Gender-based Violence against Women in Liberia: A Problem of Weak Legal System, Male Dominance, and Women as Weapons of War.

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Abstract

The rate of gender-based violence (GBV) in Liberia remains high and is an increasing concern amongst people in the country. The purpose of this research paper is to examine the connection between the weak legal system, a culture of male dominance, using women as weapons of war and gender-based violence in Liberia. Using an interdisciplinary analysis, this research paper analyzes the incidence of gender-based violence against women during the Liberian Civil War (1989-2003) and in post-conflict Liberia (2003-present). This paper claims that a weak legal system, a culture of male dominance, and using women as weapons of war are key contributing factors to the high rate of GBV against women in Liberia.

This research paper addresses the correlation between weak legal systems, a culture of male dominance, and using women as weapons of war and GBV against women in Liberia. During the Liberian Civil War, the legal system broke down and there was no punitive measure in place to address GBV. Men in warring factions raped women routinely to instill terror on civilian population and their enemies. Men in warring factions used the Liberian cultural perceptions male dominance that classify women are men’s properties to violate women. The research recommends strategies including proper treatment, empowerment, and integrative programs for survivors of GBV, punishments of GBV perpetrators, and community dialogues to address GBV against women and the needs of GBV survivors in Liberia.

*Keywords:* War, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Weak Legal System, Women as Weapons of War, and culture of male dominance.
Dedication

Dearperser Ready Workanuan. You are not only an inspirational woman but also a woman with great intelligence and potential. I am aware that your intelligence and potential were crushed by the discriminatory indigenous cultural customs, practices, and beliefs of our country, Liberia. In this research paper, I have tried to address your concerns. I hope you continue to live to reap the fruit of your inspiration.
Section One: Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women remains a critical concern in Liberia and needs attention. My dream is to help address the high rate of GBV in Liberia. As a child, I was introduced to an environment that did not respect women’s worth and dignity. I was a child when the deadly Liberian Civil War erupted in 1989. During this wartime in Liberia, women were highly vulnerable to different forms of GBV. In some instances, I witnessed combatants torture women and strip them naked in public places. Both rebels and government soldiers raped women routinely and the alleged perpetrators never faced charges. Therefore, it is my desire to address the plights, concerns, humiliation, and severe forms of human rights violations, including GBV, that women faced in Liberia during the Liberian Civil War and continue to face in post-conflict Liberia. I intend this research paper as a contribution to examine GBV against women in Liberia and help to address it. I also recommend a few strategies to address the challenges GBV survivors face in the country. Unless the causes or contributing factors to an alarming social or cultural problem are uncovered, it is difficult to solve and address such problems or prevent their recurrence. Yet, the desire to ensure social justice for all men and women, whether in times of war or the post-conflict era, also stimulates my interest in this research project.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, “sexual and gender-based violence refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships.”¹ Sexual and gender-based violence, encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature. It inflicts harm on women, girls, men, and boys.² GBV is a subset of sexual and gender-based

² UNHCR, Paragraph 1.
violence. In most cases, the two are used interchangeably. However, GBV will be the term employed throughout in this paper.

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women is a serious and complex social problem. It has legal, cultural, and psychological implications. GBV is a violation of human rights and is often rampant in a country with a weak legal system. Some traditions and cultural beliefs and practices, such as the Liberian traditions and culture, can influence GBV. It can have psychological impacts that include grief, trauma, low self-esteem, and a sense of powerlessness on survivors. GBV stems from unequal power relations between men and women. Therefore, approaching GBV from an interdisciplinary perspective is most productive. This is because incorporating insights from different disciplines (including criminology, psychology, anthropology, and women’s studies) will help to provide deeper insights, better options, and multiple intersections from which to address the issue.

As it stands currently, GBV against women in Liberia is one of the country’s most troubling and persistent problems. Amnesty International reveals that “Thousands of women and girls were raped, forced into sexual slavery or subjected to other forms of sexual violence during 14 years of almost continuous conflict in Liberia.”3 Similarly, Sharon Abramowitz and Mary H. Maran claim that “A survey of more than sixteen hundred women conducted in 2005 by Igor Hodson found that over 90 percent reported being subjected to some form of sexual abuse during the conflict.”4 From a general or global perspective, Rashida Manjoo and Calleigh McRaith claim that “despite efforts to address issues of GBV in conflicts and post-conflict areas and to raise awareness of these issues,

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GBV continues to be a major problem.\textsuperscript{5} To the present day, Liberia is still struggling with GBV against women. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection continues to emphasize the high rate of GBV in post-conflict Liberia. In fact the ministry revealed that 1,685 GBV cases were reported to it in the single year of 2017.\textsuperscript{6} If 1,685 cases were reported to the ministry, more than likely, many more offenses went unreported.\textsuperscript{7}

Because of such a high rate of GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and the current rate of GBV in post-conflict Liberia, this research project seeks to address the following questions:

1) What are the roles of patriarchy, uneven power relations, traditional culture, and a weak judiciary system in the high prevalence of gender-based violence against women during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia?

2) Why do the numbers of rapes of women and girls increase during times of war?

3) What are the challenges of GBV survivors and how are the challenges being addressed?

To address these questions, this research paper claims that a weak legal system, a culture of male dominance, and using women as weapons of war are key contributing factors to the high rate of GBV against women in Liberia. GBV against women in Liberia is an issue to take very seriously. Currently, a number of scholars including Godpower O. Okereke, Rashida Manjoo, and Calleigh McRaith, Sharon Abramowitz and Mary H. Moran, Charli R Carpenter, and others have researched.

\textit{https://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/research/ILJ/upload/Manjoo-McRaith-final.pdf}


\textsuperscript{7} This report seems not to appear online but it was sent to me directly by the ministry.
GBV in Liberia. Though their research findings are troubling, they are significant because they set the premise for intervention and provide insight into the problem. Like those sources, this research paper is also relevant because it will help to unearth the contributing factors to GBV against women in Liberia and set a precedent for further intervention and prevention of GBV against women in future times of war and post-conflict Liberia.

This research paper examines the contributing factors to GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia, the challenges GBV survivors face, and efforts that aim to help address those challenges. As such, the paper will consider the following key primary and secondary sources. The primary sources will include: (1) an interview with a lawyer, an advocacy officer of GBV who works with Medical Mondia in Monrovia on the causes of GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia. (2) The Amnesty International report on GBV during the Liberian Civil War. (3) The GBV statistical reports by the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection from 2011-2017. (4) The website of the Liberian Women’s Media Center.

The secondary sources mentioned here are among the key secondary pieces of scholarship on my topic. (1) "Beyond Strategic Rape and between the Public and Private: Violence against Women in Armed Conflict," *Human Rights Quarterly*. In this article, Aisling Swine uses empirical research from three countries, Liberia, Northern Ireland, and Timor-Lest to examine what counts as conflict-related GBV under international law.8 (2) "Crime and Punishment in Liberia," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*. In this journal article, Godpower O. Okereke studies and discusses the problem of crime and punishment in Liberia and how rape and other forms of sexual violence were common during the Liberian Civil

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https://search.proquest.com/docview/1704172131/fulltextPDF/60D6F29BA50647E7PQ/1?accountid=10771
War.³ (3) “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” in *Theorizing Masculinities*. In this source, Michael Kimmel offers different accounts of how masculinity and the desire to satisfy manhood subjects women to violence. He claims “the hegemonic definition of manhood we have developed in our culture maintains the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women.”¹⁰ Here Kimmel did not specify whether he is referring to Western Culture only. However, this concept seems applicable to the Liberian culture. (4) *Against Our Will, Men, Women and Rape*. In this book, Susan Brownmiller discusses the psychology of rape and how women became an option for rape in the case of acquiring power. She explains how women were used as weapons of war in the first and second World Wars.¹¹ Even though the book is dated, her discussion is relevant and provides a similar situation to the GBV during the Liberian Civil War.

**Limitations of the Study**

More qualitative interviews would have benefited this research paper. Such interviews would have provided more data from many survivors of GBV in Liberia. It would have also provided profound insights into the issue of GBV against women in the country. However, I conducted only one qualitative interview because of poor teleconnection systems to Liberia and financial constraints. The research was unable to establish whether the customary laws of Liberia are written laws. However, this paper refers to the customary laws of Liberia as laws because

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previous and credible scholars, such as Susan H. Williams, who have researched and written peer-reviewed articles on GBV, traditions and culture in Liberia referred to it as such.\textsuperscript{12}

Another limitation of this research paper was to establish whether poverty is a key contributing factor to GBV in Liberia. The major claim of the paper is that a weak legal system, a culture of male dominance, and the practice of using women as weapons of war are key contributing factors to the high rate of GBV against women in Liberia. Nonetheless, Okereke argues that poverty appears to be another key contributing factor to GBV in Liberia.\textsuperscript{13} He claims that "the high poverty rate (95\%) and the high unemployment rate (85\%) have increased the vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation as women and girls are forced to exchange sex for the most basic necessities."\textsuperscript{14} Again, more qualitative interviews would have helped to clarify Okereke’s claim.

Research Paper Structure

This research paper has six sections. Section One provides a brief introduction that highlights the necessity of studying GBV against women in Liberia and sets the context of the study. The section outlines the most important questions that guide the research and the research paper’s major claims. Section Two presents the methodology of the research paper and encompasses a description of the research design. The section explains how relevant data were collected and the methods used to analyze key primary and secondary sources in examining GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia.

\textsuperscript{13} Okereke, 69.
\textsuperscript{14} Okereke, 69.
Section Three presents liberal feminism as a theoretical framework that guides the research paper. The section discusses and analyzes how liberal feminism and the insights it provides will guide this paper. The section concludes with how unequal power distribution between men and women is a root cause of GBV against women. The section further points out how liberal feminism’s perspectives could be used to address GBV in Liberia.

Section Four consists of a review of literature relevant to the research. The section focuses on a review of secondary sources including books and journal articles about GBV in Liberia. Section Five includes an examination and analysis of primary and secondary sources, which include Amnesty International reports, the government of Liberia’s reports on GBV, the Liberia Women’s Media Center, and an interview and about GBV in Liberia. The section also elaborates on existing efforts by GBV Stakeholders to address GBV in Liberia. Section Six presents a summary of the research findings and proposes a few recommendations.

Section Two: Methodology

This research paper examines the high rate of GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia. The study examines and analyzes key primary and secondary sources and what the trend in those sources indicates to the research focus. One method used to examine and analyze these sources is to compare the data or statistics the sources present in order to establish accuracy and reliability.

In addition, this research process used a qualitative interview to gather more information about GBV during the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia. The research paper used a qualitative interview because it best suits the prevailing situation in gathering pertinent information about the problem. According to Kathryn Roulston, “Qualitative interviews may be conducted individually or in groups; face-to-face, via telephone, or online via synchronous or asynchronous...
computer-mediated interactions." Given that the interviewee is an advocacy officer of Medica Mondia who lives overseas in Liberia, I conducted the interview via telephone. The research was also a phenomenological interview because it focused on the interviewee’s experiences, perception, and understanding about GBV in Liberia. According to Roulston, a phenomenological interview generates data to examine participants’ life experiences and understanding about a particular problem. Open-ended questions characterized the interview. This is because according to Roulston, "Open questions are those that provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer." Therefore, I used open questions to avoid leading the interviewee into a situation that would make her provide answers desired by the interviewer. I used coding to analyze the interview because it helps to summarize the interview and keep the name of the interviewee confidential. According to Roulston, "Codes are labels that researchers apply to sections of data whether transcripts, documents or field notes that represent some aspect of the data." In the interview, sections of data or talks developed, names and phrases were labeled with specific codes. For example, I selected phrases such as "a weak legal system," "using women as weapon of war," and "perception of male dominance" from the interview and coded them manually.

For example, the interviewee’s name was coded as G-1. Liberian culture perception of male dominance that subject women to GBV in Liberia was coded as “perception of male dominance.” The culture of impunity to address GBV during the Liberians Civil War and in post conflict Liberia was coded as “a weak legal system.” Combatants desire to instill terror on civilian population by raping women in captured territories was also coded as “using women as weapons

16 Roulston, 16.
17 Roulston, 12.
18 Roulston, 151.
of war.” The selected phrases appeared several times in the interview. The frequency of the appearance of the phrases in the responses of the interviewee signal how critical they are to the interviewee in examining GBV against women in Liberia. The number of times the phrases occurred in the interview are listed in the appendix.

Section Three: Theoretical Framework

Liberal feminism is a theoretical framework that guides this work. Generally, according to Amy R. Baehr, “Liberals hold that freedom is a fundamental value, and that the just state ensures freedom for all individuals.”\(^\text{19}\) Liberal feminism is the theoretical framework that guides this work because it shares the view that freedom is a fundamental value, and insists on freedom for women as Baehr implies.\(^\text{20}\) However, Baehr argues that “Liberal feminism is part of, and thus finds its roots in, the larger tradition of liberal political philosophy; thus we see much liberal feminist work inspired by Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls (and other figures in this tradition).”\(^\text{21}\) One of the major concerns of liberal feminism that it shares with the feminist political philosophy is generally a concern with understanding the "gender systems" of nations. Gender systems involve the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions. Liberal feminists, as Baehr explains, draw on radical feminist insights into the nature of violence against women, the nature of gender, and some socialist feminist work on women's exploitation in the home.\(^\text{22}\)

Liberal feminism frowns at violence and the threat of violence against women. For liberal feminists, violence and the threat of violence violate women's worth and dignity. Violence can force women to do what they do not want to do. In the liberal feminist view, women should be


\(^\text{20}\) Baehr, Paragraph 1.

\(^\text{21}\) Baehr, paragraph 54.

\(^\text{22}\) Baehr, paragraph 54.
free of the limits set by patriarchal, paternalistic, and moralistic laws, because such laws restrict women's options on the grounds that such limits are in women's interest.\textsuperscript{23} Liberal feminism provides several relevant perspectives on gender issues and patriarchal systems and how to address them. Some of these perspectives focus on women’s freedom, autonomy, and an equal distribution of power between men and women.

Women’s freedom, autonomy, and an equal distribution of power are crucial to liberal feminism in finding a remedy to violence against women situated in the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions. According to Amy Allen, from the liberal feminist’s approach, power is a resource that is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women.\textsuperscript{24} She also discusses power in terms of domination. That is, instead of viewing power as a resource for critical social good, power is a relation of domination that includes oppression, patriarchy, subjection, and so forth. Such a relation of domination is practiced in unjust and illegitimate manners between men and women, with men holding more of the power or dominion.\textsuperscript{25} Even though oppression and subjection may involve other forms of ill-treatment, GBV is not an exception. GBV against women in Liberia is a product of an unequal power distribution between men and women. This is rooted in the tradition and culture of Liberia. Examining the unequal power distribution between men and women in Liberia is a positive step to address GBV against women in the country.

Liberal feminists propose three relevant frameworks to address gender inequality and women’s subordinations to men. According to William N. Massaquoi, the frameworks are: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development

\textsuperscript{23} Baehr, paragraph 2-3.
\textsuperscript{25} Allen, paragraph 4.
The WID framework sees women’s subordinations as a result of their exclusion from development planning. WID therefore recommends the integration of women in development planning as a means of addressing women’s subordinations to men. The WAD framework emphasizes the importance of women’s knowledge, work, goals, and responsibilities as crucial to the maintenance of societies and, as such, women should not be subordinates to men. GAD then focuses on the examination of patriarchy, capitalism, the global economy, and how these systems tend to ensure the subordination of women. It proposes policy and legal measures to deal with the gender division of labor, domestic violence, and increased women’s participation in decision making. For example, GAD pleads for creation of women’s organizations with effective political voice in order to strengthen legal rights and increase the number of women in decision making. Drawing from these perspectives, this research paper seeks to examine how gender and patriarchal systems in Liberia allow gender-based violence against women in the country in order to find a remedy to the situation.

**Section Four: Literature Review**

Whether in times of conflict or during the post-conflict eras, GBV against women is a human rights violation and a reality that must be addressed. Unless key contributing factors to GBV are exposed, challenged, and discouraged, GBV against women will continue to take place. The following literature review confirms that a weak legal system, a culture of male dominance, and using women as weapons of war are key contributing factors to the high rate of GBV against women in Liberia. The literature review also highlights existing efforts to address GBV in Liberia.

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27 Massaquoi, 15-21.
However, GBV against women seems to be a common phenomenon in conflict and post-conflict eras around the world because of similar contributing factors. As such, this research paper will first examine the works of scholars such as Susan Brownmiller, Rhonda Copelon, Michael S. Kimmel, who provide insight into how GBV against women in conflict and post-conflict eras is common. Although these authors are Western scholars, who focus on the Western world and not on Africa, their works can inform those who want to treat GBV against women in Liberia.

Defining the Problem

Susan Brownmiller has written about a long-standing history of GBV against women in times of war. One needs to remember and consider such history while addressing GBV against women in times of war. Even though her text is dated and focuses on European wars, it remains classic in the field and applicable in many dimensions. In *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Brownmiller discusses rape against women as it relates to the prehistoric tribal fights for land, cattle and labor power.\(^{28}\) The author argues that "this struggle first led to the rape of women…. The women became laborers and objects of pleasure for the conqueror; the women’s males became slaves."\(^{29}\) Brownmiller further provides a cogent analysis and discussion about the psychological causes of men raping women during times of war. Such psychological causes apply to the rape of women during the Liberian Civil War. Because this research is an interdisciplinary research, it is appropriate to discuss such psychology of rape. The author describes men’s attitudes about rape during war as “funny” and unconscionable, but something that one cannot rule out. Historically, Rape has accompanied religious and revolutionary wars as a weapon of terror.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{28}\) Brownmiller, 12.

\(^{29}\) Brownmiller, 12.

\(^{30}\) Brownmiller, 31.
perfect psychologic backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women. For her, some soldiers often use rape as proof of their newly won battle—proof of their victory and dominion to women, to themselves, to other men. She writes “war provides men with a tacit license to rape in the name of victory and power of the gun.”

Sometimes in men’s struggle for power, including war, women are objects of violence. Implied in Brownmiller’s argument is the extent to which the rape of women became a component of men’s struggle for power. Her argument about the psychological causes of rape during times of war and the usage of women as weapons of war is similar to the cause of GBV perpetrated against women during the Liberian Civil War. For example, during the Liberian Civil War, men in warring factions raped women and used them as weapons of war. That is, raping women as an example to instill terror on others (specifically the community members to keep them under control and enemies to frighten them) and for the women who are raped to be terrified to provide the rapists services in their warfare. Brownmiller’s argument provides a lens to examine gender-based violence against women during the Liberian Civil War.

Arguably, rape is a particularly humiliating form of GBV that appears to be the most frequently perpetuated form of GBV during times of war. Rhonda Copelon argues in “Reconceptualizing Crimes against Women in Time of War” that “[a]lthough largely ignored until recently by human rights advocates, the testimonies and studies of women tortured by dictatorial regimes and military occupations make it clear that rape is one of the most common, terrible, and effective forms of torture used against women.” She further claims that "Rape attacks the integrity of woman as a person as well as her identity as a woman." Rape, she

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31 Brownmiller, 33.
33 Copelon, 67.
continues, can make a woman feel homeless in her own body. She concludes that "[i]t strikes at a
girl's power; it seeks to degrade and destroy her; its goal is domination and
dehumanization." Such a form of GBV is also common in many contemporary societies
including Liberia. Rape was perpetrated against women throughout the Liberian Civil War and
continues still in post-conflict Liberia. Copelon’s discussion about rape is significant to this
research paper as it provides a deeper insight into how rape destroys a woman and makes her fee.
Her argument helps in understanding the challenges and concerns of GBV survivors in Liberia.
Based on Copelon’s research, successful treatment of victims must include trauma-informed
approach that addresses not only the physical implications of GBV but also the psychological
ones.

Toxic masculinity and men’s lack of understanding of and support for healthy masculinity
could be considered a contributing factor for GBV against women. In “Masculinity as
Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” Kimmel
elaborates on how masculinity, a desire to satisfy manhood, can subject women to violence. The
author claims "the hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a
man of power." The author also claims "the very definitions of manhood we have developed in
our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and those men have over
women." If one analyzes Kimmel’s concept of masculinity carefully, it implies a cultural
perception about male dominance and power. These two—male dominance and power appear as
key contributing factors to GBV against women. Kimmel contends that when men view women
as objects they are more likely to violate them; this reflects similar behaviors that combatants

34 Copelon, 67.
35 Copelon, 67.
36 Kimmel, 125.
37 Kimmel, 125.
exhibited against women during the Liberian Civil War. For example, Kimmel asks us to consider, "Think of how men boast to one another of their accomplishments—from their latest sexual conquest to the size of the fish they caught—and how we constantly parade the markers of manhood—wealth, power, status, and sexy women—in front of other men, desperate for their approval." While Kimmel’s text is western, his arguments about using the woman’s body to prove manhood and power apply to men’s rape of women during the Liberian Civil War and provide a deeper insight into how men’s desire to prove masculinity and power can lead to GBV against women.

Historically in the West and in Liberia women have been viewed as men’s property or objects used to prove masculinity, manhood, and power. In fact, Bamidele claims that women are regarded as property in many cultures, including the culture of Liberia, and therefore to violate women is seen as proving the domination of the men who own the women. The Liberian Civil War provided a conducive atmosphere to employ such a mentality. In times of war, men feel emboldened to exercise power over women and to claim them as their property. This is because during times of war there are no punitive measures in place to query and curtail such acts. It could also mean that if men view women as property, then taking the property of their enemies signals to the defeated that the victors truly are in control, because they “own” the vanquished property—their women.

Viewing GBV against women in Liberia from a feminist perspective, the issues of unequal power distribution, and a domination that includes oppression, patriarchy, subjection, and so forth in unjust and illegitimate manners, play key roles. Kajsa Aune asserts that "According to Connell (1980), power is a social structure which organizes gender relations between women and men."

38 Kimmel, 129.
39 Bamidele, 76.
She also asserts that "Such power abilities are unequally distributed between women and men based on patriarchy and gender ideologies that confirm male supremacy and women's subordination, which essentially structure gender relations." In many instances, the Liberian culture favors men in terms of power distribution and relations. Men are given more power over their female counterparts. For example, Shai Andre Divon and Morten Boas examine how GBV cases are addressed by the plural legal system of Liberia. They argue that traditional gender roles codify the domestic subordination of women in Liberia. If power was equally distributed between men and women in Liberia, GBV may not be as rampant as it is in the country today. When power is granted unto one gender over the other, some people can abuse it. In most instances as this research has revealed, Liberian men have abused their culturally granted dominion over women to violate women's rights.

The rate of GBV against women was high during the Liberian Civil War and remains high in post-conflict Liberia. This is a serious concern in the country. In 2013, Okereke researched the issues of crime and punishment in Liberia before the 1980 coup d’etat and the period after Liberia returned to civilian rule in 2004.\(^\text{40}\) In the study, Okereke found that the failure to enforce existing laws is a problem. He also reveals that different forms of discrimination, including racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination continue to be problem in the country. His study discloses that rape and other forms of sexual violence were common during the Liberian Civil War.\(^\text{41}\) As he asserts, “Rape—including gang-rape, rape of very young children, rape of pregnant women, and rape of elderly-women was among the most serious crimes and the most rampant forms of sexual violence committed against women during the civil war.”\(^\text{42}\) According to Okereke, after the war ended, the

\(^{40}\) Okereke, 63.  
\(^{41}\) Okereke, 63.  
\(^{42}\) Okereke, 65.
Liberian legislature passed laws against rape. These laws also seek to abolish the customary and traditional belief in Liberia that sexual intercourse between a man and his wife should be at the will and pleasure of the husband. However, the laws did not bring an end to sex crimes including GBV in Liberia.\textsuperscript{43} This means that GBV is definitely still a problem in Liberia as other reports and statistics have shown.

Okereke also found that “sexual violence was so common during the Liberian conflict that even United Nations (UN) aid workers, peacekeepers, and refugee camp officials were said to have sexually assaulted large numbers of underage children.”\textsuperscript{44} Even though Okereke did not clarify whether the UN workers were white Europeans, Black Africans or whether there was a racial dimension to their assaults, he provides an alarming point. Okereke’s study indeed provides relevant data and insight about GBV during the Liberian Civil War and how wide spread it was from men in warring factions to humanitarian workers.

A culture of impunity and a weak or broken legal system can promote many forms of human rights violations, including GBV against women. In 2015, Aisling Swain noted this in a research study conducted on violence against women in armed conflict using empirical data from three countries, Liberia, Ireland, and Timor-Leste. The research reveals several findings. Key to this research paper is the connection between GBV and a culture of impunity because of Liberia’s weak legal system. The author reveals that the culture of impunity observed throughout the Liberian Civil War also gave rise to the high prevalence of GBV during that period. During this war period, statutory institutions (law courts and police stations) broke down and there was no law and order.\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, anyone could violate another person or commit crimes and easily get away

\textsuperscript{43} Okereke, 69.
\textsuperscript{44} Okereke, 65.
\textsuperscript{45} Swaine, 772.
with them. This finding points out the weak legal system of Liberia as a key variable for allowing those who commit sexual aggressions to go unpunished.

The dual legal system of Liberia can allow GBV against women. Specifically, the customary laws of Liberia, which are based on traditional and cultural beliefs and practices, are in many ways gender discriminatory and can lead to GBV against women in the country. In 2012, Susan H. Williams conducted a study on gender equality and the customary laws of Liberia. The study reveals that the Liberian customary laws allow gender discrimination that violates women’s rights mandated under the equality that the Liberian constitution guarantees. She reveals that "customary laws for many of the tribal groups in Liberia include gender discriminatory practices. Some of the discriminatory practices include the treatment of adult women as minors, the inability of women to inherit property either from their fathers or their husbands, the tradition of levirate, polygyny, bride price, and female genital cutting." These can be categorized as harmful traditional practices that at times include sexual and gender-based violence. To challenge and get rid of the customary laws that violate women’s rights in Liberia, Williams advocates the following: 1) providing support to Liberian women in local communities to speak about such laws effectively; 2) encouraging tribal communities to develop a decision-making mechanism that reflects both local custom and incorporate meaningful opportunity for dialogue; and 3) abandoning and reversing the codification of the customary laws by the national legislation. The customary laws have acquired the status of statutes in Liberia. Traditional culture, practices, and beliefs on which the customary laws are built at times encourage GBV against women and condone rape. Even though Williams implies that her three suggestions are not very easy to implement, they are relevant to this research. Her work provides an insight into the importance of women’s

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46 Williams, 81.
47 Williams, 81-83.
empowerment and integration, dialogue, gender discrimination, and the need to revisit the customary laws in Liberia. These are crucial to the focus of this paper.

**Searching for Solutions**

To combat GBV against women in Liberia, addressing the needs and plights of GBV survivors is a crucial concern. According to Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al, in 2013, a joint research conducted by Isis-WICCE and the Ministry of Gender and Development of Liberia confirms women’s experiences of gender and sexual-based violence during the Liberian Civil War. The research reveals that combatants of every warring faction involved in the Liberian Civil War used women as weapons of war. The combatants specifically used torture and rape to frighten and weaken their opponents and prove how terrible, powerful, and merciless they were." For example, the research reveals a participant’s testimony as follows:

"Violations took place in bushes; others took place in homes and houses, by the roadside and in barracks of warring groups. Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) detained people. Some atrocities took place in churches. Violations were committed as a result of the civil war where there was no law and order. Warlords saw themselves as their own gods. Power and greed took over their lives. They only looked at what they could do to gain power at all cost. Rape and torture were used as a weapon of war to weaken the opponents." For example, the research reveals a participant’s testimony as follows:

According to authors, another woman from Pleeb Maryand County in Liberia reveals her experience in the following way. She said, "I was captured in 1992 and raped. I was with the rebels all through the bush until 1994, when I started falling sick and I went to the hospital. I later went to Guinea and returned in 1997 and got very ill again. When I went to the hospital I was tested positive of HIV, it is only my sister who knows my status." Another woman from the same

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49 Helen Liebling-Kalifani et. al., 8.
50 Helen Liebling-Kalifani et. al., 7-8.
Pleebo, Maryland County, also a participant in their study revealed that Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebels were killing machines, a torture group who used rape as a weapon of war. National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) used civilians as laborers and rape as a weapon of war.⁵¹

Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al. reveal that the war affected women’s general health, reproductive health, and mental health.⁵² The study revealed that well over half of the number of women in the study experienced some form of sexual torture including objects being forcefully inserted in their vaginas. Women who experienced these forms of torture have surgical problems, damaged reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, gynecological problems, and high psychological distress scores.⁵³ They found the omission of women from justice and rehabilitation processes in post-conflict Liberia to be a problem in addressing GVB in the country. However, the authors reveal that health services for GBV survivors, justice and policy changes, and a provision of sustainable, gender-sensitive services are key elements in addressing GBV against women in Liberia.⁵⁴ The research provides deeper insight into the Liberian Civil War and how women were used as weapons of war during the period. It suggests that no warring faction involved in the Liberian Civil War can be excused from the GBV committed against women during the period. Men in all warring factions including the AFL raped and tortured women routinely. Even though the Liberian Civil War is over, addressing the plight of survivors of GBV from the Liberian Civil War and in post-conflict Liberia is crucial. The findings and recommendations proposed by these authors resonate with the purpose of this research paper.

⁵¹ Helen Liebling-Kalifani et. al., 8.
⁵² Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al., 9-10.
⁵³ Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al., 9.
⁵⁴ Helen Liebling-Kalifani et al, 1-3.
While GBV against women persists in post-conflict Liberia, it also has received increased attention and pressure in the country. In research conducted in post-conflict Liberia in 2013, Peace A. Medie found that physical, gender, and sexual violence remain a major concern in Liberia. The author sees reporting rape cases as a necessary step to seek justice for GBV victims. Such a step, she claims, is undermined by the weak and corrupt justice system in Liberia. Nevertheless, the women’s movement in the country is making efforts to curtail rape and seek justice for survivors. Some of the efforts include the creation of several women’s policy documents, such as the 2006 GBV National Action Plan, and new state agencies to address rape. Drawing from strategies and insights that Medie’s study reveals, alternative strategies can be developed to help address GBV against women in Liberia.

Even though, the rate of GBV was very high during the Liberian Civil War and remains so in post-conflict Liberia, the government of Liberia is making efforts to curtail GBV against women in Liberia. Seun Bamidele’s study in 2017 on barriers to gender justice in post-conflict Liberia confirms the Liberian government’s efforts to address GBV against women in Liberia. As his study reveals, Human Right Watch estimated in 2002 that 54% of women and girls in Liberia experienced sexual violence during the Liberian Civil War. Bamidele found a link between men’s rigid adherence to gender roles and expectations and the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia. Bamidele further reveals that the cultures and policies of Liberia have

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56 Medie, 388.
57 Bamidele, 69.
subjected the female body to what he calls a “gender dimension of genocide” but is not understood by international opinion.\textsuperscript{59} He writes:

However, what has been so disturbing is that public outrage and international opinion still fail to understand the gender dimension of genocide—that women are targeted at several levels as a racial or ethnic identity in addition to the fact of their gender in Liberia. This failure to center gender in the understanding of sexual violence erases women from the face of genocide and treats them as non-existent. As a result, responses to women as such are few if any. This means that women of Liberia who survive sexual and gender-based violence have no place to turn for their trauma. The community often regards them as “damaged” and official justice institution have generally had little to offer.\textsuperscript{60}

However, his study reveals that the Liberian government has passed legislation to promote and protect women’s rights during the administration of former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.\textsuperscript{61} This research paper will build on these findings for further understanding of how culture and policies subject women to GBV in Liberia in order to develop an effective approach to address the problem.

Liberia has a dual legal system comprised of the customary laws and statutory laws. It requires additional research to understand whether or not the customary laws of Liberia are written. However, the laws are used by traditional leaders to settle disputes in local communities. Scholars, including Okereke, Williams, and Bamidele, refer to the customary laws as laws but not as customary traditions. The customary law specifically is flawed by gender discrimination. The discriminatory nature of the customary laws of Liberia serves to promote indigenous cultural customs, practices, and beliefs that protect and promote a patriarchal system of male dominance in many ways. This is not to argue, however, that the customary laws of Liberia are bad in totality. Some customary laws are good and are used to peacefully settle disputes amongst people in the

\textsuperscript{59} Bamidele, 77.
\textsuperscript{60} Bamidele, 77.
\textsuperscript{61} Baidele, 79.
local community in the absence of statutory laws. But the argument is that such customary laws of Liberia can violate human (women’s) rights. For example, William argues as follows:

Thus, customary law systems are both a reality of life and a recognized part of laws in many countries. But such systems are also deeply problematic because they often violate human rights and other constitutional norms. In particular, most customary systems include gender discriminatory rules or procedures. For example, in Liberia, in many of the cultures, wives have no right to inherit their dead husband's property—it goes to his parents or brothers instead. Indeed, widows are seen as part of that property and are expected to marry one of their dead husband's brothers. Daughters have no right to inherit their father's property. After a divorce, a woman has no right to the custody of their children. Early marriage for girls is expected in many groups, leading to serious health issues and loss of educational opportunity. In some groups, spousal abuse is tolerated. In some groups, female genital mutilation, or FGM, is practiced.62

Early marriage is a forceful marriage of girls to elderly men whether the girls agree or not. In most instances, the girls who are forced into such marriages are under age and can be forced to have sexual intercourse with the men to whom they are forced into marriage. FGM is an act of sexual violence against girls. Spousal abuses are most often perpetrated by male spouses against their female spouses and this, too, can involve forceful sex against the will of the female spouse. It is most often challenging to promote human rights within a society that legalizes the violations of those rights for certain human beings as mentioned in the quote above. Such laws as the customary laws of Liberia undercut the promotion and protection of human rights, especially the rights of women in Liberia and thus violate the basic premise of liberal feminism. This also reflects the weakness of the legal system of Liberia. An effective legal system cannot promote and include such laws that undermine its efforts in protecting its citizens' rights. Unless these laws deeply rooted in the Liberian traditions and cultures are abolished, the violation of human rights including gender-based violence against women in Liberia may continue.

Depending on the definition of GBV, other studies acknowledge that even men and boys are also victims of GBV during times of war as well. In 2006, Charli R. Carpenter focused her study on GBV against men and boys in conflict situations. According to her, “the Lui institute has recently recognized, and as Women’s Caucus acknowledges, most of the harm men and boys face during wartime…may qualify conceptually as gender-based violence.” Her study reveals that sex-selective massacre, forced recruitment as boy soldiers by opposing militia, and sexual violence that men and boys experience in times of war are based on their gender. Carpenter also found that "the ritual castration of male prisoners and enslavement of adolescent boys along with women for sexual purposes has been a notable feature of warfare throughout history." As Carpenter defines gender-based violence, it is a form of violence perpetrated against a person because of his/her gender and also the roles or responsibilities they play in society. In fact, she claims, “The empirical record suggests that of all civilians, adult men are most likely to be targeted in armed conflict.” According to her, in times of war men can be forced to sexually assault another person, often a family member. This is also similar to some instances of rape during the Liberian Civil War as stated earlier. Carpenter’s argument implies that because these acts of violence are perpetrated against men and boys based on their gender, such acts qualify as GBV. For her, the GBV against men and boys needs attention when addressing GBV. This will ensure a comprehensive approach in addressing GBV.

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63 Carpenter, 86.
65 Carpenter, 94.
66 Carpenter, 86
67 Carpenter, 88.
68 Okereke, 65.
69 Carpenter, 86.
Section Five: Research Findings.

Preparing to Address Gender-based Violence

It is a mirage to rely on the government of Liberia to single-handedly mitigate gender-based violence against women in Liberian and address GBV survivors’ needs and challenges in the country. Researching, exposing the issues, and developing more strategies like the Women’s Movement in Liberia in local communities will help to treat and address GBV in Liberia.

The rate of GBV in Liberia from 1989-2018 remains high and is an increasing concern in the country. According to the Women’s Media Center (WMC), the fourteen-year Liberian Civil War destroyed Liberia in an unthinkable manner and targeted women for the perpetration of GBV.70 The center claims “an estimated 250,000 people died in Liberia’s civil war, which began in 1989 and lasted until 2003—about a century and a half after the country was founded by freed slaves from the United States and the Caribbean.”71 In addition to the devastation of lives and property, the war also perpetrated GBV as one of the main strategies of war used by all warring factions. The WMC further reveals that “according to the United Nations, some 40,000 women were raped during the conflict.”72 Many other findings also reflect how women became targets for GBV during the Liberian Civil War. According to Liebling-Kalifani and others, the war not only destroyed Liberia's social and economic infrastructure but also promoted different forms of violence including rape and sexual assaults.73 Even in post-conflict Liberia, GBV remains the

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71 Liberia-Women's Media Center, Paragraph 1.
72 Liberia-Women's Media Center, Paragraph 1.
73 Liebling-Kalifani et al., 3.

However, during the Liberian Civil War, there was no legal system in place to address GBV against women. Judicial and policing systems broke down and so GBV was common. The Liberia-Women’s Media Center also specifies this in their conflict profile of Liberia as follows:

With the breakdown of infrastructure and social norms, Liberia experienced a dramatic increase in sexualized violence. Before the war, legal, health, and security services for survivors of sexualized violence were practically nonexistent outside of the capital, Monrovia, and survivors had little redress to the formal system. During the war, women were abducted, gang-raped, forced into “survival sex” (i.e., sex for money or favors, which may be defined as rape by the International Criminal Court), or turned into sex slaves, according to the UN’s IRIN news service.75

Like the WMC, Swaine discusses the breakdown of statutory institutions as a contributing factor to GBV during the Liberian Civil War. She asserts that "[a]ccess to, and the presence of a functioning legal and policing system is often impossible during times of conflict….In Liberia, there had been a complete breakdown of statutory institutions and minimal.”76 Under such conditions, men of warring factions proved their manhood and power within the captured territories by raping women. Imagine how rape—including gang-rape, the rape of pregnant women, and the rape of elderly women was common during the Liberian Civil War when warring factions captured a territory.77 Arguably such acts of rape reflect the weak or broken legal system during the Liberian Civil War. It also displays ethnic rivalries in which men claimed ownership of

75 Liberia-Women’s Media Center, paragraph 8.
76 Swaine, 771.
77 Okereke, 65.
what their rival had. The issue of ethnic rivalries claiming ownership of what their rival had is also discussed later in this paper.

An interview was conducted with an attorney at law (G-1), an advocacy officer of GBV against women in Liberia who works with Medical Mondia. The interview was intended to gather data about how the weak legal system of Liberia, Liberian culture of male dominance, and using women as weapons of during the Liberian Civil War contribute to GBV in the country. The interviewee responded to a list of open-ended questions regarding GBV against women in Liberia. The questions are representative of phrases ("a weak legal system," "using women as weapon of war," and "perception of male dominance") and each question asked matches one of the phrases into which data were grouped for analysis.

When G-1 was asked about how the Liberian culture puts women at risk of GBV, she said the following:

Liberia has a culture of male dominance. Such Liberian culture of male dominance has taught every male Liberian that women are subjects to men. Some of the roles of a woman are to take care of homes and to provide sex to men whether willingly or unwillingly. Therefore, Liberian men used such cultural perception of male dominance to commit GBV against women during the Liberia Civil War. Even in post-conflict Liberia, men still use such cultural perception to commit GBV against women.78

Responding to questions about which warring faction committed GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War, G-1 answered, “Combatants of all warring factions committed GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War as a way of using women as weapons of war to prove their power to the enemies.”79 G-1 was then asked, why was rape, a particular form of GBV against women so prevalent during the Liberian Civil War? She said, “The culture of impunity toward GBV perpetrators during the Liberian Civil War was a key contributing factor to the high

78 Interview with G-1, a Medical Mondia Gender-based Violence Advocacy Officer, March 12, 2018.
79 Interview, G-1.
prevalence of GBV during the Liberian Civil War. Combatants raped women in their captured territories to show their might and were not punished.” When she was asked why GBV remains persistent in post-conflict Liberia, G-1 said, “It is because the same culture of impunity during the Liberian Civil War also continues in post conflict Liberia. Perpetrators of GBV can go unpunished. Therefore, the rate of GBV will continue to be high.

When analyzing the interview narratives above, G-1 responses reflect the Liberian culture of male dominance as one of the key contributing factors to GBV against women in Liberia. In the first quote above for instance, G-1 mentioned “culture of male dominance” four times reflecting how culture of male dominance is critical in understanding and addressing GBV in Liberia. The Liberian culture of male dominance has influenced GBV during the Liberian Civil War and continues to do so in post-conflict Liberia. Liberia is a country with a culture of male dominance and such dominion is problematic. Oyodeju Olukoju also argues how the Liberian culture subjects women to men. According to him, a feature of the patriarchal social system in Liberian communities is the domination of men over women. He further argues that in many cases men are almost always rated above women in terms of power distribution in Liberia. During the Liberian Civil War, Liberian men misused such dominion granted to them by the Liberian indigenous cultural beliefs and supported by Western patriarchy, including Christian patriarchy, to commit GBV against women in the country since there were no legal systems in place to judge their actions.

G-1 responses to other interview questions also reflect how combatants’ desires to instill terror amongst civilian population by using women as weapons of war and Liberia’s weak or

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80 Interview, G-1.
82 Olukoju, 99.
broken legal system also contributed immensely to GBV in Liberia. Using women as weapons of war by raping them was common during the Liberian Civil War. The WMC also claims that, as reported by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces in 2007, acts of sexual violence were committed mainly against women and girls and included rape of women—sometimes in front of family or community members as weapon of war.83

One point that helps to understand using women as weapons of war during the Liberian Civil War is this: Civilians are very important in warfare for their voluntary or involuntary supports or roles. Therefore, during the Liberian Civil War when the combatants involved in the war captured women, they used rape to terrify them so as to keep them under their control to provide them with services they needed. In such cases, the women cooked for them, washed their clothes, and under duress submitted themselves to have sex with the combatants by force. Such strategies of raping women to frighten them in order to continuously provide services to the fighters supports the fighters or combatants immensely in their warfare like other weapons that they used. Therefore, such strategies can be considered using women as weapons of war. After all, whatever one uses during the times of war to achieve his goal could be considered as a weapon of war.

The research also revealed that people of specific ethnic groups were targeted for GBV during the Liberian Civil War. According to the Liberia Women’s Media Center, a survey conducted in Monrovia in 2013 found that women who were accused of belonging to particular ethnic groups were targeted for GBV by all warring factions during the Liberian Civil War.84 Okereke confirms that "Although hundreds of thousands of women and girls across the country

83 Liberia-Women’s Media Center, Paragraph 12.
84 Liberia-Women’s Media Center, paragraph 13.
suffered some form of sexual violence, those from the Mandigo and Krahn ethnic groups were disproportionately targeted by government forces, reflecting the ethnic dimension of the war.”

Sadly, as normal and widespread as GBV against adult women was during the Liberian Civil War, it extended down to children as well. As mentioned earlier, United Nations (UN) aid workers, peacekeepers, and refugee camp officials also sexually assaulted large numbers of underage children.” The questions are, how fully does the UN itself understand and address GBV in times of war? Why are the UN workers themselves perpetrating sexual and GBV, especially against young children when they should be preventing it? What is the UN’s effort in addressing the Liberian cultures and policies that subject the female body to GBV in the country? Addressing these questions will also help to address the issue of GBV against women in Liberia. Public outrage and international opinion need to understand the gender dimension of genocide and address it. The most frustrating aspect of gender and sexual violence against women in Liberia is the aftermath and this needs attention. As victims or survivors, women are stigmatized in communities where they live. They are often labeled in ways that make it difficult for them to identify with others. They live with such heavy trauma that sometimes leads them to their early graves. Survivors with such trauma from GBV are unable to cater to themselves and their families and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the nation at large.

Despite several efforts of non-governmental organizations to curtail GBV after the Liberian Civil War, GBV in post-conflict Liberia remains a serious threat to women in the country. The Global Database on Violence Against Women’s report on the prevalence of violence against women in post-conflict Liberia confirms the high level of gender and sexual-based violence against

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85 Okereke, 65.
86 Okereke, 65.
women in the country.\textsuperscript{87} The database in 2008 divulges that Liberian women suffer high levels of different forms of violence, which include GBV.\textsuperscript{88} Sometimes it is quite astonishing why women are most often the targets of violence in societies. However, to answer such a question seems difficult unless efforts are made to dig out pertinent facts and evidences.

Similar to the UN Global Database report, reports on GBV from 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 by the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection emphasize the high prevalence of GBV in post-conflict Liberia. In the 2014 report, the ministry claims that 2,383 GBV cases were reported to it in 2011, 2493 GBV cases in 2012, 2195 GBV cases in 2013 and 1392 GBV cases in 2014.\textsuperscript{89} Although the number of GBV cases reported to the ministry dropped in 2014, it increased in the following years. For 2015, the ministry claims that 1555 GBV cases were reported.\textsuperscript{90} As the ministry claims, 68% of the total cases was sexual violence, of which 86% was female survivors who were less than 18 years, while 1.3% was boys.\textsuperscript{91} The ministry also asserts that “a total of 1,413 GBV cases was recorded and reported in 2016.”\textsuperscript{92} About 71.3% of the GBV cases reported in 2016 were sexual violence cases of which 62% was female survivors.\textsuperscript{93} Up to 2017, the rate of GBV had not improved. The ministry reports “a total of 1,685 GBV cases was reported in 2017.”\textsuperscript{94} In the tables on page two, of all the GBV reports by the Ministry of


\textsuperscript{88} UN Women, Global Database on Violence, Subsection, “Prevalence Data on Different Forms of Violence against Women in Liberia.”

\textsuperscript{89} National Gender-based Violence Statistical Report, (Monrovia, 2014), 2.


\textsuperscript{91} Gender-based Violence Annual Statistical Report, 2


\textsuperscript{93} GBV Statistical Report, 2.

Gender, Children and Social Protection from 2014 to 2017, rape and gang-rape are amongst the highest ranked.

These statistics flag a consistently high rate of GBV against women in post-conflict Liberia amidst the efforts to address the crisis. However, in post-conflict Liberia, warring factions desire to use women as weapons and instill terror amongst members of the civilian population, as it was in the case of the Liberian Civil War, is no longer the issue. A weak legal system and prevalent indigenous cultural customs, practices, and beliefs of Liberia that protect and promote a patriarchal system of male dominance (Women are men’s properties; sexual intercourse is at the will and pleasure of men, etc.) are key contributing factors to GBV in post-conflict Liberia. The prevalence of such practices and beliefs make it difficult to follow the principles of liberal feminism that advocate equality before the law. Other countries may have similar patriarchal cultures; additional research needs to be conducted to determine whether such culture also contributes to GBV against women in such countries.

Relating to Liberia, the Ministry of Gender and Development claims that the “Legal and judicial institutions have a shortage of qualified personnel and weak capacity to contribute to improve security and prosperity, and to provide equitable access to justice for the poor.”95 The ministry further emphasizes that "The justice system currently suffers from chronic capacity constraints."96 It further clarifies that “The lack of human, material, and financial resources has severely hampered the administration and delivery of justice.”97 These factors combined with several others have impeded efforts to address and mitigate GBV against women in Liberia over

96 The Liberia National Gender Policy, 14.
97 The Liberia National Gender Policy, 13.
years. For instance, when Medie discusses why GBV survivors keep away from reporting GBV cases, she argues as follows:

People also view the criminal justice system as corrupt. The unofficial fees levied on complainants by the police and the courts dissuade people from reporting GBV. The length of trial and the time that it takes away from work is also a burden on survivors. The fear of relationship, stigmatization, and being accused of lying (in the case of rape) also discourages reporting. Some survivors and/or their families also accept payment from the rapist in exchange for keeping cases out of the police stations and courts. Liberia’s crippling poverty has made this a common practice. These factors also contribute to the withdrawal of cases after they have been reported to the police.98

If a legal system of a country is corrupt and lacks human, material, and financial resources to function appropriately, the protection of human rights as advocated by liberal feminism can be difficult. Such a legal system could be classified as a weak legal system that fails to protect its own citizens. Any efforts to address violence such as GBV under such a legal system will also face serious constraints. This has been one of the constraints in addressing GBV in Liberia. A weak legal system can encourage the recurrence of human rights violations in many societies. Similar to the situation during the Liberian Civil War, in which NGO workers perpetrated GBV against young girls in refugee camps and displaced centers, NGO workers have also perpetrated GBV against young girls in post-conflict Liberia. This is also infecting the girls with HIV and other diseases. The “MORE than ME” rape scandal of Liberia reported by BBC on October 15, 2018, is one example.99

98 Medie, 385.
99 BBC News, According to the investigative report, Katrie Meyler, a founder of More than Me founded school in the West Point slum in Liberia. Then: she entrusted a local man named Macintosh Johnson to recruit vulnerable young girls in the West Point slum of Liberia's capital Monrovia for her school, which opened in 2013. Johnson, who later died from AIDS in prison, was her main contact on the ground while she continued to live outside of Liberia for up to 10 months a year. According to police records, Johnson repeatedly raped several young girls under his care at his home and on school property. Of the 10 girls who testified against Johnson at the time of his trial, one was tested positive for HIV, according to a statement from More Than Me's Liberian advisory board. After his arrest in 2014, no members of More Than Me attended the trial to testify against him, according to the report. The girls and their families reportedly feared to go to charity administrators or public officials because they did not want to risk losing access to the charity's resources such as education, food, and health services. Katie Meyler, the CEO of
Currently, several GBV stakeholders including women’s groups are working tirelessly to mitigate GBV in Liberia. The Women’s Media Center claims that “From the beginning of her presidency, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf demonstrated a personal interest in addressing sexualized violence. Under her presidency, post-conflict Liberia has prioritized efforts to address sexualized violence.\textsuperscript{100} The government has placed strategic emphasis on improving protection, prevention, and rehabilitation mechanisms for survivors. In many speeches, including her acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize, Johnson Sirleaf highlighted the need to confront the issue of sexualized violence in Liberia and all over the world.\textsuperscript{101}

Medie also reveals the same. As she argues, “the women’s movement in post-war Liberia, though facing internal challenges, has organized to prevent rape and to seek justice for survivors.”\textsuperscript{102} Amongst the women's organizations, the most active are the Women's NGO Secretariat which maintains links between the various women’s organizations, the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) which has branches across the country, the Association of Female Lawyers Liberia (AFELL) and Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness (THINK).\textsuperscript{103} According to Medie, these Women NGOs assisted in the creation of several women's rights policies, the 2006 \textit{GBV National Action Plan}, the creation of new state agencies to address rape, programs to prevent rape and support survivors, and a National GBV Taskforce to address GBV in Liberia.\textsuperscript{104} Women are taking leadership roles in these organizations to curtail GBV against women in Liberia. Amidst these efforts, GBV remains a serious challenge and threat to women in post-conflict Liberia. It would be thoughtless, however, to discredit the efforts of these

\textsuperscript{100} Liberia-Women's Media Center, subsection: Legal precedent.
\textsuperscript{101} Liberia-Women's Media Center, subsection: Legal precedent.
\textsuperscript{102} Medie, 386.
\textsuperscript{103} Medie, 387.
\textsuperscript{104} Medie, 389.
organizations in addressing GBV in Liberia. Complementing their efforts with other strategies and programs through non-governmental organizations is necessary.
Section Six: Conclusion

The understanding of GBV against women during the Liberian Civil War and in the post-conflict era is a sad memory to live with. In conflict and post-conflict eras, GBV remains a terrible nightmare to women’s worth and dignity. Rape, in particular, is a humiliating form of gender-based violence highly practiced during times of war. As Copelon argues, "Rape has long been viewed as a criminal offense under national and international rules of war." She further claims that "the 1994 Geneva Convention as well as the 1977 protocols regarding the protection of civilians in war explicitly prohibits rape, enforced prostitution, and any form of indecent assault and call for the special protection of women, including separate quarters with supervision and searches by women only." However, these efforts have not significantly curtailed the act of GBV against women in times of war.

Like other wars, the Liberian Civil War did not have any punitive measures in place to protect women from GBV. Under such condition, anyone could do anything at will and go with impunity. According to Aisling Swaine, a respondent interviewed about rape during the Liberian Civil War said rapists were not frightened because there were no punitive measures in place for reproach. Because of the lack of punitive measures during the Liberian Civil War, combatants or warring factions’ desire to use women as weapons of war through GBV and the Liberian cultural perception of male dominance worked concomitantly to humiliate women.

An effective legal system is crucial in combating any crime and human rights violation including GBV. However, during a time of war many legal systems can break down or be weak. Therefore, to stop GBV against women in times of war is to first and foremost avoid war. Secondly,

105 Copelon, 64.
106 Copelon, 64.
107 Swain, 772.
national and international laws and rules that protect women in times of war should be reinvigorated with severe punishments for leaders of wars as well as identified perpetrators of GBV in times of war. Thirdly, post-conflict governments of Liberia should ensure proper treatment, empowerment, and integrative programs for survivors of gender-based violence. And fourthly, engaging men and women in focus-group discussions and community dialogues which would demand seeking common ground between men and women would be effective. This will help change men's perceptions of women and enable them to recognize the worth and dignity of every woman to abstain from the act of GBV against women.
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Secondary Sources


Appendix

Phrases and number of times the occurred in the interview:

“Perception of male dominance.”-----------------------------14 times
“A weak legal system.”----------------------------------------11 times
“Using women as weapons of war.”-----------------------------16 times

List of interview questions:

1. What is your understanding about gender-based violence against women during the Liberian Civil War?

2. What is your understanding about using women as weapons of war and how was it practiced during the Liberian Civil War?

3. How high do you think was the rate of gender-based violence against women during the Liberia Civil War?

4. Why was rape, a particular form of gender-based violence against women so prevalent during the Liberian Civil war?

5. Was there any form of protection for women from gender-based violence during the Liberian Civil war?

6. Who do you think committed gender-based violence against women during the Liberian Civil War? Were they combatants or civilians?

7. How do you think the Liberian culture can influence gender-based violence against women in the country?

8. What are specific cultural beliefs and practices of Liberia that put women at risk of gender-based violence?
9. Why gender based violence remains persistent in post-conflict Liberia?

10. Can men and boys be victims of gender-based violence as well?

11. How do you think that gender-based violence against women during times of war can be minimized if not stopped totally?