been involved in political causes. It appears that women’s activism during the civil war was the impetus for a women’s movement in Liberia. The next section will address this activism.

3.12 Liberian Women's Activism during the War

Veronika Fuest notes that since the end of the civil war, women’s organizations in Liberia have proliferated at a rapid rate (Fuest, 2008). Yet even during the war women’s
organizing was prominent. In fact, women’s groups were the only civil society organizations which functioned continuously throughout the fourteen year civil war (O’Reilly, 2011). This section will highlight the three major moments in women’s wartime activism, provide a case study of the women’s organization the Liberian Women’s Initiative, and address reactions to women’s organizing during the war.

**Major Events in Women’s Wartime Organizing**

As noted, female activists in Liberia became engaged in organizing early on in the war, as soon as they began witnessing the mounting social, economic, and political chaos created by the fighting, in order to help themselves and their families survive (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Sewell, 2007). Specifically, women participated in demonstrations, sit-ins, and other events. However, the three main events regarding women’s activism largely took place closer to the end of the war. The first event was the campaign by members of the Mano River Women’s Peace Network to convince the leaders of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to meet in Rabat, Morocco. Later the Mass Action for Peace movement was staged by affiliates of the Women in Peacebuilding Network, and multiple women’s groups organized protests in Accra, Ghana which led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. These events are defined by scholars as significant because they contributed to bringing an end to the conflict (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Gbowee, 2009).

The first major event in women’s wartime organizing began in 2001 and was initiated by activists with the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET). Founded in May 2000 in Abuja, Nigeria, MARWOPNET served to facilitate the efforts of women living in the region to work together toward conflict resolution in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Organizers with the *Femmes Africa Solidarité* (FAS), a Swiss-based non-governmental
organization in existence since 1996, brought together the initial members of MARWOPNET to help guide them in the creation of the new women’s group. These first members of the organization largely consisted of elite, professional women who were mainly ministers, academics, members of parliament, journalists, lawyers, and researchers (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005). Later, after the organization was officially established, women from other socioeconomic classes and many ethnic backgrounds also joined (Johnson, 2011). Essentially, MARWOPNET, headquartered in Freetown, Sierra Leone, was an umbrella organization that brought together those in development-focused women’s groups. Significantly, MARWOPNET activists believed that women could influence their husbands and children to work toward ending the conflicts (Sewell, 2007). Thus, a substantial part of the group’s focus was on women’s embodiment as wives and mothers. Toward this end, members of Femmes Africa Solidarité provided those in MARWOPNET with training in conflict resolution (“Profile of the Mano River,” 2013; Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005).

A major project undertaken by MARWOPNET, which began in June of 2001 and ran through that August, worked to bring the presidents of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia together in order to address the ongoing civil wars in both Liberia and Sierra Leone (“Profile of the Mano River,” 2013). After successfully convincing Charles Taylor and then-president of Sierra Leone Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to meet with one another, the delegation of Liberian, Sierra Leonean, and Guinean women sent on this mission encountered difficulties in Conakry, Guinea. Previously, then-president of Guinea, Lansana Conté, had made clear that he did not wish to meet with Taylor under any circumstance. However, the MARWOPNET delegation

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11 One of the more than thirty groups represented by the Network was the Liberia Women’s Initiative (LWI), an organization which will be profiled later in this paper (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005; “Profile of the Mano River,” 2013).
reportedly approached Conté by emphasizing their status as mothers and sisters. According to Amelia Ward, the women were to have said to him, “Look at us, we are your mothers, your sisters, your people are suffering; your mothers are dying; your children are dying. We came as mothers to you” (Sewell, 2007: 18). Additionally, during this meeting, MARWOPNET member Mary Brownell informed Conté that he had to meet with Taylor and that, furthermore, she would lock the two together in a room and sit on the key until the men worked out a plan to end the fighting in the Mano River region (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005).

Such tactics proved persuasive as Conté agreed to follow the women’s recommendation. Erica K. Sewell believes that Conté agreed to meet with Taylor and Kabbah in March of 2002 in Rabat, Morocco due to the delegates’ sincerity (Sewell, 2007; Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005). Scholars with Femmes Africa Solidarité add that Conté also stated that the demanding manner in which the female activists addressed him would have been completely unacceptable to him if the delegates had been men. Regarding Brownell’s threat that she would lock both Taylor and he in a room together, Conté is quoted as saying, “Only a woman could do such a thing and get away with it” (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005: 589). However, despite the fact that the women’s work directly led to the meeting of the three heads of state, MARWOPNET representatives were excluded from the meeting. Officials associated with the negotiations mentioned the meeting to members of MARWOPNET only two days prior to it taking place, thus giving the women no time to arrange funding to send a delegation. Yet, even if the women had been able to attend, they would only have received observer status, rendering them unable to actually participate in the proceedings (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). As noted by member Mary Brownell, the mentality of the men was simply that women should not be involved in such matters (Fleshman, 2003).
Nevertheless, as a result of the 2002 meeting between the three heads of state, Conté, Kabbah, and Taylor agreed to begin peace talks, reopen the borders between the three countries, work to decrease the availability of small arms, and find ways to increase economic development in the Mano River region (Femmes Afrique Solidarité, 2005). Although the fighting in Liberia would continue for another year, the women were not only successful in persuading the three leaders to meet, they also saw signs of progress as the men began at least outlining steps to address the massive security needs of those living in the Mano River countries.

The second major event in Liberian women’s wartime organizing, known as the Mass Action for Peace campaign, had its start in November 2001 when members of the West African Network for Peace-building (WANEP), a civil society organization founded in 1998 to work toward ending conflicts in West Africa, created a new branch which sought to increase peacebuilding strategies through women’s activism (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; “About Us, West Africa Network,” 2013; “WIPNET: Women in Peacebuilding,” 2013). The program was labeled the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and was designed not simply to end conflicts within West African, but also to address women’s rights issues, such as the systemic violence against women, particularly rape and human trafficking, as well as harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting. According to Thelma Aremiebi Ekiyor and Leymah Gbowee, members of WIPNET believed that these forms of gender based violence were due to the lack of women’s participation in civic and political institutions (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005).

Yet, it was not until April of 2003, as LURD fighters marched from the countryside toward Monrovia, that Liberian WIPNET members officially instituted the Mass Action for Peace effort (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). However, this movement actually had its roots in the personal experience of a WIPNET activist, Leymah Gbowee, a social
worker, who in June 2002 dreamed that God asked her to call upon the women in her Monrovian church to gather together in order to pray for peace in Liberia. After sharing the idea with her fellow female church members, Gbowee went to women in churches throughout Monrovia to recruit for her project. Based on the idea of women praying together for peace, female members belonging to several churches formed the Christian Women Peace Initiative (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

During one of these recruitment speeches in a church in June 2002, a Muslim police officer named Asatu Bah Kenneth heard Gbowee describe her vision of Christian women praying for peace. Kenneth was inspired to create a parallel collective within the Monrovian Muslim community, which she called the Liberian Muslim Women’s Organization. Furthermore, Kenneth envisioned Liberian Muslim women praying alongside their Christian counterparts, and working together for an end to the war (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; “Activists in the Film,” 2013). Thus, leaders within the two organizations united forces to show Liberian women’s solidarity, joining under the banner of WIPNET. There was some initial resistance from certain Christian and Muslim women who were hesitant to work with those outside of their own faith. However, leaders of both organizations emphasized Liberian women’s commonalities, such as all women being targets of the fighters, and soon members of both the Christian Women Peace Initiative and the Liberian Muslim Women’s Organization agreed to work with one another (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

By March 2003, when it became apparent that LURD leaders were planning a large scale attack on the civilian population, members of the two groups developed a plan for a demonstration to call for an end to the violence. Consequently, on April 11, 2003, approximately 1,000 members from both groups, dressed in all white, began to meet daily in the fish market of
Monrovia which was located in a central area, on a road that President Taylor was driven on daily. The women, transformed into activists who not only prayed for peace but also openly defied government restrictions against protests, began publically demanding that Taylor acknowledge them. The women wanted recognition for their petition which requested an immediate ceasefire from all sides as well as an official dialogue between the warring parties to be monitored by a third party (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

Although during the first week of the women’s rally in the fish market Taylor and his administration ignored the activists, the daily practice of gathering at the market had begun to create strong bonds between the Christian and Muslim women. It was by working together that members of the Liberian Muslim Women’s Organization and the Christian Women Peace Initiative decided on a second tactic to work toward a ceasefire. In addition to their continued street protests, by April 2003 they also began to employ a “sex strike,” in essence refusing to have sexual relations with their husbands or boyfriends until the fighting stopped. Members hoped that this would influence their romantic partners to press for a ceasefire. Vaiba Flomo, leader of the Christian Women Peace Initiative, explained that the activists’ philosophy was that part of a woman’s power lies in denying her husband access to her body (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). It remains unclear how effective this tactic was, although journalists certainly seized upon reporting the strike, publicizing it extensively (Witter, 2008; Gbowee, 2010).

Nevertheless, the strategy that was undeniably effective was the on-going street protest. The daily demonstration at the fish market had blossomed into the official WIPNET Mass Action for Peace campaign by early April. As the activists became a daily presence in the streets of Monrovia, even during rainstorms, they began to attract major attention from both the media and
the general public (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). During the demonstrations, female activists held signs demanding an end to the fighting and also sang songs decrying the violence. The slogan for the Mass Action for Peace was, “We Want Peace; No More War,” words which also became part of the song that activists sang during the protests (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005: 135). At one point, over 2,500 women participated in the daily protests (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

These women involved with the Mass Action for Peace were recruited from diverse settings, including internally displaced persons’ camps, markets, schools, churches, and non-governmental organizations (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Moreover, women involved came from a multitude of ethnic groups (“Profile: Leymah Gbowee—Liberia’s,” 2011). However, it is important to note that at the start, most members were mainly rural women. Initially, many elite Liberian women viewed the campaign as being “beneath” them. Class tensions were a real issue as those already participating felt insulted that most urban, professional women did not take them seriously. It was not until weeks into the protests, when the media had started to publicize the demonstrations, and elite women felt the staying power of the campaign that they began to join in the Mass Action for Peace activities (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005).

Through the skillful manipulation of the international media, members of the Liberian branch of WIPNET were eventually able to pressure Charles Taylor to meet with them (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). During this meeting with Taylor and representatives of his administration, which occurred on April 23, 2003, the activists demanded that Taylor develop an immediate ceasefire with the leaders of the rebel factions. Gbowee made the official statement to Taylor in which she stressed that a major concern of the women
associated with the Mass Action for Peace movement was the future of their children ("Pray the Devil Back," 2008). Taylor did not agree to the activists’ demands in April, but due to their continued daily protests at the fish market, as well as their participation in additional demonstrations outside the U.S. embassy, the parliament, and other government buildings, activists kept international interest in the situation high. By June of 2003, international pressure compelled Taylor to submit to negotiations in Accra that would ultimately lead to the final ceasefire agreement that ended the war in August of 2003 ("Pray the Devil Back," 2008; Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Badmus, 2009).

The success of the WIPNET members in forcing Taylor to attend the Accra peace talks is exceptional. However, members did not end the campaign there (Ekiyor et al., 2005). When these peace talks began on June 4, 2003, delegations from several women’s groups also attended the conference, although they were not officially invited (Sewell, 2007). Those with WIPNET sought to continue their Mass Action for Peace effort and thus secured funding to send some their members to the negotiations (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; Lederach and Lederach, 2010). It was in Accra during the peace talks that the third major women’s wartime organizing effort began. There, several women’s organizations joined together and essentially forced the warring factions to sign onto the final ceasefire agreement which ended fourteen years of war in Liberia ("Pray the Devil Back," 2008). Eight members of MARWOPNET’s Liberian branch, led by Ruth Sando Perry, officially represented all of the women’s groups at the negotiations, and MARWOPNET’s vice president Theresa Leigh-Sherman signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement as a signatory witness ("Profile of the Mano River," 2013; Sewell, 2007).

During their time in Accra, women wept and pleaded for peace. Some scholars have traced this form of protest to the roles played by women in West African funeral traditions where
women’s collective weeping was a prominent feature of the funeral rite (Casimiro et al., 2009). Gbowee stated to reporters at the demonstrations that the women were there to be the men’s conscience. In other words, the mere presence of the women was meant to put pressure on the men to work toward ending the war (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

As part of their protesting, several activists developed position papers on the direction that they believed the negotiations should go, which they presented to both the warring parties and the third party negotiators. However, before presenting their recommendations, the various women’s groups in attendance had to lobby for access to the hall where the actual discussions were taking place. Through persuasive arguing, female activists secured a place for themselves at the peace table, with two representatives and two observers who were present throughout the talks (Sewell, 2007). Additionally, activists worked together to issue collective statements to journalists and reporters. Such testimonials included comments on both the horrific living conditions for Liberian civilians, as well as petitions asking for a United Nations intervention force to help end the war. Furthermore, WIPNET members met individually with the representatives of each faction, as well as with many of the third party mediators, and also held what they termed the Liberian Women’s Forum in which participating women gathered to discuss their analyses of the ongoing peace negotiations (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005).

When the negotiations appeared to stall, members of all the women’s groups decided on a more extreme tactics (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). The final breaking point came on June 21, 2003, following a bombing of the U.S. Embassy by LURD forces in which a large community of internally displaced persons, who had been staying within the embassy’s walls, died as a result of the attack. Activists in Accra realized that it was time for a more radical course. First, they began by recruiting more women to join them in the area outside of the negotiation room (“Pray the
Devil Back,” 2008). Once gathered, the female activists, numbering over 200, barricaded the door to the negotiation room where representatives of the warring factions and Taylor’s government were meeting. This sit-in prevented both the leaders of the various factions as well as the official mediators from leaving the negotiation table (Sewell, 2007; Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; Gbowee, 2009). Activists held up signs which included statements such as, “Killers of our people—no impunity this time!” and, “How many babies do you intend to slaughter?” (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005: 137). For two hours, even at the behest of lead negotiator General Abubakar, the activists refused to relent, and continued blocking the men from leaving (Gbowee, 2009). Eventually, security guards were called and Leymah Gbowee, one of the most prominent of the women’s groups’ leaders, was threatened with arrest for obstructing justice (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

At this point, Gbowee declared that the guards, all men, could arrest her and that she would make it easy for them, and thus, she began disrobing. Not only considered a taboo throughout most West African societies, it is also considered a great curse for a man to see his mother naked (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; Lederach and Lederach, 2010). As previously noted, in Liberian society, men view all women older than themselves as their mothers (AFELL et al., 1998). Filomina Steady describes Gbowee’s defiant act as a “weapon symbolizing the power of motherhood,” specifically meant to shame the men so that they would not arrest her (Steady, 2011: 105). Thus, when Gbowee began to strip, the male security guards became agitated, and her actions caused a massive uproar in the hallway in front of the negotiation room (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Gbowee explains that those outside of Liberia are often confused that in a country with such a high number of rapes that the security guards felt so strongly against seeing her naked. According to Gbowee, the act of her disrobing, in addition to being a curse,
was also disturbing to the men because she was actively choosing to undress. Thus, it was also about her agency and power in the context of the situation that made the men so uncomfortable (Carmon, 2010).

In the end, Gbowee’s gamble was successful and the guards failed to arrest her. In fact, her ploy created such pandemonium that a LURD general attempted to climb over some of the activists in order to escape the negotiation room. However, several women pushed him back into the room, upsetting the general who appeared ready to retaliate by striking some of the women. Fortunately, the lead negotiator, former Nigerian president General Abulsalami Abubakar, prevented such a reprisal by shaming all of the representatives, informing them that if they were “real” men, the women would not have to treat them like boys. Following this, the female activists finally agreed to let the men leave. However, the women threatened that if progress was not made within two weeks’ time, they would again lock the men in the negotiating room (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). The activists articulated what they meant by progress, giving the men three ultimatums. First, the women demanded that the delegates representing the warring parties attend all further negotiation sessions; second, the men must cease insulting the female activists; and, lastly, all parties had to sign onto a final peace accord within two weeks (Gbowee, 2009). In addition to these threats made by the women, the media was attracted to the great furor caused by the protest, which provided yet another reason for the men to resume talks as they felt international pressure upon them (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005).

This demonstration is cited by many analysts as the single event which put enough pressure on rebel leaders and Taylor to sign the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which led to the end of the fourteen year civil war (Sewell, 2007; Gbowee, 2009). The mood of the conference participants changed perceptibly following the sit-in in front of the negotiating room.
Prior to the event, the leaders of the warring factions refused to compromise, obviously relishing both their hotel amenities as well as the attention they were receiving. However, the women’s activism created a changed atmosphere that made the talks no longer enjoyable for the men. Within two weeks of the sit-in, the delegates representing Taylor and his administration, as well as delegates from both militias, LURD and MODEL, all signed onto the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, officially ending the Liberian civil war (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008; Birikorang, 2003/2004).

However, just prior to the men’s two week deadline, female representatives from forty-five Liberian women’s organizations gathered at the Golden Tulip Hotel on August 15, 2003. Leaders of MARWOPNET worked with members of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to create a one-day workshop to help bring women’s issues to the fore at the peace conference (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Specifically, these women gathered to issue policy recommendations regarding the future role of women in Liberia. Under the leadership of Ruth Sando Perry, the activists created a list of recommendations which included: increasing women’s participation in peacekeeping missions and in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration services; increasing women’s involvement in the peace negotiation process; reserving half of the leadership positions within the transitional government for women; encouraging Liberian women to support female political candidates; asking for support for women’s groups from the Liberian government, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAID), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women to assist in controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic that had become widespread during the war; including the delegates at the Golden Tulip in the reconstruction and redevelopment effort; and establishing contacts with donor agencies to provide programs on skills training and microcredit lending.
These policy recommendations became known as the Golden Tulip Declaration (“The Golden Tulip Declaration,” 2003).

As highlighted, MARWOPNET representatives signed onto the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The women were invited because of the important role that they played in the negotiation process (Casimiro et al., 2009). Additionally, some gender-relevant policies were included in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, but they were vague (Fuest, 2008). For example, Article XXVIII of the accord read, “The Parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments within the NTGL [National Transitional Government of Liberia]” (“Liberia: Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” 2003). However, although there was not a significant focus on women within the agreement, even the limited and vague gender references within the accord were better than what has been written into most postconflict treaties (Fuest, 2008).

Therefore, in conclusion, the role of women in leading to an end to the Liberian civil war has been well chronicled. As Mary H. Moran and M. Anne Pitcher observe, such organizing is especially striking since women from across Liberian society participated. From the most influential, elite women of the urban areas to illiterate villagers of the rural areas, women became involved in collective movements to end the war (Moran and Pitcher, 2004). Furthermore, it was women’s activism which ultimately led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). The three most decisive wartime activist efforts by women are: the success of MARWOPNET members in convincing the leaders of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to meet; WIPNET’s Mass Action for Peace movement; and the major demonstration in Accra, Ghana. To further highlight the work performed by female activists, the next section will present
a case study of the women’s group the Liberian Women’s Initiative which actually had its start early on in the war.

Case Study

As mentioned, almost as soon as the conflict began in 1989, many Liberian women became involved in women’s organizations which addressed issues related to wartime conditions. One such organization was the Liberian Women’s Initiative, which had a profound influence on the efforts and techniques employed by female activists near the end of the war (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). This section will trace the origins of the Liberian Women’s Initiative, describe its membership, discuss the tactics and strategies that the organization’s members employed, and finally, highlight the three greatest achievements of the organization.

On February 4, 1994 in Monrovia’s City Hall, the Liberian Women’s Initiative was founded by Mary Brownell, Etweda Cooper, and Maureen Shaw. These leaders developed the women’s group to serve as an umbrella organization for civil society groups (Sewell, 2007; AFELL et al., 1998; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Badmus, 2009; Aning, 1998). Brownell states that the Liberian Women’s Initiative sought to encourage women to play a more meaningful role in the civil sphere (Sewell, 2007). Specifically, its formation was noteworthy as until this point of the war, women had been involved primarily in humanitarian activities, but the women who joined this group sought to become involved in political activism (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Ruth Cesar said that the catalyst for the creation of the Liberian Women’s Initiative was that “enough was enough.” Members were fed up with seeing their relatives die, especially their husbands and children, and wanted an immediate end to the

12 Women remained prominent in both activist and humanitarian endeavors throughout the war by joining such organizations as the Association of Women in Action, the Abused Women and Girls Project, the Women’s Development Association, Concerned Women of Liberia, the Women’s Development Association of Liberia (WODAL), the Federation of Liberian Women, Women in Action for Good Will, and the Rural Women’s Association (Sewell, 2007; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).
fighting. Notably, Cesar directly ties the groups’ activism to the women’s “…natural-born instinct to protect the family, to protect our children…” (Sewell, 2007: 16). Such statements highlight the strong maternal basis the Liberian Women’s Initiative’s membership.

The specific makeup of the membership of the organization was incredibly diverse, despite its founding members being elite, urban professionals (“Best Practices in Peace Building,” 1998). According to Mary Brownell, the women who composed the group spanned all religious and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, members came from both rural and urban contexts, and from various socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, rural women played a prominent role in the work performed by the organization. The diversity of the Liberian Women’s Initiative proved crucial to many of the group’s undertakings, especially in proving their objectivity in interactions with factional leaders since women from rural and urban areas, and of all ethnicities, belonged to their organization (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

With the Liberian Women’s Initiative, Brownell essentially organized a number of women to form a pressure group that focused a large portion of its activities on approaching the various militia factions to plead for an end to the fighting. In addition, Brownell also noted that the group wanted an end to the rape epidemic associated with the war (Sewell, 2007). The organization’s active campaign to end the fighting spanned from 1994 until 1996, concluding once Taylor won the presidential election in 1997 (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). One of their most prominent tactics was the use of street demonstrations to protest the violence (Sewell, 2007). According to Isiaka Alani Badmus, nearly every rally demanding an end to the bloodshed during the period from 1994 to 1996 was organized by members of the Liberian Women’s Initiative (Badmus, 2009). In addition, the activists also engaged in letter writing campaigns. Several significant figures, such as all of the leaders of the various factions, United Nations officials,

Another major strategy that members employed was working toward disarmament, especially by trying to improve the control of small arms (Casimir o et al., 2009). The women circulated recommendations and made statements to Liberian and international journalists, politicians, and government officials indicating that they wanted the banning of arms sales and total disarmament of all militias fighting in Liberia (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Following the second Abuja Accord, activists focused their efforts on assisting the ECOMOG forces in the demobilization process (Badmus, 2009). Another tactic included weekly meetings in both mosques and churches to pray for an end to the fighting (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

The Liberian Women’s Initiative’s most striking form of activism was arriving, uninvited, at the conferences in which representatives of the various factions met to attempt to work out ceasefire agreements. Mary Brownell recalled informing the militia leaders, who were often displeased by the women’s presence, that she would follow the militias wherever they went until they finally stopped fighting (Sewell, 2007). The first conference that the women attended was the 1990 peace talks in Banjul, Gambia. Through skillful use of the media, members made it known that they wanted to be involved in the negotiation process and pressured ECOWAS officials, who sponsored the talks, to recognize their right to be present. By December 1994, at a peace conference in Accra, Ghana, members were awarded with recognized status by ECOWAS,
although they were still not formally invited to the negotiations (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

In May of 1995, members attended a peace conference in Abuja, Nigeria, uninvited as usual, during which time they insisted on putting forth their colleague Theresa Leigh-Sherman to address members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Sewell, 2007; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Official mediators at the conference initially told the women that Leigh-Sherman would not be permitted to present her paper. However, Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings, one of the third party negotiators, deviated from the proscribed proceedings and announced to the leaders of the warring factions that while they had heard from the men, they also had to hear from the women, and thus invited Leigh-Sherman to address the conference attendees. Leigh-Sherman’s position paper, which began a practice adopted by other women’s groups, especially at the 2003 Accra peace talks, included several recommendations for disarmament, in addition to policy recommendations concerning the form that a new government of Liberia should take, particularly that it be more inclusive of women. One specific recommendation was the group’s demand for the participation of women in all state matters, beginning with the peace process (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). This presentation at the 1995 Abuja conference was the first major achievement of the Liberian Women’s Initiative.

Following the conference in May 1995, ECOWAS officials began to recognize the role that women could play in helping to end the war. Thus, they actively encouraged members of the Liberian Women’s Initiative to approach factional leaders in order to pressure the men to meet with one another and start peace talks again. The delegations sent by the Liberian Women’s Initiative to urge the militia leaders to meet with one another were successful in bringing the
leaders together in July 1995 in Monrovia. This critical meeting was a watershed moment as the July 1995 talks in Abuja would never have occurred if the activists had not met individually with factional leaders in order to persuade them to agree to more negotiations. However, while some members were present at the July negotiations in Abuja, they were only observers. Thus, despite the crucial role that they had played earlier that month during the discussions in Monrovia, they were unable to participate in the sessions at Abuja (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

In July 1996, a delegation including women affiliated with the Liberian Women’s Initiative was invited to Abuja for yet another round of talks between warring factions. A former Liberian senator and Liberian Women’s Initiative member, Ruth Sando Perry, was part of this delegation. However, when she arrived at the hotel where the negotiations were taking place, she was denied admittance. It was only at the insistence of a Nigerian official that Perry joined the proceedings, where she was surprised by her nomination to be leader of the Council of State, the transitional government. Perry’s struggle to enter into the male-dominated space of the peace conference, even with an invitation, exemplifies the struggles that female activists as a whole had in participating in the conflict resolution process (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

While Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s status as the first female democratically elected president of Africa is more well-known, Ruth Sando Perry’s position as the first woman to head an African state is also acknowledged by many scholars and analysts as an important historical event (Adams, 2008; Fuest, 2008). At the 1996 second Abuja Accord, Perry’s name was put forward due to her status as a former senator, but it was her work with the Liberian Women’s Initiative which so clearly earned her the nomination as Liberia’s transitional leader. Perry was dedicated to reconciliation between all sides and had a proven track record of working to end the fighting. Current Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has emphasized the vital precedent that Perry
set by proving to those in mainstream Liberian society that women are as capable as men ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004). Nevertheless, Perry was only able to rise to leader of the transitional government by emphasizing that her values and politics derived from her status as a mother. For example, bestowed with the title “mother of the nation” by journalists, Perry saw it as her special duty to address the issue of child soldiers (Aning, 1998: 14-5). Indeed, following Perry’s appointment as head of state, women with the Liberian Women’s Initiative, including Perry, focused their attention on the process of demobilization (Aning, 1998).

The third major achievement of the Liberian Women’s Initiative’s members’ activism is the legacy of their efforts, especially WIPNET’s Mass Action for Peace campaign (Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005). Likewise, the practice of creating and presenting policy recommendations was employed by members of several women’s organizations during the final peace agreement in 2003, but began with the members of the Liberian Women’s Initiative in the early 1990s ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004). Overall, the prolific wartime organizing performed by Liberian women’s groups, such as the Liberian Women’s Initiative, has been widely acknowledged (Fuest, 2008; O’Reilly, 2011; “Profile of the Mano River,” 2013; Gbowee, 2010). MARWONEP was collectively awarded the 2003 United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights, while Leymah Gbowee, leader of WIPNET’s Mass Action for Peace, won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, alongside Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Yemeni activist Tawakkul Karman (“The Nobel Peace Prize,” 2013; Sewell, 2007). However, within Liberian society, female activists are not always appreciated.

Societal Reactions to Women’s Organizing

Despite the attention many women’s groups and specific individuals have garnered internationally, some within the mainstream of Liberia have not been receptive to the work of
female activists. During the war, detractors would often ostracize, mock, and question the motives of the women involved in organizing. While many expressed appreciation for the activism performed by women during the war, there were others within Liberian mainstream society who did not believe that women should become involved in activism under any circumstances. Two major problems that faced many women while they were involved in wartime organizing were isolation and ostracism. It was particularly difficult for individuals who were the only visible women in their communities engaged in organizing. Such women were greatly stigmatized. Frequently, those who disapproved would pressure women into refraining from protests by socially ostracizing them. In fact, their continued involvement in women’s groups even led some women to be shunned by their communities (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

Moreover, some women were actually publicly humiliated for being activists. Such open attacks became more common as women’s groups found success in their organizing. According to Massa Washington, as female activists gained acknowledgement for their efforts, they were increasingly subjected to negative criticism. For example, some detractors would verbally attack activists, mostly by questioning their motives. Members with the Liberian Women’s Initiative were frequently described by detractors as “frustrated women whose husbands had left them” (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004: 32-33). Thus, women were often lampooned and denigrated for being activists simply because of their gender. In fact, during Ruth Sando Perry’s tenure as head of the transitional government, she and her administration were often disparaged by remarks which focused on Perry’s gender. For example, a common expression of the time referred to Perry and her administration as the “petticoat government” (Steady, 2011: 141).
Stephanie Anne Johnson notes that this negative criticism directed at female activists is due to the common belief in Liberian society that women should restrict their activities to that which directly impacts the home or domestic sphere (Johnson, 2011). Although Western concepts of the private sphere and the public sphere do not necessarily have historical roots in Liberia, such ideas have nevertheless spread throughout many societies in sub-Saharan Africa, including Liberia, due to colonialism, including through Americo-Liberian influence (Sudarkasa, 1986; Olukoju, 2006; Hansen, 1992; Akpan, 1973).

However, many Liberian men supported the work of women’s organizations during the war. Yet in the postwar period, many of these same men felt that the women should no longer be activists, especially because after the war much their activism focused on integrating women into the political sphere. Women working toward ending the fighting fit with many traditional ideals of women as essentially peaceful and particularly skilled at mediating conflicts. Thus, many within mainstream society embraced the role that female activists played in ending the war because it exemplified women’s roles as mothers. Yet the idea of female activists becoming involved with other political matters was viewed by many as incompatible with the role women should play in Liberian society (Lederach and Lederach, 2010; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

The role of women in society raises the question of the influence of feminism in Liberian women’s organizing. It is unclear exactly how many of these activists viewed themselves as feminists. Leymah Gbowee, one of the most prominent leaders of the women’s movement, is a self-declared feminist. Gbowee’s feminist praxis has centered on being an advocate for the end of intimate partner violence, demanding increased reproductive rights and access to education, and eliminating child marriages (Knowles, 2012). While Gbowee is the only documented
feminist involved in Liberian women’s wartime organizing, it seems doubtful that she was alone in embracing feminism. Certainly, many female activists were working to improve the social status of women. However, it remains unclear whether such individuals avoided the term feminism in order to be less controversial or if they in fact rejected the feminist ideology.

Indeed, as Owen Alik Shahadah points out, many Africans reject the concept of feminism, even if they in fact support increasing women’s rights. Such individuals argue that feminism is a Western import that is anti-African and even imperialistic. They believe that feminism causes familial relations to deteriorate since they view feminism as forcing men and women to compete against one another (Shahadah, 2010). Other African scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyewùmí question whether the concept of womanhood is even relevant in the context of sub-Saharan Africa where social identities are often so overlapping and intersecting that gender does not unite women the way it does in the Western world. Nonetheless, Oyewùmí concedes that rising gender consciousness is a major trend in Africa (Oyewùmí, 2003). Meanwhile, some anti-feminist Africans also contend that feminism is anti-motherist and thus prevents women from fulfilling their biological and cultural roles. Others believe that only “authentically” African ideas and practices can improve the situation for women (Shahadah, 2010). Yet feminist defenders such as Minna Salami observe that it is only when Africans begin discussing feminism that they are accused of forgetting their African traditions and/or being brainwashed by imperialists (Salami, 2011).

Yet even within the larger context of sub-Saharan Africa, feminists often emphasize different issues than Western feminists. For example, many African feminists insist that they do not want to be treated or viewed in the same way that men are (Casimiro et al., 2009). According to Hildra Tadria, African feminists frequently do not support gender neutrality or the
idea that women should be able to do anything that men can do. Such feminists often view women who take on traditionally male roles as causing men to feel less valuable or even sidelined. Instead, many African feminists seek to build an appreciation for what women already do, and to present these duties and roles as equally worthy of respect as the roles that men fulfill. For example, such feminists would argue that cooking food and raising children is as important as working outside the home to provide money for the household (Knowles, 2012). Thus, feminism in Liberia functions differently than it does in the West. Instead of fighting traditional stereotypes or promoting gender equality in the workplace, it focuses on building appreciation for traditional feminine tasks (Knowles, 2012; Casimiro et al., 2009). However, the question remains if such an approach in fact challenges unequal gender relations. Overall, it is clear that in Liberia, female activists were controversial.

3.13 Motherhood as Mobilization for Activism

Political institutions, as well as social and cultural norms, typically prevent women from being “agents of change,” however, worldwide, many women attempt to circumvent these constraints by mobilizing on the basis of their maternal identity (“Best Practices in Peace Building,” 1998: 6; Sharoni, 1997). This was essentially the case within Liberian women’s wartime organizing where much of the desire to transform society derived from the activists’ identification with motherhood. Leymah Gbowee typified this point of view in a PBS interview by stating, “We believe that as mothers, we are the ones who will change everything” (Steady, 2011: 23; “Bill Moyers Journal,” 2009).

One significant way that women mobilized around maternalism was by centering their concerns on children, especially their futures (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). For example, during the meeting between women involved in the Mass Action for Peace movement
and Charles Taylor and his administration, Leymah Gbowee emphasized that the activists were demanding a ceasefire mainly because they were alarmed about the dangers to children’s well-being (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Likewise, members with the Liberian Women’s Initiative felt that they had a natural desire to protect their families, most especially their children (Sewell, 2007). Clearly, such strong concern for children highlights women’s maternal identities.

Another maternal mobilization strategy was emphasizing the skills that women possessed due to their roles within the family. Women were described as having high level expertise in reconciliation and mediation methods due to their status as wives and mothers (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Typical of this philosophy is a quote from Elizabeth Bannerman, of the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, who states, “Motherhood is an advantage. If you can manage a home, you can manage a nation” (Steady, 2011: 133-4). Steady notes that this philosophy, that running a household enabled women to become capable of many things, contributed to women’s efforts during the war (Steady, 2011). In particular, the skills associated with maternal roles were viewed as providing activists with the ability to facilitate negotiations between warring factions. As Evelyn Townsend of the Liberian Women’s Initiative explains, the women would approach the factional leaders objectively, attempting to treat all the men the same in order to build up the men’s confidence in the women’s impartiality (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Stephanie Anne Johnson describes this technique as part of the “relational skills” that women employ within the home, especially between squabbling siblings. Such abilities to be flexible and inclusive were thought to serve women in their roles as mothers, but also in their roles as facilitators in mediating between warring factions (Johnson, 2011).

Finally, Liberian female activists employed maternalism by pressuring young male fighters to feel a filial debt to the women. For example, in the July 1995 discussions among
warring factions in Monrovia, one militia leader is to have stated, “When your mother calls you, you must show up,” implying that although he may not have wanted to attend a peace talk, he felt that he should honor the women’s wishes (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004: 28). Following the Abuja meeting between militia leaders that May, it had appeared impossible to secure another dialogue due to the animosity between the men. However, female activists approached factional leaders by emphasizing their roles as mothers and were able to secure another round of talks (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). It appears that the women created feelings of duty and obligation in the male militia leaders as the men felt compelled to attend peace talks. A similar situation occurred in 2001 when MARWOPNET members approached Conté in order to secure his attendance at a meeting with Taylor and Kabbah. The women simply told Conté that they came to him as mothers and sisters, which was likely a veiled way of asking him to consider his familial duties and honor their wishes (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005; Sewell, 2007).

Why was motherist mobilization so effective in Liberia? According to Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, when Liberian women identify themselves as mothers, they do so in the context of African matriarchal philosophies (Aning, 1998). One such example is what Filomina Steady calls “the queen mother paradigm,” which has existed historically in many sub-Saharan African societies, and heavily influenced female activists in Liberia (Steady, 2011: 30; Lebeuf, 1963). Another reason maternal mobilization was prominent among women in the civil war is that political motherhood has been used as a mobilizing tool with great frequency within the modern women’s movement throughout sub-Saharan Africa, including Liberia. Maternal identity provides women with the “moral authority” from which to argue for their right to be included in political systems and in decision-making processes (Casimiro et al., 2009). This point of view
resonates worldwide, and is particularly strong in Africa; even in the African diaspora the symbol of female leadership is often portrayed through mother imagery (Steady, 2011). Scholars such as Emmanuel Kwesi Aning and Jennifer Pollack argue that maternalism is strategically employed by Liberian women in order to allow them the culturally acceptable space to exercise their right to be in the public realm since motherhood is so highly valued within the society (Aning, 1998; Pollock, 2007). Likewise, Mary H. Moran and M. Anne Pitcher argue that for rural Liberian women during the war, motherhood was used to justify concern for their communities and their work within the communities. Thus, activists argued that their involvement outside the private sphere was an extension of their natural caring roles (Moran and Pitcher, 2004).

Finally, Stephanie Anne Johnson argues that motherhood as a tool of mobilization allowed diverse groups of Liberian women to find commonalities and cross social bridges by emphasizing their shared status as mothers (Johnson, 2011). As noted, the Liberian Women’s Initiative, WIPNET, and MARWOPNET, among others, included women from multiple ethnic, racial, class, and religious backgrounds, and included diversity across education, occupational, and environmental (rural/urban) cleavages. Oyèrónké Oyewùmí believes that the concept of motherhood unites African women, making it easy for women to relate to one another through their shared experiences as mothers, making an excellent basis for solidarity among women across Africa (Oyewùmí, 2003). It appears that during Liberia’s civil war, female activists exemplified Oyewùmí’s theory.

Overall, this section sought to highlight the motherist mobilization in Liberian women’s groups’ wartime activism. Motherhood is an immensely valued concept in Liberia where women receive admiration from men for their work as mothers. Many Liberian women were inspired to
become activists during the civil war based on maternal roles and representations. Such maternalism centered on themes of wanting to protect children; the belief that women possessed unique skills as mothers; and through strategies that sought to influence male fighters, militia leaders, and officials by implying that these men had a duty to honor their mothers by following the women’s wishes ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004). Motherhood is a major focus on this paper. In the final chapter of this thesis, process-tracing of the war will be employed to assess whether women’s activism was one of the main causes in increasing women’s rights immediately following the war. Nevertheless, this section provides evidence that much of the activism during the war was motherist.

3.14 Gender Interests Typology

This next section will analyze the form of activism taken by Liberian activists during the civil war through the use of Maxine Molyneux's gender interest typology. This tool will help to determine whether the overall form of women's activism during the civil war was overtly feminist on the basis that strategic gender interests directly challenge patriarchy and are thus distinctively feminist. Since the ultimate goal is to understand whether it is the form of women's activism, motherist or feminist, which affects gains in women's rights, it is important to clearly define what is feminist in the work performed by those in Liberian women's groups. Obviously, women’s organizing was diverse. However, overall, three main goals of women’s groups emerged during the war. First, nearly all female activists attempted to stop the fighting between the various militias in an effort to end the war and also universally pursued the goal of increasing

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13 Molyneux developed the typology to define the form, strategic or practical, that women's gender interests take in activism. Strategic gender interests seek to alleviate women’s subordinate status while practical gender interests address urgent needs which usually do not entail immediate female emancipation or gender equality (Molyneux, 1985).
women’s involvement in public life. Additionally, some Liberian activists targeted improving the political and social status of women.

The first major action during the war taken by those involved in women’s groups was the campaign to bring Taylor, Kabbah, and Conté together for a meeting to address security concerns in the Mano River region, specifically the on-going conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. With delegations sent to each individual head of state, MARWOPNET activists were eventually successful in persuading the three leaders to meet (Femmes Africa Solidarité, 2005). However, Mary H. Moran and M. Anne Pitcher argue that the efforts undertaken by the activists were undermined precisely because they were women. While the male officials praised the women for succeeding in convincing the three heads of states to agree to talks, it was the women’s very status as female which prevented them from being considered important enough to be involved in the actual proceedings of the meeting (Moran and Pitcher, 2004).

Clearly, those with MARWOPNET wanted to be involved in the Rabat discussions. However, from their statements made individually to Taylor and Conté, the only conclusion that can be drawn with absolute certainty is that the women wanted an end to the violence in the region. The activists defined their concerns as the safety of women and children, and focused on the suffering which women were subjected to by the ongoing fighting (Sewell, 2007). Thus, the emphasis of these activists was on women’s practical gender interests and role as mothers. Had the Rabat meeting led to substantial steps toward ending the civil war it certainly would have helped Liberian women, along with men and children as well. Yet nothing, at least based on the available literature, suggests that MARWOPNET members made demands concerning issues of gender inequality or improving the status of women in any direct or transformative sense.
Furthermore, the entire purpose of the WIPNET campaign, the Mass Action for Peace, was aimed at bringing an end to the fighting between the various warring factions. Peace was the resounding theme surrounding the entire movement, whether through the women’s prayers for an end to the violence or in their protests for a halt to the fighting (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Thus, WIPNET’s activism was also focused on practical gender interests since their campaign centered on ending difficult wartime conditions. Likewise, the majority of the protesting and organizing associated with the 2003 Accra peace conference was similarly aimed at restoring the basic security situation in Liberia by halting the fighting among warring factions. This confirms once again that a major theme of Liberian women’s wartime organizing centered on addressing women’s practical gender interests (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

In each of the above examples, the activists’ intentions were channeled toward improving the immediate needs of women by finding a way to end the violence. An end to the war would have benefited women, along with the rest of society, but such efforts for peace were ultimately grounded in practical gender interests rather than strategies to address gender relations. However, one method that activists often employed to reach this goal of ending the fighting was by insisting that their demands for peace were heard because they were mothers. Activists used their status as mothers to demand respect and to be heard, and thus, in this capacity sought to increase respect for women which, in fact, indirectly addressed women’s strategic gender interests by challenging women’s inferior status to men.

Likewise, these same actions also increased women’s prominence in the public sphere. While they may not have overtly challenged women's subordination to men, such efforts did apparently lead Liberian women to view themselves in a different light. For example, Clara d’Almeida stated that women who were activists proved to themselves that they could do more
than wash dishes and take care of children ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004). As noted elsewhere, movements which further women's practical gender interests have often empowered women. Involvement in any form of collective organizing, regardless of whether it attempts to improve women’s lower social status, can lead women to self-actualization (Hartmann-Mahmud and Huiskamp, 2006). Thus, activism focused even on only ending the fighting proved to Liberian women that they were competent. For example, activists presented position papers to government officials, released statements to the media, organized demonstrations, used management skills, and spoke out in a public setting ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

Another major theme addressed by some female activists targeted improving the political and social status of women. Some women’s wartime activism attempted to end rape, a form of gender based violence which both produces and continues inequalities between men and women, while also reinforcing male power and control ("Gender Equality," 2013). Ending a form of gender based violence would address women’s strategic gender interests, as eliminating the practice would challenge unequal gender relations. A primary reason that members of the Liberian Women’s Initiative focused on strategies to bring warring factions to agree to ceasefires was to work to end the widespread rape epidemic (Sewell, 2007). WIPNET members recognized that all forms of violence against women, including female genital cutting, rape, and sexual slavery, were symptoms of the structural inequalities that define women in West African societies as second class citizens (Gbowee, 2009; “Gender Equality,” 2013). While not directly addressing misogyny in their efforts, Liberian female activists nonetheless did address the power differential that is at play in the gender based violence of sexual assault. Thus, by finding ways
to combat rape, Liberian female activists hoped to improve women’s status by ending one facet of male domination.

The other major instance where Liberian women’s activism dealt with strategic gender interests was in recommending policies which would help to integrate women into political processes, especially into decision-making roles. Activists sought to bring women into the peace negotiation process, the disarmament and reconstruction process, and into the upper echelons of the next government of Liberia (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; Gbowee, 2009). Female activists who issued the Golden Tulip Declaration were focused primarily on increasing women’s involvement in government, civil society, and employment. They demanded reserved leadership positions in the transitional government for women, and also promoted the idea of encouraging women to run for office. In addition, activists advocated for increased funding from the Liberian government and outside sources to promote women’s continued involvement in civil society groups, and recommended that Liberian women be provided with skills training and access to microcredit loans in order to improve their economic position (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004; “The Golden Tulip Declaration,” 2003).

However, Leymah Gbowee notes that the majority of the activism performed by women’s groups during the 2003 Accra peace negotiations failed to secure an increase in women’s strategic gender interests as the women’s efforts were mainly focused on putting a stop to the fighting. Indeed, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement neither reflected the role that women played in helping end the war, nor did it address women’s issues (Gbowee, 2009). Clearly, however, efforts to increase the role of women in government, civil society, and the economic sphere were put forward, and such recommendations did attempt to help women gain strategic gender interests. According to Molyneux, actions such as these are a way of addressing
women's strategic gender interests because they not only highlight women's inferior status to men, they also seek to change that status.

Maxine Molyneux's gender interest typology is a useful tool in determining whether the overall form of women's activism during the Liberian civil war was overtly feminist or not. Based on the logic that strategic gender interests directly challenge patriarchy, acts falling under this category are labeled distinctively feminist. Since the ultimate goal of this paper is to understand whether it is the form of women's activism, motherist or feminist, which affects gains in women's rights, it is important to clearly define what is feminist in the organizing work performed by Liberian women's groups. Overall, the two main goals of most female activists were efforts to stop the fighting between the various factions in order to end the war, and the second theme was to increase women's involvement in public life. In addition, some women’s groups aimed at improving the political and social status of women, thus suggesting that there was what could be characterized as a feminist element to at least some of women’s organizing. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that women can become involved in government and the economic sphere without the intention of expanding women’s rights. Thus, the mere presence of women may not necessarily be feminist or even beneficial to more equitable gender relations. In spite of this, it is still characteristic of feminism to seek to expand women’s roles outside the home. Table 2 serves as an illustration of Liberian women’s activism following Molyneux’s typology.
Table 2: Molyneux’s Typology Applied to Liberian Women’s Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Gender Interests</th>
<th>Women’s Action</th>
<th>Practical Gender Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Mano River Women’s Peace Network</td>
<td>Persuaded government leaders to meet to address security situation, focusing on an end to the fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought an end to rape and other forms of gender-based violence</td>
<td>Mass Action for Peace</td>
<td>Held street protests demanding a ceasefire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Tulip Declaration recommended increased roles for women in government, civil society, and economic sphere</td>
<td>2003 Accra Peace Talks</td>
<td>Demanded an end to fighting by sequestering and threatening factional leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursued an end to the rape epidemic and recommended women become more involved in the public sphere</td>
<td>Liberian Women’s Initiative</td>
<td>Demanded ceasefire through protests and through conflict mediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, defining what counted as feminist activism is important. It is clear that in the case of Liberian women’s wartime organizing both motherist and feminist mobilizations played a role. The following section will analyze the progress that women made in the postwar period.

3.15 Gains in Women’s Rights Following the War

The final portion of this chapter will measure the changes in the dependent variable, women’s rights, as a result of the war. To measure these changes, five indicators are employed, female literacy rates, the availability of birth control, the rate of maternal mortality, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code, which were selected due to their status as widely accepted measures of equality (Issan, 2010; Lovenduski and Norris, 2003; Pezzini, 2005; Bianco and Moore, 2012).

As described in chapter one, the changes in the dependent variable will be traced five years prior to the war and five years following the war in order to ascertain whether women’s rights increased. Thus, in the case study of Liberia, the years 1984 to 1989 will be compared.
against the years 2003 to 2008. Similar to Lebanon, it is difficult to obtain female literacy statistics. According to the World Bank, in 1984, 19.3 percent of the female population age 15 and older was literate. In the context of postwar Liberia, the only available year falling into the five year radius is 2004, when female literacy for those 15 and older had risen to 47.9 percent\textsuperscript{14} ("Data, World Bank," 2013). In comparison to similar countries, the female literacy rate in Liberia was about average in the 1980s. For example, in 1988, Côte d’Ivoire had a female literacy rate of 23 percent and Senegal a rate of 18 percent. While the female literacy rate for Liberia in 2004 was lower than the Cameroonian 2007 rate of 63 percent, Liberia’s female literacy rate was much higher than other West African nations. In 2005, Burkina Faso had a 22 percent female literacy rate, Nigeria had a 2003 female literacy rate of 43 percent, and Senegal had a 2006 female literacy rate of 33 percent ("Data, World Bank," 2013).

This rise in Liberian female literacy is likely connected to the increase in girls’ access to education that came as a result of the war. According to officials with the Liberian Ministry of Education, while females are still a minority in the education sector, girls’ enrollment in both the primary and secondary levels have noticeably risen from prewar numbers. Notably, in the time period from 1998 to 2001, girls went from consisting of 40 to 42 percent of all primary school students, and from 31 percent to 41 percent of all secondary students. Since the end of the war, Liberian parents of various ethnic and religious backgrounds report that they believe the education of girls to be as important as educating boys. Since so many women became heads-of-house during the war, parents are concerned that many girls could grow up to be women who have to be the main providers in their families, or at least important contributors to the family’s finances, and thus now see the necessity of educating daughters (Fuest, 2008).

\textsuperscript{14} The next available year is past the five year marker of this study. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in 2010, 56.8 percent of the Liberian female population 15 years and older were literate ("Data, World Bank," 2013).
In regards to the second indicator, birth control, the percentage of Liberians using birth control\(^{15}\) in 1986 was estimated at 6.4 percent. After the war, in 2007, it was estimated that 11.4 percent of Liberians were using some form of contraception ("Data, World Bank," 2013). Sub-Saharan African countries in the south have higher usage of contraceptives than those in West Africa. For example, in 2007, birth control was used by 9 percent of the Mauritanian population and 15 percent of the Nigerian population, while 53 percent of the Batswana population and 41 percent of the Zambian population employed contraception. Thus, Liberian usage of birth control does not appear to be drastically low in relation to other West African countries, although it is certainly a considerably low percentage of the population who uses contraception ("Data, World Bank," 2013). Worldwide, contraceptive usage is lowest in the sub-Saharan African region. Even in 2010, only 21.83 percent of those living in sub-Saharan Africa used birth control ("Contraceptive Prevalence…in Sub-Saharan Africa," 2013). There is a high unmet need for contraception in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in West Africa (Gribble and Haffey, 2008).

Concerning the third indicator, maternal mortality rate, the World Bank reports that in 1988 Liberia had a maternal mortality rate of 578 per 100,000 live births ("Data, World Bank," 2013). Following the war, the World Bank and UNICEF agree that in both 2007 and 2008, approximately 990 women died in childbirth for every 100,000 live births ("At a Glance: Liberia," 2003; "Data, World Bank," 2013). To compare Liberia to other West African states, Guinea Bissau had a maternal mortality rate of 910 per 100,000 live births in 1990. Thus, Liberia’s 1988 rate of 588 deaths appears to be low for the region.\(^{16}\) However, Liberia’s 2007 and 2008 rate of 990 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births is an overall high for the region. Benin’s maternal mortality rate stood at 400 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2006,

\(^{15}\) The World Bank defines contraception as any method which attempts to prevent pregnancy ("Contraception Prevalence," 2013).

\(^{16}\) No other maternal mortality rates for West African nations are available for the mid to late 1980s time period.
Burkina Faso’s maternal mortality rate was 310 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2006, Guinea’s 2005 maternal mortality rate was 980 per 100,000 live births, Mali’s 2006 maternal mortality rate stood at 460 deaths per 100,000 live births, and Nigeria’s 2008 rate was 550 women’s deaths as a result of childbirth per 100,000 live births (“Data, World Bank,” 2013). Liberia’s maternal mortality rate, one of the highest in the world, is directly tied to the civil war. During the conflict, Liberia’s healthcare system essentially disappeared as infrastructure was destroyed and trained medical professionals largely left (“Liberia: Maternal Health Worsened,” 2008; Nyepon, 2011).

In the years leading up to the civil war, there were women who served in the Liberian parliament. However, there is a lack of information concerning just how many women served in the legislative branch in the 1985 election17. It appears that one female was elected as a member of parliament in 1985,18 Ruth Sando Perry19 (Beyan, Burrowes, and Dunn, 2001). In the first postwar elections, which occurred in 2005, 8 out of 64 seats in the House of Representatives were won by women, while women claimed 5 of the 30 Senate seats (“Liberia: House of Representatives,” 2013; “Liberia: The Liberian Senate,” 2013). As Melinda Adams and Gwynn Thomas point out, women’s representation in the legislative branch has been lower in Liberia than in other postconflict African states such as Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Burundi, and Uganda. Despite the adoption of an election reform law in January 2005 by the National Elections Commission which stipulated that 30 percent of the candidates nominated for public elective offices for each political party should be women, this gender quota was not enforced in

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18 Based on available information, other past female legislators have included Sally Howe, Elizabeth Collins, and Catherine Collins, who served in 1952 (Fuest, 2008; Steady, 2011).
19 Certainly, there may have been others, but no records exist to confirm this. Regardless, the number is likely quite low.
the 2005 elections. As a result, only 12.5 percent of the House of Representatives and 16.7 percent of the Senate was composed of women (Adams and Thomas, 2010).

The final indicator used in this study is the number of positive changes for women made to the family code. Kristina Scurry Baehr and Chi Mgbako explain that both formal and customary law have existed simultaneously in Liberia, noting that this tradition is rooted in the socio-political differences between the more recently arrived Americo-Liberian community and indigenous Liberian groups. Historically, individuals from indigenous ethnic groups were not covered by formal laws which meant equal rights have not traditionally existed among those living in Liberia (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011; Ajibewa, 1999). Essentially, magistrate and civil courts ensured the operation of formal law while clan chiefs, town chiefs, and paramount chiefs had initial jurisdiction over civil cases, although not criminal cases (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011).

The postwar period in Liberia has seen changes made in the family code to benefit women. The most important of these was the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 2003. This law guaranteed that a woman had the right to own property and also could not be forced to marry a man against her will. The law also stipulated that a woman should inherit one third of her husband’s property if he dies, and finally, the law noted that dowry was to be viewed as a gift and was therefore not required to be paid back if a couple divorced. Prior to the war, most indigenous Liberian women were not permitted to own or inherit land or property, putting them at a severe disadvantage to men. Yet, this important law, a formal law it must be noted, does not always protect women in the way that it was intended. It relies on the chiefs overseeing civil cases to follow formal law rather than customary law, and as Kristina Scurry Baehr and Chi Mgbako observe, most chiefs are apt to follow customary law rather than the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011).
Another new law was developed in the postwar period which deals with rape. Traditionally rape has been handled between families, where the accused rapist is asked to pay the family of the rape victim (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011). As previously noted, involving the courts is believed to disrespect the family of the accused rapist (Jones, 2010). However, in 2005, the Act to Amend the New Penal Code Chapter 14 Sections 14.70 and 14.71 and to Provide for Gang Rape, also known as the Rape Amendment Act (RAA), was passed. This law defines rape as any non-consensual sex and declares that a person under age 18 cannot give consent, even in the case of child marriage (Kalwinski, 2007). The provision relating to child marriages is particularly important, and gives child brides a legal measure to fight back. However, Melanie Teff points out that while this represents positive change, overall, the law is largely not enforced and it is difficult to even come by a copy of the law meaning that not many people are aware of their rights (Teff, 2009).

In the aftermath of the Liberian civil war, these two laws represent major changes to the family code that promote gender equality. The Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law gives all Liberian women the opportunity to inherit property and land and also gives them the legal right to refuse marriage to a man not of their choosing. However, implementation is difficult in areas where customary law has normally taken precedence. Likewise, the Rape Amendment Act does criminalize rape, but ignorance of the law is a problem. Nevertheless, these laws are integral to transforming unequal gender relations between men and women. The first law attempts to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to inherit and own land and property, while also guaranteeing that women and men can both choose their marriage partners. Similarly, criminalizing rape attempts to safeguard women from a gender based violence that promotes hierarchical gender relations.
Thus, by comparing the five indicators of female literacy rates, the availability of birth control, the rate of maternal mortality, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code, in both the prewar and postwar contexts, it is clear that there were improvements in women’s rights following the Liberian civil war. One major change was the increase in female literacy rates. A year after the war, literacy rates for women age 15 and above had increased by 148.2 percent. Likewise, there was a jump of 78.1 percent in the use of birth control, although even in 2007 only a small portion, 11.4 percent of the population, used contraception. However, the rate of maternal mortality not only failed to improve in the aftermath of the civil war, it in fact shows complete regression in maternal health care since then. One year into the war, maternal deaths increased by 107.6 percent from 1988 levels. In 2007, rates had decreased from 1990 levels by 17.5 percent, but still had shown an overall increase of 71.3 percent from maternal deaths before the war. As previously noted, Liberia’s health infrastructure was destroyed during the war (Atwood et al., 2012). This at least partially explains the increase in maternal mortality rates.

As described, the number of female parliamentarians in the 1985 election is difficult to determine. Ruth Perry is the only confirmed winner of these elections when the total number of seats in the Liberian parliament stood at 90 (“Liberia: Date of Elections,” 2013). Thus, women made up only 1.1 percent of the parliament, if Perry was indeed its only female member who won election in 1985. By the 2005 elections, 13.8 percent of the members of parliament were women, indicating an incredible increase of 1,154 percent in female representation, although women’s participation rate is still below the world average.20 Similarly, substantial progress has been made concerning the area of family code through the Equal Rights of the Customary

20 Of course, it is debatable if Perry was the only woman serving in the 1985 elections so this jump may not be as drastic as it would appear.
Marriage Law and Rape Amendment Act, at least in terms of changes to the law, if not its implementation.

In conclusion, Liberian women’s wartime organizing focused on both practical and strategic interests while also implementing motherist mobilization. However, only half of the improvements in women’s rights, in female literacy rates, access to birth control, number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code to benefit women, can be attributed to women’s activism. Female literacy rates improved largely due to the conditions of wartime. Parents increasingly began to send their daughters to school as they feared that their daughters might have to one day financially support themselves since the war was resulting in so many female-headed households (Fuest, 2008). Likewise, the rise in access to birth control was not something that female activists ever focused their organizing on during the war, and is more likely attributable to other civil society actors. However, the rise in the number of women in parliament is likely connected to Liberian women’s activism which repeatedly focused on strategies to include more women in government. Jacqui Bauer believes that the high number of women’s organizations in Liberia combined with the high level of women’s grassroots activism led to the increased rates of female participation in politics. Bauer also attributes women’s increased political participation to the presidential candidacy of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf which inspired women to want to become more involved in politics (Bauer, 2009).

Similarly, Liberian women’s activism is connected to both the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law and the Rape Amendment Act. Those with AFELL, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, organized female activists beginning in 1995 to advocate for a bill which addressed issues associated with a woman’s right to choose their marriage partner as well as inherit land and property. In 2002, AFELL led Liberian women activists in a march of support
for the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law when the bill was stalled in the national legislature (Massquoi, 2007). Likewise, activists associated with AFELL were instrumental in advocating for the Rape Amendment Act, and in fact AFELL lawyers actually wrote an initial draft of the bill (Massquoi, 2007; Paye-Layleh, 2005). Therefore, while female literacy and access to birth control increased for other reasons, Liberian women’s activism, which focused on both practical and strategic gender interests while combining motherist and feminist mobilizations, did influence the outcome of increased female parliamentarians and the changes to the family code that benefited women.

3.16 Conclusion

In Liberia, women’s organizing did not end with the conclusion of the civil war as it did in the Lebanese context. The vast majority of Lebanese women put aside their political agendas in order to focus on more urgent needs, such as finding adequate food, but also to simply focus on rebuilding their personal lives (Maksoud, 1996). In contrast, Liberian women involved in women’s groups stayed active following the war’s finish. For example, many women who had mobilized during the war continued their efforts by supporting Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s bid for the presidency (Bauer, 2009). The next chapter will use process-tracing to compare the difference in the types of mobilization techniques used by the majority of Lebanese women and Liberian women in order to explore whether this had any effect on the differences in the respective postwar situations in Lebanon and Liberia.
Chapter 4: Analysis and Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

The ongoing debate among scholars concerning whether war and its aftermath bring an opportunity to further women’s equality in political, economic, and social standing has largely centered on women’s direct participation in fighting and women’s entrance into the workforce (Bop, 2002; Meintjes, 2002; Turshen, 2002; Enloe, 1993). This thesis seeks to contribute to the possibility of a connection between women’s liberation and war by considering motherist and feminist movements in Lebanon and Liberia in order to determine whether it is the approach of activists which affects women’s rights. Thus, this final chapter will employ the process-tracing technique to assess and compare Lebanese and Liberian women’s respective wartime organizing in order to trace whether the type of activism had any effect on postwar gains in women’s rights. Additionally, this final chapter will answer the posed research questions and offer suggestions for future research.

4.2 Process-tracing

This section will briefly review Lebanese and Liberian women’s wartime activism, employ process-tracing to determine if motherist or feminist mobilizations affected women’s rights in the aftermath of war, and consider other factors in the differing postwar situations for women in Lebanon and Liberia. In Lebanon’s civil war from 1975 to 1990, the overall tone of women’s groups was motherist. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there were feminists involved in wartime activism and that feminist actions were taken by many women’s associations. However, the main method of mobilization during the Lebanese civil war was through women’s maternal identity. In contrast to Lebanon’s situation, Liberia’s women’s
movement during the civil war, which lasted from 1989 until 2003, was hybrid motherist-feminist, meaning both a motherist and feminist orientation was employed.

Therefore, through process-tracing, what follows will highlight how the different orientations of the respective activists in Lebanon and Liberia affected female literacy, women’s access to birth control, maternal mortality rates, the number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code that benefited women. After first comparing the changes in the dependent variable in Lebanon and Liberia and briefly reiterating the major points of women’s activism in each case study, there will be an analysis of the role of Lebanese and Liberian women in the respective peace accords. This will be followed by a discussion of the differing methods of confrontation used by women’s groups as well as the decision of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to run for president in the first postwar Liberian election.

In Lebanon, female literacy, which increased by 44.9 percent, and maternal deaths, which decreased by 64.1 percent, saw a drastic improvement from the prewar years of 1970 and 1971 respectively, to the postwar year of 1995. Likewise, it was certainly positive that birth control was legalized and that its use increased by 15.3 percent from 1971 to 1996. Nevertheless, the number of women in parliament did not rise substantially, only by 2.3 percent from 1972 to 1992 (Hariri, 1996; “Data, World Bank,” 2013; “The Situation of Children and Women,” 1995; “Global Health Observatory Data,” 2013; “Lebanon: Parliamentary Chamber Majlis…1992,” 2013; Hajjar, 2003).

Likewise, in the five year period following the war, although some changes occurred in the family code to benefit women, women nonetheless still faced many discriminatory laws, in issues such as polygamy, inheritance rights, and divorce, and were at the mercy of religious judges (Mansour, 2005; Livingstone, 1992). Most importantly, such changes to the family code
did not represent substantial gains in equitable gender relations, although they certainly contributed to the reduction of patriarchy. The 1993 decision to count the testimony of men and women on equal terms in court was a major step toward ending gender inequality (Suad, 1997). Nevertheless, other improvements made in the five years after the war did not substantially address hierarchal gender relations. For example, women were deemed competent enough to testify in court in real estate matters and were also permitted to start a business without first securing their husband’s permission. Additionally, female diplomats were allowed to continue working if they married non-Lebanese men and women were no longer placed under the legal categorization of “incompetent” or “underage” in Lebanese law (Shehadeh, 2010; Lattouf, 2004). While addressing strategic gender interests, these changes to the family code nevertheless did not substantially alter inequitable gender relations, but were a step in that direction.

In Liberia, literacy rates for women age 15 and above had increased by 148.2 percent from the prewar to the postwar period. Likewise, from 1986 to 2007 there was a 78.1 percent jump in the use of birth control. However, the rate of maternal mortality failed to improve in the aftermath of the civil war. One year into the war, maternal deaths increased by 107.6 percent from 1988 levels. In 2007, rates had decreased from 1990 levels by 17.5 percent, but still had shown an overall increase of 71.3 percent from maternal deaths before the war (“At a Glance: Liberia,” 2003; “Data, World Bank,” 2013; “Global Health Observatory Data,” 2013). Nevertheless, the number of women in the Liberian parliament increased by 1,154 percent from 1985 to 2005 and significant changes to the family code that benefited women also occurred. For example, the Rape Amendment Act penalized non-consensual sex, not just gang rape as the law had stood before, and the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law gave all Liberian women the opportunity to inherit property and land and also the legal grounds to refuse marriage to a
man not of their choosing (“Liberia: Date of Elections,” 2013; Kalwinski, 2007; Baehr et al., 2011).

In contrast to the changes to the family which benefited women that were made in Lebanon, the changes made to the Liberian family code went further in addressing gender inequality. Criminalizing rape, a form of gender based violence, is a major step toward ending patriarchy since it seeks to address power differences in hierarchical gender relations (“Gender Equality,” 2013). Similarly, the issues addressed in the Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law seek to rectify the inequalities between men and women’s access to land and property, which have historically disadvantaged a large proportion of Liberian women. Additionally, this law also provided a woman the legal right to turn down a marriage if she did not want it and, furthermore, also protected against child marriage. Both are substantial steps toward more equal gender relations since such stipulations seek to change the traditional power differences between women and men (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011). Table 3 offers a comparative illustration of the differences made by Lebanese and Liberian women during their respective civil wars:
Table 3: Differences in Lebanese and Liberian Women’s Wartime Gains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Liberia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Literacy Rate</td>
<td>44.9% increase</td>
<td>148.2% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Birth Control</td>
<td>15.3% increase</td>
<td>78.1% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Mortality Rate</td>
<td>64.1% decrease</td>
<td>71.3% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Female Parliamentarians</td>
<td>2.3% increase</td>
<td>1,154% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to Family Code which Benefited Women</td>
<td>Raised retirement age for women from age 54 to 64; gave equal weight to men and women’s testimony in court; allowed women to testify in real estate matters; allowed women to work without husband’s permission; allowed female diplomats to maintain Lebanese citizenship upon marrying non-Lebanese; recognized women as a separate legal category from “incompetent” or “underaged”</td>
<td>Allowed women to own land and property; guaranteed women would inherit one third of husband’s property upon death; gave women right to refuse marriage to man not of their choosing; criminalized rape; criminalized all sex with those under 18 as sex, even in case of child marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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By comparing the postwar outcomes in changes to the dependent variable as measured by the indicators of female literacy, availability of birth control, maternal mortality rate, number of women in parliament, and changes to the family code that benefited women in Lebanon and Liberia, it becomes apparent that one of the most crucial differences between the two cases is the number of female parliamentarians in the respective countries. While changing the leadership does not necessarily change the system, there is a widespread literature indicating many positive associations with increased roles of women in leadership. One major advantage associated with female leadership is that political institutions tend to become more inclusive of women, as well as others traditionally located outside of the centers of powers. According to Alyse Nelson, women typically bring power sharing ideas in their leadership styles that promote participatory
politics (Nelson, 2012). Thus, the extreme rise in the number of women in the Liberian parliament is a clear indication of important changes for women. When women are in positions of power, they have a greater ability to facilitate changes which affect women’s rights. While Lebanese women’s participation rates in parliament did increase, it was by a mere 2.3 percent. In comparison to Liberia, with a rise of 1,154 percent in female parliamentarians, it is obvious that Liberian women were far better off than Lebanese women in the postconflict period. Political participation is integral in the fight for gender equality. While increases in female literacy rates and availability of birth control, decreases in maternal mortality, and changes to the family code that benefit women are important, they are only beneficial if women use these benefits by becoming involved in the public sphere. There is little significance in achieving greater access to education or laws which increase women’s access to economic outlets if women do not pursue decision-making positions in these fields.

In addition to the comparisons between women’s postwar situations in Lebanon and Liberia on the issues of female literacy, women’s access to birth control, maternal mortality rates, the number of female parliamentarians, and changes to the family code that benefited women, it also important to note that Lebanese women largely halted their activism in the aftermath of war while Liberian women continued organizing (Maksoud, 1996; Bauer, 2009). In fact, even in 2012, Lebanese women have some of the lowest rates of political participation in the Middle Eastern region (Stamadianou, 2012). Although Liberian society still largely believes that politics in men’s business, and while much of Liberian women’s increase in politics has been through government appointments rather than through voting, in contrast to their Lebanese counterparts, Liberian women continue to make substantial progress in increasing their political
participation (Holmgren, 2013). In order to understand why these differences exist, the critical instances of Lebanese and Liberian women’s respective wartime activism will be reviewed.

To reiterate, the actions taken by the three major women’s groups during the Lebanese civil war were the ten-member delegation sent by the Lebanese Women’s Council in 1975 to request that those in government end the ongoing violence, the 1983 women’s conference put on by the Lebanese Women’s Council, and the 1984 peace march in Beirut (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983; al-Khatib, 1984; Shehadeh, 1999a; “No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984). Following Maxine Molyneux’s typology of gender interests, it was determined that the majority of actions around these events sought to address practical gender interests, specifically the ending of violence associated with the war (Molyneux, 1985). Nevertheless, a majority of the efforts which took place during the 1983 “The Role of Women in the Save the Lebanon Campaign” conference were feminist-based. For example, those attending the conference advocated for government policies that openly acknowledged female oppression in Lebanon and the attendees also made specific recommendations such as increasing female access to education, and increasing the number of women in professional jobs in the government and private sectors, and into decision-making positions in the realm of politics (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983).

Likewise, the two case studies of Lebanese women’s groups provide evidence that the emphasis of such associations was largely on maternalism. For instance, while the Women's Renaissance Gathering sought to help women and their children find normalcy in war, promote efforts to end the war, and advocate for women's rights, the majority of its focus was on women as mothers. This was best exemplified through the group’s efforts to cater to mothers and their children by creating activities that the two could share together. Additionally, while steps were taken to improve the status of women, it was often tempered by distancing the Women’s
Renaissance Gathering from feminism, usually by avoiding phrases such as “women’s rights” (Narsh, 1982; Ward, 2009).

In the other case study, the disability rights group, there was indeed a feminist orientation. Most of the association’s activities concerned providing humanitarian relief, but the group also equipped members with the necessary terminology to explore the intersections of disability, gender, and neocolonialism, and similarly encouraged women living with disabilities to become involved in activities outside the home. Significantly, the group did not emphasize women’s status as mothers, yet some of the women in the group nonetheless proclaimed that their interest in becoming activists was due to their maternal identities (Wehbi, 2010).

Therefore, overall, Lebanese women’s groups’ activism was mobilized not through feminism but rather maternalism. In contrast to Lebanon’s situation, Liberia’s women’s movement during the civil war was hybrid motherist-feminist. The three major events in Liberian women’s groups’ wartime activism were: the 2001 demand made by members of the Mano River Women’s Peace Network to the leaders of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea to work to end the ongoing violence; the 2003 Mass Action for Peace movement put on by affiliates of the Women in Peacebuilding Network; and finally, the activities in Accra, Ghana organized by multiple women’s groups which ultimately led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003 (Sewell, 2007; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008).

While much of the mobilization and many of the strategies employed by Liberian women were motherist, a significant portion of women’s groups’ mobilization during the war was feminist oriented. Thus, while the delegation with MARWOPNET used their status as mothers to put pressure on the presidents of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, they nevertheless had hoped to be included in the meeting so that they could inform the leaders of their own opinions and
insights (Sewell, 2007; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Likewise, the Liberian branch of WIPNET typically mobilized women around concerns for their families, especially children, but also emphasized women’s strategic gender interests, especially as targets of gender based violence (Sewell, 2007; Ekiyor and Gbowee, 2005; “Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Most notably, even as the many women gathered at the 2003 peace conference in Accra, Ghana used motherist tactics, such as shaming the men by treating them as boys or employing the taboo against seeing one’s mother naked, they also put forward a feminist platform (“Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). This was best embodied by the Golden Tulip Declaration in which activists sought to increase women’s involvement in government, civil society, and the economic sphere (“The Golden Tulip Declaration,” 2003). Similarly, the case study on the Liberian Women’s Initiative also indicated women’s simultaneous mobilization through motherhood and feminism. The group sought to engage in both practical and strategic gender interests by seeking not only to end the general violence of war, but additionally, to end the gender based violence of rape. Most importantly, those with the Liberian Women’s Initiative demanded an increased role for women in government and civil society (Sewell, 2007; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004).

Thus, while Lebanese women largely centered their activism around their status as mothers, Liberian women’s organizing entered a gray area where maternalism merged with feminism. Female activists in Liberia, like their counterparts in Lebanon, sought to address the practical gender interest of finding a way to end the war. However, Liberian women also went on to push for important strategic gender interests such as advocating for a role in the final ceasefire agreement.

Despite the differences in approaches, as mentioned in chapters two and three, gains for women were made in both the Liberian and Lebanese postwar contexts. After the war, Lebanese
and Liberian women saw a rise in female literacy rates, increased access to birth control, overall
decreases in maternal mortality rates, more women in parliament, and improvements for women
within the family code (Hariri, 1996; “Data, World Bank,” 2013; “The Situation of Children and
Women,” 1995; “Global Health Observatory Data,” 2013; Hajjar, 2003; “Lebanon:
Parliamentary Chamber Majlis…1992,” 2013; Shehadeh, 2010; Suad, 1997; “At a Glance:
2013; Fuest, 2008). However, the Lebanese case shows that such gains were not nearly as
extensive as in Liberia. In fact, Kirsten Schulze maintains that most of the wartime gains made
toward female equality in Lebanon were lost in the aftermath of the war (Schulze, 1998). One
purpose of this paper is to determine if the larger role of feminism in Liberian women’s approach
cculated to the contrasting respective postwar situations for Lebanese and Liberian women.

The first crucial distinction between the cases lies in the respective conflict resolution
processes. Lebanese women were not involved in the final peace agreement, the Ta’if Accord,
while Liberian women played a role in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Fisk, 2002;
Lebanon: Majlis; Fuest, 2008; “African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). As minor as
Liberian women’s contributions were to the writing of the peace agreement, nonetheless, some
vague references to gender equality were written into the Comprehensive Peace Agreement
(Fuest, 2008; “Liberia: Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” 2003). While a line about how “[t]he
Parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments
within the NTGL [National Transitional Government of Liberia]” may seem relatively
insignificant, such a difference presents a striking contrast between the two case studies as the
Ta’if Accord does not include any mention of women, much less seek to rectify gender
Accord,” 2013). This is likely due to the fact that no women participated in the talks that led to the Ta’if Accord which were negotiated by those parliamentarians of the 1972 election who were all men (Hanf, 1993; Hajjar, 2003; “Lebanon: Majlis Al-Nuwwab,” 2013).

In fact, it appears that women’s involvement in the peace agreement process is pivotal. Donald Steinberg argues that gender-neutral peace accords essentially neglect the voices and representation of women, and ultimately fail to address the needs of half of the population (Steinberg, 2011). Furthermore, according to Sheila Meintjes, it is from the start of ceasefire negotiations and well into the postconflict period that women must be present and participating, rallying around a cohesive women’s agenda that actively promotes increasing women’s equality in political, economic, and social terms if there is to be any hope that positive changes gained during the social upheaval of war will be maintained (Meintjes, 2002). Overall, the work of Steinberg and Meitjes indicate that women’s active participation in the peace accord is critical to improving the political and social standing of women.

Therefore, the significance of the input of Liberian women into the Comprehensive Peace Agreement may have been more than simply a vague reference to gender equality. By participating in the process and even having female representatives of the Mano River Women’s Peace Network sign onto the official accord, it set into motion a precedent for increasing women’s involvement in overtly political matters and increasing women’s role in decision-making positions (“Profile of the Mano River,” 2013; Sewell, 2007). In fact, the long tradition of the members of the Liberian Women’s Initiative in attending peace conferences beginning in 1990 blazed the trail for women’s participation in the 2003 Accra talks and consequent involvement in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). Moreover, Liberian women’s inclusion in the 2003 Accra talks signified that they were
important and acknowledged that they were members of society who had as much at stake as any Liberian man. As a result of their presence, women were able to secure, at least as a rule, that there was to be a 30 percent gender quota for women in the legislature in the 2005 elections. Although not implemented, the quota nevertheless led to at least the idea that the inclusion of women in government was something to strive for (Adams, 2008). In contrast, Lebanese women’s groups did not seek to involve themselves in any of the ceasefire negotiations which occurred throughout the war which likely confirmed to many in the mainstream that women were not interested in political matters.

A second point in which the cases diverge was in confrontation methods. Liberian women attended ceasefire conferences, which as previously noted usually occurred without official invitation to do so, but furthermore, Liberian women spoke directly to many men and those in government when they demanded increased roles for women in the public sphere. For example, members of Liberian women’s groups informed men at various peace talks that they wanted increased representation in the political sphere, especially in decision-making positions (“African Women and Peace Support,” 2004). In comparison, during the Lebanese civil war, women largely only made such demands at the 1983 conference organized by the Lebanese Women’s Council. Such an event was mainly attended by women and although a statement was released declaring the necessity of increasing the social status of women, allowing more women into government, and increasing women’s access to education and job opportunities, such demands were not acknowledged by mainstream Lebanese (Ghurayyib and Stephan, 1983). Lebanese female activists did not appear to publicize their feminist demands which meant that outside of the community of those involved in the women’s movement, most mainstream Lebanese remained ignorant of the demands of women activists.
Finally, the decision of an individual woman to run for president in Liberia, both during the war in the 1997 elections as well as in the postwar election of 2005, had a profound effect on the different outcomes of the two case studies. Essentially, the 2005 presidential campaign of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf epitomized the call for increasing women’s roles in decision-making positions made by Liberian female activists. Although Sirleaf embraced an essentialist motherist trope in her campaign, the mere act of her running for president nevertheless embodied the call for women’s rights. While the election of a female president does not necessarily alter gender relations, Melinda Adams and Jacqui Bauer argue that Sirleaf’s campaign united the women’s movement around an agenda that kept them organizing beyond the end of the war (Adams, 2008; Bauer, 2009). In Lebanon, there was no parallel woman who stood for election at that level. Thus, unlike Lebanese women who largely put their activism aside following the Ta’if Accord in order to address the individual problems in their personal lives, Liberian women stayed in activist mode largely because of Sirleaf’s campaign (Maksoud, 1996; Bauer, 2009).

Overall, the primary difference between the postwar situations for women in Lebanon and Liberia is centered on maternalism, which emphasizes women’s roles as mothers. As Shirin M. Rai notes, women mobilized as mothers obscure their own status as individual women and are thus rendered invisible as individuals. Instead, they only appear as wives and mothers (Rai, 1994). By emphasizing motherhood, Lebanese women’s groups prioritized women’s duties to serve their families. It would seem only natural that most Lebanese women then put aside their political agendas to focus on the rebuilding of their personal lives as this capacity to serve others was promoted by maternalism (Maksoud, 1996).

Unquestionably, the destruction wrought by the civil war did tremendous damage to the family life of millions of Lebanese (Abu Nassr, 1996). Yet a consequence of this decision to turn
inwards and away from the community resulted in the loss of many advances in women’s rights, especially the chance for changes to the family code that benefited women. The responsibilities of motherhood would appear to be a crucial part of many women’s decision to turn inward. The notion of a good mother centers on serving one’s husband and children, even to the extent of sacrificing one’s own desires and needs. As Mirna Lattouf notes, Lebanese women are often criticized for becoming involved in organizing efforts that seek to increase women’s rights as mainstream society views their activism as a shirking of their motherly duties by focusing on their own needs rather than devoting their attention exclusively to their children and husbands (Lattouf, 2004).

It appears that the central difficulty with the ideology of motherism as a strategy to increase women’s rights is that motherism itself often seeks to take the focus off women and put it on others, usually children. Rather than argue that as mothers women deserve rights, Lebanese women largely advocated for an end to the war so that children’s suffering would end, albeit alongside their own. In contrast, activists associated with the Liberian women’s movement paired motherism alongside more feminist concerns during the war, such as demanding a presence at the ceasefire negotiations. Because the majority of Lebanese women were mobilized around their identities as mothers, they were much less political in their demands for increasing their rights than their Liberian counterparts as their strictly motherist orientation led them to focus on others rather than themselves. Yet, Liberian women activists were mobilized on both maternalism and feminism, and their more feminist stance appears to have allowed them to advocate for themselves.

The hypothesis discussed in chapter one predicted that motherist mobilization would not be enough to secure advances in women’s rights. However, Lebanese women did make gains in
women’s rights. Thus, on one level the hypothesis is refuted in that motherist mobilization at the very least does not preclude advances to women’s rights. Nonetheless, it would seem to be, as predicted, that a more feminist orientation allows women to maintain wartime gains in women’s advancements. Thus, the Liberian example indicates that partially mobilizing women based on their maternal identities does not negatively impact longer term increases in the social, economic, and political status of women. However, it is only with the development of an overall feminist orientation of the women’s movement that would seem to lead to sustained and larger increases in women’s rights. Therefore, motherism is not detrimental to women’s rights as many Western feminists have argued (DiQuinzio, 1993). Yet, neither does maternalism alone appear to lead women closer to full equality, mainly because it does ensure that gains are sustained.

Nonetheless, as argued by many scholars, maternalism does serve as an important entry point for women into political activism as it legitimizes women’s actions or obscures the fact that women are even acting politically (Aning, 1998; Pollack, 2007; Rai, 1994). In both Lebanon and Liberia during their respective civil wars, women’s activism was accepted by mainstream society when it related to their roles as mothers. This is best demonstrated in the Lebanese context by the efforts of most women’s groups to end the general wartime violence as such activism confirmed the innate peacefulness of women, which is often associated with women’s roles as mothers (al-Khatib, 1984; Shehadeh, 1999a; “No to the War, No to the 10th Year,” 1984; Ruddick, 1983). Likewise, a group such as the Women’s Renaissance Gathering spent considerable time trying to improve the status of women, yet it also focused on designing activities for mothers and children to do together (Narsh, 1982; Ward, 2009). Similarly, in Liberia, women’s efforts to work toward disarmament, along with campaigns to end the fighting also confirmed women’s maternal roles. For instance, Liberian women were viewed as being skillful at helping warring factions to arrive
at compromises because they were mothers and thus were used to resolving fights among their children ("African Women and Peace Support," 2004; Johnson, 2011; Steady, 2011).

Furthermore, in Lebanon, the Bakleen chapter of the Women’s Renaissance Gathering had male support through members’ work in the community kitchen. There, embracing the traditional feminine role of caretaker of the family and home, women cooked meals for the men guarding the town’s borders from Israeli attack. Certainly, the women were claiming their right to be involved in the public sphere and their right to be political. However, these women fully embodied ideals associated with motherhood (Ward, 2009). Similarly, Liberian women were openly praised for their roles in bringing about an end to the war which was often associated with women’s maternal desire to protect their children (Lederach and Lederach, 2010; Sewell, 2007). Overall, those within the mainstream of both Lebanon and Liberia tolerated, or even advocated for, women’s involvement in activism when such work appeared to conform to stereotypes associated with traditional maternal roles.

Likewise, many Lebanese and Liberian women only seemed to become interested in joining women’s associations when recruited as mothers. For instance, Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee indicated that she, like many others involved in the Mass Action for Peace campaign, were demanding that Charles Taylor meet with opposing factions to work out a peace agreement because of their concern for the future of their children ("Pray the Devil Back,” 2008). Elsewhere, Gbowee has stated that many Liberian women felt that since they were mothers, they could transform Liberian society (Steady, 2011; “Bill Moyers Journal,” 2009). A parallel example of this same philosophy in the context of Lebanon were women such as Iman Khalifeh, conceptual designer of the 1984 peace march in Beirut, who plainly stated that her decision to
become involved in activism was rooted in her concern for the suffering of children in wartime (“The Right Livelihood Awards 1984,” 2013).

However, as far as the research question, *Is a more motherist approach better than a more feminist approach in promoting women’s rights?*, it must be acknowledged that, in fact, maternalism alone does not appear to help women to gain more rights than if a more feminist approach were pursued. Through process-tracing, it was revealed that it was Liberian women’s use of a melding of motherism and feminism into a motherist-feminist hybrid that led activists to want to continue organizing and working for change following the civil war. In the case of Lebanon, the overall lack of a feminist conviction in women’s organizing coupled with the full embrace of maternalism appears to have left women without the desire to coalesce around an agenda pushing for women’s rights in the wake of the war (Maksoud, 1996). It would appear that the majority of Lebanese women emphatically embraced their maternal roles and purposefully distanced themselves from the women’s movement to instead fully return to “hearth and home.”

Yet while many feminists, such as Patrice DiQuinzio, have feared that maternalism wrongly reduces women to their biological capabilities, women’s connection to motherhood nonetheless remains an important tool in raising female consciousness by emphasizing the uniqueness and importance of motherhood as a social institution (DiQuinzio, 1993; Forcey, 1991). Many non-Western scholars have pointed out not only how important motherhood is in many parts of Africa, Asia, and South America, but also how maternalism and feminism can in fact be combined (Oyewùmí, 2003; Afshar, 1996; Gheytanchi, 2001). The case study on Liberia provides an excellent example of this technique. Liberian women’s actions during the war showcased their simultaneous connection to motherhood and feminism, and that motherism, when combined with feminism, does not prevent strident and sustained gains in women’s rights.
The next portion of this section will address the second sub-research question which asked whether feminism would create a backlash to women’s rights, possibly increasing resistance to female equality. According to Ann E. Cudd, lessening the oppression of one group often requires the loss of certain advantages or privileges of another social group. Thus, backlashes typically follow any advancement toward progress (Cudd, 2002). This was the case in both Lebanon and Liberia, regardless of the respective mobilizing formats. In Lebanon, Kirsten Schulze believes that nationalism, based on sectarian affiliation, was both in the lead up to and during the civil war at an all-time high, and she argues that this trend continued after the war. According to Schulze, during the war, the nationalist discourse allowed women only temporary access to new public roles as they were needed to help assert their community’s power over other confessions. However, following the war, nationalism actually limited women’s abilities to demand new rights as it forced them to conform to so-called “traditional” norms which were connected to ideas of nationalism (Schulze, 1998). As Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis have noted, nationalist discourses often hold up women as the transmitters of culture and thus encourage women to embrace all of an ethnic community’s cultural traditions. By rejecting traditional roles, women are often condemned as rejecting their communities (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983).

In fact, there was a significant backlash against Lebanese women’s advances in the aftermath of the civil war. Despite women’s increased levels of education, the ideas promoted by larger society were that women could not be both a mother and working professional. Additionally, society pushed the notion that a woman must find a husband to look after her and that women were not rational enough to make good decisions (Schulze, 1998; Lattouf, 2004). Such narratives embraced stereotyped notions around the “traditional” roles of women and were
a part of the intense nationalism that pervaded Lebanon after the war. Regardless of the fact that Lebanese women had largely mobilized on their maternal identities, society sought to push them back into traditional roles that only tolerated women’s presence in the private sphere.

Similarly, a backlash also occurred in the context of Liberia. Leymah Gbowee noted that those who had previously supported the efforts of female activists during the war believed that women should return to the private sphere in the postwar period. Many men were tolerant and even proud of women for their role in helping to bring about the final ceasefire. Yet, such individuals did not want to see women becoming involved in other political matters that threatened their own privileged position (Lederach and Lederach, 2010). However, many Liberian women remained active and committed toward advancing women’s rights and refused to leave the public spaces in which they had made such significant inroads during the war (Adams, 2008). Thus, the backlash was not as detrimental to the gains that Liberian women had made during the war because the overall more feminist conviction of the women’s movement appears to have led women to continue organizing, mostly by supporting Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s presidential campaign (Bauer, 2009). Yet, in the case of Lebanon, most of the wartime gains toward female equality were lost after 1990. Kirsten Schulze believes that a major reason Lebanese women were unable to maintain wartime gains was due to society’s portrayal of women as not competent enough and not strong enough to adequately continue performing new public roles (Schulze, 1998).

Overall, the generally motherist mobilization and orientation of most Lebanese female activists reinforced the role that nationalist movements assigned to women, which is that of wife and mother, the upholder of tradition (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983). Therefore, the fact that Lebanese women’s activism embraced a motherist ideology contributed to most women’s
philosophy that they were best at being mothers. Essentially, both civil society and mainstream society were touting the same narrative which was that women’s duties were to serve others as mothers. To be good mothers, larger societal ideals in Lebanon promoted the notion that it would be best for women to stay at home and to not engage in paid work in order to fully care for their children (Kikoski, 2000). However, in order to be at home with children, women relied upon men for financial support. Due to the traditional role of men as the final decision-maker of the household, women were left without the ability to make decisions within the home. Additionally, since most women were likewise not working outside the home or participating in politics, they were also deprived of making decisions in the economic sphere or in government (Abu Nassr, 1996). For example, Nancy W. Jabbra’s longitudinal study of a rural village in the Bekka Valley, composed mainly of Melkite Greek Catholics, indicates that roles for women remained largely identical in both prewar and postwar contexts. Whether in the early 1970s or early 2000s, women were expected to not only marry and have children, but to also drop out of the workforce upon marriage in order to focus exclusively on their roles as mothers and wives (Jabbra, 2008).

Thus, whether women pursue motherist or feminist approaches in their activism, a backlash would appear inevitable. Likewise, based on the examples of Lebanese and Liberian women’s wartime experiences, it appears that while a feminist approach creates resistance to women’s rights, a movement which at least partially embraces feminism seems better suited to ensure the maintenance of wartime gains. Certainly, Lebanese women, despite the generally maternalist approach of most women’s groups, saw positive increases in their access to education, job opportunities, and power within the household (Abu Nassr, 1996; Moghadam, 2003). Nevertheless, there was a backlash against such gains that pushed the narrative that women should contain their lives to the private sphere (Schulze, 1998).
Overall, it is clear through the use of process-tracing that women’s groups’ mobilization plays some role in whether gains made during wartime are sustained in the aftermath of war. As evidenced in the study of Lebanon, more motherist oriented mobilizations, which do indeed provide female activists with social legitimacy, when not paired with feminist mobilizations ensure that an overemphasis on women’s roles as mothers will largely encourage women to strictly pursue a life in the private sphere. This is most likely because both women’s groups, even if they advocate for increasing women’s roles in public spaces, employ the same narrative as larger society: that women are best at being mothers. Thus, women have little encouragement to maintain their presence in the public sphere, but a number of incentives from the more conservative elements of society to renounce activism and instead focus largely, or even exclusively, on their caretaking roles of wives and mothers. Nevertheless, as both case studies demonstrate, motherist mobilizations do not prevent gains in female literacy, the availability of birth control, reductions in maternal mortality, the number of female parliamentarians, and changes to the family that benefit women. However, sustained and larger gains are only to be found when some form of feminism is employed. Finally, backlashes against advances in women’s rights are inevitable whether women’s mobilization is based on feminism or motherhood.

This section will conclude by considering other factors which may account for the differences between Lebanon and Liberia. Certainly, while citing the variables between the outcomes of the respective postwar situations for women’s rights in both Lebanon and Liberia based specifically on the form of women’s mobilization is important, it is also necessary to consider other factors. A central difference between the two cases is the particular respective socio-historical contexts of Lebanon and Liberia. Lebanon, as a country in the Levant, and
Liberia, as a country in West Africa, have very different histories and cultural influences. Particularly relevant to this study is the very pronounced concept of the female private sphere and male public sphere that exists in Lebanon for women of all confessions but which is not as strong for a large portion of Liberian women (Van Dusen, 1976; Olukoju, 2006). In fact, the majority of indigenous Liberian women have traditionally connected their maternal duties to performing farming or marketing work in the public sphere as there is a common understanding in many Liberian communities that mothers must sometimes work outside the home in order to provide for their children (Casimiro et al., 2009). Thus, Liberian activists who mobilized around their identities as mothers had to overcome a less significant barrier than Lebanese women who more often found that they had to justify their presence in the public sphere even when they were mobilized as mothers. Likewise, it may have been easier for Liberian women to combine motherist and feminist mobilizations since the social institution of motherhood was not restricted to the private sphere as it was in Lebanon.

4.3 Future Research

Studies which consider the focus of women’s groups’ mobilization, whether motherist, feminist, or hybrid mother-feminist, must be expanded to cases beyond that of Lebanon and Liberia. It would be pertinent to further analyze the mobilization of women’s activism in nationalist independence wars, which has already been done in works such as Elizabeth Baron’s *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* and Elizabeth Thompson’s *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Likewise, studies of women’s activism that compare motherist and feminist movements from other civil wars would be also be important, especially if they were drawn from other areas of the world, such as Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and South Asia, among other
regions. Additionally, incorporating further case studies from both sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East would also expand knowledge concerning types of mobilization and likely reveal more about the particular situations in Lebanon and Liberia and how to sustain progress and build upon it. It would also be interesting to analyze cases following John Stuart Mill’s method of agreement in which the examples were similar except for the timeframe during which the wars took place, in order to investigate the possible effects of international and transnational women’s organizations on local women’s mobilization.

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis explored the topic of women and wars, particularly regarding the possibility that wars allow increases in women’s political, economic, and social standing (Bop, 2002; Meintjes, 2002; Turshen, 2002). While the majority of this literature has focused on women’s direct participation in fighting and entrance into the workforce, this paper instead sought to analyze the issue from the angle of female activists’ wartime mobilization, whether it was more motherist or feminist, and the results associated with each (Enloe, 1993).

This paper began by providing a review of the relevant literature on the topic of wars, feminism, and motherism, in addition to describing the research question, *Is a more motherist approach better than a more feminist approach in promoting women’s rights?*, and two sub-research questions: (1) does a motherist approach allow women a culturally acceptable space from which to make demands? and (2) can a feminist approach backfire and actually increase resistance to women’s rights? Then followed two chapters which explored the respective case studies of Lebanon and Liberia by providing general background information, summaries of the civil wars, and descriptions of women's experiences both prior to, and during, the wars. This final chapter reviewed Lebanese and Liberian women’s wartime activism using process-tracing
to determine whether motherist or feminist mobilizations provide better gains in women’s rights in the aftermath of war, and considered other factors in the differing results of the Lebanese and Liberian women’s rights situations.

The hypothesis, that the motherist approach limits gender equality in comparison to a more feminist approach, appears to be the case in regards to the postwar situations in Lebanon and Liberia. Lebanese women, who employed a mostly motherist approach in their organizing, did obtain important advances toward ending hierarchical gender relations. Many women had to become heads-of-household as a result of wartime conditions which enabled them to prove to themselves and others that they were capable of being self-sufficient. Women’s access to education increased as did the number of women working outside in the home in professional fields (Abu Nassr, 1996). Likewise, female literacy, access to birth control, and the number of women in parliament increased while maternal mortality decreased (“Data, World Bank,” 2013; “Lebanon: Parliamentary Chamber Majlis…1992,” 2013). There were also changes made to the family code which benefited women (Shehadeh, 2010). Nevertheless, while these were all critical developments in ending gender inequality, the changes were not as extensive as the transformations made in the postwar context of Liberia where women’s organizing was hybrid motherist-feminist.

Liberian women, like their Lebanese counterparts, also increasingly found themselves as heads-of-household due to the war, which led to the same realization of their ability to be self-sufficient (Danuweli, et al., 2011). Liberian women also witnessed increased rates of literacy, access to birth control, and number of female parliamentarians (“Data, World Bank,” 2013; “Liberia: House of Representatives,” 2013; “Liberia: The Liberian Senate,” 2013). Changes to the family code which benefited women were particularly important in transforming hierarchical
gender relations. The Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law attempts to rectify women’s unequal access to land and property, and also address child and forced marriage which produce and sustain gender inequality (Baehr and Mgbako, 2011). Likewise, the Rape Amendment Act attempted to address the gender based violence of rape, a profound impediment to gender equality (“Gender Equality,” 2013).

Thus, Liberian women’s blend of maternalism and feminism led to their making more progress in their postwar situation than Lebanese women. For Lebanese activists who solely embraced motherist ideals, the overall narrative that they received from both mainstream society and civil society was that women were best at being mothers. Thus, following the Ta’if Accord, women turned their attention to their family life and largely removed themselves from organizing campaigns. In contrast, Liberian women, seemingly inspired by the feminist messages in their organizing, remained activists in the war’s aftermath.

Therefore, it is clear that while maternalism does not preclude advances in women’s rights, it nevertheless does not maintain gains in women’s rights to the extent that mobilization and orientation that feminism provides. However, motherism can provide crucial social legitimacy for female activists by opening the door for involvement in the public sphere and allowing women to be heard by mainstream society. Yet, this study finds that if maternalism is not paired with feminism, most the gains made in war will be lost. Finally, a motherist mobilization is no more effective at preventing backlashes than a feminist mobilization. Therefore, these findings offer lessons that may benefit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which seek to promote women’s rights, and help women in postconflict situations reap all the gains to which they are entitled as citizens.
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