

WHEN DO WE GET TO PEACE?
PATTERNS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
IN POST-CONFLICT LIBERIA

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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PART ONE: RESEARCH QUESTION

The research sought to understand some of the ranges of experiences of women and girls in post-conflict societies by examining the types, frequency, and nature of gender violence that women and girls experience in post-conflict Liberia. Given the nature and scale of sexual violence during the fourteen year civil conflict, what are the patterns of gender violence in post-conflict Liberia? Has sexual violence continued, and, if so, who is affected and how? Does the potential continuation of sexual violence reflect an attempt by men to reassert their authority and control over women and in society? Has there been an increase in domestic violence since the end of the war, and if so, is this in any way correlated with men pushing back on women and the public spaces and roles they filled in political, economic, and social life during the war? In light of post-conflict violence and poverty, what opportunities exist for women to mobilize in prevention and response to gender violence, and what barriers to justice exist for women and girls? Can we document any effective models for resistance to violence from the Liberian context? Given the frameworks that we have for understanding gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, this research seeks to understand what the reported violence in Liberia says about the aftermath of war for Liberian women and society in general.

While this research was primarily exploratory in nature, I undertook it with a hypothesis that there has been an increase in domestic violence since the war ended, as has been documented in other post-conflict countries, and that women and communities may not have the access to services or criminal justice systems that they need in order to address the post-conflict violence. Additionally, because many Liberian women were extremely politically active in spearheading the Liberian peace movement and negotiations, I hypothesized that there would be tension around women's post-conflict social, economic, and political roles, which may cause violence between men and women at the inter-personal level.

Gender, Conflict, and Violence

Women, their gender roles, and their vulnerable position in many societies continue to be a central focus of much development and humanitarian assistance to conflict and post-conflict societies. Yet, conventional conflict analyses conceive of the institutions, frameworks, processes, and actors that cause, drive, and respond to violent conflict in ways that are “gender

blind.”¹ Those that have argued for a gender analysis of conflict recognize that “uncovering gender differences” allows for an understanding of the underlying power relations, and any corresponding contradictions or contestations, in a given society.² Feminists argue that gender roles and identities intersect with political, economic, social, and cultural structures and norms in ways that define and influence men’s, women’s, boys’ and girls’ positions and actions. Accordingly, proponents of a gender analysis of conflict assert that an understanding of an individual’s identity and agency within conflict as defined by the social processes of gender and all other types of economic, political, and social power will shed invaluable light on conflict processes.³ The connections between individual violence and social conflict at community, state, and international levels can be more easily understood through an appreciation of gender as a core relation of power, function, and identity between and among men and women.⁴ More importantly, drawing a connection among individual identity, interpersonal violence, and structural violence allows us to understand that “the absence of war does not mean peace” for those experiencing personal violence in post-conflict societies.⁵

While the focus of this paper is on violence in the aftermath of armed conflict, it is important to describe briefly the general nature of gender-based violence and gender relations before, during, and after armed conflict. Briefly, gender-based violence (GBV) is an act or threat of a specific type of violence that has cultural, social, or political meaning because of a man, woman, boy, or girl’s gender and, in some cases, age. Due to their frequent unequal power status, women predominantly experience violence based on their gender. GBV can occur because of someone’s sex, because of a person’s relationship to the opposite sex, or because of an individual’s social group membership. Liz Kelly uses the word “continuum” to describe the range of sexual and gender violence that women may experience. The continuum concept allows one to understand how severe forms of sexual violence, such as rape and murder, are connected

¹ Judy El-Bushra, "Transforming Conflict: Some Thoughts on a Gendered Understanding of Conflict Processes," in *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*, ed. Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson, and Jen Marchbank (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2000), Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman, eds., *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

² El-Bushra, Cynthia Cockburn, "The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace," in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

³ El-Bushra, 67.

⁴ Cockburn, 25.

⁵ Johan Galtung as quoted in Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson, and Jen Marchbank, eds., *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2000).

to common male behaviors. That is, the ways in which “ ‘typical’ and ‘aberrant’ male behaviour shade into one another.”⁶ Deeply embedded in social, cultural, economic, and political contexts, GBV can occur at the family, community, or state levels.⁷ Similarly expressed along a continuum, the target of violence can be the body, home, community, or country,⁸ and the type of violence can be explicit, implicit, domestic, public, institutional, physical, or economic.⁹ During periods of no armed conflict, GBV may be experienced and understood differently in public or private domains, and the causes and damage of domestic or “private” violence are often considered outside of or unrelated to political and public processes.¹⁰

During armed conflict, gender roles often become “essentialized” such that traditional identities may become even more influential in defining men and women’s gender, position, and power within the conflict.¹¹ In traditional perspectives, men are perceived to be the more active perpetrators and women the more passive victims of violence in conflict. Despite the fact that traditional roles are often emphasized during conflict, they do not necessarily determine how men and women will participate in or experience conflict. What is more important than traditional conceptions of gender roles is how political and military leaders within a conflict situate themselves in relation to traditional gender identities. As the conflict develops, are men and women isolated or do both groups participate in the conflict’s escalation and manifestation? More specifically, who is doing what and to whom, when are they doing it, where are they doing it, why are they doing it, and how are they doing it? Additionally, the issue of who has access to public space has a profound impact on whether or not women break with their “traditional” gender identities and participate in or, as we will see in the case of Liberia, protest against violent conflict. At times, the social, political, and economic changes that drive or follow conflict create spaces for some women and some men to challenge, redefine, or reconstruct their

⁶ Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, ed. Michelle Stanworth, Feminist Perspectives (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 74-75.

⁷ Margaret Schuler, ed., *Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from around the World* (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 1992).

⁸ Giles, 12.

⁹ Anu Pillay, "Violence against Women in the Aftermath," in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*, ed. Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2001).

¹⁰ Tina Sideris, "Rape in War and Peace: Social Context, Gender, Power and Identity," in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*, ed. Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2001).

¹¹ Cockburn; Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in the New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

gender roles and relations.¹² The disintegration of social relations or hierarchies during conflict may provide marginalized groups an opening to assert their influence and identities.¹³ For some women, a potential shift may involve taking on more economic, political, or social responsibilities, which can lead to increased vulnerability or influence, depending on the context.¹⁴

In times of armed conflict and as societies militarize, sexual and non-sexual violence often becomes much more intense, brutal, and public. Militarization is a sociopolitical process by which a society militarizes. Cynthia Enloe argues that militarization occurs when the legitimacy of non-military things depends on an association with military goals.¹⁵ This can include interpersonal relationships, men and women's social roles, and sexual intercourse, which becomes a weapon of war in mass rape. The militarization of societies during conflict can often be witnessed through an increase in domestic violence as social tensions and the presence of weapons in homes increase.¹⁶ Rape is a tool used by fighting forces to terrify and displace populations and to send a message of disempowerment to the men on the enemy side. During armed conflict, rape is often perpetrated on a mass scale, done in public, and can involve torture of the individual as well as relatives of the individual(s). This kind of public sexual violence undermines social stability because it represents such an extreme perversion of social norms, such that rape becomes an attack on the culture and social system itself.¹⁷ Mass rape is often explained as a pillage and booty phenomenon, as a message being sent to a community's men about their inability to protect women, and as a military sanctioned means of promoting soldierly solidarity.¹⁸ Ironically, the experience of rape during war may allow an individual to process a "political phenomenon in deeply subjective ways," potentially enabling a survivor to avoid "privatization of the damage" through an understanding of the socio-political nature of the rape.¹⁹ Finally, as different cultural meanings connected to the gender norms of the society and of the conflict are often ascribed to female and male bodies, methods of violence and instruments

¹² Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen, eds., *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*, ed. (London and New York Zed Books Ltd. , 2001).

¹³ El-Bushra, 67.

¹⁴ Cockburn, 35.

¹⁵ Enloe, 145, 217.

¹⁶ Cockburn, 32.

¹⁷ Sideris, 147-48.

¹⁸ Cockburn, 36.

¹⁹ Sideris, 147-48.

of torture tend to be gender differentiated and sexualized.²⁰ Importantly, although sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war in many contexts, the exact form that sexual violence takes often varies depending on the cultural and social dimensions of a particular area and the political goals of the groups perpetrating the violence.

As governments and the various armed groups sign peace agreements and armed conflict disappears from the public eye, post-conflict societies experience moments of apparent limbo, during which they accept, reconcile, or reject social changes that occurred within the conflict period. In most societies, torn by violence and confused by shifts in gender and generational roles, there are often tensions about how to reorganize livelihoods and create social order.²¹ The result is generally a strong backlash against any changes associated with women taking a more active or public role in wartime social positions or activity, as men disempowered by war seek to reassert their authority and masculinity and reestablish control through “tradition.”

The disempowering experiences of war - public sexual violence, forced labor, and loss of property – can have a less violent but equally humiliating counterpart in the post-conflict period, unemployment and poverty. The reintegration and readjustment period can present opportunities and challenges for men, women, boys, and girls. Yet, the high levels of unemployment in the post-conflict period can serve to emasculate men even further, as they may be no longer able to fulfill their former gender roles as providers, even in the absence of conflict.²² In a sense, it is as if some men have lost their gender identity, as the economic, political, and social realities of the post-conflict period have created spaces for others, particularly young men and women, to fill more dominant, influential, and powerful positions in social and family hierarchies. This may in no way resemble the former order of things, and may leave many men searching for a way to reclaim their influence and reconnect with a lost gender identity that was defined by power and control (often over women and younger males).

This conservative, patriarchal backlash translates into distinct kinds of violence experienced by women and girls in the aftermath of conflict. Men’s reassertion of power can emerge in violent forms of control and abuse, such as the rape of young girls. No longer openly condoning violence, societies may begin to accept violence as a form of discipline, and this

²⁰ Ximena Bunster, "Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America," in *Surviving Beyond Fear: Women, Children & Human Rights in Latin America*, ed. Marjorie Agosin (New York: White Pine Press, 1993). Cockburn, 36.

²¹ Meintjes and others, 12.

²² El-Bushra, 76; Pillay, 42.

reassertion of violent control may be reinforced by agents of socialization, such as institutions like the church or through figures like clan leaders.²³ For example, Pillay notes that, “even though violence *per se* was not condoned in their societies, women expected to be ‘disciplined’ by their husbands or brothers” such that a “woman seeking assistance from the clergy is often reminded of her duty towards her spouse and of her obligations to ensure that the marriage works so that the children are cared for adequately.”²⁴ In many countries, women are considered to be legal or de facto minors, which further legitimizes decisions to forcibly control women’s behavior and mobility. The control of women’s productive and reproductive activities and resources can be particularly important for young women, who are often viewed as commodities in societies that engage in resource distribution through marriage.²⁵ At the community and family levels, one of the first traditions that is often fought over is the perceived need to control women’s sexuality and sexual and productive labor. In particular, it is deemed important to control the sexual behavior of young women.²⁶ The desire to return to pre-conflict social orders often reflects age rather than gender divisions, as women can seek to enforce the same expectations regarding behavior on other women and girls as do men.

Domestic violence often increases in post-conflict periods because intimate and domestic relationships may be the single place where men can express dominance and can act as their former imagined selves – powerful and superior men – in a climate of economic underdevelopment and social change.²⁷ In many ways, violence or the threat of violence can be used as a tool by men to regain control over household wealth and resources, as well as women’s productive and reproductive labor.²⁸ As previously noted, many women have expanded their economic and public roles during periods of conflict, and they may be the sole providers of economic support for families in post-conflict situations because of their adaptable livelihood strategies. Meintjes et al. assert that older generations, who depend on younger generations for economic support, see it as necessary to “re-establish the customary flow of wealth from young to old,” as well as in the current context from women to men.²⁹

²³ Pillay, 40

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Meintjes et al, 11.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sideris, 155-56.

²⁸ Meintjes et al, 13.

²⁹ Ibid.

The sexual violence experienced during war can also lead to violence and isolation for women in the post-conflict period. Many women who were raped during the conflict are rejected by the men who raped them and, in many cases, their communities. Their experience of rape is often seen as an attack on their men's and communities' honor and a diminishing of their "value" as women. This banishment can be particularly stark for some women, as "men often kill women who return with children born of rape, and women's suicide rates are high."³⁰ Societies coming out of conflict that blame women for sexual violence while failing to demand accountability for the men that perpetrated the violence demonstrate and further re-entrench systems of male domination.³¹

Women who demand more autonomy and resist this reassertion of patriarchy may face a marked increase in violence.³² Yet, an individual's ability or space to resist often reflects her position and influence within post-conflict society, as well as where she was during the war. For example, rural widows are generally more vulnerable and have different options than urban women who may have greater access to collective organizing and national and international agency services and information.³³ Experiences of displacement can also have an impact on an individual's level of empowerment and strength of agency after the conflict, and these differences will also be influenced by gender.³⁴ Women's groups or movements, having formed often in response to desperate economic and social conditions, may not have developed a sense of consciousness or institutionalization that would enable them to effectively resist the backlash against their new positions in society. Many groups have a difficult time transitioning from grass-roots organizing to national policy making movements, in part because they do not have the attention or support of the international community.³⁵ Additionally, many women's established networks in refugee and internally displaced camps break down after they repatriate or return to their communities, where they may lack the support of other women.³⁶ Thus, the high levels of women's activism and changes in gender norms realized during a conflict tend to diminish or disappear altogether in the post-war period.

³⁰ Ibid, 12.

³¹ Ibid, 13.

³² Ibid, 12.

³³ Ibid, 6; Pillay, 42.

³⁴ Cockburn, 40.

³⁵ United Nations, *Women, Peace, and Security: Report of the Secretary-General as Pursuant Security Council Resolution 1325*. (New York: United Nations, 2002).

³⁶ Meintjes et al, 10.

On a structural level, the policies and practices of international peace and reconstruction interventions may devalue the women's grassroots peace-building efforts during the war, which sidelines and silences many women during formal processes of peace-building and reconstruction.³⁷ On a basic level, most peacekeeping missions define security in strictly military terms as the control of violence in public spaces. Yet, many people, particularly but not exclusively women and girls, experience numerous forms of "private" violence in the post-conflict period, including rape and domestic violence.³⁸ Therefore, in order to establish real security and set a framework for a peaceful post-conflict situation, peacekeeping operations and reconstruction agendas need to employ a more gendered and human-focused concept of security. A gender aware human security focus would require strategic changes in institutional and policy planning. This would involve thoroughly training police forces on gender-based violence from the very beginning of their development, partnering with local women's organizations and civil society actors, and creating legal frameworks that cover gender-based violence and guarantee equal treatment in order to make the security and reconstruction process more responsive to women.³⁹ In reality, these kinds of institutions and processes rarely exist due to structural, political, and cultural impediments, such as policy incoherence among UN agencies, failed implementation due to lack of funding and political will, and cultural misconceptions and bias about gender, private violence, and security.⁴⁰ The failure to properly address human security and private violence within peace and reconstruction interventions effectively ignores and reinforces the backlash that women face in their communities and limits women's options for resistance.

Meintjes et al. note that while we understand that violent backlash in the aftermath happens to women and girls, we do not yet fully understand *why* it happens.⁴¹ Moreover, we do not fully understand how some communities are able to pull out of violence, transform

³⁷ Ibid, 8-9.

³⁸ Women, Peace, and Security, 73.

³⁹ Ibid; Tracy Fitzsimmons, "The Postconflict Postscript: Gender and Policing in Peace Operations," in *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, ed. Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

⁴⁰ Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart, eds., *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, ed. Mark Selden, War and Peace Library (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2004), Angela Raven-Roberts, "Gender Mainstreaming in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Talking the Talk, Tripping over the Walk," in *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, ed. Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004).

⁴¹ Meintjes, 21.

destructive social identities, and create sustainable coexistence.⁴² We do know that violence in the aftermath is often widespread, systemic, and culturally and politically significant. Pillay reminds us that at times, “Mass rape became gang rapes, mass murders turned into serial killings. Legitimizing violence as a means to end conflict effectively legitimized the use of violence to resolve conflict in the home.”⁴³ The danger in ignoring the continuum of violence and artificially distinguishing between war and peace for women and girls is that it becomes more natural to mobilize and speak out against gender and sexual violence in war, while simultaneously viewing violence in peace (especially violence against women in private spaces) as an unfortunate but ‘normal’ way of life.⁴⁴ By examining the nature of a shift in gender relations and a continuum of violence into “peacetime,” we gain greater insight into the processes and cycles of conflict and, possibly, into ways to achieve genuine peace for all members of society.

The Liberian War and the Experiences of Women and Girls

The civil wars in Liberia were among several ongoing and inter-related conflicts in the West African region during the 1990s and early 2000s. While many have argued that the Liberian conflict has roots in regional, generational, ethnic, and political tensions from previous centuries,⁴⁵ the most modern phases of the war encompassed the years from 1989 to 2003. Following a coup in 1980 and the brutal nine-year regime of Samuel K. Doe, Charles Taylor and his insurgent army invaded from Côte d’Ivoire in 1989. Doe was killed in September 1990, and there followed seven years of brutal fighting over territory between the rebel factions, while West African peacekeepers from ECOWAS (deployed in August 1990) stood by in the capital, Monrovia. An internationally monitored election in 1997 resulted in what “the Ecowas [sic] countries had set out to prevent in August 1990” - the overwhelming election of Charles Taylor to the presidency.⁴⁶⁴⁷ Despite the sanctioned election, domestic strife continued during Taylor’s presidency, and a new and fractious rebellion broke out in 1999. This stage of the civil war lasted until 2003, when Taylor was forced to step down and go in exile to Nigeria, while a peace

⁴² El-Bushra, 83.

⁴³ Pillay, 35.

⁴⁴ Sideris, 146, 157.

⁴⁵ Paul Richards et al., *Community Cohesion in Liberia: A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment* (The World Bank, 2005), vi.

⁴⁶ Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 109.

⁴⁷ The election is famous for the song sung by supporters, “He killed my Pa, he killed my Ma, I’ll vote for him.”

agreement was signed and an international peacekeeping force of 15,000 took hold of the country. In all, the fourteen year war resulted in over one million people displaced, estimates of 80% of the housing destroyed, and approximately 5-10% of a population of three million killed.⁴⁸

While the details of the various phases and turning points of the conflict are beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to understand that the war in Liberia was more a widespread series of protracted conflicts than a single event, and that these conflicts had gendered, economic, ethnic, geographic, political, and spiritual dimensions. Most notably for this study of gender, conflict, and violence, the Liberian war involved extremely high levels of sexual violence perpetrated by fighting forces, creating severe social upheaval, which generated a well-established and effective women's peace-building movement working in opposition to it.

Pham argues that the war may have been cast aside by the international community as yet another post-Cold War African civil war had it not been for the "exceptionally bizarre and brutal nature" of the conflict.⁴⁹ The accounts of the cross-dressing teenage boys and juju warriors, ritualistic killings, and cannibalism shocked many in the international community.⁵⁰ Yet, Liberian women and girls experienced a much more silent and grotesquely systematic torture that, in the mid-1990s, was becoming increasingly understood as a weapon of war: sexual and non-sexual gender-based violence on a mass scale.⁵¹ It is estimated that between 50-75% of women in Liberia are now survivors of both gender-based violence and rape.⁵² During the war, sexual violence was manifest in numerous ways. It could involve a single incident of public rape in one's community during the course of an attack or looting spree, or it could involve forced detainment so that one could be used as a sex slave, cook, cleaner, or "bush wife." Whether through detainment or attack, these rapes often occurred by the force of a person or a weapon,

⁴⁸ Richards and others., 2.

⁴⁹ John-Peter Pham, *Liberia: A Portrait of a Failed State* (New York: Reed Press, 2004), 117.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (1994); Ellis above.

⁵¹ The various forms of rape constitute sexual gender-based violence. Non-sexual gender-based violence can include domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse, denial of support, forced marriage, and isolation or control of a person's movement. This individual level non-sexual violence is gendered because it reflects the core relations of the various types of economic, political, and social power and gender identity among men, women, boys, and girls.

⁵² Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, "Liberia's Gender-Based Violence National Action Plan," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 27 (2007); Lois Bruthus, "Zero Tolerance for Liberian Rapists," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 27 (2007).

and a variety of objects were used to penetrate women and girls.⁵³ Women and girls of all ages were targeted, and the violence against women and girls especially escalated where “there was active fighting and where the conflict was intense and protracted.”⁵⁴ Extended detainment of women and girls by various fighting forces was common, as was voluntary enlistment or collaboration with the fighting forces for many boys and girls. Utas notes that it was crucial for young girls and women to have relations with at least one fighter in order to ensure support and protection for her family.⁵⁵ Women and girls who were unable to join with any of the local fighters or “big men” often lost this limited protection, and so were vulnerable to anyone and, in a sense, designated as available for “use”.⁵⁶ Even if a woman or girl had given her limited consent to join the fighters, the situation could turn quickly should he die or leave her, as was the case with a girl that Utas interviewed. Having been sent by rebel forces back to their jail after her rebel “boyfriend” died, she recalled that,

This jail time was even worse. They used to do bad, bad things to me. They would come in group. They turned me around, put me under the hot sun and then they would start beating me for the whole day. They would also tie me behind the car and drag me around. There were two jails. They kept me in the dark one. That was the place they used to have me. When they were done eating they threw the balance food [the leftovers] for me. When they pee-pee [urinated], they poured the pee-pee water on me. During that time I was sixteen years old.⁵⁷

In this narrative, the abducted girl reveals how she has experienced violence at multiple levels and through a range of forms. Her experience of detainment involved periods of beating, torture, rape, isolation, and abuse, illustrating well Kelly’s conception of a continuum of violence that women may experience. The girl unwillingly transitions from a “protected” status gained through her sexual relationship with a rebel soldier to being a torture victim because of simply being a girl in the presence of a group of men conducting war. Her torturers intended to dehumanize her, as the men inflicted on her body and psyche the violence of war and socio-political meaning of gender in conflict. Her armed captors saw her both as a sexual being and an object to torture, which illustrates the low status that women had during the conflict and the sense of empowerment that men could attain by overpowering and abusing her. She transitions

⁵³ Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, “Hundreds of Victims Silently Grieving,” in *What Women Do in Wartime*, ed. Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya (New York: Zed Books, Ltd., 1998), 132.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mats Utas, “Agency of Victims: Young Women in the Liberian Civil War,” in *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (James Currey, 2005), 58.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 60.

from having at least superficial agency in her relationship with the rebel to becoming a captive without choice or control over her body or movement.

Women and girls also experienced non-sexual gender-based violence during the conflict. Physical and psychological violence were extremely common. There are reports that women were made to watch mass executions and were forced to laugh or applaud while the execution was taking place.

Women who showed any emotion while they were forced to watch the murder of their own or others' children were shot. Several women described seeing the murder of pregnant women and their unborn babies. One woman told Swiss [soldiers] that she was forced to watch while a pregnant woman was held down, her belly cut open, and her unborn baby removed and cut up. This woman said that 40 people were forced to watch and applaud while three soldiers committed this atrocity.⁵⁸

The impact of these kinds of experiences extends far beyond the moment of violence. For all civilians and combatants in conflict, the psychosocial trauma of what was witnessed or done during conflict stays with people into post-conflict periods. For example, children that witnessed the raping of their mothers or beating of their fathers by young people in armed forces are likely to relate to their parents differently after the conflict; on a large scale, this may translate into the loss of respect for older people and tradition among the youth. Depending on the situation or nature of the violent experience, the trauma may affect an individual's mental health or may change social relationships within a community, such as with the reintegration of combatants and those who were victims of violence, particularly rape.⁵⁹

Liberian women and girls who are survivors of rape often face health consequences in the aftermath of conflict, yet social stigma can prevent them from reporting incidents of sexual violence in the aftermath. The social stigma surrounding rape can be so intense that it is literally deadly or socially too risky to reveal to others that one has been raped.⁶⁰ For reasons already highlighted, the blame for rape traditionally falls on the woman or girl, and the consequences may be an inability to marry or social exclusion. In Liberia, survivors of rape face many barriers to justice due to a culture of impunity and an inability or unwillingness of the judicial system to

⁵⁸ AFELL; African Women and Peace Support Group, *Liberian Women Peacemakers: Fighting for the Right to Be Seen, Heard, and Counted* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 2004);7.

⁵⁹ Much work has been done on traditional reintegration, reconciliation, and healing ceremonies. See, for example, the work of Rosalind Shaw.

⁶⁰ Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, *Where Are the Girls?* (Montreal: International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), 44.

properly prosecute rape cases, as well as a lack of the necessary health care facilities to address physical and psycho-social needs.

In spite of the physical and psychological wounds inflicted on women during the war, this period also created new opportunities for women in Liberian society. The daily political, economic, and social reality of living within a conflict lead to openings in public spaces for women, and many challenged or took on new gender roles, some more constructive than others. For the young girls and women that left their communities or were sent away by their parents in exchange for protection, new roles and non-traditional behaviors, such as looting and fighting were possible, as they were not under the supervision of traditional social networks. Other women and girls were able to organize towards more peaceful ends. At times, individual young women were engaging in public mediation at the community level. Even girls associated with fighting forces were able to develop basic conflict resolution skills. Utas describes one girl's experience in conflict resolution and the sense of responsibility and accomplishment that it gave her.

He forced me to take up arms. He gave me a gun to hold; I used to be very scared.... Sometimes when some of the commandos did bad in town I would try to assist in solving the problem. For instance, when people were beating up other people who had been stealing things, I would go in between and tell the people to stop and to please forgive them. Sometimes when they wanted to kill somebody I would go there and convince them to forget about the issue. That was what I used to be doing, taking a responsibility behind the fighters. That was the reason why the civilians liked me.⁶¹

On a collective level, examples of women's public action include the Liberian women's movements for peace, Mano River Union Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and Women In Peace-Building Network (WIPNET). In part due to the reality of the conflict, which forced men from public life, and in large part due to their own initiative and strength of will, many Liberian women were able to stage mass, public protests for peace and to navigate areas controlled by armed factions in order to deliver humanitarian assistance. Their campaigns not only facilitated the distribution of food and resources to war-starved regions, but also made the peace talks in 2003 effective. Having established themselves as representatives of the Liberian people, these groups literally created a human barricade outside the peace negotiations in Accra, Ghana, when the parties inside were threatening to leave the talks in a stalemate. Their human barricade demonstrated that the women felt that Liberians literally could not live without a peace

⁶¹ Utas, 73.

agreement, and they were willing to lay down their bodies and lives to persuade the participants to continue forward towards peace.⁶²

In Liberia today, women and girls, and some men and boys, continue to experience violence that has continued from the conflict into the post-conflict period. While the scale and intensity of organized sexual and non-sexual gender-based violence may have diminished since the end of the war, there are many reports that domestic violence continues to occur at extremely high rates.⁶³ In addition to domestic violence, there are reports of high rates of rape of young children, sexual exploitation, prostitution, and teenage pregnancy resulting from rape and prostitution.⁶⁴

Liberia presents an important case through which one can consider theories of gender violence and continuums of violence in post-conflict transitions. During the Liberian civil wars, the participation of young people in the conflict contributed to drastic social upheavals through which many former hierarchies and gender categories were challenged, shifted, or turned upside down. The young people's participation in conflict created a sense of helplessness and resentment among some older members of their communities, who no longer fully trust their own authority or their children. Additionally, the public nature of wide-spread sexual violence can itself be socially disruptive and publicly humiliating for older people and survivors, especially given that rape often involved torture and robbery by young people. Any changes that result from conflict, propelled by generational divides and shifts in gender roles and occupation of public space, are particularly important for Liberian men in the post-conflict situation. As discussed above, men who feel disempowered by the changes that conflict brings often violently push back on women's and girls' sexuality and women's public roles in order to reassert their formerly dominant position, thereby increasing the levels of post-conflict violence experienced by women and girls.

Methodology

This paper examines the nature of post-conflict violence in Liberia in order to determine whether the gains that women have made during the war will be able to transform into long-term social

⁶² Leyma Gbowee, "A Conversation with Women Peacebuilders," ed. Security Boston Consortium on Gender, and Human Rights (Medford, MA: 2006).

⁶³ June Munala, "Challenging Liberian Attitudes Towards Violence against Women," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 27 (2007).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

change and, importantly, help contribute to sustainable peace. The research was conducted from May to August 2006 in Ganta (Nimba County) and Monrovia (Montserrado County), Liberia. The data collection techniques used include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and direct and participant observation. Monrovia and Ganta were selected in order to provide an urban and rural case, respectively, and because they were most accessible to me during my time in Liberia due to my work with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), transportation constraints and because the IRC has offices in both cities. Three sites were selected within each city using a site-based approach to recruitment, as well as participatory methods and consultation with community members in some cases. After extensive discussions with key informants, sites were selected within each city based on several factors, including the described levels of disruption experienced by the community during the conflict, the current described existence of community structures and/or institutions, and the physical or programmatic presence (or lack of) of one or more non-governmental organizations (herein NGO) conducting relief work and/or providing social services. For the purposes of this study, I defined “disruption” as the level of breakdown of “traditional” or customary social structures and practices in a community due to forced displacement or experience of armed fighting or violence in the area. The presence of an NGO in the community was important because I assumed increased levels of access to services. In each site, I attempted to control these variables by selecting a community that did not fit any of these characteristics. In total, I conducted sixteen focus groups and sixteen interviews, or eight interviews and eight focus groups across three sites in both Ganta and Monrovia. Discussions were audio recorded and then transcribed and coded for types and rates of violence, as well as reasons for the violence given by participants.

The key informants in each case were Liberian social workers with the Gender-Based Violence (herein GBV) program of the IRC. These women managed or worked daily in these communities and were intimately aware of the nature of the community and types of violence that are regularly occurring. Aware of the factors that I was interested in exploring, I asked to hear from each woman about what she thought had happened to or in the community, based on her daily experience with community members. Did people leave, when, and how? Has everyone returned? Do they have community leadership now? How active is the leadership? Are there schools, clinics, police stations, or courts in the community? After the key informant interviews, I became aware of other factors that seem relevant to investigate, including whether

or not and which people (men, women, and/or children) had participated in the fighting, more specific characteristics of the community leadership (gender, age), and whether there were independent (and, often, long-established or independently established) community-based organizations or only IRC established women's groups in the community.

In Ganta, three sites were selected based on the above mentioned factors. An individual site is a sub-community within the larger city area, which people refer to as "their community" (as opposed to a larger Ganta community). Based on the informant interviews, Site 1G was seen as a typical community in Ganta, which meant that most people had been displaced during the armed conflict but had returned, that there were a lot of vulnerable women and female heads of households, and that it had an average amount of community schools, churches, and community groups. Site 1G also contained the offices of an international aid organization as well as local NGOs, and the IRC GBV programs were active in the community. Informants described Site 2G as a rather non-traditional community because it had strong community structures and a female community leader. This community is slightly isolated from the main part of town, and many of the people were associated with fighting forces during the conflicts. Accordingly, it was reported that many people from Site 2G stayed in the town or often hid nearby during the most recent war. The IRC GBV programs were also active in this community, and they had an active women's group. Finally, Site 3G was selected because it was near the police station, but did not have the active presence of any IRC GBV program because the community had repeatedly rejected attempts by IRC social workers at offering services there. This seemed to indicate that the community was perhaps less well organized. A site-based approach to participant recruitment was used predominantly in Sites 1G and 2G, with outreach to community members conducted through churches. While I do not have official statistics (and I am not sure that anyone does), I believe that each site had approximately 1,000-3,000 residents.

Within Ganta, I selected churches as my site for recruitment because in a rural area like Ganta churches are the only common and prevalent institution among communities while only a few have clinics or government offices and other kinds of institutions that could serve as a recruitment site. This approach allowed me to speak with general members of the community in a systematic manner, as most members participate in some church sub-community. Once I introduced the study to the church leadership, I left it to the church members and leaders to decide the composition of the group (e.g. all male, all female, mixed gender, large (10) or small

(5)). Due to the small geographic and population size of each site, it was possible to contact every church within the site, which averaged at five to six churches per site.

In Monrovia, I again selected three sites. Site 1M was selected because it is removed from the center of the city and it was described as representing a general Monrovia community, which means that it was of mixed tribe, that fighting forces had moved in and out of the area, that people had either stayed throughout the armed conflict or had left and returned, and that it had an average amount of schools, clinics, hand pumps, and churches. Site 1M also had its own community political structure and independent women's groups. Site 2M is a squatter area with a lot of movement in and out, reportedly high levels of daily violence, as well as a lack of community organization due to the dynamic nature of population movement and its size. Site 3M was selected because it had a reportedly effective women's action group, a large population, was a point of fighting during the conflict, and had access to UN police stations, as well as international agency clinics. Because transportation in Monrovia is relatively easily accessible, it appears that most communities have at least access to some services. Due to the size of communities, recruitment in Monrovia sites relied less on a site-based approach through contact with churches and more on convenience or snowball sampling generated by discussions with my research assistants and community leaders. More accurate population statistics are available for Monrovia and each site had between 3,000 and 9,000 residents, although the areas that surround each sub-community to constitute one of 16 zones on Monrovia could have totals of 65,000+ residents. It is possible that informants referred to these larger zones when discussing their communities.

There were several constraints to the research process. Time and resource constraints meant that I was not able to do as in-depth and consistent recruitment within each site as I desired, especially in Monrovia. I was also not able to get beyond urban or town centers because of transportation and ethical concerns.⁶⁵ In rural communities, language barriers required that I

⁶⁵ Some ethical concerns surrounding gender-based violence research arose during the IRB approval process. It was identified as important to select and interview participants in a way that would maintain anonymity and confidentiality about the nature of the research in the community. For this reason, efforts were made to allow participants to select the location of the interview and to have adequate time to consider participation. It was ultimately understood as impossible to ensure complete anonymity about participation due to the nature of social networks in West Africa and the obvious attention drawn to a foreigner in a small community. Yet, I also recognized that individuals in small rural communities may have a much more difficult time participating in a way that would ensure confidentiality and, more importantly, their safety and security. These were the concerns that led me to focus the research on larger towns, even though women and girls in very rural regions have important and distinct contributions to make to the discussion of post-conflict gender violence.

use a local community member for translation, which opens room for error. Most importantly, despite my attempts to walk to locations where possible and avoid making connections with the aid agency with which I was working as an intern, I was likely rarely able to breakdown my identity as a Western NGO worker in an international peacekeeping and aid hub like Monrovia. This may have impaired my ability to have candid conversations or gain access to individuals, although I found that this only seemed to be the case on rare occasions. When I did feel that my efforts to gain access to a community were being denied or inhibited, it was due to the general “interview/focus group” fatigue that I felt in Monrovia and to the culturally conservative or politically hesitant nature of a particular church or two in Ganta. This may indicate that using churches as an institution for site-based recruitment may not as effective as other sites.

Before looking at the specific experiences of violence in the conflict and post-conflict period in Monrovia and Ganta, there are several aspects of the Liberian context and transcription process to highlight in order to make the text more clear to readers. First, as in most social situations, community does not have a standard definition in Liberia. For the most part, when referred to in this text, a community signifies the geographical and administrative unit within a greater urban area. Yet, some participants considered their community to be a sub-section of the larger administrative unit, such as a quarter or neighborhood, while still others considered the community to center around the church or community organization, meaning that members may be geographically dispersed yet still a part of the community that experiences and processes social relations. Secondly, Liberian English, although essentially the same as American English, includes a few key colloquial phrases about social relations. These phrases will be clarified throughout the text by inserting the American English translation in parentheses following the Liberian English. Finally, the interviews and focus groups were transcribed as exactly as possible, although there were moments that were unclear due to accent or background noise. These phrases or words are generally indicated with “(?)” and when I was able to partially decipher what was said, I indicated my uncertainty by enclosing the phrase in parentheses, like this “(...)”. Any clarification of meaning that needs to be made to a quotation will be enclosed using brackets, like this [...].

PART TWO: VIOLENCE DURING THE WAR

This section is not meant to cover the experience of war in Liberia comprehensively. Rather, it is intended to highlight what people who participated in this study experienced during war in order to offer a frame of reference for the more in-depth discussion of post-conflict violence. While personal histories varied, there were three main trends in experiences in both Ganta and Monrovia, which I have categorized as war, rape, and killing. War is the most general category and covers a range of experience; this section offers a glimpse into what war meant in an urban and rural setting. This section concludes with a comparison of the types of violence experienced during the conflict in Monrovia and Ganta.

Monrovia – An Urban Case

War

The general experience of war and the types of violence reported varies according to the experience of different communities and people within each community. In general, people expressed a sense of constant fear and insecurity. This insecurity was caused by the armed conflict, fear of fighting forces, and lack of safe places to stay that were not controlled by an armed group. Other major concerns included poverty, hunger, disease, the absence of educational, health, and employment facilities, and the lack of food and shelter (23.1). One community leader succinctly said, “Our lives were in danger here.” (23.1) It seems that there were few places in Monrovia that were not severely affected by the war.

For some people, the barrage of weaponry in or over an area constituted a serious threat to their lives, while stealing and raping also limited their movement. Participants in one community reported that rockets could fall on houses and stray bullets could catch people if they were on the beach or going to the latrines (17.2). At the same time, many people migrated into this same community because it was in a location that was controlled by neither the rebels nor government forces. A member of this community explains the impact that this in-migration had:

So everybody decided to come here for safety. And then, even though we were always – people have bad people among people. We had people here who were raping women, people were here, you know, taking people’s things away, and killing people. The community had some heinous crimes here, but not to that extent because they do it at night. In the day, the public was there to look at them to see that certain things don’t happen. But all in all, this place was a safe haven, where more people were packed up here. People took rescue here. (19.2)

This man's understanding is that bad people within the overall group were raping, stealing, and killing people in the community at night, although the day was relatively safe. Another member of this community explains that "there was fear in everybody at the time" (22.1), while yet another person in the community said that the harassment and daily stealing by the soldiers caused them to be "afraid to even get on the street" to get food needed for the day (17.1).

Armed robbery posed a major threat to people that remained in their homes. One elderly community leader explained how they would be robbed:

During the war in this community, you see what we see here is Taylor's boys were then were (havocking?), raping the children. They stealing in the house time and take you from your house (?). Carry you outside. Take all your belongings. When you get money there, they take it. When you get any good things that matter, they take it. They leave you outside and go. If you want to fight them, they will kill you. So we just leave the house with them. When they searched the whole house, then we come back, and they go. (29.1)

In this account, the concurrent threats of killing, robbery, and rape completely depleted the informant's will to continue his normal life, and any act of resistance in these situations could be deadly. During the war, men in particular were unable to defend their home and belongings, let alone invest in their own family's future by acquiring savings or material goods.

Finally, forced labor and conscription of children and young men and women into fighting forces was also reported in one community. A male community leader described how the government would collect children and force them to go to the war front.

And sometimes they carried the little children, those children and forced them into war front. Some were lucky. Came home...Only wounds on their arms, their legs, or some part of their body. Some could only been discharged from the hospital. In the night you see them back home. There was no way their parents could avoid such a situation.... That people fight. And some children that was – especially with this community, uh, there are people, children that were here that are loose. Yeah. Little children. They are seven. You know, sometimes you will say, I will give you fifty US dollars, seventy five US dollars, and go fight. Some were willing. But time came, some – they were just like, everything loose. They could grab any young boy who was able to handle the AK 47 and just go fight. (22.1)

In this man's experience, the complex nature of recruitment – both through physical force and economic exploitation – of children into fighting forces is clear. He went on to say that despite some people's attempt to persuade the warlords and government force leaders to refrain from involving their children in war, the reality of poverty and need for survival combined with the forced recruitment by armed forces resulted in many children and young people joining the war

effort. His description of children as “loose” during the war reflects a loss of control of the youth by older generations, which will have an impact on post-conflict social relations. In all, these processes of war ultimately served to undermine pre-war social and economic order, leaving older people and men in particular, disempowered and humiliated.

Rape

Participants in all three sites in Monrovia reported rape as a “bad thing”⁶⁶ that happened in their communities during the war.⁶⁷ In general, the rape that happened during the armed conflict in these communities often occurred in front of family members, was often accompanied by robbery and/or the killing of husbands, and was predominantly done by fighting forces (i.e. individuals with guns).

The reported prevalence of rape varied from community to community, with participants quantifying the numbers affected using phrases like “most people”, “some women”, “the women”, and “the other women that were raped.” In one community, a participant reported that most women and girls were raped, and that people fled the community because of the rape that was happening. She says:

A lot of people left. A lot of people left. Because of the raping they were doing. So that’s what made them to leave. They used to rape people in the night. Take people’s things. Come and make it (?) with your wife, right in front of you. They rape your wife. They take whatsoever they get. So that’s what made most people leave. But I stayed here. (18.8)

In describing how rape affected her community, this woman identifies the combined threat of rape and armed robbery as the main reason for people’s departure. This illustrates the “pillage and booty” explanation of mass rape identified by Siefert.⁶⁸ Also notable in this description is how the speaker distinguishes herself from the community because she stayed despite the raping. In a sense, this is an indication of her strength as well as of her status; because she was able to

⁶⁶ In Liberian English, “bad thing” is the most general way to ask about violence and other negative behavior without specifically asking about things like rape and fighting in the home or on the streets.

⁶⁷ There has already been some scholarly and investigative documentation of women’s and girls’ experience of the armed conflicts in Liberia (See Utas for an example of scholarly work, as well as other reports done by aid, refugee, human rights, and UN agencies). This section is not meant to offer a comprehensive view of what women and girls have experienced during the conflict, nor is it meant to call others’ reports into question. Rather, it is important to highlight what participants in this study reported in order to better understand their experience and the continuum of violence in the post-conflict period. For a more holistic understanding of the conflict period, one should look into these sources further.

⁶⁸ Cockburn, 36.

withstand the violence and remain in her community, she was able to act as a first-responder and key informant when INGOs arrived with assistance. This has enabled her to take the lead in developing a community response system for gender-based violence, as is described below.

Men also experienced rape as witnesses. Two male participants highlighted the use of weapons, the killing of women's husbands, and the raping of women in front of others. These male informants said:

No, people who were fighting [were raping]. Who had guns. They were doing that. Because of the power of the gun. They raped women and killed the women's husbands because they wanted to be with the woman.... And the woman is left there like that. So the women, the women, most especially, the women were the victims of the war activities in our country. (19.8)

They raped the woman at willing. The government troop come here. Instead of saving people, they would come here, grab your daughter, grab your son, took them from you to carry things for them. As well as the women, raped them right before your very eyes, they'd do that. (23.1)

The men's lack of control over protection of their women, families, and homes is clear in these descriptions. In a sense, their experience is almost one of disbelief, particularly in the second excerpt. In the first account, the man differentiates himself from the men that were committing the rapes. He says that the men who had guns were the men who raped, indicating that there were different types of men who had various levels of power during the war. Finally, the identification of women as victims of war activities by the first man reflects the significance of rape as a war crime for people in the community; certainly other men were killed during the conflict, yet he highlights women as among the most serious victims because they were raped.

Finally, a few women were willing to offer details about the process of rape, including the many forms that it could take and its many consequences, including physical abuse, psychological suffering, and death.

Raping women. Raping women. And when you talk, they beat you. Some people died from it. After the war, World War 3⁶⁹ again the same thing in this community, and nobody was here. All the women and children, they killed everybody. We to suffer. And since suffering. (26.1)

What gave birth to my organization [local NGO] is on July 20th, on a Sunday morning immediately after devotion [church], while we were in our house, some armed men from the former government, Taylor's side, they came, they jumped over my fence. The men grabbed my screaming daughter from by my side. Ten years old

⁶⁹ World War 3 was the last phase of the attack on Monrovia in August 2003. This was the final battle of the war, after which Charles Taylor left Liberia.

on (her own day?), and raped her until she died. When she died, I saw blood. I saw doo-doo. I saw vomit. The boy that came to rape me, he wasn't even quite twenty-five. But because I was sick, he put it in between my legs. Because at that time, I had a store. I was well-established. So a lady paid some of my money, she gave me 12,096 dollars. I wrapped it up in a sandwich and put it between my legs. When he came to rape me, he took off my trousers and my panties, and the money dropped out after the whole thing (?). He said, 'Oh, she's got more money in her.' He put his hand in me. He took on the (pluck?) of blood and rubbed it on my legs. And my fourteen years old daughter, the other man took his penis and put it in her mouth. They were over, I saw over several men... They took our car, they took our belongings. So when I came home, when I came to this (inaudible) house, the other women that were raped along the whole thing, they came to sympathize with me. And I said, 'Well, we are the war-affected women.' So my story coupled with other women's stories, gave birth to this organization. (25.1)

The first woman informant says that beating was a consequence of resistance, and that beating could result in death. This indicates that women experiencing rape would likely be aware that they were also at risk of being killed. Her association of rape from earlier periods of conflict with the killing of the last period of conflict further elucidates this reality for women. The second woman's description of her rape and the raping of her daughters illustrates the range of the kinds of rape and consequences of rape that women and girls experienced during the war. In this instance as in others, rape was accompanied by robbery, even from the woman's body. The social upheaval element of rape of older women by younger men is also clear in her identification of the "boy" that raped her as not even twenty-five years old. The woman was also forced to watch one of her daughters as the fighting forces raped her to death, which illustrates the kinds of torture of family that people witnessed as well as the deadly consequences of rape for some girls and women. Finally, we also see in her story the support networks that women and girls who experienced rape helped establish for one another in the aftermath of the attack and conflict.

Finally, rape and sexual violence during the war left psychological and social scars on the survivors and witnesses, especially young people. One male community leader explained his thoughts on the impact of the war on the children,

...the children saw how their parents were maltreated during the war. During the war, elderly people were naked. Were walking naked. Some of them were stripped naked by the rebels and fighters. They saw their parents stripped naked. Some of them saw their parents, you know, they were used, raped by these soldiers in front of them. You know, sexually harassed, in front of them. They saw their own parents. Some of the little boys were even forced – they said, you lie underneath your mother. These experiences are all there. So God helps them to survive these kinds of things, you know, the main violence, you know, problem is still there....So because of that,

they are disobedient to parents. You know, no recognition of any elderly role that you play in anything. So, you know, these are bad things happening. (28.2)

In many situations, virtually all community and family members were exposed to personal and public humiliation and violence, particularly those who were victims of sexual violence or who were forced to participate in the sexual torture of other family members. This man believes that children have lost respect for older people as a result of witnessing and being forced to participate in this sexual violence. In many ways, the humiliation of older people in front of their children has disempowered them, uprooted pre-war social hierarchies, and challenged all forms of social and moral norms.

Killing

Many people lost members of their families during the armed conflicts, and some reported witnessing family and community members being killed in extremely violent ways. One woman recounted,

I lose a lot of my family. Right now I got nobody at home. They went to where and catch my auntie's husband. Right in front of the woman, they cut the man to pieces just how you cut steaks. They cut the man, they were cutting, the woman (hollered?) and she died on the spot. Just like that....So our only brother then that's living been there in the other place, they hear it. Now, I knew they were running from the people going down that to catch them too. My only brother. I see when they catching him. Cutting, cutting, cutting. The other one, they put gas over him. So right now, I (shut up ?) all my family there. No brother. My ma, my pa, everybody died. And since then, everybody died. I can't go back home again. So the war has really put me way behind. I'm just living here now. (22.2)

This woman witnessed the extreme torture and brutal killing of her entire family, and she is now alone in Monrovia. Women such as this informant who lost the male members of their family are often extremely vulnerable in post-conflict periods because they lack the protection of men in a society that often legitimizes women through their relationships with men. Several participants reported that there are many widows and single parents in their communities after the war. One woman discussed how women's husbands were beaten and killed during the 1990 war, saying, "1990 war, everybody beating people, beating our husbands. They even killed some people's husbands there. Some people's husband had left. You can't see the man there." (26.1) The absence of men in post-conflict communities has an impact on women's physical and economic security, as they are made more vulnerable to robbery, assault, rape, and poverty.

In conclusion, the experience of war in the urban context seems to have been characterized by violent fighting around communities and direct attacks on populations. These attacks by fighting forces involved the brutal slaughtering of people and mass rape. People were also generally very insecure and vulnerable to armed robbery and displacement within the city.

Ganta – A Rural Case

War

Armed robbery, poverty, and forced labor by fighting forces were the most general experiences reported about the war period in Ganta. In many ways, the armed robbery that people experienced during the war caused or exacerbated the food insecurity, lack of shelter, and overall poverty that people faced. One older female informant recounted:

[translator speaking] During the Ganta fall, she and her children went into the bush. When they went in the bush, they had sufficient food. They hauled the rest and they carried it to where they were stopping in the bush. The soldiers followed them and they went there. They took all the rest for them. And they were there with hunger. Looking for yam in the bush before eating. So she was worrying over that, and she's now sick. And she's now sick because of the thing they did to her. (15.7)

They came and took all their things from them. The cattle they had, they came and killed everything from them. They soldiers would cut their own food they planted out in the bush. The rest, they tell them to beat it and give it to them. To pound the rice and give it to them. Old ladies like this. They will come and force her. If at all she don't do it, then they beat her sometimes. (15.7)

[Translator speaking] When the war came, they ran away. They went in the bush. And their belongings were taken. They took all their belongings... And when they took all their things, they ran away.... And after 1990, when they came again, they bought some things again. But later on, war came again. 2003 Ganta fell. And they ran in the bush again... They never had anything with them. (6.1)

This repeated pattern of flight and loss was reported by several other informants or interviewees. Over time, people's material loss and displacement further increased their vulnerability because they were exposed to hunger, disease, and the elements in addition to fighting and armed conflict. Participants reported having their cattle, market wares, farm goods, clothes, food, and money stolen. The robbery and looting also constituted a form of war; one woman said, "when they went there [to villages in bush], the war followed them." (4.2) Indeed, displacing people in rural regions seemed to be a war tactic as there appears to have been the attempt by armed

groups to move people away from town centers into the bush where they would be completely exposed and open to attack.

Armed robbery also frequently resulted in killing and other kinds of violence, such as beating and forced labor. Several informants described their experiences:

The bad things that happened here? Some of the people, they went on my farm. (A pause) They went on my farm and take all my cattle and they beat my ma. On the farm.... They used to come into town and grab people. Beat them. Steal things from them in this town. (4.1)

Because during the war, people were killing people, taking things from people. If you have your, your little market to sell, the soldiers would take it from you and you would be left with nothing. (1.1)

When they were in the bush, the Freedom Fighters would go there. They would pull you. If you have your money, they take you. They put you under the sun. They put you under gunpoint. If you are not lucky, they kill you. When they are in the bush. (A pause) They take your money from you. (6.3)

These statements demonstrate how people faced both physical violence, psychological violence and economic destruction in confrontations with soldiers. For pregnant women, beating could result in miscarriage, as was reported by one participant, although physical assault seems to have been mostly perpetrated by the fighting forces.

A male participant explained how armed robbery contributed to the social upheaval of the war.

From 1989 we began to see different phases of living, which as I told you yesterday, the children couldn't no more respect the older because everything was very short and clear. That is, they were in arms - because once they had the gun, no longer they could respect any other persons. They would tell you, "Old man, please take off your shoes." If you know that your shoes is important to them, then you take it off. The old slipper they had they take it and give it to you to use as shoes. Besides that, they used to ill-treat others who were not in arms. Like those of us that that were not in guns, they felt that the gun was like an iron jacket on them, which nobody can do them anything. So, once they got the gun, anything they need from you, they can demand you, take it from you, nothing you can say. If you believe you like, you love your life, you easily take the material and give it to them because the material can be found another time. And your life, if you mind the material and they take away your life, nothing else you can get. So these are some of the things that the people used to do, that I see to it that it was different from the way of living before. (2.1)

This informant's narrative illustrates the changes in the perspectives and attitudes of many young men and some women that having arms brought and how that impacted those that were being threatened with them. It illustrates well the loss of power and influence of the older generations

during the war. It also demonstrates the way that some older people experience war not as a simply a period of conflict but rather as a dynamic process of social upheaval and change that continues to influence relations between generations in the post-conflict, even though the fighting has finished.

Other significant experiences of war reported by participants were forced labor, the separation of parents from children during displacement, and poverty. One male participant reported that men were forced to carry loads to the next town or battlefield for the armed forces. He says that women were forced to become involved with the forces in other ways.

But when it comes to raping, many were affected, were women. Women were affected because once they get in the area and they find young, two-three young girls there, they will force them to go with them. Some of them, for me, I will call that forcing because some of these girls that they went with them, I will not tell you they were satisfied to love to them because some of the conditions was like, in your area you live in, you find it difficult to get food. Once everything gone, they can get the food from other people. Once you the woman, you near them, they feed you with it. So I call that, you know, forcing the women, because it was not to their satisfaction. They were only ... some of them only loved to them because they wanted to survive. That's how they get close to them. So it was not true love. Because I ... for me, I can observe this, in the present stage, those women that were with them, you can't see them with some of these women. Some of those good girls that forced themselves to love to them because of the things they had, you can no longer see them with them. So, it was a force. (2.3)

This analysis of women's relations with males within fighting forces echoes that of Utas. That is, women established relationships with combatants in strategic ways and under coercive conditions as a means to protect themselves and survive during the war period.

Many children lost their parents during the war, either during displacement or to the conflict. Some youth did not live with their parents during the war. These youth either left their parents by choice or were forced to leave by the armed forces to serve as porters. (5.3) In other cases, children were reported as having left or being lost during the period of their parent's displacement to Guinea.

Yeah, we started, you know, we started going apart. Children going so, mothers going so. ... So they began to know that their parents went to Guinea. They began to look for their parents... Yeah, the children began to come back to find their parents. Some of them, since then, they have not even seen them. They left there. Whether they have killed them or not, we don't know. (7.1)

This participant reports that the overall situation and loss of family members grew worse when the Guinea border was closed for a time in 2003. Others reported that many of these children's

parents were killed during the conflict, so children are now alone and “suffering, looking for food.” (1.1).

Finally, people generally discussed the threat of displacement and poverty during the war, particularly the sickness and starvation, which “killed most people,” especially children (15.1/7).

One older woman recounted:

Some children ... some people died, they go hide themselves. They go in the bush. They go hide themselves. No food. Nothing. They die in the bush.... Yes. Some people go hide themselves. Some old, old people hide themselves in the bush. They die there.... Yes! Plenty died in the bush here! Because no food. No food to eat. They died in the bush. (4.27)

One participant concisely stated, “The war affected many people. As long as you live around Ganta, you were affected from the attack in Ganta here.” (16.1)

Rape

Participants in all three sites in Ganta also reported rape happening in their communities during the war. Most people who described rape said that it was a common occurrence, saying that it was “the number one thing that we experienced” and was “very rampant.”

Several participants reported that rape was often done by multiple men with weapons, usually while women were fleeing in the bush.

[translator speaking] They [elderly women] said when they ran away in the bush, when the Freedom Fighters see them. More than five men can go out with one woman. They rape them. (6.2)

When they go in the bush, they grab women, they force them, they rape them. More than 4-5 person goes out with one woman during the war. (9.1)

Women were raped because, as I told you from the previous period, they were in arms. So anything they feel like doing, there’s nobody that had power at that time. Besides those that were in arms. They used to rape women because they were having their gun. (2.3)

These descriptions of rape illustrate how vulnerable women and girls were when they were running from their homes and potentially without the protection of their families or communities. The inability of men to protect women is also evident in the last statement, as the informant notes that men without guns did not have power.

Another elderly female community leader described the aftermath of rape:

But the time the war was on, they used to do it for common!...They used to do it but now, the time, the war finished now. But they used to do it....Oh. The government

forces....Yes. The both [rebels and government forces]. They grabbed one. When they grabbed one woman, they can do anything with it. So now they kill the woman; they go.... Sometimes they used to do it to small, small girls. They leave them. (4.11)

Not only was raping common, but women or girls were also often abandoned or killed after the rape. If the rape occurred outside of the victim's community, then they would likely be even more exposed and vulnerable than if they were nearby and able to be rescued by family or community members.

Some women and men addressed the longer-term impacts of the rape that happened during the war.

2003 is the war that I experienced. That I saw rapes. Women, I mean, soldiers raping children. Beating women. Forcing our teens from us. And they caught some of us today, we are still lying down on the ground, taking all our belongings. (15.1)

During the war, there were many things that were happening, like raping, where we force somebody to go out with a person. Or, in other words, we say sexual harassment. And even it traumatized most of the youth. They're (supposed to serve?) as leaders in the future. Now they have too much violence. (16.2)

In the first quote, children are again identified as the targets of rape by soldiers and women the victims of beating. This woman makes the connection between the rape, abduction, and violence of the war with the insecurity, poverty, and robbery that people face today. The second quote also makes a similar connection by noting that the rape and violence of the war has traumatized the youth, leaving them with too much violence for their elders to believe they can serve as leaders for the future of the country. These accounts demonstrate that the violence of the war is not a thing of the past for some rural Liberians, but rather a part of a dynamic process that influences their lives today and their beliefs of what the future will bring.

Killing

Most people interviewed reported that family members were killed during the war by fighting forces during periods of conflict in their communities and while they were displaced and in the bush. Many people reported that their children and other "innocent" people were killed.

And they killed one of my sons in town here in the war. ... Yeah, my son. They killed him. My first child.... So by beating for my mother – she died.... During the war. So, that are the things that happen in this town. For big town, they was killing people in the town. So that's the things that go on here. (4.2)

2003 - it was a terrible war because the enemy that came here, they were so awful. They brought a lot of weapons. A lot of weapons, that we couldn't even make it from the beginning. So, they really came up (?). They were really capable. They had too much. All the hospitals, the schools. They started burning them down. They started burning schools, the clinics, the hospitals. They started burning them down. They came and tortured our people... Yeah, they tortured our people. They killed them here! (7.2)

When the everything (?) war came, they killed him. They left me with three children. They cut his head off. (some women respond with grunts and other sounds) And I was pregnant, they told me, said, we're going to open your stomach so you will see the baby. (starts crying). So since then, nobody to help me, help making market. (crying) (15.1)

The second statement makes clear the total devastation that people experienced. They were targeted by the fighting forces and their community infrastructure and institutions were destroyed, which likely pushed them further into hiding in the bush without food, water or shelter. The last excerpt reveals both the gendered nature of killing a mother's child in front of her and an incredibly brutal and gendered nature of psychological torture and threat of killing the unborn within its mother's womb.

Others reported that people in the town not associated with the fighting forces also participated in killing. One participant spoke about a man that had killed a girl in the town for her body parts and stated that this happened during the war, although many others claim that this kind of ritualistic killing was not happening during the war (8.11). Another participant noted that "some of our friends were killing," indicating that people may have been using the conflict to engage in killing and looting or potentially fighting in self-defense or as part of the armed groups in the area. (9.1)

The reasons that participants gave for the killing included for property, "loving," and because of the desire of people doing the killing. One older male community leader said,

It is the desire of some of the people. It's what they like, just to do bad things to somebody. During the war time, they would just look at it, say, "I will do bad to you. I will do bad things to you." Then they would go and do it. So these are some of the things. They just want to do bad things to somebody to hurt your feelings.... Sometimes when somebody beats you, and they abuse you, they hurt your feelings.... That is what I said - it's just to satisfy themselves. (3.6)

This man's explanation for why some people use violence against others has an element of fatalism in it, a passivity that enables him to avoid contemplating the social significance of violent behavior. Instead, the decision to be violent becomes a matter of personal will or

preference. These explanations for the killing confirm the reports about killing happening in conjunction with armed robbery, rape, and because of the “power of the gun.”

Finally, as evidenced by the woman who was threatened with having her stomach cut open, the psycho-social trauma of witnessing the death of people remains a significant concern for some people.

They caught her ... before they could kill her husband, they caught her. She was sitting like this and they killed her husband. So from that day when she worries over it...and she's worrying too much now and making her to be sick... (8.9)

Targeted killing of civilians is illegal under international humanitarian law and international customary law and represents a devastating consequence of contemporary conflict. Often for outsiders, these killings are just a statistic of war. At the community levels, these murders have serious impacts on the mental health and physical and economic security of people in the post-conflict period. Widows and orphaned children are often most vulnerable to security threats and poverty in post-conflict Liberia.

Comparative Analysis of Findings from Monrovia and Ganta

The experiences of war described by informants were not that different in Monrovia and Ganta and mainly focused on overall war related violence, rape, and killing. Yet, there are a few findings within each category that stand out for each location. In Ganta, the experience of war was more defined by destruction of homes and communities, which caused displacement into the bush. This meant that people were vulnerable, living in extreme poverty, and exposed to attack by armed forces. In Monrovia, people spoke less of displacement, and it seems that any movement was between dangerous and safer areas in Monrovia rather than outside of the city to unsettled areas. The presence of artillery and stray gunfire seems to have been more of a threat in Monrovia than in Ganta.

Armed robbery was a serious problem in both Monrovia and Ganta, although men in Ganta spoke more directly of the social upheaval caused by the activities of young people with guns. One male community leader said that the youth stopped respecting older people because they had guns during the war, and he gave an example of how youth stole the shoes off of his feet and gave him their old slippers to illustrate the disrespect that adults endured due to the “power of the gun”.

Rape seems to have been more public in Monrovia, probably due to the fact that it is a more densely populated area, whereas rape in Ganta seems to have happened while women were displaced in the bush. Notably, in both Monrovia and Ganta, participants did not offer many explanations for why rape was happening besides the war itself and the power of the gun. This seems to indicate that people expected rape to happen during the war. Attributing this kind of mass torture of women to a specific period allows people to rationalize and cope with the levels of atrocity that they endured. Yet, we will see that rape continues into the post-conflict period, and many women are asking why it continues, as there is really no longer an easy explanation.

The reports of killing are generally similar, although people seem to put slightly more emphasis on the killing of family members in Ganta. These comparisons do not mean that war was worse in the urban setting than in the rural setting. It was perhaps experienced differently, and these distinctions are likely to have an impact on the kind of violence happening in the post-conflict period.

There are two findings about the nature of gender-based violence during the conflict that are important to the study of gender violence after the conflict. First, no one spoke of domestic violence happening during the war. This does not mean that it did not happen, but rather that people did not comment on it as a negative thing that happened to women during the war. Yet, domestic violence is a major concern for women in Monrovia and Ganta after the war. Second, rape often occurred in conjunction with armed robbery at night. The discussion of post-conflict gender violence below will demonstrate that the simultaneous perpetration of rape and armed robbery continues in the post-conflict period, especially at night. Nighttime is a time of insecurity and vulnerability for many in the post-conflict period due to the lack of protection by security forces like UNMIL and the Liberian National Police. This is preliminary evidence for the continuum of gender-based violence into the post-conflict period.

PART THREE: VIOLENCE AFTER THE WAR

With the exception of gun and artillery fire, most of the types of violence experienced during the war continue into the post-conflict period. Informants reported that fighting, killing, armed robbery, and rape continue in their communities at alarming rates. Although the fighting forces have disbanded, people now fear gangs of young men and ex-combatants that move through their

neighborhoods at night, and the nighttime is a period of lawlessness and insecurity for many, as it was during the war. Informants regularly expressed frustration with and confusion about this situation because they feel that the end of the armed conflict and stabilization of the government should have led to changes in their daily lives. For example, abandoned children are sometimes trafficked into Monrovia and are often tricked or exploited to sell on the streets for other people, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This mirrors the kind of exploitation of children that led to their participation in fighting forces. Many informants felt that the security forces, Liberian government, and international community have failed to bring peace to their communities. Participants have many other concerns about other types of violence, some of which will be highlighted here, and this paper does not mean to imply that post-conflict violence is limited to gender-based violence.

While many kinds of violent experiences and threats were reported during meetings with participants, my focus is on gender-based violence and direct and indirect security threats that influence gender violence. Rape and domestic violence are a major concern in both Monrovia and Ganta and are my focus in this section. Rape and domestic violence are extremely serious and probable threats to women and girls in post-conflict Liberia.

Monrovia – An Urban Case

Rape

Rape is a major concern in all three sites in Monrovia in the post-conflict period. While the widespread rape that fighting forces perpetrated during the conflicts no longer occurs, older men and ex-combatants continue to rape young girls and women at alarming rates and in sometimes overtly brutal and grotesque ways. In categorizing and analyzing rape in the post-conflict period, I have used the definition of rape from the Rome Statute, which defines rape as a crime against humanity. The definition is, “The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body. The invasion was committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power,

against such person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.”⁷⁰

While the specific circumstances of rape may vary, there are several common trends. Based on their testimonies, I have broken the participants’ descriptions of the post-conflict rape into several components: who rapes and how men rape, who is raped, the circumstances in which men rape, the impact or aftermath of the rape, how frequently men rape, and reasons given by participants about why men rape. These trends, while described independently, comprise a substantial description and analysis of the entire process of post-conflict rape.

Informants reported that rapists are mostly males who are significantly older than the female victim. Participants used words like “adult men”, “ageable men”, and “fifty year old man” to describe rapists. If a rapist was not considered “old”, then the informants would often give the age of the rapist and the age of the girl to demonstrate the age difference. For example, “Sometimes forty year old man goes, rapes three year old child,” (18.7) or “This twenty-eight years old man went out with a fourteen-years old girl.” (17.4) A few participants reported that ex-combatants and “cutlass men”⁷¹ are the ones that are raping. One female participant told of a particularly torturous rape allegedly committed by an ex-combatant.

Emergency case now. Like what happened here a few times. A ex-combatant went around two o’clock in the night. The day before yesterday night. He said, he’d given loving to somebody (?). He went and cut the girl through here (?) [gestures at her genitals] and cut her (head, hair?) and chopped, chopped it (from her, in front of her?). Then he called his friend to have the girl. Then from there, he got ten dollar pepper and he put it in the girl’s vagina. Then he turned around and bought two packs of candles and lit (?) it in the girl’s vagina. (18.17)

This gruesome story of rape also involves torture and mutilation. This girl was cut, gang raped, and had foreign objects intended to burn her shoved inside her vagina. The rape happened in the middle of the night in an area known as an “ex-combatant ghetto,” and obviously no one around came forward to rescue the girl during the rape. It also seems significant that the rapist was able to perform so many acts of violence on the girl, as if she was completely unable to fight back or flee over a long period of time. Finally, the highly violent, unrestrained and unlimited nature of raping of girls by combatants in the conflict and post-conflict period is alarmingly similar.

⁷⁰ “Elements of Crimes”, International Criminal Court, Adopted by the Assembly of States Parties, September 2002.

⁷¹ A cutlass is a tool with a long, curved blade used to cut grass and other plants in Liberia. Some informants referred to the groups of boys and men that rob homes in the night using a cutlass as a weapon as “cutlass men.”

Other common threads were the incidence of gang rape. When an informant would share a specific account of rape or discuss the general phenomenon of rape, she would often describe situations of two or more men involved in the violence. For example, “two of them raped her” (25.3) or “two or three men on you” (24.2). The method of gang rape is also similar to the way men raped during the war. During the war, fighting forces would attack a family or woman in groups and rape them multiple times, as described above. It appears that boys and men are continuing to rape in groups in the post-conflict period, although they are not raping exclusively in groups as there are some cases where a man raped a girl while he is alone, usually in the girl’s home. This indicates that the use of rape as a tool to develop group bonding and solidarity between men during war⁷² may also be used for similar purposes among men during peacetime.

A few participants also shared concerns about incest:

Uncle say, Where you coming from? They are coming from market, video. Uncle will go and (carry that one in arm and ... her), rape that one. When they go ask, What happened to you? I went in with Uncle, Uncle called me and carried me inside there. He put his thing, he put it in my butt. Oh, your Uncle! Yes. That other case was here. (22.6)

Some men with their own daughters. Yeah.... Well, it don’t happen often but since I’ve been in this community, the – I know about three persons that and they do that... We sit down – one of them, one of them did it to his daughter. And the Women’s Action Group wanted to take action against the man. But when we looked, he hide the girl. Up till this time we have not seen the girl. But if we get the girl, we’ll be able to file the case. So they took the girl and sent the girl to a different place. (18.7)

What is most significant about these accounts of incest are that girls are at high risk in their own homes, as well as the ease with which rape and incest could be covered from public view, by literally hiding the girl. In most cultures, incest is always shockingly aberrant, and this seems to be no different in Liberia. That incest was not reported as happening during the war and that several participants commented on the incidence of *known* cases of incest reflects that there may be a generalized problem of incest. Major questions arise about why men, fathers, uncles, and brothers would sexually abuse and rape their own daughters, nieces, and sisters and what this says about male masculinity in the post-conflict period.

The kinds of rape also vary, ranging from vaginal and anal rape to sexual torture. The above accounts have illustrated both types of rape, and the following two accounts offer further examples.

⁷² Cockburn, 36.

Then we have another, a report where, even right on our beach here, a four year old child went to toilet. And on the beach, because we don't have toilet facility in this community. We ...have few, can't be able to afford (?) everyone. So, um, the little girl went to toilet, to find someone came from nowhere, we don't know, and they went and they carried (?) her and had her there. Sodomized her.... Yes, on the beach. Four years old girl. You know, and, uh, we find that there was a girl that people sodomized and they also raped her, you know, through the two holes. You know, the rectum and the vagina. And all of those things, they do it to the children. And it's very rampant in our community and also in other areas. (20.5)

Like one woman way to the coast (?). She liked to pepper the child in the, in the vagina. So, somebody came and told me. They said, "One woman down there, she can pepper the child.".... Pepper. She can take the pepper, beat it, and put it in the girl's vagina. (18.6)

These accounts of rape demonstrate how vulnerable girls can be in their homes and communities. In the first excerpt, the girl was attacked while using the beach as a toilet because her community does not have any latrines in any safe places. While in such a vulnerable position, she was raped at least twice and likely severely harmed. The second account illustrates how women can rape and sexually torture girls, as rape is defined rape as "penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body."⁷³ Although this kind of rape by women was less common, it indicates that girls are vulnerable to a variety of forms of sexual abuse by men, boys and women.

All of the examples of rape included in this section show that rape has not ceased to happen in post-conflict Monrovia, and that it continues to happen in ways that include elements of torture and gang rape, much like what happened during the conflict.

Just as men vary their methods of rape, they also rape in a variety of settings. There was less consistency in the circumstances of rape that women and men gave than in the kinds of rape. The stated physical locations of and circumstances of rape and sexual assault include in the street, in the home while sleeping at night, in the night in ex-combatant ghettos, in the fields while gathering greens, on the beach, anytime at night while you are walking alone, and, most commonly, during armed robbery. Yet, men can rape women virtually anywhere at any hour. One participant says:

[translator] She said, the rape case is rampant. She said when you're walking after eight or nine night. You alone. Those bad boys then, they will just call you. They

⁷³ Elements of Crime, Rome Statute.

will take off your (parts?) [skirt] Tie and rape you....Almost two or three men on you when you alone.... Anytime they see you alone, you a woman walking alone, they see you with nobody in the night (?), they grab you. Four to five men on you alone.... Yeah, they tie you and close up your mouth so you can't talk. (24.2)

She's pregnant. She was raped. She went to go for greens to sell in the wheat grass (?). When she went, two of the tappers, Firestone tappers – that's an American company that has their Firestone. Two of the tappers were tapping. When she started picking the greens, they grabbed her. The two of them raped her. And she's pregnant. No medication. No food. They took her to me. (25.3)

These accounts reflect both a well founded fear of being alone at night, as well as a woman's vulnerability while being alone during the day, including while engaging in livelihood activities to support herself. The wide range of contexts given by participants indicates a great sense of uncertainty and insecurity because rape can essentially occur anytime and anywhere. Often these rapes occur while women and girls are going about their daily routines, such as going to the beach to use the toilet because there are no latrines, going to the field to collect greens, or even sleeping. It seems that the most insecure times for women and girls are any time that they are alone, day or night, when there is an armed robbery taking place, and for some when they are in their own homes.

People reported that girls are the most frequent targets of rape, although it is unclear if men and women consider women as possible targets of rape. That is, they may not consider marital rape to be rape, or they may not think that women who have already had sex or have been raped can be raped again. For example, one female participant said, "But the people found out that he was not the doer of the act [of rape of a girl]. So, they found the girl, they said that she was not even a virgin" (26.3). While it is not clear if this means that she could not have been raped according to community standards, it does indicate that a girl's or woman's sexual history has some influence on *how* people process and judge the incident of rape. What is also clear is that people believe that young girls are the most vulnerable and most frequent rape victims. Almost all participants that described rape as a problem in their communities referred to the rape of "small children", "the girls", "the little girl", "the little child", "daughters", "baby", "the eight year old", and less frequently, "a boy" or "old lady" or "their women." One participant was extremely upset as she shared about the continued phenomenon of mass rape:

At least we've got some security now. We have elected government. But today the violence still goes on. They're still raping the girls! They're still raping the women! They rape as low as seven years old. They rape eleven. They rape ten. They rape nine. (25.2)

In part girls are seen as particularly vulnerable because of their lack of awareness about rape and their powerlessness within the community. For example, a female participant explained how men rape little girls by saying, “maybe because the cutlass men will pull the little child maybe with a biscuit or candy. Or sometimes they show you small money. Your mother and father is not around. They carry you.” (26.3) This seems to indicate that young girls who are not under the immediate protection of their parents are more vulnerable. Yet, as will be discussed further below, some girls are directly exploited by their parents or relatives through prostitution or household labor as an income generation strategy and also through incest. For example, a girl that works in the home of another family may be at risk. One participant said, “Sometimes a girl child living with a man and working in the home. While they’re sleeping in the night, he creeps to her, the little girl. It happens here often, plenty!” (18.7)

Participants were also very insistent about the negative impact that rape has on women and girls. For communities in Monrovia, the impact of rape takes social, physical, and psychological forms. On a social level, the most common complaint was that rape was “damaging” and “spoiling” the girls and “polluting” the community. One woman said, “He raped a eight-years old child, and he damaged the girl’s whole womb” (17.4), and another says, “The girl children spoil” (18.6).

Men’s violent rape of young girls and women can also involve cutting of the vagina and insertion of foreign objects or materials, which resulted in the incidence of fistula and permanent disability or even death for some participants and their family members. For example, in one community a woman said, “they raped a sixty years old lady that she doo doo on herself,” indicating the woman now suffers from fistula. (25.2) Some girls become pregnant from rape and have no support or are too young to carry a child so have abortions or miscarriages.

The experience of rape often has a lasting psychological impact on rape survivors. One leader of a women’s local NGO for war-affected women said,

“I was responsible. I had my decent home in the city (?). I had my car. My children went to good school. For African woman, I fed my children three, four times a day. They never begged. But they raped my daughter to death. They took away all my property. They brought me down to zero.” (25.4)

While some people make attempts to respond to rape, many feel that there is nothing that can be done. More often than not, justice for rape survivors is critically compromised. Overall

systemic responses and community interactions with the police and courts will be covered in more detail below. Within the context of these specific discussions about rape, a few people said that they could bring rape survivors to the clinic or to international or local NGOs or community groups that have child protection or gender-based violence programming. Sometimes people report the crime to the police or the Women and Children Protection Unit of the police, but participants often talked about the ineffectiveness of this option because perpetrators were back on the streets within a few days. Some participants said:

“And they [government, police] can do nothing about it.” (20.3)

“There has been nothing done about these things. When you go, sometimes the parents find out that going to the court will bring a whole lot of long problems for them and they don’t have money to pursue the case and whatsoever.” (20.5)

“We went the next day, they released that man. (crying) They released him.” (25.1)

“They called me on my cell. I called 911. Where the area? Where are you? Where you know we went in? By the time they could get there, the crime was finished!” (25.3)

“So, that case, they carried to the UNMIL police, and they carried the man to [prison]. After certain time, it was resolved, and the man is now home.” (26.3)

At times it is the parents who compromise justice for their girls. Several participants reported that parents can take money from the rapist or his family in return for their silence and inaction in prosecuting the crime. For example one woman said,

“But this girl, she was insane. She’s not that normal. So the parents said that they will compromise the case because the girl is not that normal. And they accepted money. They took \$150 USD. Just to destroy evidence of the rape case” (17.4).

Another informant framed the response to rape in a strictly medical way: “He raped a seven years old girl. That was also reported to the GBV and also the Child Welfare Committee. We went, and we intervened...They got her resolved. The doctor said she was going to be ok” (26.3). What is unclear in this statement is whether the response stops at a girl’s medical evaluation or whether there is also a comparable judicial response. Additionally, a few community activists and volunteers that I spoke with shared how they had demonstrated at government buildings to raise awareness and call for help from the government and international community to respond to the epidemic of rape of young girls in their communities.

While there were a range of types of and responses to rape, almost universally people say that rape is “rampant” in their communities and increasing. However, when asked to compare this experience to the war experience, they said that there was more rape during the war. Yet, their narratives reveal that despite a diminishing of frequency and scale, the rape of the post-conflict period has a decidedly war-like intensity because of the use of torture, gang rape, and the prevalence of rape that happens during armed robberies. All of these things characterized rape during the war. One religious leader pointed to the experience of war:

Raping is very rampant around. And most of this raping is done by ex-combatants. Yes, we don't know because of the things they went through (?). To think of the ways, to think of what they went through. And the kinds of concepts that actually develop in their humanity. We don't know how many drugs or whatsoever is responsible. We cannot actually tell why. But one of the things we see rampant is raping. And that is done mostly to young girls. Young girls. Sometimes under-aged even, you know, we see that happening. (28.1)

One participant said, “It has not stopped. If anything, it's worse. Because I see that we should be secure by now because we have security.... But it's worse than before because before, it was war” (25.2). When asked to give specific rates, women who work with community action groups said that they receive between five and fourteen and sometimes twenty two cases a month in their communities. They also reported that sodomy (sex between men) is reported about two times a month, and in two communities women reported that two to three cases of incest had happened.

In general, people said that they hear about cases, especially with young girls, every day. This general awareness and concern about rape happening at high rates was confirmed by members of a community clinic, who said that they also receive cases daily. The nurse said, “Every two, almost every day those cases can come in. If they come, we just have to transfer them because we don't handle...It is a bigger problem, you know, so we don't handle it with the clinic. We send them to the hospital.” (31.3). As will be discussed in more detail below, the inability of community clinics to handle rape means that women and girls must travel to larger hospitals outside of their communities in order to receive treatment. It is also significant that the nurse said that rape was a “bigger problem,” indicating that it is happening at such high rates that a local response would be inadequate.

Perhaps most notable are the people that said rape *was not* happening. A group of Ghanaians living in an extremely impoverished part of Monrovia said that they do not see rape

happening after the war, and two male community leaders (one government and one local) said that rape is not happening in their areas. Rarely, one or two older women in focus groups would also say that they did not see any bad things happening to women after the war. This seems to indicate that rape cases are either not being reported to community leaders of some areas or groups, or that those leaders are not honestly reporting the incidence of rape in their communities. The issues of reporting and response to gender-based violence will be covered below.

Most people said that they did not know why rape was happening. One woman said that children were being paid for sex because “the children doesn’t have anything. They are not eating well.” (20.6). Another man said that because of poverty young men are accepting money to have sex with other men. He says, “but if you had to ask one or two people they will tell you, ‘Oh, my parents are not working. My parents cannot send me to school. There’s no job. The government cannot provide job. So how do you expect me to survive?’” In these explanations, there is an evident blurring of the line among rape, sexual exploitation and prostitution. What this seems to indicate is that people consider sexual exploitation to be a forced arrangement entered into due to a lack of other options, much like how girls would enter into sexual relationships with combatants during the war. Yet, sometimes people explained rape as an expression of men’s power. An older man said, “And some men don’t have the patience – they rape women” (19.6).

These few guesses at why rape is happening – because of poverty, the impact of the war, males refusal to respect the integrity and voice of women and girls – stand out in comparison to the majority of people who are confused and concerned about why rape continues to happen after the war. Most women do not offer any clear explanations regarding the causes of rape.

In conclusion, the most important aspects of post-conflict rape in Monrovia seem to be that it is happening frequently to young girls at high rates and that it continues to happen in violent and brutal ways. Perhaps the most revealing statement was made by the local NGO leader, who said that rape is effectively worse now than it was during the war even though that it is happening less. Here, post-conflict rape was worse because it is not supposed to happen and women are supposed to be secure. This indicates that rape may have been accepted as part of the

war in Liberia, an unfortunate byproduct that women had to bear. Now that the armed conflict has finished, women are beginning to wonder about the causes and justice of “peacetime” rape.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence was a second concern that participants reported when asked about the “bad things” that are happening to women. Unlike rape, the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence has increased since the end of the war, and most people believe that this is due to poverty. In this section, I have broken the process of domestic violence into its various components: the kinds of violence that men use against women, the stated causes of and circumstances surrounding domestic violence, the impact of domestic violence on women, the rates of domestic violence, and the stated reasons for domestic violence.

Participants in Monrovia overwhelmingly stated that the “African man”, husbands, and boyfriends regularly beat their women, wives, and girlfriends. “Beating” was the term predominantly used to describe the kind of violence that men perpetrate against the women in their lives. Yet, despite the prevalence of beating, participants noted that domestic violence could take other forms, such as denial of support, destruction or appropriation of livelihoods, restriction of movement, abandonment, and other forms of more violent abuse that result in miscarriages or death. For example,

Sometimes you find a man married his wife, eh? Beats on the woman and damaged her legs. Take the vein, you know, cut her and the vein has problems. She has the legs problem that she can’t walk. Then he leaves her and went and married another woman. For more than ten to fifteen years, she’s just like that. (17.5)

They beat them. Beat the woman. Sometimes the man can beat the woman while the woman’s pregnant; she will have abortion [miscarriage]. Then the next thing is – sometimes, the man will not beat the woman, but he will refuse to feed the woman. And the woman don’t have no means of getting anything. Sometimes the man can pry??? the woman for going around with friends, and he says, “Don’t go around with friends and friends will not come to you.” (18.10)

Sometimes if they want – I know one girl.... She was selling. The man went and took the money. Stole the market money from her and go support his girlfriend with the money. And left the girl....she’s not selling. And the woman he carried the money to, the woman leaves. He comes back to the girl now, no money. (18.10)

These accounts reveal the range of types of domestic violence. Beating that resulted in permanent disabilities and damage like that of the woman in the first excerpt was not uncommon; in the poorest and most overcrowded community, several women told stories that

were similar to this one. The second and third stories illustrate denial of support and control over women's economic and social lives, as even women who are working towards economic self-sufficiency may have their income stolen to support a man's girlfriend. Men supporting women outside of their relationships was a common complaint. One woman's story reflects the continuum and intensity of violence over time, and it is worth quoting at length.

Like as for me. I'm a living witness to that. My oldest daughter, she was 29 years old when she died this gone (?) August. It's because from beating that she died. Because she had a boyfriend, and this boyfriend beat her! They were living together. This boyfriend beat her ...He beat her and stepped in her!... So, when she came, after two, three days, she hid it from me. After a week, then she started getting sick, small, small, small, small. So I took her out to the hospital. After two days, the fever was too high in her. Then when she said, "Mama, I want to vomit." When I put the bucket down, that girl vomited pure blood!...." So we took her to the hospital. She spent – she was on tubes. She never used to get that. They pumped that blood, pumped that blood, pumped that blood until that blood finished. So, she spent two weeks in the hospital, and we got her back....But sometimes it used to bother her. Sometimes we take her to the hospital and take – we try, try, no way. So the last one now, she was pregnant at that time, and it started on her again..... So that Sunday, it becomes worse. She vomited until almost filling a big bucket, full of (?) blood. So that Sunday, I rushed her to the hospital....She spent one month, two days in the hospital. From hospital, we carried to JFK [national hospital], they took the test. Everything inside her stomach – her whole stomach inside was rotting. (audible responses from other participants) Because the blood. You could see it. ...They said the baby was lying there, it was not correct. You can see everything. But inside her stomach, everything was rotten. So you can see the blood just (something unclear – passing?) like that – pah, pah – inside her. ...So now every day she would cough up blood. Because when that blood, she vomited the blood, then no blood again. They've got to give her another blood. So that once she was on this, she died. March 25. She died from it. So I'm living with this today. Beating is not good....

No, we didn't do anything to him [the boyfriend]! I only called him the time they gave us this (?) in the hospital. I called him on the phone. I said, where you beat (?), you beat my daughter from that time. And nothing happened. He came one time again when the girl was in the hospital the first time it happened. When the girl came from the hospital, she came to me. She was there, so that (inaudible), "Mama, I'm hungry." I said, "Ok, well then go buy things on the road." When she went out with this girl on the road, [he] stopped the girl and beat her right from the hospital. Reach her when the girl went off. We grabbed him that day and carried him to the police station. He spent four days in cell. And when then the people came and talk to him, I said "You're leaving?" (?) And I left him. He went. When the girl was sick again for the second time, when I called him, I said, "Where the place you beat my daughter, now she's in the hospital. I don't know whether she will live or she will not live....So she's staying in the hospital." That boy never stepped there, until the day the girl died, we were going to go bury her, before I saw him. I tell you. And they've got a child! The little girl is with him now. Three years old child. So I'm a living witness to that.

Beating is not good for (small people?). Because sometimes you beat that child there. You will not know what happens to that person. A 29 years old child just lost like that (?). She left two children....And she used to overlook it. I used to tell her, I said, "If he hit on you, (don't try?) for it." She said, "Mama, nothing will happen." And last thing, she was under the ground. So I am a living witness. (20.9)

In many ways, this history speaks for itself: the woman's daughter was abused repeatedly which caused internal bleeding and led to her death. What is most shocking about this horrific account is that the young daughters of the deceased woman are now living with the father who beat their mother to death. This raises questions about girls' and boys' experiences of domestic violence, although most people did not discuss this. The mother's admonition at the end of her account reveals that women may often disregard patterns of serious abuse to their own detriment. Moreover, her repeated statement that she is a "living witness" means that she now feels compelled to testify publicly about the consequences of gender violence.

Police officers and clinic staff, who are often responding to a large number of cases, said that women who have been abused by their partners often have scratches, bruises, "beating marks", and cuts or gashes. One police officer said, "They beat you, beat you until they cut over your eyes. They cut your fists...They beat them. They beat them. They box on them. They gash them. *They gash them* [his emphasis]. I receive cases all the time" (25.2) A female nurse said that weapons like sticks or cutlasses are occasionally used by the men to inflict wounds on women.

Unlike with rape, participants had a much clearer sense of when and why domestic violence happens in the post-conflict period. Poverty and men's inability to generate income to support the family was the predominate explanation for most participants. That is, men beat their wives not necessarily because they blame them for being unemployed, but because the women may put pressure on them to provide the daily support for the family, which frustrates men. Men report that this frustration and anger at their situation causes them to be violent. One woman's response covers a range of reasons given by many informants:

You know, what happens is that you find out that some of these men now, you know, when the woman asks for, you know, children's food money for the day, the child support or, you know, the daily support. You find them, some of them, they get so agitated because they don't have the money to give. You know? You are not working, you don't have the money. But the woman expects you. Sometimes because you see that you are, you know, also the breadwinner for the family. She has children from you. So sometimes when she asks, you get agitated, and you start beating on the woman. And some of them, they have, you know, their girlfriends out

there. They will go leave the woman. Do a whole lot of things. They don't have nothing to give her. Most of the time, when she tries to ask, you know, they beat on her. And then sometimes, you will find out that some of these women too, you know, when the man, um, sometimes ask them, you know, sometimes when the woman is so exhausted, they ask you for sex. And you tell them, "Look, I'm tired today." And they will beat you for that. So many things they beat women for in the community. Sometimes these cases come, and we talk about these cases, you know. You find out that people just beat women for little or nothing. Little or nothing, they will just beat women for. And then they think sometimes that this woman is so high head, so I'm going to beat her. Sometimes some of them get drunk and come and beat on the woman. You see, so many things they do. Some of them take in drugs and they put in liquor. They come home. When they come home, you know, they just beat on the woman. They see the woman like a, you know, something that they can beat on. So that's what most of them can do. (20.8)

This woman explains well that women can be beaten by their husbands for any reason, which means that they may not know when or why their husbands will use violence against them. Although she does not discuss this directly, she insinuates that men see women as having an inherently lower almost non-human status when she said that men see women as "something" that they are able to beat. Other stated reasons for why men become violent in their homes include women's anger at men's refusal to send children to school, women "going outside to look for money", men not being able to control their temper, women ill-treating men for not being able to provide, women not doing enough to generate income for the home, the effects of the war, and men "who too have lost their color." (19.8). Overall, men blamed women as the trigger for their violent behavior, and rarely openly claimed responsibility for their own actions. Many women also hold themselves responsible for the violence against them by citing the activities that they do that cause violence. This demonstrates the power dynamics of a patriarchal system and women's tendency to internalize their low social status and men's tendency to use their powerful status to oppress women.

In relating their experiences of domestic violence, participants mentioned several specific situations, in addition to a married couple within their home, where domestic/intimate partner violence is likely to occur. These include boyfriends and girlfriends living together, when a man refuses to pay after commercial sex, at night, and when men have multiple women that they see.

Participants unanimously reported that women are the targets of violence in the home, although some discussed how men can be verbally abused by women that they are married to or with whom they live. One participant said, "Even though women facing more problems, men are more bad to the women. But sometimes men face problems with their women also." (30.7)

Interestingly, very few mentioned violence that is directed towards children, either from the mother or father. This may be due to the fact that women more frequently discipline children or that men and women do not consider physical discipline of children to be violent. However, we will see that the discussion of child abuse was more prominent in Ganta. Of the women that are victims of domestic violence, those without families living nearby or who are very young may be more vulnerable than older women who do have outside support networks. One participant said:

Yes, young! You find a child very young and give the child to a man just to get the daily bread. And some men, they have their wives and things with them. But being the woman, don't have no background (?). The war has killed her parents, they beat on you. They say, anywhere you want to go, you can go. You don't have nowhere to go. (17.4)

This woman reveals that girls who marry young may be in abusive relationships that become more severe because the girl is limited in her options and support network outside of the marriage, in part because she has no family or place to go. In a sense, it seems that a relationship like this is a form of bondage.

Domestic violence happens frequently across all three sites in Monrovia, although in some communities it happens much more than in others. Unlike rape, almost all informants said that it is increasing in frequency since the war. When female participants were asked how frequently domestic violence happens in their communities, they would answer, almost frantically, “Every day, every hour, everywhere”, “every day that breaks, it's increased”, “It's rampant. It's too much”, and “almost every day.” The reports from community workers validate these claims. Women who participate in community response programs reported that they receive between two and fifteen cases of domestic violence *every day*. As with rape, one of the male community leaders said that domestic violence is “very hard to see” in his community, despite the fact that other community members said that it happens every. Although people reported that domestic violence happens every day, it seems that extremely violent incidents are more rare, with beating to death happening “not too much” in one community and extreme violence such as the “bursting” of a woman's eye not happening regularly in another. Yet, in the community where beating to death is rare, a woman said that women have to go to the hospital or clinic often because of beating. One nurse in the third community said, “[Domestic violence] was controllable [during the war], but right now it is rampant.”

Whereas participants believe young girls to be the greatest victims of rape, they believe women to be the greatest victims of domestic violence. These women are also sisters, daughters, and mothers to other women, who have told their stories for some because they are no longer alive to tell them. Domestic violence seems to be increasing in the post-conflict period, and it can range from daily battery to murder. There seems to be little to no justice, and in some cases abandonment and lifelong poverty, for women who are permanently disabled by their husbands. Women face many barriers to justice in their communities, at the courts, and at the police in their attempts to end violence in their homes, as will be discussed in more detail in section four of this paper. That people believe that poverty and men's unemployment is the root cause of domestic violence indicates that few men and women are openly addressing the underlying causes of men's violence against women, which are women's low social status and men's need to reassert their dominant masculine identity in an environment where they feel disempowered. By focusing on men's employment alone without addressing the underlying gender relations in post-conflict Monrovia, there seems to be no resolution in sight for women without an immediate upsurge in development. At the moment, attention needs to focus on how to raise awareness about the causes of domestic violence and to empower women to seek just resolutions of violence in their communities and country.

Direct Security Threats

While the focus of this paper is on gender violence in the post-conflict period, there are other kinds of direct security threats that participants reported that may have influence on or relationships to gender-based violence. These are physical assault and armed robbery. The issues of post-conflict security and rule of law in Liberia warrant entirely separate studies. Yet, the public use of violence is important to discuss within the context of gender-based violence because both public and private violence relate to changes in gender identities and to the broader social reconciliation processes of post-conflict periods.

Physical Assault

Participants reported that there is a culture of fighting in the post-conflict period. This public violence can happen between men and men, between men and women, and between women and women, although it is unclear if fighting always means physical fighting, fighting with weapons,

or sometimes just verbal fighting. Participants said that fighting happens frequently on the street among the youth, especially ex-combatants. One man said,

There is beating. People have become accustomed to fighting, just anything. Fighting. Yeah. It's very common. Any small thing, any small confusion whatsoever. Misunderstanding. It will result into fighting, yeah. You know, that kind of thing. It is so common around. (28.2).

Others said that they believed that some ex-combatants had not changed their ways from the war, that they still “get that habit in them” (29.1) or are “still not de-traumatized” (31.1), which means that war-like fighting may continue through inter-personal relationships. One older man said that there is “No good peace here.” (29.7).

We can begin to see how public violence between men can transition into private violence between men and women in the account told by one woman.

And most of the time you see that these little boys are passing around sometimes beat the little girls. Sometimes if a boy wants to talk with the little girl, and the girl is not interested in this particular boy. And because he (?) finds out that this girl is in the streets, everyday, he wants to use that force to talk with this girl. If the girl says no, sometimes he jumps on the girl to beat the girl. Because he finds out that this girl is not out of menstruation. Or maybe he looks at the girl's background, home (?) background, it's not clear if it's good. So he looks around at (who owns this girl?). So all the time he beats on the girl. (30.6)

There are two things that stand out in her account. The first is that the boy chooses to become violent against the girl because she avoids speaking with and having a relationship with him. Rather than discussing his feelings and respecting her decision, he beats her, like he is punishing or trying to coerce her. The second is when the woman says that the boy looks to see if the girl's background at home is good, if there is anyone that “owns” her. This seems to say that if no one owns her, then the boy feels more confident in being violent with her. What this issue of ownership and protection mirrors is the situation during the war when women and girls needed to be aligned with a combatant or group of combatants in order to protect themselves. Has the family or marriage replaced the armed group as women's sole source of protection in post-conflict Liberia? A culture of violence during the day and on the streets, where people resort to physical fighting to handle conflict, can lead to a culture of violence and men's reliance on force to resolve conflict within people's homes. Insecurity and impunity increase when security forces, police, and the courts also fail or are unable to protect people in their communities.

Armed Robbery

Public violence that occurs on the streets during the day reaches into the home at night through armed robbery. Armed robbery and the violence that is associated with it is significant in the discussion of post-conflict violence for several reasons. First, along with rape and domestic violence, it was one of the major concerns of most people at all three sites in Monrovia. Second, armed robbery occurs mostly during the night, which is also a very insecure time for women, as highlighted in the above section on rape. Finally, men at times rape the women in the homes that they rob, and this dual threat of robbery and rape has roots in the war, illustrating the very real continuum for women of conflict violence into the post-conflict period.

Participants' explanations of armed robbery reflect the intensity of fear and insecurity that they constantly feel in the post-conflict period. For example, one man said, "Armed robbers just come in, they put everybody under gunpoint, they ... steal your properties, and if there's any resistance, you are killed. If there's even no resistance, they still kill you." (28.1) Some women reported rape as happening during the robberies in their area, and the fear of rape and the horrors of one's imagination is evident in one woman's explanation of what happens during the robbery:

Uh, we hear that they beat you, they chop you, they have their cutlass. They chop you. They chop you. They harm you. If you have anything, they take it away. If they have lucky, when they get in your home, they do every bad thing that you're thinking about, they do it to you. Sometimes they rape you. They take what they want to take away. And you become the victim. (26.2)

It almost seems as if everything bad that the women are thinking about is likely to be what happened to them during the war. Others described the "silent weapons" – cutlasses, sticks, and sharp objects - that the young men and ex-combatants use to threaten people almost every night. Interestingly, when asked about rates, most people said that armed robbery happens every night, but that it happens that frequently in areas *around* their community, not *in* their community. Despite the fact that people do not report the armed robbery as happening regularly in their communities, they are still perpetually fearful of the threat of such violence, which is illustrated by the comments of one woman who stated, "we're never in peace here." (20.11)

Indirect Security Threats

A non-violent indirect security threat is something that makes an individual vulnerable to future exploitation and violence. As with direct security threats, participants listed numerous and very

serious indirect threats to their security, which include poverty, social upheaval from the war, sexual exploitation, and widowhood. Many of these issues warrant their own space for discussion and are beyond the scope of this study. Yet, several of these indirect security threats have an impact on post-conflict gender-based violence because they make women, girls, and sometimes boys more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. These are situations rooted in poverty, which influence women's and girls' reproductive and productive activities, as well as in the impact of war on communities and individuals.

Poverty and Survival

On a basic level, economic underdevelopment and post-conflict poverty in Liberia means that most parents are unable to provide for their children, who then must search for other ways to provide for themselves. This was a common concern expressed by men and women because they struggle with what children have turned to – stealing, prostitution, and forced marriage or labor – and felt that their children no longer respect them. For example, one man said, “Most of the parents are actually there but because probably from the effect of the war, they have become financially down...As a result they cannot take care of their children, especially girls, the way they are supposed to at all.” (28.3). Another woman said, “No control of my children then. Because I ain't got to support them” (26.8). These coping mechanisms seem to take a particularly risky form for girls. School-aged girls may then “do things out of the way” and choose to engage in commercial sex to earn income. In other cases, parents may force their daughters into prostitution. One woman said, “You find single parents. You find a woman with four, five children. She don't even have the hand to take charge of her children. For that reason, they send the children on the streets to become a prostitute.” (17.3) Participants reported that both boys and girls engage in prostitution, and that men are seeking commercial sex with both. Engaging in prostitution rather than going to school can lead to teenage pregnancy and increase one's risk of sexually transmitted diseases; the clinic staff interviewed in one community said that 75% of people that come in have some type of sexually transmitted disease. Other participants reported that young men often deny pregnancies, increasing the incidence of single mothers, who, in turn, may become more vulnerable to exploitation or who may need to engage in commercial sex to support themselves. Teenage pregnancy also increases the financial

burdens on already strained families, and also decreases the likelihood that girls will go to school.

War Destruction and Social Disruption

The war also broke down social institutions and destroyed community infrastructure, which leaves women, boys, and girls vulnerable at several levels. One male community leader said, “Actually the war really – it went into all fabrics of life. It went into the home, separated husband from a wife, children from the parents. ...So, you see, every fabric of life here is affected. Broke down *all* institutions [his emphasis].” (23.2) The physical destruction of war means that Liberians face severe underdevelopment as they begin rebuilding their country. A lack of public educational facilities and the high cost of private education means that many children are not in school. Spending their days on the street, children may then be used for other economic or exploitative purposes.

Additionally, an acute lack of basic infrastructure throughout all of Liberia means that people are often without access to clean water and sanitation and the poor condition of roads means that security forces do not have access to them. Without latrines or running water, participants reported having to go to the bathroom on beaches or in fields and bath at night beside their homes, which leaves girls and women extremely vulnerable to rape, as evidenced by the accounts of rape above.

The social changes brought about by war make women and men vulnerable in different ways. One male community leader stressed how vulnerable widows are in the post-conflict society. He said,

Most of them, they [fighters] killed their husbands and they don't have husband again, so they remain vulnerable to society....Because they have no option. ...And nobody to take care, so they themselves, psychologically, they will begin to do things out of the way. They have to look for ends meet. So anybody that comes across them will take them for nothing. (19.7)

What is interesting in his comment is the use of the word “to” and not “in” when he says “vulnerable to society.” In a sense, rather than being a vulnerable person within a passive, larger society, he is saying that the society is active and prone to preying on older women who are alone. I hypothesize that the same situation exists for young teenage mothers and girls who are without the immediate protection of their family.

A second issue is the impact that the war has had on younger generations and on men. Many men and women feel that the youth no longer have respect for them, and a few women expressed their concern as mothers. One woman said, “So as a result now, we the parents, we the people, we the mothers then for our children then, we the ones that are suffering now. Because if a child goes off, you looking giving advice to her, she can’t hear you” (20.2).

Men also expressed feelings of confusion and worry about and alienation from the social change brought about through women’s empowerment and talk of the guarantee of women’s reproductive and productive rights.⁷⁴ One man shared his frustration about sexual relations with his wife: “The woman refuse me sexually. If I take her now, she says, ‘Oh, the man raped me.’ And then I’m going to go jail. So this program should come and try to come program and teach them to understand... You cannot refuse me, I don’t get no other woman.” (30.7). Women can also reinforce this confusion and sense of disempowerment; one woman explained, “Some of the women then regard the men to be stupid. They stand in the street and abuse the man. Make the man ashamed all the time.” (18.11). In post-conflict Liberia men face very real challenges to their former privileged and powerful status within their relationships and communities. Men like the first informant who are unable to adjust to contemporary changes in women’s sense of reproductive empowerment can become frustrated, and his desires to reassert control or revert to his former position could lead to violence against his wife. Men who feel publicly ashamed by women are likely to connect this sense of humiliation to what they experienced during the war, and they may also violently seek to regain a lost masculine identity.

In some situations, economic roles have changed within families, and men questions the impact of this. One man asked, “What about the [working] mother who is not prepared to give requisite attention to the child?” He continued to explain that women’s absence in the home can lead to children entering prostitution as well as fighting in the home, as if women are solely responsible for raising children and protecting society against these negative outcomes. In reality, the economic situation of the post-conflict period may require women to work outside of the home, sometimes as the only breadwinner of the family. Yet, this man insinuated that it was the woman’s responsibility to maintain order in the family and in society, and her failure when there is disorder and harmful activity happening. This reflects a sense of self-disempowerment

⁷⁴ Rights guaranteed through new rape laws and expressed through the post-conflict economic reality where many women are working for INGOs and in other livelihoods and provide the sole income for the family.

on behalf of the man, who may not take responsibility for family development and outcomes even though he is not able to contribute as much financially as he may have been able to in the past .

Informants in Monrovia, which a densely populated urban area, report that rape, armed robbery, fighting, and insecurity continue and domestic violence has increased in the post-conflict period. The case of Ganta will demonstrate that rural regions face similar but slightly different threats due to the nature of the experiences of war in that area.

Ganta – A Rural Case

Rape

Participants in all three communities reported that rape is a problem affecting women and girls in the post-conflict period. While rape seems to be happening less frequently in Ganta than in Monrovia, participants reported that men are also raping young girls in Ganta. This section describes and analyzes what participants said about who rapes and how they rape, who is raped, the circumstances in which men rape, the impact or aftermath of the rape, how frequently men rape, and reasons why men rape.

There was a decidedly predatory and abstract way in which participants described who rapes. “They” was the most common word used to describe perpetrators, and a few people said other equally vague terms such as “people” and “you”, as in “Then you come and deny it!” (8.6). Others identified men directly, and it can be assumed that most of the people that rape are men or young men, although one participant stressed that women can rape as well. She said,

It evens happen in the identical houses that we are sitting in. One little girl in the house, her own, her maid did it. Women and all can do the raping. She left her little crying baby, her maid. According to her, she went in the bathroom. I don’t know. When she came, the woman had fingered (?) the girl. She had spoiled the girl. They carried her to the hospital and all. The men and all can do it. And spoil our small, small children. It’s a problem. (14.5)

This is yet another example of when girls are not safe in their homes, and where older women rape girls with fingers, foreign materials or objects. Another example of the way in which people see rape as a predatory process, was in one woman’s concise statement: “They’re going after the young girls...” (11.2) In Ganta, people have an overwhelming and pervasive fear of

“hidemen” – people who hide in the bushes to kill you and take your parts away, which will be discussed in more detail below. The use of an abstract term such as “they” to describe the group of perpetrators with a predatory and evil nature who rape and go after their young girls reflects this general fear of one’s surroundings and the unknown terror that awaits them just outside of their communities.

As in Monrovia, people reported that children and young girls are the most frequent targets of rape, although women are also raped regularly. The age range people reported when describing the children that are raped were from five to nineteen years old. For example,

About the raping, it is mostly happening to the young girls, the small, small children. Yes. The teenage children or the young girls... it can happen to them. Yes, it can happen to women, too (7.6)

Sometimes women can be raped. There are rapes by people. And even the little girls and all can be raped. These are the bad, bad things that are happening to women. They don’t respect women. They don’t give their rights to them. (9.4)

Some people are raping other people’s children. (12.1)

The male participant that made the second statement accurately connects rape of women and girls to the denial of their rights and a lack of respect for women. The last statement, although relatively straightforward, reveals a lack of trust in and suspicion about other people. One male participant confirmed this directly when he said, “Now, now, nobody knows who is who. There is no one who is trustworthy today. No one to trust one another.” (16.11)

In keeping with the abstract nature of the discussion of rape, the participants did not give much information about where rape is taking place or what leads to rape taking place. The one place that was reported by several people was the home, and otherwise people reported rape as simply happening to children or women. This may indicate that they hear about rape happening and do not have specific cases that they are familiar with and so thus could not give more details. One woman did say that sometimes men can rape “a child sleeping with them in their house” (1.13), and one man said that men can force their women to have sex if women are tired, which also indicates that rape happens in the home. Another woman described how she was attacked in her home.

She said they can do it to children mostly. Sometimes women. She herself that’s talking, just recently it happened to her. And she was yelling. She wanted to take cutlass and chop the person. She was crying for money (?). And the person not got her too. What she thought, she thought the person was taking money from her. She’s

(inaudible) in her house, and she don't have anyone to help her. So when the person knocked, and it was a man that was speaking. What she thought, that the person was bringing money for her. And he entered the house. (woman is standing and acting this out). When he entered the house, he came, he grabbed her! Telling her to take off her clothes. Telling him, don't break my hand, you want to break my hand? She started looking for cutlass. She took her cutlass. She said, when you catch me, I will chop you with the cutlass. Telling him, that when you touch me again, I will chop you with the cutlass. The person leaves her now. He started talking to her now. What thing you brought for me before you come in? Have me as your wife. So that's what's happening. The raping. That's how they can do it. They do it to women, they do it to children and all. (15.6)

This experience demonstrates the vulnerability of women who are living alone as well as the complicated nature of relationships between men and widows, who may have more desperate economic situations. The translated story is confusing in that the woman seems to say both that she thought he was taking money from her as well as possibly bringing money to her. The combination of robbery and rape is a common threat for women, and the situation seems more perverted if there is a confusion on the part of the woman between theft and potential support.

The impact of rape on women and girls is similar to what was reported in Monrovia. A few participants said that girls that are raped can be “destroyed totally” and raping girls is “spoiling them.” One woman described how a man raped a woman so badly that she developed a fistula that could not be fixed by a doctor. The woman sharing the story said, “I don't know how she will make it.” (14.10). Another mother told of her experience in trying to prosecute the man that raped her daughter:

They can just go and catch our children there and make love with them. Virginize (?) them. Rape them.... Because they are raping. You take my child, you go and vulgarize (?) my child. Then you come and deny it! You stand right here because you know I don't have any body (?) where to carry you. You see? They virgilize (?) the child, because they know you don't have anywhere to carry them. Then when you call upon them, they sayThey deny it....They deny it! So these are the things that are happening in the community. (8.6)

This woman believes that men are raping children because they know that the parents will not be able to prosecute them for it because there is really nowhere to take them – the jails, police station, and courts in rural Liberia are barely functioning, as will be discussed below. For this woman, men rape because they can and because there is complete impunity, as there was during the war. It was unclear what the social impact of being “destroyed totally” and “spoiled” is for women and girls in Ganta.

Rape was definitely reported as happening less frequently in Ganta than in Monrovia, and fewer people answered about frequency than reported that rape happens. One participant expressed a continuity in incidence of rape between the war and the post-conflict periods by saying that “They’re still raping people. They’re still doing it.” (11.2). People generally reported that rape was not “constant” and that it happens maybe once a week, which means that they had *heard* of one case per week. One person said that rape can happen two to three times in a month. A police officer validated these estimates in his report that he had handled four rape cases in May 2006, but none in June. Another woman said that rape is happening every day, but she may mean that attempts or the threat of rape happens every day rather than an actual event.⁷⁵ When people were estimating incidence of rape, they seemed to be considering the entire town and not just their sub-community. One woman said that “only when they do maybe it in your area that’s how you can know...Once in awhile.” (8.8).

Of importance are those that said that rape was not happening. As in Monrovia, several community leaders, both male and female, said that rape was not happening in their communities, and two male community leaders and one church group with men and women did not mention rape during the discussion at all unless directly prompted. This also seems to indicate that they are either not reporting cases or not receiving them. As will be discussed below, people may not report rapes to authorities because they accept money to settle the case informally, or they may report the case directly to the police, bypassing the community leadership. In general, it seems that there are more rumors of rape than actual cases, although some people indicated that there is an increase in the rape of children during the post-conflict period.

Finally, a few participants gave some unique reasons for why rape happens. One woman said that women can cause rape if they “wear short, short things that will make the men to do something to them”⁷⁶ or if they have been accepting payment from a man and then refuse sex (1.12). She says, “I’m saying, sometimes the men - I’m a man - then I see you, I start to give you money. Then I tell you, I say I want you. Then you start to take money from me. Then time comes and I say, ‘Oh, I want for you and myself to go to my house today’, and you refuse. So this is the time that they can get angry and rape.” This same woman said that children cannot

⁷⁵ See discussion of threat of hidemen below.

⁷⁶ This was a common explanation for rape among men and in popular debate in Liberia during my time there.

cause rape. Although she attributes blame to women in these two situations, she describes the fundamental reasons for rape as men's sexual desires and their anger. Another woman said that men can rape young girls to get their blood for "medicine." She said, "They can do it to them to get their blood because of their medicine. They do it to make medicine with it to get rich. So it is mainly happening to children, children under 13." (9.5).⁷⁷ Two people gave more common reasons for rape:

Small, small children. For now nine years old. Eight, five. They get them, spoiling them. Because they were so used to the women being in war (?). Some of them can come (and hit the woman?), hiding the gun. They tell you say, I want you. You will be forced to love to him [during the war]. Only because – the influence of the gun, they will use it to love to you. Because they not getting gun now, so they can force the small, small children then to do the bad bad things to them. So that's the problem that we're facing. (14.6)

Because, some of us [men], just because of the war, some of us, you know, we are not good in head. So, if some woman says, I'm tired tonight, you know, he will try to force her because he will not even listen to her. (7.6)

The woman making the first statement seems to be saying that because men no longer have guns to force older women to have sex they now force younger girls, who may be more easily coerced, manipulated, or physically overpowered. The man speaking in the second excerpt admits, in a sense, that some men have been disturbed because of the war, which leads them to ignore the wishes of their wives and to rape them. Both of these reasons for rape touch on very important issues of masculine identity and sense of power and control in post-conflict periods.

Overall, participants reported that rape of children is a problem in their communities, although it is not reported as happening as frequently or in as brutal ways as in Monrovia. Participants in Ganta also attributed rape of girls and women to a variety of causes, from traditional medicine to men's desire to overpower women like they could during the war. There also seemed to be an unwillingness or hesitance to discuss rape openly in these communities, which may indicate that more rape is happening that people are failing to report or that rape is not happening at as high levels in Ganta as in Monrovia.

⁷⁷ It was unclear from the interview whether this "medicine" has something to do with HIV/AIDS curing treatments.

Domestic Violence

Nearly all participants addressed domestic violence as a major problem for women in the post-conflict period. The salient aspects of their discussion are that domestic violence can or is feared to lead to murder and that children are involved in some cases. An overview of what participants said about the type, circumstances, impact, rates, and causes of domestic violence is below.

As in Monrovia, most people described domestic violence by saying that men “beat” their wives when there is confusion or fighting in the homes. Unlike with rape, people referred directly to the men, “loved ones”, brothers, husbands, and “lovers” that use violence against “their women” and children. In addition to beating, participants said that men can hit, hurt, ill-treat, restrict activity of, and threaten to kill women. The threat of murder was evident either in direct statements about the kinds of domestic violence or insinuated in descriptions of the impact of family violence. For example,

[Community leaders] can come and interview you. They make peace among you all. Sometimes when you vexed too much, you woman, you vexed too much, sometimes you say you don't want the man. Sometimes your parents can agree with you because the man has got bad ways in him. The community goes around and talk to the people. When they talk to you, and you are not satisfied, you leave the man. Sometimes the man says, I can't leave you. Sometimes your life in danger, you see? (12.7)

Then when he talks maybe you will join him too, then you will be worried. Then he beats you and kills you or he hurts you. (6.18)

Domestic violence is not limited to partner relationships; male family members can beat women family members and children. A woman explained that she must live with her brother because she has recently returned to Liberia, and she described how he beats her when they fight about the children not having food to eat. Children may also become caught in this cycle of violence that flows from men to women to children. One woman said, “Women beat their children, sometimes every day.”(1.7) Another man said, “Child do something to you, instead of advising the child in the rightful way, they don't do it. They go to work and beat on that child unmercifully!” (2.5). Whether the fighting between children or parents and children is verbal or physical, some people noted that physical violence is used against children in what can be assumed to be a form of discipline.

Participants reported that men beat women and parents beat children both in the home and on the street, both in the night and during the day, and for a very wide range of reasons. Two excerpts demonstrate the both very private and very public nature of domestic violence.

The last time one man and his wife fight in town, they (something unclear) between them, he told the people that he could forget about it – Let he and the woman went to bed. When they went, he beat the woman and choked her and killed her. So that one never works.... The [community] discussion did not fail. But he came and begged the people now... when they came to judge the case, he came, he begged, he said he had forgotten about everything. But when they went home now, that's the time he beat the woman and choked her and killed her. (6.10)

Sometimes when they will just go, they put up with (?) their girlfriend on the street and say "What you came to do here?" You know, just grab her by her t-shirt, start holding her and beat her. Say, "What you came to do? Let's get to the house?" Yeah. It can sometimes happen in the street. (7.4)

In the first statement, the woman explains how only in the private space of the home was the husband completely free to act out extreme and fatal violence on his wife. When the community leaders were present in a public setting, he restrained himself and the woman was in a safe space. Without the presence of others and in her home, she was completely at risk and was murdered. The second statement made by a male community leader illustrates the complete opposite situation of the first example. Here the presence of other people does not restrain the man, as he beats his girlfriend for her movements and activities outside the home. In some ways this situation seems more terrifying than the first, if that is possible, because if a man will hit an intimate partner in front of others, then there are likely no limits to what he would do when no one is around. It seems that public expressions of partner violence is not uncommon. Several people described domestic violence as happening in public, with one person literally saying, 'Men beating their wives, I can see it.' (9.4)

Other circumstances that can make women vulnerable to partner violence are when they are not near relatives and when they are engaging in livelihood and income-generation activities. One woman said, "Sometimes when your parents, they are not around, he will catch you and beat you" (12.11). Another woman described how sometimes young women and girls can be beaten when they are on the streets and interacting with lovers and away from their homes (10.3). Women and girls may also be at risk when simply engaging in livelihood activities or even moving away from their home. One woman said, "And sometimes when you go look for food, they say you go look for men. Sometimes when you go sit around, they say you come for

looking for men” (12.11). This reflects a constant suspicion of women’s activities by men, which can translate into a barrier to movement and restriction of women’s livelihood options.

The reasons that participants gave for why men become violent with women and parents with children were both wide-ranging and specific. Broadly speaking, reasons include men’s behavior and sentiment, poverty, and other unknown reasons. While poverty, hunger, and a lack of jobs was a very common response, it was not the primary category of cause that participants noted, unlike in Monrovia. However, poverty and unemployment are very important in the daily lives of men and women in Ganta. These two descriptions about the effects of poverty on partner relations are given by a woman and man, respectively. They illustrate the different perspectives that men and women can have about why men beat their wives.

Yes, Because of the hardships, the man cannot stand it. Sometimes because no jobs, the men get angry and beat us! Sometimes if we do small things, they beat us! If a man – I had a man, he beat me because he don’t have no job. We have small money to do. He want to do this, do this, why, he beat me. (12.2)

Because since the war, there is no jobs and our women too can leave us and go outside too. So when they come we be vexed and start beating them. We don’t got no money to support them. They can leave us and starting to some man’s house, so we just, we beat them. (12.3)

The woman understands that men beat their women almost as if they are punishing them for not having jobs. From her perspective, women bear the physical burdens of poverty. Conversely, the man explains his use of violence as a retaliation against women for leaving the home, possibly to another man, in search of some support for her and the family. Speaking quite honestly, this man admits that he is threatened by his inability to provide for his family and his wife’s challenge to his authority. He uses violence to reassert his power, authority, and control over the woman and his family, even if it means that the family will go without food as a result. Beyond unemployment, hunger was a word used regularly by people to explain the situation that spurs violence. According to one person, “They don’ have food to eat. Any small child come and give any kind of cross word, he will beat on that child.” (6.17)

Participants frequently referred to men’s sense of privilege and men’s temper in explaining why they hit. One female participant said that men got “hot-headed,” (6.11) while another man said, “They started beating them because their woman was theirs. They say their woman is so, they are not equal with them...Since sometimes will be to your, you know, dissatisfaction, you know, ...then you start beating her because that’s your wife.” (7.5,7) This

man, also quite frankly, identifies that men do not see women as having an equal status to them, which justifies their ability to use violence against women. Several women mentioned that men can beat women for “simple things” or “unnecessary reasons” or “sexual problems,” which is fairly vague language. This kind of broad explanation for domestic violence indicates that women do not necessarily understand why men beat them or what would precipitate violence, and living under those conditions could be extremely stressful and uncertain for some women. Notably, at least two community leaders said that they did not know why domestic problems happen at all because they are “not in the various homes,” which reflects a separation between community leadership and inter-personal violence.

Finally, some women have a definite understanding of why they are frustrated in their relationships and what they believe can do to prevent domestic violence. One woman said:

When the woman is working, the man is working, their children are working, there will be no problem in the home. Because, ok, I can tell you if the man goes to work, he brings money. Most of the time, this time when man go to work, when they're having money they take their money and support girlfriends out. So this is why they have problems in the home...Then you the wife in the house, when you talk that can bring problems. So if at all you're working, your husband's working it will not bring problems...No, not only man to support her. She knows how to do something, she can support herself... But if you don't have no working, the man, only the man working, when he get money he goes lavish it, you will get angry. Then when he talks maybe you will join him too, then you will worried. Then he beats you and kills you or he hurts you. (6.17)

In a sense, this woman assumes that men will take money to spend outside the home on girlfriends. Her explanation for why men become violent is that women get angry when the men waste money in maintaining external relationships. In order to prevent violence, she argues that women need to be financially independent. Having money and resources will insulate her from the activities of her husband. Another two women explained the process that women go through before they respond to violence by going to the police or leaving their homes:

Sometimes you accept the (tension?) until you can limit it. But when the person is continually on you, that even other people come in to bring, you know, to counsel the person, he cannot do it. He's always on you. Then there is no other help that you can find unless you reach to the police. (10.7)

So when your people come to you, say, 'Don't carry the man to court, or don't take the man somewhere.' Sometimes you can forget it and stay with your parents. That's what I did. When he beat me, he hurt me, my brother went and talked three different times. So he can't understand, so I decided - I wanted to take him to court. But he was beating me for little (?) things, when I take him to court, they jail him.

He could see me somewhere and do something to me. So I decided to come to my family to sit down. (12.11)

These women's histories reflect the constant tension that they face in their relationships with their husbands, almost as if they are making daily strategic decisions about their survival in the relationship. After a certain amount of time, it seems that these two women had no other option but to leave the relationship and home to seek refuge with the police or outside family. While some women are able to leave abusive homes, others are less fortunate. The impact of domestic violence on women and children can be lethal, as one woman described:

They killed the wife for cassava business...The man asked his wife to pick cassava. And the woman looked for the knife and she did not see it. Another day they saw the knife, and she took, he beat the woman because she said she never knew where the knife was. So, for that, he was beating on the woman. He beat on the woman until they carried her to the hospital. She died. (6.6)

This account demonstrates how a simple disagreement can transition into murder very rapidly and without much warning. Additionally, the use of violence seems to be a form of punishment, albeit a lethal and permanent punishment, for the woman by the husband for her "neglect." Other women reported lasting physical injuries, such as not being able to talk or hear from abuse experienced during and after the war.

Finally, most participants said that domestic violence and fighting between men and women and parents and children happens in their communities every day or almost every day, although a single person may not experience violence daily. Rates given for individuals tended to be around one to two times a week or month. A few participants said that domestic violence was happening at low rates, and one male community leader said, "We don't just beat children like that" in his community (3.6) Yet, the majority said that domestic violence is increasing, especially since the end of the war. A police officer reported that cases of domestic violence had increased in recent months. When questioned about specific rates, he said,

It depends. It depends on the community. On the individual. On the individual themselves. Sometimes in a week, none. Sometimes in a week we receive two, three domestic violence cases...It's increasing right after the war...Up to now (thumps on table), domestic violence is increasing. Yes. After the war, it's a serious repercussion, you know. (13.4,13)

In one community a woman said that domestic violence happens to most of the women, indicating a wide prevalence. Finally, the specific kinds of domestic violence seem to fall along

a continuum of intensity from verbal and physical fighting to murder, with the incidents weighted towards the fighting. For example, one woman said that two people had been killed from domestic violence in the last year, while people say that fighting happens every day. Yet, there is always the fear that fighting will lead to more serious violence. A woman said, “Sometimes every day [fighting happens] because the community is big. Not all leads to beatings, but some can ...” (15.8)

Overall, men’s violence against women in Ganta is said to be increasing, is used regularly against most women, and happens often in public. Children are often involved in domestic violence, and men’s violence against women can be lethal. This fear of lethality and the uncertainty about exactly what causes men to be violent seems to translate into a generalized fear of domestic violence by most women.

Direct Security Threats

As in Monrovia, there are other direct security threats that may influence gender-based violence or influence women’s activity in the post-conflict period. These are what people in Ganta call “hidemen”, as well as public fighting and armed robbery.

Hidemen

The “hidemen issue” was the overwhelming concern of people in Ganta. It was literally the first thing that almost all people spoke of when asked about bad things that are happening in their communities. For this reason, the issue of “hidemen” should be addressed in much more detail in other research, because it was consuming and major fear for the population. When people in Ganta speak of “hidemen”, they are referring to groups of boys and young men that hide in the bushes to hunt people, especially children, capture them, kill them, and take away their body parts, such as hearts, tongues, eyes, sexual organs, and ears to make traditional medicines with them. They also refer to this as “ritualistic killing.” One older woman said that this is a new practice: “But this one, they don’t used to do so. Taking people’s parts there to carry it... When the war...they said the war was over. That’s the time they’re doing it.” (4.10). Participants reported that people capture people and steal their parts in order to sell them and make money. The parts are then used for “medicine.” Beyond this explanation, participants did not really speculate about why human parts are used in medicine, most likely because they either cannot

speak of secret societies that might be using the medicine or because they do not want others to think that they are associated with the hidemen or medicine people. For example, people said:

Yes, because they find it difficult to work for money! So, they feel that that is the easy way to earn something....So that they can be able to get quick money. (2.2)

Yeah, the hidemen problem happens when people want spare – when they want human hearts. Because hidemen can – hidemen – our problem is that when I want human parts, and I will contact her and she will form a group. And they will charge me a certain amount of money. When the money is paid and they carry on the – it’s for ritual purposes. For ritual purposes.... Those who are, those who are in it for positions in government. In it for positions like Ministerial positions. Senatorial positions. Yes. These are the people that want these parts. And some other people want it too for businesses – for their businesses to improve. To have a bigger business. To make money. And so forth, yes. (13.1)

We don’t really know their aim of doing it. We don’t really know their aim of doing it. So we can’t just say something about it. Because you that are doing it, you know your reasons. (10.3)

Most participants reported that attempts at capturing people are happening almost every day throughout Ganta, and sometimes less frequently in their areas. The rates for actual killings ranged from one to five killings a month. The police officer confirmed only one killing. It is unclear what constitutes an attempt; some people told stories about finding young men lurking in the bushes, but more generally it seems that there is simply a fear that people are attempting to catch people, especially children.⁷⁸ One woman said, “All the time’s it’s happening. Many times. Even now, now....It’s happening” (14.2). Rumors abound. In discussions with people in Ganta, they reveal that this threat is omnipresent and palpable.⁷⁹

For women, the threat of “hidemen” is particularly oppressive. While both men and women expressed fear for their children and fear at being caught, day or night, women and in particular older women revealed that this threat restricts their movements. They said:

If you go on your farm, to come in town again is hard because when you are coming you can be worrying whether you see hidemen on the road. Before you come to town, you can get behind men, or when you see boys coming home, you follow them.

⁷⁸ The man that discussed child abuse in the section on domestic violence said that missing children is a serious problem in the community. He works at a radio station and makes the announcements every day. Perhaps the fear of hidemen catching one’s children and making them disappear is somehow a projection of people’s fear of their role in making their children leave.

⁷⁹ One woman believed that the “big, big people” from the NGOs in their “big, big” white cars and black windows were the ones that are catching their people. She said, “Then they will come and steal our child from us secretly and go kill them for their parts.” (16.8). While she was the only person to say something like this (and if she was even being serious), it does indicate the level of insecurity and threat that people feel if even the people that are there to assist and rebuild communities are thought to be preying on them.

So it's difficult for one lady to travel on the farm. So that's the bad, bad things that are happening. (15.6)

Yeah, this same hidemen business – some of us want to go make for contract and look for money. But no way. We're just sitting down like this. No way for us. No food. I got plenty children but no food. This hidemen business, no food. (15.5)

Going somewhere, with nobody around you, they grab you while you're in the bush. You're a woman, you're not able to fight. Your eye open. They tie you, they tie you. They take this one. They take that one. They take all the small, small things. (15.5)

The hideman business – it's serious now. Because we've been keeping the bucket inside. We don't get up at night. (6.9)

In the night, people can't sleep. People dream bad, bad things. When you go on your farm, to the village. When you go to the farm, you will meet some group of men there all in black clothing, with their hair plait. You see? If you just say, "what are you all doing here?" That will be the end of you. So when you see it, you have to run back, to tell the people. You see? So it's difficult for us. Most especially, we the war-affected widows, that have to go look for food in the bush, to eat. I mean, that's problem for us!... The only way we help ourselves is by going in the swamp to make our rice farm, or going in the bush to make farm, and plant cassava! But if the hidemen embarrassing us, what will we do now? (8.3)

These women express a continuous need for protection of men when they are out alone, even if it is just to have men unrelated to them nearby when they are on the road. Their fear of being alone means that they have limited to no means of generating livelihoods, as most people need to plant farms in the bush in order to eat. The bush is clearly a dangerous place for women. Widows and women usually reported that hidemen attempts were happening very frequently, saying things like, "I say every day! Every day! Any hour. Any time! Because there are many! They are all over in the bushes hiding....They can run behind you every day!" When pressed they said that actual killings do not happen that frequently. Yet, women's fear of being alone, without a husband, especially out in the bush while looking for food, is very similar to what their lives must have been like during the war. The threat is different, but the feeling is the same, and this restricts their movement in the post-conflict period.

Robbery and Fighting

As in Monrovia, two other direct security threats that influence or coincide with gender-based violence are robbery and fighting. Young men and ex-combatants are the group presenting the greatest threat in both instances. In Ganta, armed robbery happens frequently and mostly during

the night while people are sleeping, and especially when it is raining because it is more difficult to hear people entering. The dual threat of “stealing and raping” was reported by two women. Another woman said, “Our children are not going to school. But then when they get into the street, they are robbing us there” (8.3). This is an unsettling and twisted reality for some mothers and women, who may fear their own children in the post-conflict period. A second threat is physical and verbal fighting, which can happen on the street and in public places between men and men, men and women, and women and women. If fighting becomes physical, it can involve knives, and some of these disagreements can lead to murder. One woman said, “We are suffering here. We the black are suffering. The black and black can kill one another here.” (16.11). Verbal abuse can be just as disempowering. One older man said,

Say you are the passenger, the next one is a passenger, you get a load somewhere that you want to stop the car there to take the load. Then the other people that are in the car, they start embarrassing, saying, “Who is this man? Did he charter the car? Why is he wasting our time for this?” They start abusing you while you’re waiting for your load to come put it in the car. (3.4)

This kind of physical fighting and verbal abuse of older people is significant because the public use of violence has connections with private violence and because it disempowers older people. As discussed earlier, men who choose to engage in physical violence with one another are likely to use physical violence within their homes. Younger men who disrespect and abuse older people, particularly men and especially in public, are further challenging former social hierarchies and masculinities. This may cause men to reassert their authority violently or forcibly within their homes.

Indirect Security Threats

The social changes that result from poverty and war have the greatest influence on gender-based violence in Ganta. People in Ganta face extremely serious indirect security threats from material poverty – a lack of institutions, infrastructure, and opportunities means that most people face hunger, disease, and exposure to risks. In some cases, the livelihood options available to people may increase their risk, such as the widows that farm in swamps who may be more exposed to malaria and other diseases. Yet, it seems that extreme poverty is universal and can be considered to be the grim and unfortunate background to social changes in gender and generation relations. These shifts in social relations may make women and girls vulnerable to violence.

Social Change – Men’s Unemployment

The first common concern was that men were not able to find work and provide for their families. For men, this was a confusing, frustrating, and humiliating experience. One woman said, “And some men, if you are not working, people overlook you in the community. You become sorrowful” (1.4), and another woman said, “You see, the big men are there, sitting down” (6.16). Two men explained how this makes them feel:

For the men, today, the women have gained more rights in the world, and many people don’t give jobs to the men today. So that is one of the bad things that is taking place in the life of we the men. We are jobless to sponsor the home. And the result of being jobless, it causes our children to go into the street to satisfy themselves and give their body, most especially our girl children. (16.5)

We can be embarrassed. We can be embarrassed because we the men, we have to struggle. You know, have to struggle. Because by right, it’s not supposed to be so. We suffer a lot sometimes, just on the farm to also (?) ...If I’m the man in the group, and I don’t do that, you know, the woman, too, will not respect me. (7.6)

These men not only feel neglected and embarrassed, but they also feel responsible for what happens to their children when they cannot provide for them. The second statement indicates that some men have a sense that this is not how things are “supposed” to be – as men, they have rights that guarantee that they can at least have the opportunity to provide for and garner respect from their family and women. Women, on the other hand, may see their new roles as a burden.

Yeah, one of the things that we the women facing, the problems that we the women facing, we are the bread winners for the men today. Because after the war, there is no jobs. So we sell. We do garden and many other things for us to feed the husband and the children. (15.6)

Interestingly, this woman discussed rape immediately after making this statement during the interview. Perhaps this is a coincidence, but perhaps it is an indication of how men are reacting to their socio-economic positions and empowered women in post-conflict Liberia.

Social Change – Children’s Disobedience

Most adults were also very concerned about their relations with the younger generation and their children in particular. That is, they were concerned with how their children relate to them in the post-conflict period. Some people complained about how their children are robbing from them and are not in school, just “spoiling” on the street. Lack of respect for elders and children’s

disobedience of parents threatens men and women, but in different ways. Two community leaders discussed their interactions with Liberia's youth in Ganta:

Well, I've still got problems with them. I've still got problems with them. Because even some of them, they have not really been – they are still traumatized, you know. We have to talk to them. So I counsel them. I go and talk to them. But we've still got problems. They've still got problems. When they're ready to fight (trails off) (P chuckles)... Sometimes they started abusing them, because, you know, they are traumatized. So, sometimes they don't respect the parents. (7.3)

Then, after the war time, the way how we used to live before, it's not like that again. Because of the children that took guns, they went and killed people, they don't got time. They don't know respect. When they see old man they will abuse you. "Old man, let me pass, man. Who are you?" So they make us to feel bad things at the old age as we are. (3.1)

The first man is a youth leader and his role in the community is to try to organize the youth to have group projects and discussions. As a leader of the group, he sees that the experiences of war prevent youth from maintaining better relations with elders. The second man is an older community leader. For him, the youth's inflated ego and sense of empowerment from the war time is the major impediment to change. He feels much more threatened and resentful of the way that he is treated, possibly because he remembers a time when social relations were more ordered. For women, children's disobedience has other kinds of consequences:

The children have no control again. Because they're used to this money from 1990 up to 2003. Since they're used to money, there is no way that you can tell your own son now and say sit down here for him to agree. He will go out doing criminal acts, and we the women, we are the ones that are victims. Because in our African setting, when you have a child, when he's good, the father praises him and says, that is my child. But when the child is bad, that's the mother that have the problem in Africa here... The fathers blame us. That it is our fault... But I feel that it is not our fault. It is the war. (15.2)⁸⁰

After this war – of course our children, during the time there was no war, we were able to put them under control. But immediately when they working, and they begin to bribe these children and carry them, you people call them child soldiers, we the mothers, we are troubled. Sometimes they beat us. Our own children beat us. They cuss at us. They don't listen to us again. (15.2)

The first woman identifies the same hubris of war in her children. Yet, she continues to say that women are the victims of children gone awry. Not only do children sometimes beat their mothers, but fathers blame the women for the kinds of negative activities in which their children

⁸⁰ Interestingly, this woman later identified the period spent in the camps in Guinea as a turning point because children who were fifteen were identified as adults and received the provisions of adults. Once this happened, she says that the children began to challenge her authority because they were now "adults."

engage. As with unemployment, social and family relations surrounding children's behavior are another area where women may be vulnerable to violence as a result of patriarchal systems that blame them for instability.

Widowhood

Of the women that may be vulnerable to poverty and social disruption, widows are particularly at risk because they are living within sometimes violent, uncertain, and power-driven social systems without male figures to protect or shield them. As discussed above, widows are particularly constrained by their fear of hidemen. Another woman revealed how women without men face intimidation when attempting to prosecute rape cases.

When they impregnate that child, when they talk about it... When they virgilize them... [Translator] When they carry them, because they don't have money to carry them anywhere, because they don't have husbands, when they're talking to them, they don't even listen to them. They abuse them....[Participant] Yes! Then they hold their flashlight like this ... "You say that man raped you? That man? Are you sure? Are you sure that man?"... The men!... Those are women!... The men there that do it! To the war-affected women.... The parents will go there to ask them, they will take their torch light, and flash it in your face and say, (chuckles) "Are you sure? You are not making a mistake? Are you sure? Or are you lying? Am I the one?" They will say that to you.... They deny it. (8.7)

While all parents may face these same kind of barriers to justice, women without men and without resources may face greater barriers in the legal and criminal system. Widows also may be more vulnerable to exploitation. One woman explained, "she's a widow, and so men can come and say 'I love you.' But they will come, they will be with you for some months. But since they realize that you have more children now, they will sometimes impregnate you and leave you..." (8.9). Single mothers struggle with the challenges posed by their children, and one widow said, "So we, people just coping with the children all over." (11.1)

Other threats to women and girls

Other threats for women and girls include forced marriage, prostitution, no access to education, and teenage pregnancy. One police officer shared how teenage girls may face all of these threats at once:

Yes, these people, they was arrested three days ago by the police. And we asked them, what are their problems. And teenage girl said, "I'm fifteen years old and my mother is forcing me into early marriage. She's wanting me to go on and to have an

affair with a gentleman because she no longer has the means of assisting me or sending me to school. So she's going to force me into early marriage. So I want to go down to Monrovia to live in Monrovia." How you gonna live in Monrovia? She said, "I'm going to live any way I feel like it (?)." So that alone, you know, it has serious repercussions on the child. To go and live in Monrovia any way you feel like it. And you don't want to listen because you don't have a brother, you don't have a father, you don't have anybody. You are going to Monrovia just to live. So, we presume that going to Monrovia to live, you are going to involve into prostitution. That's the only means you are going to be able to sustain yourself in Monrovia because you don't have nobody.... So you see it's a very difficult situation that we find ourselves. Where our girl children from twelve to fifteen years, they are all engaged into sexual activities because they want to sustain themselves. They want to buy clothes. They want to feed themselves. Their parents can no longer do these things for them. (13.11)

These young women, when facing forced marriage, had to make the decision to enter into prostitution in order to survive and maintain a level of independence. This situation shows both the limited options available to young women, as well as the inability of parents to care for their children. Another woman expressed her fear that men who are engaging in commercial sex outside of their marriage will be spreading AIDS to them. She said, "Then they will go to that woman there. Then they will come and divide that sickness. That sickness there, no medicine for it. Then you sitting down in the home, you will get that same sickness, because that's your husband."

Yet another young woman expressed her concerns that women were being denied rights to own property. Women that are not going to school, engaging in prostitution, are teenage mothers, and are unable to own property are more vulnerable to the poverty and backlash of the post-conflict period because they have fewer livelihood options and are more exposed to exploitation.

Comparative Analysis of Findings from Monrovia and Ganta

The people of Monrovia and Ganta shared histories and stories about their lives after the conflict that speak for themselves. There are similarities and differences in what people reported in both places, which contribute to our understanding of post-conflict gender-based violence in urban and rural environments. As with the kinds of violence experienced during the war, comparisons of the reported patterns of post-conflict violence are not meant to portray one situation as worse than the other, but rather to highlight common patterns and note important differences.

The key commonalities in what was reported about post-conflict gender violence in Monrovia and Ganta include the rape of young girls, the increase in domestic violence, and the social disruption of war and shifts in social relations. In both locations girls seem to be vulnerable on the streets and in their own home, and the war-like combination of armed robbery and rape continue to present threats to women and girls. The questions that arise out of this situation are numerous: What are the long-term social consequences of rape of young girls? Aside from personal injury and trauma, what does the “spoiling” of girls mean to the girls themselves, their family, and communities? Who exactly is raping, and why are they raping? Why are men raping young girls and engaging young boys in prostitution? Are women raped as well, but just not considered to be raped because they have already had sex? The situation of post-conflict rape on a wide scale indicates that there are security conditions in Monrovia and Ganta that require girls and some women to continue to need some form of protection in their family or through other relationships.

Domestic violence in both locations also is reportedly increasing, and men use violence against women in both public and private settings, as they reassert control over societies that have been disrupted and changed by war. Men were generally less inclined to openly discuss post-conflict violence, although there were notable exceptions in both places. Finally, people everywhere had concerns about the youth’s loss of respect for adults, as well as the loss of potential in the youth because they had few options due to poverty. There was especially a concern about the lack of opportunities for and barriers to girls going to school.

The key differences between gender-based violence in Monrovia and Ganta pertain to the nature of rape, domestic violence, and social disruption. According to what participants reported, rape seems to be less brutal and frequent in Ganta, and rape happens more frequently and involves more torture in Monrovia. In general people seemed to be more explicit in their discussion of rape in Monrovia. However, women seem to be more concerned about lethal forms of domestic violence in Ganta, although the rates of domestic violence are high in both places. In Ganta, women’s fear of regular and severe domestic violence forced some to leave their homes, which mirrors their experiences of displacement during the war. Movement from the home was rarely discussed in Monrovia. Women in Ganta also expressed more concerns about being alone in the bush, which also seems to have connections to their war experiences. People reported more frequently that children were involved in domestic violence in Ganta than

in Monrovia. In Monrovia, people attribute most of the violence to poverty and the behavior of youth that were in war, whereas in Ganta people gave responses that included these but which were more varied and nuanced. There was more of an explicit discussion of social upheaval and changes in Ganta, which may contribute to their more sophisticated understanding of why violence happens. Finally, public fighting and prostitution seem to be happening more frequently in Monrovia, likely due to the larger population size.

Overall, sexual and physical violence against women is an epidemic in post-conflict Liberia. One woman in Ganta made the best challenge to our assumptions that rape and violence against women are natural byproducts of war and transitions to peace, by saying, “Anything happening to women? Bad things? Besides the fighting, raping, and disrespecting women, I don’t think any bad things is happening to women now. Because they don’t give women rights to them.” (9.5). The unintended sarcasm and direct delivery of her statement reveals a significant lesson. She presents to us in simple terms that the war has not ended for women and girls in Ganta and Monrovia, and daily violence is a part of their “peacetime” lives.

PART FOUR: COMMUNITY AND WOMEN’S RESPONSES

Problems with the police, courts, healthcare, and community responses to gender-based violence have been highlighted above. In this section I directly address how informants interact with these formal and informal institutions when responding to gender-based violence. Where possible, the perspectives of people working within these institutions are also included. I cover responses from Monrovia and Ganta under the following categories: community leaders, community responses, police, courts, and healthcare.

In some instances, there is overlap, contradiction, and inconsistency in what people I interviewed reported about these various systems and institutions. This is likely due, in part, to the fact that the systems are complex and multi-layered. It appears that informants transition from the informal to formal systems and back again in various and distinct ways. Given this reality, it is best to view people’s use and understanding of all categories of response as part of a broader web through which people may respond to gender-based violence. The people that I

interviewed presented their opinions and information about these institutions, and this is definitively a grassroots perspective that does not seek to explain formal policy.

Community Leaders

The leadership of communities seems to take different forms, such as a combination of elders and locally elected representatives, and these community leaders appear to have varying degrees of organization and areas of influence. For example, one male community leader of a quarter (i.e., sub-community) said that he did not know who the community leader for the entire area was, which indicates that there is not much coordination or cohesion in some larger communities. When considering community leaders' role in responding to gender-based violence, the key factors I looked at are what issues community leaders respond to, how they involve themselves, and what actions they are able to take to resolve violence and conflict.

Monrovia

Community leaders in Monrovia work to prevent violence from escalating through direct interventions and community watch programs, and they advise against going to courts or the police unless something “very bad” has happened or the people want to go to court.⁸¹ For problems between husbands and wives or fighting between two people, the community leaders try to bring the parties together to resolve the issue before it escalates into further violence. One male community leader said:

We try because we don't have the logistics to stop people from chop, hitting people with machete. and all these things there. So we try our possible best that it doesn't reach that far...If it does, we call in the police. (23.7)

If the issue cannot be resolved by the community leaders or is very serious and involves weapons, then community leaders can send the person to the police or court. If the community leaders are resistant to sending people to court, then the people can go to court on their own. Some community leaders charge fines as a form of punishment to those who have been found at fault in a community court, while others do not. In communities that have a fine system, the leadership can take action to enforce fines or send people to the police if they refuse to pay the

⁸¹ Examples of what would qualify as “very bad” include rape of children, armed robbery, fighting between men on the street that cannot be contained, and severe beating of a woman that leaves her bleeding or if a man threatens to kill her or will not stop beating her.

finer. Some leaders only receive cases and, therefore, may be less likely to know if anything is happening to people, while others become more actively involved in calling cases to them.

Other major initiatives that several community leaders spoke of are community watch programs and greater collaboration with the police. Because there are no police depots (stations) in some areas, the community is effectively the first line of response to crime. The community watch teams would serve as emergency rescue teams during the night and would go to the scene of a crime to rescue the individual or stop the act from happening. They may also apprehend the perpetrator and give reports to the police. Community leaders have also made requests to the government to build more police stations closer to their communities so that people have easier access to them during the night.

A key question for women is whether these kinds of community watch programs would focus solely on armed robbery or would also include things like domestic violence and rape. One male community leader gave a definition of what he believes to be a crime:

Ok. We talk about gravity. The gravity of crimes. For example, if we saw somebody took knife and say, "You, I will stop you." It happened here at one point in time. One soldier man, shed arms down there, and killed one person instantly... Yes. Now, when we see something that which is of criminal nature, then we try to use the community of influence by calling the nearest police or UNMIL authorities to come in for reinforcement to arrest the situation. Because normally when people take silent weapons or weapons against their enemies... They will not let anybody to hold them. Then they will get on you. So on that note, we call the requisite government agency to come in quick. And that is most often the police. We will call the police, and then the police can arrest the situation....No, that [domestic violence] is simple. That is the one that we can even bring them here. That one is simple matter issue for us... Even if she's hurt.... Except [if] the other parties says, "You, you shed my blood." You know, because there are some people that got strong minds. They can say, "This man shed my blood. We're going to court." That's what they can say.
(30.1)

Notably, this community leader says that he does not consider it to be a criminal act if a woman has been physically abused by her husband to the point that she is hurt. Because these are not official crimes, community leaders try to keep these cases within the community. If community watch teams and community leaders do not consider domestic violence to be a crime, then it is likely that the men patrolling communities at night may not attempt to prevent or respond to violence in the home. The result will be that community watch initiatives will have little impact on increasing women's security.

Ganta

In Ganta, most community leaders said that they intervene in domestic disputes and other kinds of fighting, but always advise their community members against going to the police or courts. The kinds of issues that community leaders intervene in are “confusion” or “palava” (fighting) in the home and on the streets, among neighbors, families, and friends. Informants said that community leaders advise against going to the police and court because they fear that men will be treated poorly while in police custody and mostly because the process wastes people’s money, as those bringing cases will have to pay to register their cases and have them investigated. Instead, community leaders prefer to either go to the location of the incident or to receive cases at their homes in order to discover the cause of fighting and then to reconcile the conflict. There were mixed reports about how frequently community members bring cases to the community leaders, but it is clear that many informants do bring cases. One person reported that you have to pay fees to community leaders in order to register the case in the town chief’s court, as well as having to pay the cost of the community court.

Some techniques that community leaders use to respond to conflicts brought to them include conflict resolution and mediation, community-based fines, and collecting money from the community for those that do not have any money to seek treatment at health care clinics. An example from one community of a fine against someone who has been found at fault was for him or her to cook for the town or to bring liquor to the town leadership or money to the community development fund (9.10). Community leaders stressed that people are free to go to the police or courts on their own if the leaders are not able to resolve the conflict, but that they often do not support this kind of resolution. Interviews indicate that it is rare that community leaders would send a husband and wife to the police, and one person said that “usually the woman can carry the husband to court.” (8.13)

The exceptions to the procedure of keeping cases within the community courts are rape and violent fighting or armed robbery. If rape was discussed at all by community leaders, and in some cases it was not mentioned, then community leaders said that they send those cases to the police because, “[rape] is not something that you’re supposed to settle in the home.” (2.12). It is unclear if community leaders would consider marital rape to be a form of rape. Based on the fact that community leaders generally assumed that domestic violence is a community or family issue, it seems that they would not consider marital rape to be a reportable offense and would

only consider rape of young girls by non-family members and possibly family members to be a crime to report to the police. Other informants said that they will bypass their conflict resolution interventions and go straight to the police if they catch a rogue (armed robber, thief), who is likely not from the community, or if a beating of a woman by her husband is very violent, but that community leaders do not go directly to the police often. Another community leader said that she goes to the police if someone refuses to take her advice and resolve the situation. One male community leader said that less violent and severe forms of domestic violence, such as verbal fighting and routine physical abuse between husband and wife, is “another issue,” and that he alone tries to resolve it “if I know that it’s something easy to settle.” (2.12) This indicates that most community leaders consider routine physical abuse of women to be a normal part of marital and social relations and not a crime. A few male community leaders said that domestic violence is never an issue that they take to the police, which suggests that the level of intensity of the violence does not induce a more serious response in any situation. Of those community leaders that occasionally do report domestic violence cases to the police, domestic violence only appears to be worthy of outside attention when a man beats a woman until she has fainted, is unable to walk, or is near death or if the man has threatened to kill her. The result is that women are at risk to violence in their daily lives and are denied protection unless they seek it themselves.

One police officer discussed his efforts at creating partnerships with community leaders and what he thought the barriers are to effective collaboration. He said,

Even we need community policing to be introduced. Where we the police, we go into community. We go in towns and villages to explain to our oldest people. To our elders, to community leaders, to the town chief, paramount (?) chief that police and the community need to work together. If there’s information, pass it over to the police. The police will work on those informations. If you find someone in the community that you cannot satisfy with, contact the police. Police will move in. And if you see that a crime has been committed in the community, contact the police. With the limited resources that we have, we sometimes make ourselves available....

Yeah, because they [community leaders] say, “If I give information to the police, the police will hold me responsible. The police will want to question me, you know, why or how I got this information.” So at times the community leaders, they are afraid to give police information. So for us too, we find it very difficult in doing our job because the information that’s supposed to come to us from the community leaders, the information that’s supposed to come to us from the town chief, the clan chief, those informations are lacking. They keep them because they’re afraid to pass information to the police, that the police will having them arrested you know, and be questioned. So, because of this, there’s no much assistance from the community leaders, from the town, clan chief, no much assistance. Only little assistance....

Yes, it's because what happened here – let's assume that you're a community leader. She (referring to Translator) and myself live in a community. And, I was, I was once an ex-combatant. I'm an ex-combatant and I live in the community. And I went, I committed a crime against her. And the crime was reported to you as a clan chief, as a community leader. And I was invited by you to show cause why I had to offend this lady, or to show cause why I had to break into her house to steal her property. And then I come, I say, "Look, what you talking is meaningless. But if you temper with me, your life will be in danger. If you temper with me, I will get event to, at you! If you temper with me, I will do this. I will do that." Then you as a community leader, you have your wife. You have your children. You are afraid that I may come in to kill you or to harm you or to harm your children or your wife because of the threat from me to you. And therefore you get afraid of informing the police of what happened. ... Yeah, and so these people, the community leaders, they have been threatened by the ex-combatants that live within their control areas. ... Yes. Sometimes crimes are committed and police is not informed because the community leaders are afraid of their own children to have these crimes be reported to us. (13.14)

The officer's explanation for why community leaders are fearful about working with police is informative because community leaders never mentioned anything about this and because, if accurate, it shows a continued loss of power and control by elders in the post-conflict situation.

Women community leaders had a slightly different story to tell. One older woman who was the town chief explained that she is afraid to call people to her court or to carry people to the police because of fear that they will respond with violence against her. She said:

When I call them and they come to my call, we can fix it... When they don't come, some of them say they can take themselves. Some of them can take their own complaints and carry themselves.... Me, I sit down to my house. You don't call me there, I can't go there. Because me as the town chief, if I go there, I go tell you all, "Stop it." They will beat me! When they beat me, that's for nothing. Or they hurt me – that's for nothing. I've got no business to go there....(4.16)

This female informant's concern about violence against her reflects women's general fear of violence in the post-conflict period, and it is perhaps more ironic and troubling given that she is the town chief, which is presumably a position of authority. This informant also spoke much more explicitly about people not listening to her advice once she has intervened. She said,

They will not agree with me. So when I go there, police (inaudible) now. Send the person to the hospital. Then they can make it. For me, I can't do anything (?). When I tell them, tell this man go to the hospital. Then they pay money and carry to the hospital. They will say, "I ain't got money!" The only strong power here, that is the government! (4.18)

No other male community leader openly expressed this sense of disempowerment, and it indicates that some women in leadership positions may have a much more difficult time gaining respect and controlling their areas, or may be more willing to admit challenges to their authority.

Another female member of this same community said that “most people are disrespectful...those who can do it are the boys and the men.” (9.8). However, this female community leader does call for the police to come if a woman “faints” (is severely injured) from being beaten by her husband or if she is not able to resolve the dispute or conflict and does not “want trouble.”(4.17). Other older women discussed the importance of sending a woman or girl who has been raped to the hospital right away to get medical treatment. Male community leaders typically did not discuss their role in women’s healthcare after rape.

In conclusion, there does not appear to be much consistency or structure in community leaders’ responses to gender violence in Monrovia and Ganta. In one instance in Ganta, a man indirectly discussed his lack of trust in community leaders, saying that they had taken all of the food aid intended for their community for themselves. This kind of distrust may be the reason that some leaders do not receive many cases, which occasionally causes them to report that nothing bad is happening to women in their communities. In Ganta informants reported more loss of control by and lack of respect for community leadership, especially female leaders, one of which was afraid of her community members. This may be due to community leaders’ weakened financial situation and limited ability to assist their members, as was done in the past.⁸² In Monrovia the formal, male community leaders described community watch and conflict response systems that do not define men’s violence against women as a crime, and it appears that in both locations women victims of domestic violence are only referred to the police in the most serious of cases, most often when they were seriously injured.

Community Responses

Individuals respond to post-conflict violence in a variety of ways, from taking individual action to organizing systems of response. While not every individual response can be covered here, I highlight several well-functioning and creative community-based systems of response . These systems offer important lessons about how informal community leadership and systems can interact with formal leadership and government systems in the prevention of violence against women.

⁸² Some informants mentioned that before the war community leaders were likely to have been better off financially and thus able to lend community members money if they needed it for emergencies. After the war community leadership is facing the same financial difficulties as most people, which means that community members must rely on their families for emergency financial support rather than formal community leadership.

Monrovia

Individuals and community-based organizations respond to gender-based violence in their communities in a variety of ways. Because of the large number of INGOs in Monrovia and the training programs that they bring, there are examples of well-established community response systems in several communities.

Many informants said that they try to intervene in domestic violence and rape cases by mediating individual cases at the community level or by bringing a case to the police or courts. Yet, most people do not have the means to assist one another financially. Instead, members of a women's group said that they can go into homes and give counseling to encourage people to stop using violence. If the parties to the conflict do not listen to them and refuse to settle the problems in the home, then the individuals may take themselves to the police. People with problems can also bring their issues to their church communities. There was really no clear consensus among the different church groups on how their church communities respond to violence against women. Women in church groups were more inclined to discuss domestic violence if there were no male members present, which indicates that women are likely to be more comfortable confronting domestic violence when with other women and that churches with active women's groups may have members who are more receptive to responding proactively to domestic violence. Other informants reported that they engage in community-based development projects, which are intended to unify the community and give the youth a positive alternative to armed robbery and prostitution. Other informants expressed their desire to create a community watch team to patrol the exits and entries to communities at night and to potentially prevent or respond to armed robberies as they are happening by detaining the armed robbers until police can reach the community to arrest them.

Those that choose to involve themselves in others' security concerns may face some challenges to their interventions. One woman said that people, especially the youth, do not always take their advice (20.12). Another woman was concerned that parents can compromise their children's rape cases by accepting money from the rapist instead of going to the police or court. She said:

Yeah, they compromise. Most of them compromising. We try to go in and they tell us to leave them alone. ...Because it has been happening during the war, so, and the victims been down. But they don't know (the effects?) on the victim. So for that reason, they just decide to just do everything like that. (20.6)

This represents a total compromise of justice for girls in a hierarchical social system that values economic incentives over their physical and mental well-being. This informant believes that people are accustomed to rape happening during the war and are ignorant of the consequences of rape for the girl or woman, which leads to their resistance to prosecuting the case. Another police officer expressed his frustrations with the impunity and compromise of rape cases:

But we take the subject to the doctor, he will say, “Yeah the little girl was forcibly sexually molested.” But because out of poverty, the doer will talk to the girl and give her 50 or 25 USD. And she will say, “No, officer. My brother never did anything. I know this guy. I have settled the situation.” So women are affected, greatly....But when at times rape is being committed, and before we get involved, you find out that they even tried to bribe the family so that the case will just remain at the thing (?), so that it will not become a public thing. And so that’s why we are also getting in the business in making sure we can break the culture of silence. We want to break that culture. We also want to see that perpetrators are prosecuted, so that this act of rape and other acts that [are] committed against women is put a stop to.... (22.5)

This male police officer explains how the police are sometimes unable to handle rape cases properly due to individual resistance to use of formal procedures. This does not mean to say that all police officers in Liberia are doing an excellent job of handling rape cases (although some probably are), but that there may be barriers to justice that begin at the individual level. What is also interesting in this police officer’s statement is how he wants to make rape public, to break the “culture of silence,” through his advocacy and membership in a gender-based violence community action group. At the same time, women and girls facing extreme poverty may wish to or may be forced to accept money as compensation for their rape, effectively keeping the crime a private affair. Significantly, the privatization of violence and rape is very different from the war period when men raped in public settings and ways. It seems that in the post-conflict period rape is re-privatized, and some community members want to make it public again.

As rape continues in the post-conflict period, so does armed robbery, and it continues to present a threat to people in their communities. Informants also said that they are at risk if they try to assist someone during armed robberies because others have guns. Several women and one man said:

Like for instance, the rogue (robber) enters your house or bad, bad people enter your house. They kill you, you’re yelling. Nobody will come outside. Nobody will come outside....Everybody’s scared!...We don’t want to get killed....We don’t have the weapons that people carry in the house. (24.4)

So your (you all) now to part them, it will be hard. When you go to him, they bring the cutlass to chop you. You've got to go.... Sometimes some people can use cell phone to call for UNMIL. Before UNMIL comes, they run away. This is why the people that were fighting, all of them will disappear. Somebody running with cutlass in his hand, you can't run behind him. (29.4)

It seems that efforts at establishing community watch programs are hampered by this fear of being harmed when coming to someone's rescue, especially if the person who is injured is poor and does not have the means to get medical treatment. In general people said that they go to the police if the fighting seems serious, although others said that people do not always report to the police about domestic disputes out of fear that they will be blamed by the husband or wife afterwards. It appears that people are generally fearful about responding to most crimes directly and reporting some crimes like domestic violence to the police, but are less fearful or not fearful about reporting to the police on things like robbery or physical fighting between men in the streets. This suggests that individuals cannot really rely on their communities for protection and assistance, and that family disputes are not considered to be a matter of public concern.

Some informants participated in extensive training with INGOs on child protection and gender-based violence. Community members who had stayed in their communities during the war were intimately familiar with the area and its needs and therefore in prime positions to establish early response community programs. These individuals and groups, no doubt with inherent aptitudes for community organizing, were able to take the skills that they developed through these programs to create structured systems for community response to gender violence.

The community committee model is a common type of INGO intervention in Liberia. It seems that the purpose of most of the INGO training is to establish committees made of men and women or just women, such as a Women's Action Group, which will then take on activities and forms according to the needs and desires of the community. These committees perform a wide range of tasks, including fact-finding and documentation, awareness raising in the community and in schools, advocacy, case management, and in some cases, direct service delivery. Advocacy activities may include following rape cases to make sure that cases reach the courts and prosecution begins or it can involve speaking out in the community about female-genital mutilation⁸³ or pornography, which is played in the video halls for male youth. Often these

⁸³ Interestingly, the only person to mention FGM was a man who was very persistent about the need to end this kind of culturally-sanctioned abuse of women.

groups are the first responders in their communities, so people may refer cases to them directly before going ever to the police. The groups may also intervene in cases and make referrals to the relevant INGO. As social workers of a sort, they are not paid and instead volunteer their time and effort and often take on the burdens of providing services to a community in constant need of them. Their case management activities involve counseling, making referrals for larger cases that they cannot handle (such as rape), liaising and establishing working relationships with the courts, police departments, and other civil society organizations, and even apprehending suspects to bring to the police.

Sometimes they must intervene during a violent conflict because the police are unable or will not. One woman told of her experience:

And sometimes police scared. Like a case...an allegation was led on a woman that she, she did a murder. She killed a boy. And this boy was her child....So they pick up sticks, pick up iron, they pick up weapons. They said she was a witch...They want to kill her. When I got there, I said, no, no, no, please no, no, police! There was nobody to go to her rescue. I started pleading, please, please, somebody help me, somebody help me. No one could help. I pick up my phone, call the police. Police took time. Still I went back there, lock up the woman and box the door. ...The police came....And we just escaped, we took her, and we carried her for safe keeping. To keep her somewhere for the tension to go down. And, in case police wasn't there, she could, they could have killed her. And we are taking risks, but we are not getting paid. You see? It's very, very hard. (17.9)

People involved with these groups, as first responders, often face risks and jeopardize their physical safety in order to protect others in the community. This burden can put a strain on their work, families, and livelihoods.

Because these community groups may be the only ones operating consistently at the local level, they can become the de facto social service center for their issue, such as a makeshift orphanage. One woman working on child protection said that over the past months young mothers and other community members have given her 15 babies because the girls are unable to care for them or the babies are without mothers. As a volunteer, she has no resources to care for these children, although she would like to start a local NGO and get funding to be able to offer these services legitimately. Members of the groups explained how they need assistance and some form of income in order to continue to do their work, as they are being overwhelmed with cases. Without financial support and greater organization stability, they lose members who must make other choices about livelihoods at the cost of participating in the community action group.

One community in particular had such a complex and creative system for responding to gender violence at the community level that it deserves full description. This Women's Action Group responds to gender violence as the first line of response in a tiered system that includes the community leaders, police, and magistrate. The group's main activities are awareness raising, investigation, and referrals. Their group is made of a separate Security and Investigation Committee, entirely staffed by women. After a case (on issues of domestic violence, rape, child abuse, and sexual abuse) has been received, usually by contacting the leadership or a member, the Security Committee, who is trained on case management, apprehends the accused person. They then bring him or her for a meeting with the Investigation Committee, which is made of elder women in the community. For cases of domestic violence when tensions are high, they sometimes wait to have the investigation for a few days or a week until the situation cools down, but make sure that the woman is able to get to a hospital if she needs to have her health checked. It seems that rapes are reported directly and immediately to the police and the woman or girl taken to the hospital. One leader of the group said:

And sometimes, most of the time, we talk to the men how women are not slaves to them. In a very polite manner. Not with violence now. Not with force. But they've got some people they're hard to understand. If you're talking to them, if the person already vexed. So if you're going to talk to that person, you have to humble yourself to them and show them that love. And they will listen to you. So, most of the time, when we're talking on domestic [violence], we take time so that the men can be willing to listen to us...If you does wrong, you go against our rules [they fine you]. Because everybody here knows that if you abuse in this community, you will give money. That is clear cut. If you fight, you will pay money. If, if you beat your wife and she, you hurt her – even if you do not hurt her, you beat your wife, you will pay some. So...the man will find that your wife is not your slave to you. She is your caretaker. So, she is not somebody that you can beat on. So we will tell you that next time you should not do it. Not with violence. We talk to him in a very polite manner that he must understand. If your wife does something to you and you are trying to talk to her, she don't want to understand you, you can refer to the Women's Action Group. (18.3-4)

This informant believes that if they are able to introduce this conflict resolution system as something that both men and women can use to resolve conflict, then more men will be willing to participate in it instead of hitting their wives. However, they leave the decision to move forward with an investigation into a domestic violence case up to the woman and her family. If the woman's parents choose to have a community court procedure, then the Women's Action Group takes a stand against the man.

If a ruling has been delivered and the man does not want to pay the fine or resists participation in the system, then the group refers him to the community leadership. The community leadership can enforce the women's group's ruling or it can forward the case on to the police or magistrate if it is serious and the individual is very hostile. A group leader said that they also have direct access to the magistrate's office and the Women and Children Protection officer for very serious cases, bypassing their own investigation and the community leadership. She said, "I call to her and tell her – if you do that thing you have to go it very intelligently. So when I call to her, I say so and so are, so and so people called, violence there" (18.13). Despite their direct access to these officers, the group believes that they need a police depot in their community to help reduce problems and to provide a form of deterrence for future situations. With a depot nearby they would not have to leave the community to get to the police at night or call UNMIL to request a ride.

A leader of the group said that people in the community have come to understand how their group works and to respect it. In fact, she said that community members usually prefer to come to the women's group first rather than bringing cases to the police directly. She thinks that they have garnered so much respect in the community because of the hard work that they put into preventing and responding to gender-based violence. She said:

Because our hard work that we are doing. The community leadership was not able to do the work. So we the women, we can't sit there. They said, women, do something. So we help to enforce the law in this community. (18.4)

This informant also noted that if a case has reached the police, then they know that it is serious because it has gone through several rounds of investigation, and for this reason they are more inclined to take it seriously and act on it quickly. This Women's Action Group acts as a first responder in the community, and they vet serious cases of abuse for the police while also working to develop non-violent conflict resolution in the community and in the family. They do this not simply because they are advocating for women's rights (although they do), but because it is necessary. Community response mechanisms are essential because, as the group's leader said, "Not every time the police will be around." (18.15)

Ganta

There seem to be fewer organized and systematic responses to gender violence in Ganta. Instead, interventions happen at the individual level, although there are some general trends in how people respond to gender-based violence.

People universally said that they do not accept violence in their communities, and they can intervene on their own in domestic violence and fighting situations happening near them in a variety of ways. Some use basic mediation skills to resolve a conflict between a husband and wife, some refer the case to the town chief, and others support men or women in taking cases to the police or court. One female participant from the community with a female town chief said, “those who respect the town people, they call them,” while others may go directly to the police (9.8). Another woman recounted how women can take the woman being beaten by her husband away from the home for a period of time until the situation calms down (1.15). It appears that sending a man and a woman to the police or to court is rarely done; the only times that it is acceptable for community members to call the police are for “unmerciful beatings” of women (15.7) or situations where they are unable to reach a resolution and fighting continues. Otherwise a woman must bring the case herself. However, if two men are fighting on the street, then people can call the police. This demonstrates that there are different standards of violence that people will accept for men and women, and that crimes against women have a much higher threshold to reach before they are offered formal assistance.

Almost all informants that discussed rape said that they take the survivor to the police or to the clinic. However, it is not clear if people are taking the girl or woman to the clinic for the primary purpose of her health or to help document the crime, and it appears that they do not always report rape to the police. One man said:

I will take that [rape] to the clinic. To make sure whether it's true....They will take that to the clinic, then, it's put as true, it's left with the parents. The parents can say, ok, we can handle our kids here, we can handle it. If they can take them to authority, we take them to authority...Yes, sometimes we can take it to (handle it generally?), but if we don't agree, we can take it to the authority. It's left with the parents. (7.10)

This man indicates that in the case of a girl, parents have control over whether a case is reported to the police or not, and it appears that going to the police in rape cases is seen as a last resort if the community cannot reach an agreement about proper compensation. This compromises justice for women and most especially for girls who likely have no control over these decisions. In other cases, community members may also gather funds to take a girl to the clinic and ask the

rapist to refund the money. Another woman said that there is really not much that can be done about rape, except for the mother to “have patience and take care of the child” (10.5). Yet, one woman said that her immediate response to rape is to take the girl first to the clinic for assistance and then to the police station (15.9), indicating that some women may be more committed to responding to rape. It seems that most people consider rape to be a crime, however, they do not always believe that it needs to or can be resolved by the authorities.

A few communities have fines for when you beat your wife or “fight in the public” (7.9). Other methods of response were to form community watch groups of men at night to protect against armed robbers and hidemen, to form community groups with the male youth to provide forums of counseling and workshops for behavior change and skills training, to collect small amounts of money from community members and, more likely, family members to assist someone in going to a clinic, and to bring fighting and domestic violence cases to church groups for advice. Other illegal solutions include killing and mob justice. A police officer complained that people do not respect the rule of law and instead prefer to take their own action (13.3). A community member said that people fear that the police will do nothing about the criminals in their area so they wish to be able to teach those that kill a lesson by killing them (9.6).

Several people expressed fears about intervening and concerns about their inability to assist community members. Some people are afraid that they will be harmed if they intervene in fighting. One woman described her response to violent domestic disputes:

Like if I meet a couple fighting, and I know that I am not able to stop them, I’ll go and call police. I think if they see the police, they might stop. But like me, if I go there some day, they might take knife and plug me, and I will die from that.....Sometimes some men can put their women in the house and lock them up before beating. So you that standing by, you can go to the police and call on police...Yeah, when he locks the door and beating the person in there, I can go to police. Because I don’t want that lady to be killed. (15.9)

In this woman’s story we see that men can become extremely violent with women in the home, even locking the doors to prevent them from leaving, and that other women are unable to respond directly due to the need to protect themselves. In these situations and when there is a fear for the life of the woman, concerned women and men can call the police directly. Some people explained that intervening as mediators or calling the police or hiding a woman may be the only form of assistance that they can give; many are so poor that they do not have the money

to support their friends and family when others are in need of material assistance to go to clinics, police, or the courts.

Finally, some women have begun to form advocacy groups on their own or with the help of the IRC social workers. These groups hold meetings among women to discuss issues important to them, and they also can call meetings with government representatives or hold peaceful demonstrations to bring attention to community concerns, such as hidemen and rape. One widows association was also trying to build an office so that their members can hold meetings and expand their economic cooperative activities, although they had no source of funding for this effort and were barely able to begin construction.

In conclusion, communities seem to respond to the bulk of gender violence cases at the community level and through individual action. Communities in Monrovia had more access to INGO training and support, and this appears to have enabled them to develop more structured systems of community response. These systems enable people to respond to gender violence in ways that they may be afraid to do at the individual level. In Ganta, people rely on individual level action, and this seems to make responses to gender violence much more inconsistent and infrequent, which results obstructs justice and proper healthcare for women and girls. In Monrovia, some people appear to be very active in advocating for appropriate responses to rape and domestic violence, although it seems that the danger in widespread public advocacy in both locations would be if people are not properly trained on the gender violence issues. An example would be if overzealous advocates fail to respect a rape survivor's privacy and agency by going public with a case or forcing her to do something that she does not want to do. It would be regretful if people's desire and actions to make sexual violence a public issue somehow re-victimized and disempowered women. Finally, the tremendous benefits of community-based response systems are that they provide women with a group of advocates and supporters throughout the entire response process, which likely would give her the confidence to go forward with prosecution of rape or domestic violence cases. Yet, the efficacy of a community-based response requires that community leadership is aware of and actively supports the group's efforts. It was not entirely clear in Monrovia if the formal leadership was completely aware of the extent of the Women's Action Group's work, which indicates that the group may still face

barriers among male, formal community leaders to complete integration with formal community conflict response systems.

Police

The police stations that I observed in Monrovia and Ganta were dark, crowded, noisy, run down, and intimidating. The UN Police in Liberia are tasked with reforming, training, and supporting the work of the Liberian National Police. UNPOL has a target goal of 3,500 LNP trainees by June 2007, and they have assisted LNP in the development of a 911 emergency system in Monrovia and as well as having established 29 depots (stations) in Monrovia and 32 in Liberia's other 15 counties.⁸⁴ The LNP/UNPOL collaboration has also launched Community Policing Forums in Monrovia and 45 rural areas to "address public awareness and instill public trust in the national police," and has also opened a Women and Child Protection unit in Monrovia.⁸⁵ UNPOL and UNMIL have also worked to rehabilitate police stations and procure new uniforms for the forces. Notably, the LNP Inspector General is a woman named Beatrice Munah Sieh, one of female appointments that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf made at the start of her administration.

Despite UNPOL and UNMIL efforts to restructure and reestablish the police force, the LNP face some significant challenges at maintaining security and gaining legitimacy. As noted above, the regions outside of Monrovia are scarcely covered by LNP, with only 32 stations through the entire country, leaving many people unprotected and out of reach of police responses. Additionally, Human Rights Watch reports that though UNMIL was responsible for vetting police recruits in order to screen out those that may have committed human rights abuses during the war, that, "the vetting process appears to have been disorganized, inefficient, and most likely ineffective in screening out human rights abusers."⁸⁶ Moreover, the history of police abuse of civilians in Liberia under Charles Taylor's regime is well-documented. The US State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor notes that "government police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused and humiliated citizens," and

⁸⁴ UNMIL, "United Nations Police," Available at <http://unmil.org/content.asp?ccat=civpol>, Accessed on 1 May 2007.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Liberia: Human Rights Overview," Available at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/liberi12315.htm>, Viewed on 1 May 2007.

were publicly known to have assassinated and robbed people with relative impunity.⁸⁷ Given this history, it is not surprising that civilians may be wary of police forces, which may explain why some civilians are skeptical about the effectiveness and integrity of today's LNP forces. The fact that UNPOL and LNP have initiated community outreach programs illustrates that public perception of and trust in the LNP is a significant issue.

The police in post-conflict Liberia face a number of challenges, including responding to high levels of insecurity and violence with many material constraints and, until December 2006, were without arms to protect themselves. Informants had mixed opinions about the effectiveness of police forces in preventing and responding to gender violence.

Monrovia

In Monrovia, informants said that they go to the police with all rape cases and domestic violence cases if they are very serious. A serious domestic violence case would involve a man threatening to kill a woman or if the a man refuses to stop beating a woman. One woman recounted:

Like, for instance, the man is beating his wife right there, say "Oh, my brother, please stop, stop, stop." He can't listen; he refuses. He is still beating and we're seeing blood coming up. We get to the police. (17.11)

A male community official said that people go to the police most often when there is armed robbery and they need the police to arrest someone. Another group of women said that people take domestic violence cases to the police often, and one woman said that people go to the police because they prefer to settle conflicts there (17.6). In some cases the police have established relationships with community action groups, and so they come to these groups with cases or requests for assistance.

Although people seem comfortable going to the police, they are generally not very satisfied with the protection and response that police offer them. Almost all informants said that people bringing cases to the police must make a payment to the police officers before the police will respond to them. The few people who said that there are no fees were male community leaders. The exception to an obligatory fee is if people are reporting rape or if they report the case through a community action group working on child protection or gender-based violence that already has a formal relationship with the police office. If you report another other kind of

⁸⁷ US Department of State, "Liberia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2002," March 31, 2003, Available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18211.htm>, Viewed on 1 May 2007

case on your own, then you must pay some amount, (one woman said that the amount depends on the gravity of the case (20.7)) either to register or to pay for the police officer's transportation to and from the community so that they are able to apprehend the perpetrator. Other people noted that you must continue to pay in order to move your case forward, which indicates that there may also be costs for investigation.

Some people believe that these payments stop individuals from taking cases to the police. One woman explained that the police imposed this payment scheme because they believed that too many people were bringing frivolous cases, and so the fees are intended to deter unnecessary cases. Yet, some women complained:

Oh, if you cannot pay, then your case will not go on. [If] You would spend the money. [Then] You will always be right. If you don't pay, they will say, "Oh, that case there, let's drop it now. The person's not serious. (26.6)

Only the rich live in the area now...No justice for the poor. Because you don't have money to run after you case. (24.7)

If accurate, it appears that efforts to reduce unnecessary caseloads by imposing fees may have impeded some individuals from being able to get access to the criminal justice system. Others discussed the problem of bribery, and a few informants were concerned that the police release rape suspects because they are paid off. A group of Ghanaians living in Monrovia admitted during interviews that they bribe the police to go away when there is fighting because they do not want to be taken to the police station.

Even if people are able to report cases, the police response may be unsatisfactory. Some informants complained that the police do not get to the scene of an incident quick enough, and others reported that the "911" emergency number either does not work or that if they are able to get through then the police and ambulance do not know how to get to their communities. One woman's story reveals the lack of urgency and accountability that communities feel.

Police, we tried to call and tell them, their phone number. They never came until the armed robbers did what they were able to do. After they left, around 4:30 in the morning was when the police got informed, and they came. When they came, armed robbers did what they had wanted to do, they had already left the place. And we were all here. They came, they came, they checked around. They left. The next morning they came back, and from there, we didn't hear anything said about it. (26.2)

Others believe that the police are afraid of coming to their defense because the police officers have no weapons to protect themselves. Some informants were concerned that the depots are too far away to get to in the night.

Perhaps the most significant concern came from several people in one community who contend that the police were recruited from the rebel groups and armed forces. They believe that some of them still have arms that they did not hand over during the DDRR process, and that they are using these arms to rob people at night when they are off duty. They said:

What we're saying is – the same police, the same ex-combatants, are the same people that went into the police. And then now, they are not armed there, but some of them got arms! In the night they carry on them. They change clothes, and they're the same police. They're in the same police uniform. Then when you look, they say, Armed robber. When we look, we can't see the armed robber. We see police. That's why, so, we live in fear here. (31.5)

This informant's statement reflects some people's continued fear of and lack of trust in police forces. This woman's poetic comments about the confusion surrounding who is an armed robber and who is from the police reflects the full history of this institution's relationship with civilians in Liberian society. People's inability to identify and trust the police causes them to live in fear, as if they are still in war and still being preyed on by armed forces.

Ganta

In Ganta informants reported that they go to the police directly with rape cases and with some domestic violence cases. If something very bad is happening in their communities, then people will call the police to the area to pacify the situation and detain individuals. Examples of these kinds of situations would be if people are fighting physically in the street or if there is an armed robbery, although several people said that the situation is usually not bad enough to have to call the police. One woman said that she would go to the police with a domestic violence case if a man threatened to kill her or someone that she knew. In general, it seems that people go to the police with rape cases and for other kinds of domestic violence or fighting cases if they feel that it has reached a level that they are unable to handle in their community.

People generally agreed that going to the police was not a very effective response to rape and domestic violence, although some indicated that they think that the police are always responsive and available. For example, one male community leader said that the police visit his community every week to check in and make sure that everything is alright. Still others felt that the police do not enforce the law, are open to corruption, and some feared that the police beat men when they come to their communities. One person reported that the police do not come to her community during the night because they are afraid; they only respond to cases during the

day. People reported that there is nothing that stops them from going to the police, but that once someone gets to the police station, she needs money to pay to register the case, to buy gasoline for the motorbike so that the police officer can apprehend the accused (they will not walk), to bribe the officer to speed up the investigation, to buy pen and paper so that the officer can document the case, or to thank the officer if a case goes well for you. People seem to believe that without money your case will go nowhere. One man complained about police corruption:

Let the officers that's coming up at this time, after this war, let them know their duty. They must not depend on money. Let them do the right job! As a police officer, you must not first request for money before you can take issue to be a major one. Take the issue as a state issue and address yourself to it – find out who is wrong and who is right! It should be their bound duty. (2.14)

One woman noted that she does not have to pay to register a rape case, but that she does have to pay to register a domestic violence case (15.9). Another informant said that if the case is serious, such as a killing or if a woman is bleeding from an incident of domestic violence, then the police may go to the area quickly and without payment. The high-ranking police officer in Ganta that I interviewed said that people never have to pay to report cases, although he may have been misrepresenting the situation or unaware of the practices of the other officers.

Informants also had concerns about what the police do after they have arrested someone. Several people were concerned with the special treatment that people get while in prison. One woman said:

They [human rights NGOs] will carry mattresses, they will carry bed sheets. They feed them, everything. So you're the ones that, your somebody is killed. You will go there for investigation, they will not look at you. (11.10)

Informants reported that they are required to feed the people that they have accused of a crime while they are in jail. One woman said:

And mind you, if you feed that person, or if you send the person to the compound, the prison compound there, and you don't follow your case up, within 24 hours they will put the person out... You follow up by cooking to carry there, then also finding out how far you are going with the case from the police... Bringing food and going to ask the person... and asking when will the case be judged (9.18)

According to these reports, individuals who may have trouble feeding their own families are required to feed the men that may have raped their daughters before they can begin to seek justice. People also complained that the police release individuals after only a short stay in jail, effectively letting the case die. Informants suspected that people in jail may pay the police to be

released, or that the police may release the accused because they do not want to violate the detained individual's human rights by not feeding him or her. It seems that the police do not have the resources to feed and house suspects during an investigation.

A few people discussed the positive things that police can do for them, such as sending cases onto court or telling men to send their wives to the hospital for treatment before they review their case. Yet, overall people do not seem to trust that the police will be able to assist them. Several women said:

The police? Even you reach there, they can't do anything. So, you will just bear it when you know that nothing's going on good, you just come back to the house. (10.7)

The police always seek interest in the criminal than the civilian, than the victim....and as they carry the complaint to the station, they carry the criminal there, the police protect the criminal. Your (you all) will go in vain (12.4)

One police officer shared his perspective on responding to violence in communities. He said that the police do not have the logistics that they need in order to cover the area for which they are responsible, which includes not only the town but also over twenty surrounding villages. The office has no permanent car, no phones, and only minimal material support from UNMIL in the form of a car that they lend during the day and occasionally some stationery. He maintains that people do not have to pay fees to report cases, that the police have only 24 hours to investigate cases and turn them over to the courts, and that he does not know what happens in the courts once he hands a case over to them. The police rely on the IRC and a local women's group to respond to rape cases by paying to take the survivor to the clinic and finding temporary shelter for her, and he contacts the IRC as soon as he gets a rape case. The IRC also assists with prostitution cases. He admits that more crimes are committed in the night when they have no vehicle on patrol, but because they are "working under extreme conditions" and without assistance, there is nothing for him to do (13.10). He said:

But where's there no help, violence is always on the increase, yes. And we need more help. And for us, the police, we find it difficulty in performing our duty. (13.9)

He is frustrated by the tension that he sees between the police and the community, citing incidents when community members and ex-combatants have come to stone the police station or beat up police officers. He said, "And yet still we render them services. It's our responsibility to render them these services. We do that with the limited resources we have." (13.15)

In conclusion, it appears that there is a real tension between the police and communities in both Ganta and Monrovia. What communities see as negligence and corruption, may, in part, be a lack of resources and an overloading of cases for the police. Yet, there are likely real problems within the police system and their lack of accountability to civilians. What is clear is that there are some real fears of the police in Monrovia, and some people were associating them, accurately or not, with ex-combatants and armed robbers. In Ganta, the system seems so strained that they absolutely rely on the IRC to be able to handle rape cases. Because the police in Ganta have no vehicles are likely rarely able to travel out to surrounding villages, women and girls in these areas are likely to be extremely vulnerable to abuse. Finally, it also seems clear that people in both locations are more likely to treat rape as a crime that deserves police attention than domestic violence.

Courts

The court system in Liberia is multi-layered and complex, incorporating several customary and formal systems. This section does not explain or even seek to understand this system entirely, and other articles have attempted to do this.⁸⁸ Instead, this section outlines participant's descriptions of how they use the court system and the problems they face with the various systems. The common description of the use of the court in both Monrovia and Ganta is that you must pay to register a case and move it forward, although in Monrovia there appears to be more organized avenues for free access to the courts.

Monrovia

Informants in Monrovia reported that people must pay in order to bring cases to court and that the court is not an effective response for individuals or communities. In general, informants said that people in need of redress must bring their case to court by paying both to register the case and to bring the defendant to court. If a decision is reached and the individual found guilty of a crime, then they may face jail.

Several informants argued that the court is not an effective solution for individuals because the caseload is backlogged, there are barriers to access, and perpetrators are often

⁸⁸ See, for example, Marcus Holknekt, "Making the Neighborhood Safe: Police Reform, Community Involvement and Insecurity in Post-War Liberia," The Fletcher School, May 2007.

released by judges. A group of women activists said that the youth are taking one another to court at high rates, especially teenage girls “who are taking their friends to court...fighting for money, men...because violence has been applied” (17.3). It is not clear if the violence that they speak of occurred between the women or within a woman’s relationship with a man. They also said that there are more than 200 rape cases waiting to be heard at the Temple of Justice.⁸⁹ One older man described what he would have to do in order to bring a case to court:

You want to go to court, you take car. You pay your way to go. Then, when you go register your case, the messenger will send to come arrest the person. The messenger, and you pay the messenger when you come. After you come, they come arrest the person, you pay way again for your (you all) to go to court! (29.7)

This man’s description of the process reveals that someone would have to invest a significant amount of money into the case before it can even begin to be heard. Another female community activist who was troubled by the release of accused rapists from jail suspected that certain judges are freeing them (18.7).

Several community leaders said that the court conflict resolution process was not effective for their community because that system does not resolve conflict in the long-term. They said:

Because the court in itself is blind. The court don’t want to know that when they sue you, you run, you can’t pay, you ain’t got money, so you will go to jail. The court don’t want to know that, because that’s rule of law. But here, we can able to talk to you, say, “Man, let’s go in here and go in try to find that out. But we beg you, one should give you any small thing. Take that one, forget about the bad other one.” That kind of thing happens here, but not in court. The court don’t do that. They left with the complaint there too. And normally when the complaintant carries you to court, you will not agree. And so even when the court has joined the case, like ruling that this person is wrong, then we believe that the complaint will begin. From that ruling the complaint will begin there because the person will always say in the community that you, you carried me to court. You and myself were on it. And that problems will always remain. But in the community, when it’s resolved, they don’t go back to complaint again. I think that we have been working towards that. (30.7)

This man’s statement reveals the community leaders’ preference for local, community-based conflict resolution because they believe that system to be more flexible and durable. Yet, his account refers to a situation of stealing, and not to a situation of domestic violence. Clearly this

⁸⁹ The Temple of Justice in Monrovia houses the Ministry of Justice and national courts. During my stay in Liberia, the Association of Female Laywers in Liberia was calling for the establishment of a “Fast Track Court” to expedite the review of all of these backlogged sexual violence cases.

preference for local solutions may compromise justice and security for some women who are persuaded not to bring their cases to formal systems.

Notably, there are some systems in Monrovia that apparently enable people to have free access to the courts. Two community women's action groups in two locations spoke of having an agreement with the courts that a person who they bring or sponsor will not have to pay the registration fee. It seems that this avenue of free access through the community group may be one of the only ways to reach the court system for some people.

Ganta

In Ganta, informants' main concerns were about the amount of money one would need in order to effectively bring and move a case through the court system. In general, it seems that the system functions in Ganta similar to that in Monrovia; people pay to register a case in any court (both customary and civil), and must also pay a messenger fee to bring the person to court. It is unclear if the person who brings the case or who is being accused must pay this messenger fee and must post bond for the accused, but after a judge makes a ruling, the guilty party seems to be responsible for all costs. Others said that there is no cost if the police refer a case to court. In any case, there are likely financial costs to going to court, and several informants indicated that they only go to court if a case is very serious.

Informants noted that someone bringing a case needs to pay money throughout the entire process, and that this is what makes the system seem so ineffective and frustrating. One woman recounted her experience with the system.

They [ex-combatants] beat my daughter. The other one beat my daughter. And we carried him to the police station. When you go to the police station, if you didn't have money to give to the police, they will just free the people. And the ex-combatant, when they get money, they will give it to the police people, and the police will free the children. And then you in blood (?). They will tell you to go to the hospital. And then we you go, you go, you don't got money. You come back. They finished freeing the person. The person's gone home. And then you and the (inaudible) – they will send you all to court. And they send you all to court, and you don't got money. And the person that hurt you, when the person's got money, then the person will pay money. Any time you go there, you don't got money, the case will just be like that...The person went and paid certain money. When he paid the money, we went there, the person can't come. Because the person can't come. When you ask, they say, the person set his bond. The person set his bond. And you, you don't get money. You don't get no rights. They can just hurt you and go in vain. You just suffer for nothing. So that's the some of the bad, bad things that's going on. And when I see the person, I want to do my own! But when I think about the peace that you all say, peace should come in Liberia, sometimes I cool my heart and leave

my own regard... You, you don't got money, you and your children have got no food to eat. Then you just get weak and sit down.... Me, I got case in the court, but I ain't got money. (12.6)

This woman's experience indicates that people do not feel that the system is fair, that there may be confusion in the community about how the legal system works, and that there is mistrust of the legal system and rule of law. She equates justice with an ability to have her voice heard in the court, and this requires an ability to make payments into the system. Without money, she has no rights. Other informants expressed similar sentiments, and they felt that going to court without money was a waste of time. One man said, "If you don't have money? Then they throw your case out!" (3.9)

In conclusion, lack of money and resources seems to be the greatest barrier for getting access to formal court systems in both Monrovia and Ganta. In both locations it seems that going to civil courts are seen as a last resort if people are unable to settle disputes in their communities. The community leaders in Monrovia addressed the short- vs. long-term resolutions that civil vs. community courts provide, and this reflects the tension between individual and community justice. In some cases, women's individual justice for rape and domestic violence cases may be in conflict with the "community's" conception of justice, which is likely dictated by older men and, sometimes, women in positions of authority.

Healthcare

Women and girls who have been raped or beaten will have physical injuries and psychological trauma that require medical assistance. Those who have been raped are likely to suffer physical trauma and tearing in their genitals and other areas where they were beaten or restrained, and the trauma to the genitals will probably be more severe or will even cause permanent damage for younger girls who are less developed physically. Rape survivors require advanced medical care by someone who is trained in handling rape cases, providing pregnancy and HIV prophylaxis, and collecting evidence for criminal prosecution. Ideally, there will also be a rape crisis advocate available to assist the survivor in handling the psychological trauma of rape as well as the post-rape recovery. Women who have been beaten may have open wounds that require stitching, broken bones that require casting, or even internal bleeding, which requires more intensive medical care. While some women may be able to treat minor wounds at home or at the

local community clinic, other domestic violence cases and all rape cases require more sophisticated medical care.

The major concerns about healthcare are a lack of facilities in communities and a lack of supplies in clinics. In most cases, staff in community clinics are unable to treat and respond to rape cases because they do not have the appropriate training, medications, or equipment, so women and girls must travel at night to go to larger hospitals in order to get treatment. Because poor sanitation conditions are almost universal, people have limited access to latrines and clean water, which puts everyone at risk of disease. Women and girls in particular are at risk of sexual assault when moving about alone to use the fields as a toilet rather than being able to use latrines in safe spaces.

Monrovia

In Monrovia, informants reported that it is often necessary to travel a distance in order to get “good treatment” (29.3). Many local clinics are only open during the day, so people must travel at night if necessary to get to a larger hospital. Even when clinics are open during the day, many do not handle rape cases and transfer them to free hospitals run by INGOs like MSF. Some informants said that even when there are clinics in their communities, there are often few supplies; a health care worker said that her supplies are often stolen by ex-combatants. Other clinics may provide poor conditions for patients; one woman recounted how she found a girl that had been raped sleeping on the floor with no food in one hospital, and this girl later became pregnant from the rape (25.2). Most clinics are not likely to have the pregnancy and HIV prophylaxis that women and girls need to avoid unwanted pregnancies and future disease, which is why they must travel to larger hospitals.

Despite the challenges to healthcare in Monrovia, women’s action and community groups said that women’s and girls’ health is their top priority when they receive a case. One group reported that women and girls are immediately sent for treatment, and the group facilitates arranging transportation to hospitals outside the community by calling UNPOL police for a ride. In emergency domestic violence cases where women may not have enough time to collect money for the clinic or hospital fees, women’s groups may force the man who beat her to give money to pay for the woman’s treatment. If he resists putting money forward, then the women’s group may pass him the bill when the woman returns from the clinic.

Ganta

In Ganta, informants reported that it is very difficult to even get to the clinics because a lot of people cannot afford the basic clinic fees. People said that if someone needs to go to the clinic, then she needs to pay for herself because few other people will be able to assist her, except for a few family or friends. If someone does not have money to pay for her treatment, then the private hospitals and NGO clinics will not see them or give them medication. Others reported that even if you do pay for the visit, then there are often no drugs available. Although informants reported that they would go to the clinics for domestic violence and rape cases, they said that they are often unable because they cannot afford the visit. Multiple people said, “For every treatment you take, you have to buy. And if you don’t have the money, you die.” (8.5). For this reason, many people requested that the government build a free hospital in their area so that they have some access to healthcare.

In conclusion, there is clearly a problem of lack of access to quality healthcare for everyone in both Monrovia and Ganta, and most people are at increased risk to health problems and disease due to poor sanitation and water conditions. Women and girls face these same general risks as well as the risks caused by severe wounds, sexually-transmitted diseases, and physical and psychological trauma that may result from rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence. The lack of affordable and quality healthcare in communities can prevent women from getting the necessary treatment after a violent experience to reach a full recovery, which leaves some permanently disabled or even dead, as evidenced above.

Barriers to Justice for Women and Girls

Women and girls face barriers to justice for rape and domestic violence cases in their community leadership, and from their neighbors, the police, the courts, and healthcare systems. I have highlighted some of the major issues that prevent as well as encourage an effective response to gender violence above. Yet, there are several factors that appear fundamentally central to the questions of justice for women and girls. The first is whether communities, community leaders, and formal institutions and systems like the police and courts define rape and domestic violence as crimes in practice. Even though rape is clearly a crime and convicted rapists face life imprisonment, in practice most cases are not reported, some cases are compromised, others are

lost in the criminal justice system, and few rapists are convicted. Domestic violence only seems to be treated as a crime if a woman is severely attacked, and even then most community systems and leadership actively work *against* women seeking protection in police and judicial systems. Community leaders and members claim to do prevent domestic violence cases from leaving the community because they feel that formal systems of conflict resolution and justice are a waste of people's time and money, are not sustainable, and are not necessary. Ultimately, they are able to block access to justice for women because women have a lower status than men in Liberian society, and violence against women is considered normal and manageable rather than an anomaly or crime.

The second issue is the question of women's formal and informal leadership of communities and community organizations. The extent to which women leaders are respected, accepted, and supported by communities and formal, "traditional", and mostly male leaders and institutions seems to have an impact on how communities define and respond to gender violence. The inclusion and respect of women leaders may result in community watch programs that explicitly seek to prevent domestic violence and rape during the night.

The final factor that contributes to effective responses to gender violence is the development and support of women-led community systems of response, such as the Women's Action Groups described above. Community-response systems that are grounded in community practice but also in the protection of human rights may be able to find the balance between individual and community justice that seems to be an area of tension in many communities in Liberia today. If these kinds of systems can connect informal and formal conflict resolution systems and gain the support of communities and male leadership, then more women and girls may have access to justice and protection.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that women and girls in post-conflict Liberia continue to experience violence at alarming levels. Although the country is officially in peace, the war rages on through inter-personal relationships, as some men beat their wives and rape girls in their homes and communities.

This paper showed how rape continues and domestic violence has apparently increased since the war ended in 2003. Informants reported that rape happens mostly to young girls, and that there is impunity for rape due to problems with communities, community leadership, and the criminal justice system. Domestic violence has increased and occurs frequently and lethally in many communities, and informants believe that the main cause of domestic violence is men's unemployment. Both of these trends in violence against women reflect men's need to reassert control after having experienced a conflict that disrupted social hierarchies and disempowered many older men. These patterns of social disruption continue in post-conflict Liberia, as community leaders have difficulty maintaining control of the youth in their communities. Other direct and indirect threats to people's security are also gendered, as poverty forces women and girls into prostitution and insecurity makes them afraid to leave their homes and walk alone. In many ways, fear of violence has permeated most aspects of women's lives. The patterns of violence in post-conflict Liberia confirm what feminist theory says about the continuum of violence experienced by women as societies transition from war to peace.

Of particular importance is the clear continuum of sexual violence from "war" to "peace." During the war, men raped women in groups, in public, and in brutal ways that often killed the woman or girl or left her permanently disabled. Rape was a weapon of war during the conflict, and many people accepted it as such, albeit begrudgingly. After the war, men in both Monrovia and Ganta continue to rape women and young girls with near impunity, although at reportedly lower rates than during the war. Men still rape in groups and occasionally they torture the women and girls that they rape. Notably, women and girls still require physical and social protection through family relations or the presence of others in order to prevent sexual and physical violence, much like the way that women and girls needed the protection of a fighter during the war in order to avoid attacks. Yet, unlike the war, rape has now become re-privatized and is no longer the frequently public act and experience that it was during the war. Despite the government's efforts to create and enforce tough rape laws, parents may accept money from men who rape their daughters, making the rape a wholly private affair. Additionally, men often rape girls in their homes, and informants reported that older men are raping, which is unlike the war when one can assume that many in the fighting forces who were raping were younger men. In post-conflict Liberia, older men are using rape as a tool to reassert their authority and control, as their younger counterparts used rape as a tool during the war. However, unlike the time of the

war, women and communities are not willing to accept or rationalize rape during a time of alleged peace.

This does not seem to paint a hopeful picture of the situation for women and girls in Liberia. Yet, instead of seeming inevitable, we must view this situation as unacceptable as it currently stands. In analyzing the current situation, one man said:

And I'm sorry most especially – you know I feel guilty most especially for the girls children. The girls children, yes. Because their future is, is – they will not have a good future because their mind. You know, engaging into early sexual activities and early prostitution, so if you continue to grow up, going to school, you will not have the mind of going to school again. And you will not have the mind of putting yourself to be useful in the society. Where you only have the mind of that life. So most of our time, our girls children, when they are victimized in this kind of a condition, you know, we feel pity for them. It's a sorrowful situation...Because women are vulnerable in our society today. Yeah. And they need help. Women, girls are very vulnerable people that government needs to attach serious attention to so that at least they can become good people in the society. But, tsk, it's difficult to see. (13.12)

While it is true that many women and girls are vulnerable and that girls face increasing challenges to securing a future free of sexual exploitation, violence, and poverty, I do not believe that the situation is as hopeless as this man believes it to be. In Liberia today, there are positive openings for women's mobilization. With the first female head of state in Africa in President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf – a firm supporter of women's rights - Liberia is an ideal situation in which to work to increase women's and girls' security. Many of the structural challenges that other countries face, such as passing tough rape laws and having women represented at all levels of government, are already a reality with the Johnson-Sirleaf administration. Additionally, at the local level many female *and* male community activists are ready and willing to begin work on gender violence prevention and response. The task ahead seems to be building the bridges between the formal and high level political power on one end and community energy and mobilization on the other in order to create strong and sustainable local and national movements to promote women's security and leadership.

Ultimately, an effective response to gender violence in post-conflict Liberia hinges on changes in behaviors and attitudes as well as systems and structures. Focusing only on fostering the values of women's empowerment and advancement will not enable women and men that seek to end gender-based violence to effectively do their work. The Liberian government and INGOs need to also provide opportunities and resources that support women's rights advocates.

The statements made by Liberians about their need for support from the international community and their government are hopeful, desperate, and too numerous to list on this page. It seemed to me that many were making formal requests to their government through our interviews, as if they rarely or ever had had the opportunity to share what they expected from their government for the betterment of their lives. One woman from a particularly poor and violent community said:

So we really need help for us to be able to make this community a good community. Some will ask, "Can any good thing come from out of [their community]? Yes, good things can come from out of [here]! Ah-huh! So, if you people help us to be good, we can...(20.13)

Of course, people spoke overwhelmingly of the need for basic development, and many had their own ideas about the kinds of development projects that they need or would be willing to work on with their neighbors. They specifically asked the Liberian government to provide security and electricity to make their streets safe at night, to educate their children so that they are not stealing from them and entering prostitution, to enforce rape laws so that men do not run free with impunity, to pay its civil servants so that the citizens do not have to bribe the police or judges in order to get justice, to build hospitals so that people can access healthcare, and to create jobs so that men will have something to do other than beat their wives. These things are most especially in demand in rural areas, where people feel neglected and underserved in comparison to their urban neighbors.

There is currently a fundamental role for NGOs in support of both formal and informal gender violence prevention and response systems, as evidenced by the Ganta police's reliance on the IRC to respond to rape cases and the INGO trainings that have spearheaded the development of several community-based response systems. Informants also seem to rely on the INGOs and the UN to provide services that governments typically provide, such as education, healthcare, and security, and INGOs do seem to provide some of these basic services for many communities as the Liberian government stabilizes and establishes itself. What seems most important for the prevention of gender-based violence is that INGOs continue to support the community-based organizations that they have helped create and which serve as an unpaid labor force at the community level. Many informants believe that the INGO skills training and awareness raising on issues of child protection, health, and gender-based violence is working and changing attitudes. Yet, social change and protection of human rights requires material assistance in order

to solidify progress. There is a need for donors and INGOs to support community-based organizations financially so that community activists can expand their services and be paid for doing the social work that they currently do for free. One community activist said that she believes that the INGO in her community is only reaching a fraction of the gender-based violence cases that she sees. By empowering local organizations, INGOs and community activists will be able to multiply their impact and serve more women and girls.

We can start the discussions about peace and security for women by asking ourselves, as I recently was asked at a lecture by Cynthia Enloe and Jennifer Klot, “What would a feminized or woman-centered security look like?” We often talk about what makes women insecure, but spend less energy on what would make them secure. In Liberia, I believe that the Women’s Action Groups in Monrovia present some excellent foundations for models of community-based responses to gender violence. These systems are a hybrid between customary community practice and the more global individual protection of women’s rights. They also provide women with a support network to prosecute crimes against them as well as to mobilize and advocate for changes at the community level. Community-based systems are effective because they create flexible and resilient avenues through which to address widespread domestic violence in communities, as sending all men to jail and allowing it to continue unchecked are not options. These systems seem to allow women to address directly the more minor conflicts with men who are infrequent batterers while also forwarding the serious and harmful perpetrators on to the police. Moreover, the connections between these informal conflict resolution systems and formal criminal justice systems may provide women with an opportunity to gain access to formal leadership.

The goal in designing systems of women-centered security should be to define and ensure security in ways that are relevant to both individuals and communities. Women-centered security should also support community systems that provide for individual justice and protection of women and girls as well as community participation and collective cultural norms. Where individual justice and community custom clash to the detriment of women, then women’s community groups seem to be in the best position to raise awareness and advocate for change. Ultimately, we must remember that prevention of and response to gender-based violence is not just about supporting Women’s Action Groups and enforcing rape laws. This struggle is also about men and their gender identities in post-conflict societies. In Liberia advocates for

women's rights will be well-served by understanding men's stake in social change and post-conflict reconstruction and by incorporating men into their efforts to promote women's security and leadership.

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