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Female Fighters and Militants During the Lebanese Civil War: Individual Profiles, Pathways, and Motivations

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an analysis of women's profiles, pathways, and motivations to join the Lebanese civil war (1975 to 1990), with a particular focus on female fighters militants involved with Harakat Amal, Kataeb, the Progressive Socialist Party, Lebanese Communist Party, Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The article contributes to existing debates on women's motivations to join nonstate armed groups by examining both militias that included female fighters and those that did not. It is the first study so far that analyses the profiles and motivations of female fighters and militants within all major militias during the Lebanese civil war.

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After several decades of research on the roles and experiences of women in violent conflict and war, a substantial body of literature on the topic has developed in both conflict and terrorism studies.¹ Nevertheless, most mainstream publications on political violence continue to overlook gender.² Perpetrators of political violence in particular are often assumed to be male, with women frequently being cast as victims of violence or advocates for peaceful change.³ If the existence of female perpetrators of violence is taken into account at all, claims on their motivations are often rooted in essentialist gender stereotypes.⁴ This is problematic, as it is not possible to fully understand nonstate armed actors' behavior without taking all actors involved into account.

Existing literature on female perpetrators of political approaches can be divided into two theoretical approaches. Some authors examine the topic through a feminist theory/gender studies lens,⁵ while others approach the topic focusing on more general theories of involvement in political violence.⁶ While the former often aim at identifying women's experiences, discourses around female involvement and the meaning ascribed to women's actions, the latter tend to focus on causes for women's involvement. This article has an empirical interest in gender. It aims to identify the causes for female participation in the Lebanese civil war and to contribute to theories on involvement in political violence (rather than feminist theory or gender studies in the narrow sense of the term).

By analyzing the profiles, backgrounds, and motivations of women who joined the militias during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), this article contributes to

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existing debates on female perpetrators of violence.⁷ To date, only a limited number of publications analyze the role of female militants in armed groups during the Lebanese civil war.⁸ Of these, most focus solely on the role of women in some of the militias, with a strong focus on the situation in the Christian and Palestinian militias. Other organizations, such as those of the Lebanese left, are not usually included in these analyses, despite the fact that the militias of the far left included a particularly high percentage of female militants and fighters, as will be discussed in this article.

This article offers a broader analysis of women's profiles, pathways, and motivations to join the war in Lebanon, by focusing on women's motivations⁹ to join the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Fatah, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Kataeb, and Harakat Amal (Amal) as militants and fighters. These are the main militias during the Lebanese civil war to which access can be gained at the moment.¹⁰ The article shows that, despite claims to the contrary in previous literature,¹¹ the percentage of female fighters in the Christian militias was considerably lower than the percentage in most leftist groups—and that even in the highly gender-conservative group Amal, women assumed combat roles.

In existing literature on female political violence in other contexts, the question of whether or not women's participation is self-determined and voluntary is often discussed.¹² This article shows that in the case of female fighters in the Lebanese civil war, coercion did not play a role. On the contrary, without the women insisting on their inclusion, it is unlikely that there would have been female fighters in any of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. The vast majority of women (and men) interviewed for the purpose of this study named political reasons as motivational factors for their involvement. However, personal factors, such as young age and relational networks, also played a role, which is why this article also discusses individual backgrounds. Most existing publications on female involvement in nonstate political organizations tend to focus on individual factors, which can, in some cases, result in a narrower understanding of the issue at hand.¹³ In order to achieve a more comprehensive analysis, the second half of this article is dedicated to the roles of other key factors that influenced individual motivations, namely: the security context, organizational aspects and societal factors.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

As the number of studies focusing on the roles and experiences of female perpetrators of violence during the Lebanese civil war is highly limited,¹⁴ this article will draw on a number of publications on female political violence in other contexts. These include studies by authors with a background in conflict¹⁵ and terrorism studies.¹⁶ The aim of this article is to assess the extent to which these theories can help us understand why and how women joined the war in Lebanon and what the case of women involved in the Lebanese civil war can add to our understanding of female political violence in other contexts.

Choice Or Coercion?

Whether female involvement with nonstate armed groups is a choice women make is a recurring theme in existing research into female political violence. Claims of coercion can be found especially in literature focusing on Africa, and to a lesser degree Asia and South America.¹⁷ There are some conflicts in which it has been claimed that the majority of female fighters were either abducted or born to an abducted mother.¹⁸ On the other hand, it has been contended that the majority of women who join armed groups worldwide do so voluntarily.¹⁹ Henshaw in particular criticizes the focus on the use of force as a tool for recruitment (and retention) for women. She notes the “difficulty that many observers have reconciling women as willing participants in violent activity”—and criticizes what she calls the “dichotomous notion of agency that oversimplifies the realities of conflict,” by pointing to the cases of women who are coerced to join and then decide to stay.²⁰ Indeed, the distinction between coercion and choice is not always as clear-cut as suggested at times.²¹

A lesser form of the coercion argument is the belief that organizations lure women in by making false promises or by hiding the true nature of the group’s motives and activities. This explanation strips women of their agency, reducing them (at best) to vulnerable, naïve, indoctrinated and (at worst) mentally disturbed individuals. This assumption is most common in terrorism studies publications,²² which often surmise that women are being lured in by men.²³ This postulation reproduces problematic gender stereotypes, according to which men are active perpetrators and women passive victims. Moreover, this strong focus on women as the subject of manipulation contradicts the reality that sees both men and women being used and exploited by military groups.²⁴

Attempts to draw the conclusion that female participation in combat comes as a result of male coercion have been strongly contested by a number of academics, who instead point to women’s proactive efforts to join nonstate armed groups as fighters.²⁵ Some of these authors question the concept of “recruitment as a top-down process in which recruiters identify susceptible potentials and coerce them into joining their organization.”²⁶ Instead, they stress women’s insistence to be included and frame recruitment as a reactive process.²⁷ Indeed, there are multiple examples of cases where the leadership of an organization was initially reluctant to include female fighters, and where women were “eventually accepted through their own persistence.”²⁸

Individual Backgrounds

Most experts in conflict and terrorism studies agree that women who become involved with nonstate armed organizations come from a range of different backgrounds.²⁹ Despite this diversity, which makes it hard, if not impossible, to come up with one profile of the “typical” female militant, it is often possible to identify at least some commonalities. Existing literature stresses that demographic variables and personal backgrounds of men and women joining armed groups are often very similar.³⁰ In particular, many militants in nonstate armed groups are said to share: (1) their young age; (2) family ties and other personal networks that link them to armed groups; and (3) previous involvement in civic society or political movements

for the cause. The role of (4) educational background and (5) socioeconomic status are more contested.

Most conflict and terrorism scholars state that young age is a characteristic shared by the majority of women involved in nonstate political violence.³¹ In general, this seems to be the case for both men and women,³² with only minimal differences.³³ In some cases, even children are involved.³⁴ Militants, especially those from an urban background, are often students,³⁵ and married women are less likely to be involved.³⁶

Another oft-quoted characteristic is family ties or other personal networks that link women to other militants or fighters.³⁷ Eager, for example, contended that “most of the women involved in ... various types of political violence and terrorism ... were recruited or became active through personal relational networks.”³⁸ The importance of personal networks has been linked with the secretive nature of many nonstate armed organizations that rely heavily on their members’ loyalty and confidentiality.³⁹ Moreover, personal networks are said to offer points of contact with a nonstate armed groups, their organizational culture and political positioning.⁴⁰

However, mobilization via personal networks does not necessarily signify a lack of commitment,⁴¹ as claimed by some who conflate this factor with a lack of agency on the part of the female fighters.⁴² Moreover, the role of personal networks in individual mobilization is often emphasized for women but not men—even though there is substantial evidence that they play an important role for members of both genders.⁴³ Last, while many women (and men) may be drawn into a violent group through personal contacts, not all women join via existing relational networks.⁴⁴

Another factor that is described as a pathway to military roles for women in nonstate armed groups is previous participation in political organizations or civil society initiatives, such as trade unions, political parties, student organizations, or neighborhood initiatives.⁴⁵ For example, comparing loyalist and Republican groups in Northern Ireland, Alison argued that one of the reasons for low numbers of women fighters in loyalist groups is their comparatively lower involvement in community resistance and political activity.⁴⁶ While involvement in nonviolent activism is often described as a pathway into political violence for women, it seems to be an equally important factor for many men, too.⁴⁷

In terms of educational background, most terrorism scholars agree that women fighters are either as educated as or more educated than their peers outside the group.⁴⁸ Once more, this seems to be a characteristic shared by men and women.⁴⁹ Scholars working within conflict studies often depict a more complex picture, describing groups with female members with varying levels of education⁵⁰ where, for example, educated women from urban areas become involved first, then recruiting other women, including those from rural areas and women with limited educational experience.⁵¹ This phenomenon is probably to a large extent shaped by the particular conflict context in question.

As to the role of women’s socioeconomic status, while most terrorism and conflict studies scholars claim that women (and men) are from poor, working-class or middle-class backgrounds,⁵² some contend that more female than male fighters come from a middle-class background.⁵³

Gender-Specific Motivations?

A central issue in the debate on individual motivations is the question of whether men and women share the same motivations. In general, the claim that women's motivations differ substantially from men's motivations tends to be more widespread in the field of terrorism studies (particularly in psychological terrorism research) than in conflict studies.⁵⁴ However, the majority of researchers agree that men and women widely share the same motivations⁵⁵—which is not to say that some gender-specific motivations do not exist.⁵⁶

One persistent stereotype of women engaged in political violence is that they are motivated by personal reasons where men are motivated by political reasons. This claim is most commonly found in terrorism studies⁵⁷—although some within the field have criticized it as being inaccurate.⁵⁸ The fact that “the so-called ‘personal reasons’ consume so much of the public’s and media’s fascination”⁵⁹ probably reveals more about the biases and stereotypes of those observing the phenomenon of female fighters than it does about the women themselves. Indeed, some scholars criticize the tendency to belittle and delegitimize women's participation in nonstate armed groups by focusing on their personal grievances.⁶⁰ Another version of this argument is the claim that female militants are more idealistic than men.⁶¹ Despite this problematic view on female participation, the majority of scholars in conflict studies, as well as some within terrorism studies, contend that women's mobilization is as motivated by political factors as men's.⁶²

Of course, from an analytical point of view, dividing an individual's motivations into personal and political factors is problematic, given that personal and political motivations are often intimately intertwined.⁶³ Indeed, the majority of scholars working on female political violence believe that men and women are both motivated by a mixture of personal and political motivations.⁶⁴

As far as gender-specific motivations for involvement in political violence are concerned, the two most frequently cited gender-specific reasons are (1) personal experience or fear of sexual violence and (2) participation as a strategy to escape a predestined life with few prospects for equality and self-determination. There is a relatively strong focus on female participation as an act of liberation or feminism in existing literature.⁶⁵ Some contend that liberation can be a motivational factor for men too,⁶⁶ but that in many societies, women's options to find meaning and carve out space for themselves tend to be more limited than men's. Nonetheless, there are a number of scholars who deny the centrality of feminism and liberation as a motivational factor, highlighting nationalist motivations as more significant pull factors.⁶⁷ Others criticize the framing of female political violence as an act of feminism as less guided by the motivations of the women joining the war and more influenced by the cultural biases of the scholars studying the topic.⁶⁸ If liberation and emancipation can be a motivational factor for some women, it is noteworthy that full gender equality is usually not achieved in nonstate armed groups and that women are often pushed back into the domestic sphere once the war has ended.⁶⁹

While sexual violence is sometimes described as a motivational factor for women to join armed groups,⁷⁰ others have claimed that there seems to be variation in the role

played by (personal experience or fear of) sexual violence in motivating women in different conflicts.⁷¹

Other motivational factors, notably pragmatic reasons⁷² and participation in political violence as a sort of “adventure”⁷³ are less frequently mentioned. The relative lack of focus on pragmatic reasons in particular stands in contrast to the general literature on rebel mobilization and its focus on the question of whether insurgents are motivated by greed or grievances.⁷⁴

The Influence of The Security Context and Perceived Injustice on Individual Motivations

Most research into female political violence stresses that the security context and perceived notions of injustice play an important role in motivating women to join nonstate armed groups.⁷⁵ In such a context, women’s participation in political violence is framed as “legitimate self-defence” and as a “last resort,” which legitimizes female involvement in nonstate armed groups, even in highly non-conventional roles such as fighters or military leaders.⁷⁶ Security pressures and perceived injustice affect both men and women, often in very similar ways.⁷⁷ However, the security context and experiences of injustice can only partially explain the decision to join an armed group, as many individuals share similar experiences, but do not become involved in political violence.⁷⁸

The Influence of Organizational Characteristics on Individual Motivations

As far as the influence of organizational characteristics on individual motivations is concerned, both conflict and terrorism studies scholars claim that a group’s ideology functions as an important pull factor in the mobilization of women looking to join an armed organization.⁷⁹ In conflict studies, in particular, it has been argued that women are attracted by organizations that have a strong focus on community welfare and feminist aspirations,⁸⁰ as women (allegedly) see their interests and the interests of their families and communities best represented by these groups. Related to this argument is the claim that armed groups with domestic (as opposed to international) aims attract more women.⁸¹ According to this explanation, women perceive organizations with a domestic agenda as rejecting traditional gender roles more than internationally orientated groups, which focus on fighting an external enemy and less on transforming conventional gender norms.⁸² Consequently, the “more opportunity for improvement that they perceive, the more likely women are to mobilize and seek higher positions within the hierarchy of the domestic ... group.”⁸³ Of course, an organization’s aims and its ideology can be subject to change, especially over time or in reaction to external developments. Existing literature contends that the change from a relatively idealistic struggle to a movement dominated by individuals looking for financial benefit or an opportunity to settle personal scores tends to discourage women from getting (or remaining) involved.⁸⁴

The Influence of Societal Aspects on Individual Motivations

Besides the security context and organizational characteristics, existing literature on women's motivations points to the role of gender norms and expectations in the society that an armed group is based or operating in.⁸⁵ Sociocultural gender norms and expectations can either produce a general atmosphere that is supportive of women joining the fight or one which disapproves of, and thus discourages, women's inclusion, as will be discussed below.

Women's participation in public life, especially in political and military roles, is said to open up the possibility of women's later military involvement. This is said to be the case as it allows nonstate armed groups to reframe female political violence as an "extension of their [i.e., women's] involvement with public organizations such as neighborhood committees" and other nonviolent political initiatives.⁸⁶ This process has been described by existing research focusing on a range of different contexts where "women have participated fully in the early stages of the political resistance at all levels" which facilitated their inclusion in the armed struggle.⁸⁷

In this context, the effect of role models is highlighted in existing literature on female political violence. These studies claim that if women who have joined the fight are praised as heroes within the community, it encourages other women to follow suit.⁸⁸ Alison has discussed this with regard to the conflict in Northern Ireland where "(r)epublicanism has promoted active images of women as 'freedom fighters' and female paramilitary members have been celebrated in a number of republican street murals in nationalist areas,"⁸⁹ whereas the Protestant community, which has produced very few female fighters, did not actively promote images of women in military roles.⁹⁰ Class is also described as a salient factor in this context, as a woman's socioeconomic background can have an impact on how receptive society is to her inclusion as a fighter.⁹¹

Finally, a considerable number of studies on female political violence describe how an escalating security context or increasing security pressures can help overcome societal reluctance to accept female political violence, which in turn can affect how likely women are to become involved in violent acts.⁹²

Civil War(s) in Lebanon

Before moving on to the methodology section of this article, a brief overview of the causes of the war, its stages and the different roles of women in various militias shall be provided. This is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the war, but rather a brief overview to give the uninitiated reader the required background information.

Most authors focusing on the causes of the Lebanese civil war highlight the multitude of reasons that led to war in Lebanon in 1975.⁹³ Indeed, honing in on a single reason would be simplistic. The Lebanese civil war is often described as religious in nature.⁹⁴ However, even though the war clearly had a sectarian dimension, most analysts agree that it was not fundamentally a religious conflict.⁹⁵ Instead, political factors such as a contested, inflexible power-sharing agreement and fragile conflict regulation mechanisms played a major role in causing the outbreak of war.⁹⁶ The political landscape in Lebanon had been increasingly polarized since the 1970s, along a dichotomy between those on the left calling for political reforms and their opponents on the right in favor

of the status quo.⁹⁷ This left–right dichotomy was closely linked to competing Lebanese nationalisms and the question of whether Lebanon was (to be) closer to the Arab or Western world.⁹⁸ Economic factors were also at the heart of the conflict, with the leftist opposition questioning the traditional clientelist system that preserved economic interests of two dominating societal groups, the Christian Maronites, and, to a lesser degree, Sunni Muslims.⁹⁹ This volatile political situation was exacerbated by the presence of Palestinian fighters in Lebanon who were attacking Israel,¹⁰⁰ questioning the monopoly of violence of the Lebanese state¹⁰¹ and who were seen to be threatening the traditional sectarian makeup of the Lebanese state and society, and thus the Maronite Christian establishment.¹⁰² In most parts of the country, the war consisted of several rounds of fighting with relatively calm periods in between. It lasted from 1975 to 1990 and involved numerous regional and international actors who were involved at different stages.¹⁰³

At the beginning of the war, two major camps formed an opposition to one other, namely the pro-reform, leftist, pro-Palestinian Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the pro–status quo, Christian-dominated, anti-Palestinian Lebanese Front (LFr).¹⁰⁴ New actors emerged throughout the course of the war, such as the Shi’a-dominated Harakat Amal and the Shi’a-Islamist Hezbollah, which was founded in the 1980s.¹⁰⁵ Previous allies often turned against each other during later stages of the war, which resulted in heavy intra-alliance and even inner-group fighting.

Women’s Roles in The Militias

Women were involved in all of the militias that fought in the Lebanese civil war. In most cases, their participation was supportive in nature, seeing them take on traditional gender roles.¹⁰⁶ For example, female members cooked for their male counterparts, washed their clothes, or transported weapons or other military equipment. Women were also involved in intelligence, communications, and administrative support.¹⁰⁷ Only a small minority of women assumed combat roles. Since the militias’ success and survival during the war depended on a certain level of secrecy, it is difficult to know the exact numbers.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, especially at the beginning of the war, most militias were only loosely organized and kept limited (or no) records of who was fighting for them.¹⁰⁹ In addition to that, both during and after the war, some of the archives were destroyed— purposely or by accident.¹¹⁰ Also, the number of women in the militias was not always the same in every sub-unit of the militia, and numbers varied from region to region. Any study on nonstate fighters during the civil war in Lebanon can thus only rely on estimates, which must always be interpreted with caution.¹¹¹ The estimated number of female fighters was relatively low, up to 15 percent in the militias of the far-left, such as the LCP, PFLP, and the Communist Action Organisation (CAO)¹¹² and 2 to 7.5 percent in the Christian-dominated Kataeb/LF.¹¹³ The percentage of female fighters in Fatah was considerably lower than in the PFLP and probably similar to the numbers in Kataeb/LF.¹¹⁴ There were no official fighters in the PSP, and only a small number in Amal after 1978.¹¹⁵ The number of women involved in non-combat roles was much higher, reaching up to 50 percent in some groups.¹¹⁶

Methodology

The analysis offered in this article is based on fieldwork in Lebanon in 2015 and 2016 and the study of four biographies of former militia members.¹¹⁷ In total, sixty-four semi-structured interviews with sixty-nine individuals were conducted. Since ideology and aims are often considered to be two explanatory factors for female involvement in political violence,¹¹⁸ the existence of the two camps at the beginning of the war (namely the LNM and the LFr) was taken into account by including interviewees from both alliances. Thirty-four of the interviewees were former combatants (twenty-eight men, six women); twenty-six (former) party members (eleven men, fifteen women); four civil society representatives (two men, two women), three journalists (two men, one woman) and two researchers (both men). Eleven interviewees were formerly associated with the LCP, eleven with Kataeb/the LF,¹¹⁹ eleven with Amal, five with Fatah, five with the PSP, four with the CAO, four with the PFLP, three with different Palestinian and LNM-affiliated militias,¹²⁰ two with the National Liberal Party (NLP), two with the SSNP, and one with Tanzim. Due to the low number of interviews with former members of the CAO, SSNP, NLP, and Tanzim, this article focuses on Kataeb/LF, the LCP, PSP, Amal, Fatah, and the PFLP. It thus includes the profiles, motivations, and pathways into violence of women involved with four militias that did employ female fighters (Kataeb/LF, LCP, Fatah, and PFLP), as well as one organization that did not (PSP) and one that did, but only at a later stage of the conflict, from 1978 onward (Amal).¹²¹ Of the four organizations that did include female fighters, three (the LCP, Fatah and PFLP) were member of the LNM and one (Kataeb) was part of the LFr. The PSP was also a member of the LNM, whereas Amal was close to, but not a former ally of, the LNM.¹²²

Gaining access to interviewees is often challenging, especially when researching sensitive topics such as political violence.¹²³ Hence, for the purpose of this research, a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling was used. First contact was established through other researchers, journalists, and nongovernmental organizations working in the field of conflict transformation. In order to address some of the methodological problems associated with snowballing sampling,¹²⁴ the author made attempts to diversify the ways in which interviews were secured and ensured that access was gained through multiple entry points. While interviewees' statements were verified through cross-referencing, and in the vast majority of cases the descriptions of events, attitudes and opinions was consistent throughout the sample (regardless of association with a given political group), it cannot be assumed that this sample is formally representative of all militants involved in the civil war. Gaining access to research participants through multiple entry points and to interviewees from both camps and a number of different groups (including former fighters and civilians) helped to counterbalance the possible effects of constructed memories and narratives. Triangulation and cross-checking, especially through interviewing individuals who have never been involved with any political or military organization, proved to be particularly helpful in this context.

Results

Choice Or Coercion

Based on the interviews conducted as part of this study, coercion did not play a role in female involvement in the Lebanese civil war. Instead, a substantial number of

interviewees (thirty out of sixty-nine) stressed that the main reason women were included as fighters was their insistence.¹²⁵ Interviewees stressed the point that “the choice [of whether or not to join a militia] is with the woman.”¹²⁶ This was confirmed by both men and women, and by both members of the militias as well as those with no direct relation to the different armed groups. Instead, recruitment was described as a bottom-up process. For example, a former fighter with leftist and Palestinian groups emphasized that “it wasn’t that ... [the Christian militias] hired women, the women came to them. It was the same for us [members of the LNM]. This is a very important point.”¹²⁷ Looking back on her experience, a former female fighter with the LCP, who went on to become one of three regional female leaders in the party, described a similar process: “When the war started I was ready. The war started, I was a friend of the Communist Party, so I went there and said I wanted to enrol.”¹²⁸ Nearly all of the interviewees stressed how strongly motivated the women were to join the fight, either referring to their own experience or the experiences of other women they had known.¹²⁹ Women joining the fight were described as having a “clear vision”¹³⁰ of what they wanted, as being “very committed”¹³¹ and “serious about joining.”¹³² One former military commander commented that “when the young women came to us, it was not to sit on the phone” but to fight.¹³³ Another described that during the war, they saw women fighting who “couldn’t even handle a gun” properly, but who were so determined to contribute to the fight that they wanted to participate anyway.¹³⁴ In some cases, this determination went so far that the women participated against the explicit wish of their families.¹³⁵ However, female interviewees also recalled accepting the non-combat roles they were allocated, which they considered to be of equal importance, rather than insisting to be included as actual fighters.¹³⁶

Women’s insistence on being included as fighters was only successful in militias that were either open to female participation anyway (as was the case in the LCP and PFLP) or in militias that held mixed views on women’s inclusion (such as was the case with Kataeb and Fatah). The PSP and Amal, where more conservative attitudes prevailed, did not give in to women’s insistence. In the case of the PSP however, some women found ways to become combatants even with the organization denying them entry as fighters. Their strategy was to form their own independent combat unit in the Metn region and convince individual male PSP members to give them military training,¹³⁷ which provides further evidence for the argument that women were strongly motivated to become fighters. Rather than coercion, it was the women’s desire for involvement, their drive and insistence on being included that led to their participation in combat. But who were these women and how can their extremely strong motivations be explained?

Individual Backgrounds

The majority of the fighters and militia members during the Lebanese civil war were relatively young. While three interviewees claimed that women (and men) of all ages were involved,¹³⁸ a much bigger group (sixteen out of sixty-nine interviewees) agreed that many, if not most, militants were between their mid-teens and mid-twenties.¹³⁹ Nineteen interviewees (and their comrades) were of the same age as their female peers in the militias.¹⁴⁰ Seventeen interviewees indicated that they (or their comrades) were underage when they were fighting during the war. This was the case for both men¹⁴¹

and women.¹⁴² One male interviewee started to fight when he was twelve.¹⁴³ Another female interviewee spoke of receiving military training at the age of thirteen.¹⁴⁴ Sixteen interviewees recounted that many militia members, both male and female, were pupils or students at the time.¹⁴⁵ Women who were with the Christian militias in particular (but not exclusively by any means) seemed to have been students.¹⁴⁶ Many militia members, including frontline fighters, maintained a double life, in so far as they continued their studies during the war.¹⁴⁷ This double life was facilitated by the nature of the war, which in many parts of the country, consisted of several rounds of fighting with relatively calm periods in-between. The majority of female combatants in Lebanon were unmarried, although a minority had husbands and some also had children, as four interviewees recounted.¹⁴⁸

Access via personal networks constituted a common pathway to involvement with the militias for many women and men during the Lebanese civil war. Seventeen individuals mentioned a most commonly male relative (or relatives) who were involved in militancy before they joined, most frequently a sibling,¹⁴⁹ parent,¹⁵⁰ spouse,¹⁵¹ cousin,¹⁵² or uncle.¹⁵³ Only two interviewees described female relatives' militancy as a key motivating and facilitating factor, referring to their mother¹⁵⁴ or sister.¹⁵⁵ Eight interviewees recounted growing up in political families, where political debate and the preparation of political action were common features.¹⁵⁶ Familial and community-based ties played a particularly important role for women involved with the Christian militias at the beginning of the war, which saw many families and friends coming together to defend their neighborhoods.¹⁵⁷ Nonviolent political activism was another common pathway into participation in the war as part of a militia—this route into militancy was mentioned by nineteen interviewees and in all four biographies.¹⁵⁸ Nonviolent activism was a common pathway into violence for both women and men.¹⁵⁹

As far as socioeconomic and educational backgrounds are concerned, many militia members, especially at the beginning of the war, were in full-time education. In Beirut in particular, many militants were educated, especially in the communist and Christian parties,¹⁶⁰ whereas the number of educated militia members in other parts of the country seem to have been lower.¹⁶¹ There do not seem to have been any significant differences between women and men's educational backgrounds. The very long duration of the war meant that some militia members, especially those who got involved as children and went on to hold positions of responsibility, did not get any formal education beyond the level they had reached at the beginning of their involvement with the militia.¹⁶² On the other hand, some militants continued their education even while being involved with the militia, which was rendered possible by the nature of the war, which in many parts of the country, was characterized by largely calm periods with intermittent intense fighting.¹⁶³ The fact that several interviewees left the militia at later stages of the war, either to complete their studies or upon completion of their studies¹⁶⁴ could be an indicator that at the beginning of the war, more educated people were with the militias than during the war's later stages. This could be linked to the shifting composition and aims of the militias. Indeed, several of the militias turned into organized crime groups as the war went on, which caused an increasing disillusionment of many of the fighters of the first generation, as five interviewees remembered.¹⁶⁵ As far as class is concerned, some interviewees stated that while there was a certain degree of diversity,¹⁶⁶

the majority of fighters in Lebanon, men and women alike, came from working class backgrounds¹⁶⁷ or disadvantaged areas.¹⁶⁸ Some had recently migrated to Beirut and were poor but educated, as four interviewees recounted.¹⁶⁹ This was particular the case in the militias associated with the LNM—although these groups also had strong support from *petit bourgeois* members of society.¹⁷⁰

Gender-specific Motivations?

The research carried out as part of this study supports the findings of those who stress that men and women generally share the same motivations. The fact that women and men largely became involved for the same reasons was stressed in interviews with former members and supporters of all the different militias examined as part of this study. In total, thirty-one interviewees claimed this to have been the case.¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, certain gender-specific motivations existed too.

The most commonly cited factor (for both men and women) to join the war was political reasons. In the case of militias aligned with the LNM, it was the fight for Palestinians' rights and a new political and societal order that motivated both men and women to participate (as stressed by forty-one interviewees),¹⁷² whereas the members of the Christian militias became involved in order to fight for the survival of the Christian community and to uphold the sociopolitical status quo (as highlighted by twenty interviewees and two of the four biographies).¹⁷³ The main motivation of female militants with Amal was the fight against Israel.¹⁷⁴ A small minority of two interviewees contended that women were even more motivated than men.¹⁷⁵ Equally, only two interviewees mentioned personal factors such as the wish for revenge for a killed relative or lack of hope after sexual assault by a family member, and in both cases they were not speaking about their own experience but about the (suspected) motivations of another person.¹⁷⁶

However, as discussed in the literature review, it is often difficult to categorically divide motivations into personal and political reasons. For instance, defending one's community, which was one of the main motivations mentioned by most interviewees formerly involved with the Christian militias, has both a personal dimension (fighting to defend oneself, one's family, neighbors, and friends) and a political dimension (the fight for the Christian community as a whole and for the preservation of the pre-war, Christian-dominated political order). Indeed, eight interviewees stressed that it was a mixture of both personal and political reasons that led women (and men) to join the militias.¹⁷⁷

Apart from personal and political factors, some interviewees also mentioned more pragmatic reasons for joining the war, such as seeking protection¹⁷⁸ or opportunities.¹⁷⁹ However, only four out of sixty-nine interviewees mentioned such motivations. Another motivational factor for some was the sense of adventure promised by participation in the war, which was mentioned by four interviewees and in two of the biographies.¹⁸⁰ For example, one former female LCP militant recalled the happiness, excitement, and pride she felt when she saw a real weapon for the first time.¹⁸¹ Others believed that for some women, carrying a weapon was a form of "showing off" and making oneself "look important."¹⁸² In this context, the time of involvement is also interesting, as many

young women and men joined training camps or the frontline during the summer months, when they were off from school or university, with military activities providing a welcome opportunity to deal with boredom during the holidays.¹⁸³

Seeking revenge or redemption after experiences of sexual violence or fear of sexual violence was not seen as a motivating factor for women to join the war by any of the interviewees. On the contrary, the fear of sexual violence acted as a deterrent.¹⁸⁴

A more widespread motivational factor seems to have been women's aspirations to free themselves from societal constraints and restrictive gender norms and expectations in a relatively conservative society. Eight interviewees mentioned women's liberation as an important motivational factor for female militants, while this was not the case for male militants.¹⁸⁵ With regard to women's motivations, the notion of women wanting to "prove" to other militia members or the wider community that they, too, could be fighters was mentioned by some interviewees—albeit only in three out of sixty-nine interviews.¹⁸⁶ Women's emancipation was thus not mentioned nearly as often as political reasons, which the vast majority of interviewees agreed was the most important reason for both men and women to join, as discussed above.

The Influence of The Security Context and Perceived Injustice on Individual Motivations

Political considerations played a major role in motivating women to get involved in the various militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. The changing security context and perceived injustice, in particular, were the most often cited push factors for women (and men) to join the war (mentioned by fifty-seven out of sixty-nine interviewees).¹⁸⁷ Extreme external pressures left the women with the impression that everyone, including nontraditional actors such as women and children, needed to contribute.

In the case of the Christian militias, women were fighting for the survival of their community, which they saw at stake in the conflict, for the preservation of the pre-war political status quo¹⁸⁸ and against the growing influence of the Palestinian militias and their Lebanese and international allies.¹⁸⁹ The vast majority of interview partners who used to be involved with Christian militias saw their involvement in the war as a last resort and legitimate self-defense,¹⁹⁰ as one former fighter looking back on their experience described: "Our parents hadn't raised us to go to war. It was the war that made us that way. It was the environment. We were obliged [to go to war]."¹⁹¹

For women involved with the organizations associated with the LNM, it was less so the survival of their community that they were fighting for,¹⁹² and more so the fight against perceived injustice, for a new sociopolitical order and for the rights of Palestinians in Lebanon and the region.¹⁹³ For them, the fight in Lebanon at the start of the war was "the Revolution" against the order in place, in line with the ideology to which they subscribed. For example, a former fighter with the PSP recalled: "All we thought about was that we wanted to damage the regime and make the leadership social and progressive."¹⁹⁴ In a revolution, the support of all members of society is needed, hence the strong motivation of many women to fulfill their perceived duty to do their bit. In the case of Amal, it was the fight against Israel, the "absolute Evil" as several interviewees called it, which motivated the women to join as fighters.¹⁹⁵

In this context, analyzing motivations with space and time in mind becomes particularly illuminating, as it clearly illustrates that women's involvement did not remain constant throughout the different phases and locations of the war.¹⁹⁶ While this was not exclusively due to women's motivations, individual motivations and women's wish to be included (or not) did play a role in the changing numbers, and figures of female participation were at least in part influenced by external pressures due to the security context and perceived injustice. For example, this explains why the number of female fighters in the LNM groups (excluding the PSP who did not employ any female fighters) increased at the beginning of the war. At that time, individuals felt that they were contributing to "the Revolution"—until the security context defused considerably after the first round of the war.¹⁹⁷ When the Syrian army arrived in Lebanon in 1976 after this first phase of the war, numbers decreased considerably.¹⁹⁸ In 1982, when the security context tightened following the invasion of large parts of the country by the Israeli army, the numbers of female fighters increased again.¹⁹⁹ Another example would be the relatively higher numbers of women fighters in (and from) south Lebanon²⁰⁰ and the southern suburbs of Beirut, which are both areas that were particularly deprived at the time of the war.²⁰¹ Moreover, the South was also disproportionately subject to attacks by the Israeli army and its local allies.²⁰² In the case of the Christian militias, a similar observation can be made; most women were fighting in those parts of East Beirut where the conflict started and was most intense.²⁰³ Amal women also did not start fighting in military roles until the conflict escalated due to the Israeli invasion of the South, first in 1978 and then again in 1982.²⁰⁴ The members of Amal interviewed as part of this study, fighters and non-fighters alike, all cited the Israeli occupation as the reason for their involvement.²⁰⁵

While security pressures and political considerations were the main factor influencing women's motivations to join the Lebanese civil war, organizational characteristics and societal factors have much less explanatory capacity in this context. Nevertheless, they can explain the varying percentages of female fighters in the different groups (and the comparatively low numbers of female fighters across all groups), which will be explored in the following two sections.

The Influence of Organizational Characteristics on Individual Motivations

The relatively high numbers of female fighters in the Lebanese and Palestinian groups of the left,²⁰⁶ who explicitly subscribed to the concepts of women's rights and gender equality, seem to support claims in existing literature that women are more drawn to militias with gender-progressive ideologies and aims.²⁰⁷ However, women also insisted to be included in Kataeb, PSP, and smaller Christian groups that had, to say the least, a much more ambiguous position toward women's roles in the organization and in wider society. Moreover, women even demanded to be included in organizations as gender-conservative as Amal. The female members of Amal interviewed as part of this study were strongly motivated to fight for the organization's aims and seemed to stand firmly behind its ideals of gender segregation and division of labor between the sexes, even if that meant that their opportunities in the group and wider community were restricted.²⁰⁸ We have seen above that while feminism was a motivational factor for

some women, the most-cited motivational factor for women (and men) to join the war was the wish to defend their communities and fight against an unjust political system.

There is some evidence that organizational aims changing over the course of the war seem to have had an impact on women's motivations to join militias.²⁰⁹ This seems to have been the case in the later stages of the war in particular, when the aims of many of the militias changed and opportunistic goals started to supersede more idealistic aims, as discussed above. Four interviewees (two of them women) mentioned that they or their fellow combatants left their military roles when the intra-sectarian fighting started and when in many militias the struggle over assets became a priority.²¹⁰ The fact that the Mourabitoun, a mostly Beirut-based organization with many members whose participation, according to several interviewees, was mostly motivated by economic gains (it was described as "a gang" by some), did not have any female members further supports this argument.²¹¹

Organizational structure also seems to have influenced women's decision making. In the Christian militias, during the first two years of the war, female participation in military activities mostly took place in the Christian-dominated neighborhoods where groups of peers or whole families took up arms to defend their local area and community.²¹² This facilitated women's inclusion as they were fighting side by side with their friends or family members in loosely organized groups.

The existence of separate units working on women's issues in the respective political parties before the war also seems to have had an impact on women's motivations and might have played a role in attracting more women to the militia. In this context, it is telling that both the LCP and Kataeb, two parties who had had separate women's units or unions for a long time before the war started, were joined by female fighters whereas Amal and PSP, whose women's units were not founded until much later, were not.²¹³ Not all of the female fighters interviewed had also been involved in the women's units of their parties, but the very existence of these groups signaled that women had a place in the party and were part of the struggle. The same can be said about role models; women who joined the militia and inspired others to join the fight. It is highly interesting in this context that role models seem to have played a much bigger role in the leftist Lebanese and Palestinian groups, which also had much higher numbers of female fighters. Many interviewees from these groups mentioned the names of female fighters such as Leila Khalid, Soha Bechara, Lola Aboud, and Dalal Moughrabi, who joined different leftist or Palestinian groups and inspired both men and women to take up arms.²¹⁴

The Influence of Societal Aspects on Individual Motivations

Female participation in the militias was facilitated by societal changes in the years leading to the civil war. Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s was a society going through considerable social change.²¹⁵ New spaces and opportunities were slowly opening up for women in public life, especially in Beirut, and to a certain degree this was the case in other bigger cities and even some small towns and rural areas.²¹⁶ Female participation in public life, as part of the working force but also in political organizations and initiatives, became more widespread and accepted.²¹⁷ This had an encouraging and empowering effect on many women.²¹⁸ Several interviewees (eleven in total) mentioned that this

change in Lebanese society had made people more receptive to the idea of women being involved in military roles and that this in turn had encouraged women to join the fight.²¹⁹

Of course, societal attitudes to women's involvement are neither static nor monolithic. They do change over time, and there is often considerable variation in different parts of a country and different factions of society. This is why geographical and temporal variation needs to be taken into account. In this context, it is telling that the number of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war was higher in the relatively open and cosmopolitan city Beirut than it was in more conservative cities such as Saida or in the Mountain.²²⁰ The fact that many fighters who were based in Beirut originally came from the South and other relatively deprived parts of the country is also noteworthy.²²¹ On the one hand, these women found themselves in a precarious socioeconomic position and therefore had less to lose and more to gain.²²² On the other hand, living away from their extended families who had stayed in their home regions, meant that they were subject to less societal control.²²³

As mentioned previously, in the context of this research it is not possible to come to a definitive conclusion regarding the role of class. On the one hand, one interviewee thought that women from middle-class families enjoyed more freedoms because they and their families were more politically aware and believed that personal sacrifices had to be made for the sake of society's advancement.²²⁴ On the other, seven other interviewees believed that the participation of working-class women was less frowned on as they had already been working in traditionally male positions, alongside men in fields or factories for decades.²²⁵

Finally, there is a tendency among communities that have experienced prolonged and protracted conflict and who see their very existence as under threat, to allow female participation as part of a general mobilization that includes all members of society.²²⁶ This was an important factor during the Lebanese civil war—especially for the Christian and Palestinian groups who perceived the survival of their respective communities in Lebanon to be at stake, but also for Shi'a groups such as Amal who felt threatened by the invading Israeli army, as discussed above.

Despite shifting gender norms and expectations in Lebanese society in the 1960s and 1970s and despite an amplification of this process by the war (when security considerations temporarily trumped sociocultural norms), Lebanon was still a relatively conservative country, and in most areas of life, gender expectations remained clearly defined.²²⁷ This was the principal reason for the overall relatively low numbers of female fighters during the war. The majority of society disapproved of female inclusion in military operations and most women, as members of this society, either agreed with this view or were discouraged to join by society's disapproval.²²⁸ There were, of course, exceptions: some women were so motivated that they placed less value on societal approval and joined the war regardless. One interviewee for example claimed that "whether [the family] accept it or not, when a young woman decides to go [to war], she will not ask her parents."²²⁹ Another former fighter contended that "the main issue [in deciding whether or not a woman will join] is not the community but it's her."²³⁰ However, society's disapproval did discourage other women who might have otherwise been interested in joining a nonstate armed organization.²³¹

Discussion

While much of the literature on female political violence focuses on coercion,²³² the findings of this study suggest that the women who participated in the militias in Lebanon were highly motivated. In fact, the women insisted on their inclusion. In the case of the PSP, which did not officially allow women to participate as fighters, women went so far as to form their own combat unit. These findings support previous claims made by Henshaw who stressed that the extent to which female involvement in nonstate armed groups can be explained by coercion is highly context-dependent.²³³ In the case of the Lebanese civil war, the lack of coercion can be explained by two factors. First, especially during the first two years, it was a very politicized war,²³⁴ so people, regardless of gender, were strongly motivated to join militias and there was simply no need for coercion. Second, the fact that in large parts of the country, the war consisted of several rounds of intense fighting with longer, quieter periods in between²³⁵ meant that societal structures remained relatively intact. As a result, the relatively high barriers for female involvement in the comparatively gender-conservative society that Lebanon was at the time were not as affected by the war as they can be in countries with heavier and more non-stop fighting.

The findings in this study around militants' individual backgrounds largely support claims made in previous literature on women's profiles and their pathways to becoming fighters in nonstate armed groups. As far as age, class, education, personal status, and previous involvement in nonviolent activism is concerned,²³⁶ the differences between men and women were minimal. As to the question of whether more female than male fighters come from a middle-class background as discussed in relation to other political conflicts,²³⁷ based on the data available as a result of this study, it is not possible to come to a definite conclusion either way. It is not clear what was more salient, the fact that many working-class women were less affected by social constraints and gendered barriers (as they had already been working alongside men on, e.g., the tobacco fields in the South or in the factories of Beirut²³⁸) or the fact that many middle-class women tended to be more educated about and aware of political processes.²³⁹ More extensive studies into the topic would be required to determine the exact role of class in this context.

The most important driving factor for both men and women to become involved with militias in the Lebanese civil war was a perception of the security threat and injustice presented by the war, as discussed above. While this supports findings of previous literature on female political violence,²⁴⁰ the fact that it was different kinds of security threats that motivated the members of the various groups to join the fight points to the necessity of taking into account the specificity of each conflict. Moreover, the fact that these perceptions of security pressures varied over time and were dependent on location (as discussed above) stresses the importance of local and spatial variation of threat perception and how these can affect individual motivations.

The claim that women join for personal reasons whereas men are motivated by political factors, which can be found in some terrorism studies publications,²⁴¹ is not supported by the findings of this study. Instead, perceived injustice and security pressures were the most important motivational factors for both men and women to join the war in Lebanon. While it is difficult to draw wider generalizations based on a single conflict,

at the very least this further supports the claim of those who argue that widespread assumptions about gender-specific motivations to join war, especially in terrorism studies, might be misleading.²⁴²

This study found that gender-specific motivations did indeed play a role in some cases. For some women, women's rights and gender equality were a motivational factor to join the war. However, only eight out of sixty-nine interviewees mentioned this as being a motivational factor, as discussed above. This finding is particularly interesting considering the relatively strong focus on female participation as an act of liberation or feminism in existing literature.²⁴³ It instead supports the claims of those scholars who deny the centrality of feminism and liberation as a motivational factor and rather see it trumped by other political motivations such as nationalism.²⁴⁴ This finding therefore indicates that the prevalence of the idea that female participation in political movements is a feminist act may instead reveal the cultural biases of those writing on the subject.²⁴⁵

The fact that actual or feared experiences of sexual violence, a common gender-specific motivation in some other conflicts,²⁴⁶ seem not to have played a large role can be explained by the fact that large-scale sexual violence was the exception rather than the norm during the Lebanese civil war.

Seeking protection, a third gender-specific motivation often mentioned with regard to conflicts in Africa, Asia, or Latin America,²⁴⁷ does not seem to have been a major motivational factor for women to join the war either. While participants in the interviews on which this study is based did not explicitly mention this, it is likely linked to the nature of the war in Lebanon. Since the war consisted of several rounds with longer, relatively calm periods in between,²⁴⁸ it is likely that joining a militia was not seen as the only (or most cost-effective) way of ensuring personal safety. It is possible that this could have changed if the war had been characterized by longer and more intense fighting.

As far as organizational characteristics are concerned, this study does not support the assumption that women are more likely to join organizations that (claim to) fight for women's rights and gender equality.²⁴⁹ Women decided to join both organizations that officially upheld progressive gender norms as well as those where traditional gender expectations remained part of the party's practice and discourse. Nationalist convictions as well as the perceived need to counter security pressures and wider societal injustice trumped "feminist" considerations.

As to the societal context and its impact on individual motivations, overall the women living in Lebanon at the time of the civil war were facing a relatively conservative society with clearly defined gender norms influenced by traditional ideas of men's and women's roles.²⁵⁰ This remained the case despite a slow opening, especially in Beirut and other bigger cities, in the years leading up to the war—a process that was amplified by the violent conflict.²⁵¹ Some individuals did not let these societal barriers stop them from pursuing their aim to join a militia as a fighter; however, the majority of women in Lebanon refrained from joining for fear of communal backlash, which explains the overall low numbers of female participation in combat roles during the civil war in Lebanon.²⁵² It is possible that longer and more intense periods of fighting would have contributed to an increased erosion of societal barriers, which is likely to have further facilitated female involvement in the militias.

The relatively high diversity of Lebanese society, the high number of different internal and external conflict parties, the extreme volatility of alliances during the war, and the overall regional and international context made Lebanon during the 1975–1990 civil war(s) a very specific context. Moreover, especially in the beginning of the war, it was a highly politicized conflict.²⁵³ This is likely to have affected the dynamics of the conflict in ways that might not have occurred in the same manner in other civil wars (especially those in which conflicting ideologies play a less important role). The main aim of this study is thus an analysis of the motivations of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, rather than a theory of female political violence in general. Nevertheless, in many areas, this study reached similar conclusions to those of other studies of female political violence, which is an indicator that some of the arguments made in this article also apply to other conflict contexts beyond the singular case of the Lebanese civil war. At the very least, it provides further empirical support for several claims in existing literature—which is not to be underestimated in a field of study that is often characterized by its lack of empirical studies. In the case of contradictions between the findings of this study and those of previous publications on female political violence, the differing results highlight the need for more nuanced accounts, which take into account the specific contexts in which female participation in violent conflict occurs.

Notes

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2. Alexis L. Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women’s Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016).
3. Caron Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking About Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2015).
4. Gentry and Sjoberg, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores*.
5. Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Norma Vázquez, “Motherhood and Sexuality at Times of War: The Case of Women Militants of the FMLN in El Salvador,” *Reproductive Health Matters*, 5 (1997): 139–146; Julie D. Shayne, “Gendered Revolutionary Bridges: Women in the Salvadoran Resistance Movement (1979–1992),” *Latin American Perspectives* 26 (1999): 85–102; Harry G. West, “Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo’s ‘Female Detachment,’” *Anthropological Quarterly* 73 (2000): 180–194; Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Swati Parashar, “Feminist International Relations and Women Militants: Case Studies from Sri Lanka and Kashmir,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22 (2009): 235–256; Mallarika Sinha Roy, “Rethinking Female Militancy in Postcolonial Bengal,” *Feminist Review* 101 (2012): 124–131; Seema Shekhawat, “Engendering Armed Militancy in Kashmir: Women as Perpetrators of Violence,” in *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, ed. Yvan Guichaoua (Berlin: Springer); Jonna Katto, “Landscapes of Belonging: Female Ex-Combatants Remembering the Liberation Struggle in Urban Maputo,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40 (2014): 539–557; Swati Parashar, *Women and Militant Wars: The Politics of Injury* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Siphokazi Magadla, “Women Combatants and the Liberation Movements in South Africa: Guerrilla Girls, Combative Mothers and the In-Betweeners,” *African Security Review* 24 (2015): 390–402; Ma. Lourdes

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6. Karla Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (2003): 171–195; Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Martyrs or Murderers? Victims or Victimizers?" in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy Ness (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (2007): 493–519; Karla Cunningham, "The Evolving Participation of Muslim Women in Palestine, Chechnya, and the Global Jihadi Movement," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy Ness (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Anne Speckhard, "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31 (2008): 995–1023; Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Black Widows and Beyond: Understanding the Motivations and Life Trajectories of Chechen Female Terrorists," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Karla Cunningham, "Female Participation in the Iraqi Insurgency: Insights into Nationalist and Religious Warfare," in *Women, War, and Violence: Personal Perspectives and Global Activism*, ed. Robin M. Chandler, Lihua Wang, and Linda W. Fuller (Berlin: Springer, 2010); Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jennifer Philippa Eggert, "Women Fighters in the 'Islamic State' and Al-Qaeda in Iraq: A Comparative Analysis," *Journal of International Peace and Organization* 90 (2015): 363–380; Jessica Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism: From Liberation Wars to Global Jihad and the Islamic State* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).
 7. This article's main focus lies on female fighters (who directly perpetrated violence during the war), while also taking into account the experiences of female militia members (who worked in a range of different supportive roles), as the experiences and motivations of both often overlapped. The term militant is used for both women in combat roles as well as women in supportive roles. The distinction between the two is not to imply that women's involvement in non-military role was less important than their participation in combat.
 8. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*; Kari H. Karamé, "Girls' Participation in Combat: A Case Study from Lebanon," in *Children in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 378–391; Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Women and Politics in Lebanon," in *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, ed. Judith E. Tucker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, "Women in the Lebanese Militias," in *Women and War in Lebanon*, ed. Lamia Rustum Shehadeh (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 145–166; Carole André-Dessornes, *Les femmes-martyres dans le monde arabe: Liban, Palestine et Irak: quelle place accorder à ce phénomène?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013); Sarah Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107 (2013): 418–432.
 9. This article focuses on individual profiles, pathways, and motivations of women to join armed groups during the war. This is not to deny the importance of meso and macro factors, the influence of which on women's motivations will be analyzed in the second part of this article. However, a more detailed analysis of the decision making on the group and societal level goes beyond the scope of this article.
 10. It proved to be impossible to gain (sufficient) access to (current or former) members of two other major militias during the war, namely the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) and Hezbollah. In the case of the SSNP, two interviews with former fighters were conducted; in the case of Hezbollah, all access was categorically denied.
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127. Interviewee 14.
128. Interviewee 31.
129. Interviewees 6, 11, 18, 25, 26, 32, 37, 47.
130. Interviewee 27.
131. Interviewee 56.
132. Interviewee 54.

133. Interviewee 60.
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135. Interviewees 57, 64; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 62.
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137. Interviewee 9, 10, 51.
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145. Interviewees 18, 19, 22–25, 28, 32, 44, 45, 48, 53, 55, 56, 61, 63; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 126.
146. Interviewees 2, 19, 22, 25, 32, 41 54.
147. Interviewees 19, 23, 25, 45; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*; Sneifer, *J'ai déposé les armes*.
148. Interviewees 44, 45, 53, 68.
149. Interviewees 13, 22, 27, 29, 47, 55, 66; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 30–31, 37.
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154. Interviewee 18.
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160. Interviewees 2, 19, 22, 25, 32, 41, 54.
161. Interviewee 54.
162. Interviewee 1.
163. Interviewee 25.
164. Interviewees 2, 19, 22, 23, 61.
165. Interviewees 15, 19, 22, 31, 66.
166. Interviewees 1, 2, 48, 55.
167. Interviewees 18, 31, 44.
168. Interviewees 1, 2, 11, 22, 24, 31, 32, 54, 62.
169. Interviewees 7, 18, 48, 65; see also Bechara, *Resistance*; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
170. Interviewees interviewees 7, 18, 48; 2, 11, 56; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 18–19; Sneifer, *J'ai déposé les armes*, 25–27.
171. Interviewees 1, 2, 6–8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 25, 27–32, 41, 44, 46–48, 52, 55, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66.

172. Interviewees 1–3, 6–10, 12, 14, 15, 17–24, 26–31, 41, 46–49, 51, 52, 54, 59, 61, 62, 64, 65, 67–69.
173. Interviewees 2, 7, 11, 14–16, 18, 19, 25, 26, 41, 44, 45, 55–57, 59, 60, 65, 66; see also El-Murr, *Leur guerre, mon combat*, 16–17, 23, 25; Sneifer, *J'ai déposé les armes*, 34–38, 41, 44, 49, 52–56, 81–83.
174. Interviewees 12, 33–40, 50, 58, 63.
175. Interviewees 57, 66.
176. Interviewees 49, 69.
177. Interviewees 1, 8, 11, 14, 41, 44, 48, 64.
178. Interviewees 23, 48, 64.
179. Interviewees 28, 32, 48.
180. Interviewees 30, 41, 48, 58; see also Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 46, 53; Sneifer, *J'ai déposé les armes*, 89, 92.
181. Interviewee 30.
182. Interviewee 42.
183. Interviewee 48; Duplan and Raulin, *Jocelyne Khoueiry l'indomptable*, 53.
184. Interviewees 4, 58.
185. Interviewees 3, 15, 23, 27, 31, 32, 53, 69.
186. Interviewees 23, 31, 53.
187. Interviewees 1–3, 6–12, 14–31, 33–41, 44–52, 54–69.
188. This was the situation at the beginning of the war; later, many Christian militia members also fought for an independent Christian homeland.
189. Interviewees 2, 7, 11, 14–16, 18, 19, 25, 26, 41, 44, 45, 55–57, 59, 60, 65, 66; see also El-Murr, *Leur guerre, mon combat*, 16–17, 23, 25; Sneifer, *J'ai déposé les armes*, 34–38, 41, 44, 49, 52–56, 81–83.
190. Only one described the mobilization at the time as influenced by propaganda (interviewee 59).
191. Interviewee 56; see also interviewees 11, 25, 55.
192. Although this also played a role for some, cf. interviewee 47.
193. Interviewees 1–3, 6–10, 12, 14, 15, 17–24, 26–31, 41, 46–49, 51, 52, 54, 59, 61, 62, 64, 65, 67–69.
194. Interviewee 51.
195. Interviewees 12, 33–40, 50, 58, 63.
196. Interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28, 30–32.
197. Interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28.
198. Interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28.
199. Interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28.
200. Interviewees 1, 2, 24, 28.
201. Interviewee 1, 8, 18, 24, 28, 30, 31; see also Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
202. Interviewees 8, 24, 28, 31.
203. Interviewees 7, 45, 66.
204. Interviewees 50, 63.
205. Interviewees 12, 33–40, 50, 58, 63.
206. Interviewees 1, 22, 23, 27, 31, 32, 54, 61; see also Badran, “Lebanon’s Militia Wars.”
207. Cunningham, “Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism”; Ness, “Introduction”; Cunningham, “Female Participation in the Iraqi Insurgency”; Dearing, “Like Red Tulips at Springtime”; Dalton and Asal, “Is it Ideology or Desperation”; Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism*.
208. Interviewees 12, 33–40, 50, 58, 63.
209. Interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28.
210. Interviewees 15, 19, 22, 31, 66.
211. Interviewees 15, 31.
212. Interviewees 11, 16, 19, 25, 41, 44, 45, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 66.
213. Interviewees 50, 53, 63.

214. Interviewees 2, 7, 17, 22, 23, 27, 31; see also Bechara, *Resistance*, 47–48.
215. Malik Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Jennifer Philippa Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom’: The 1968 Movement and the Participation of Women Fighters during the Lebanese Civil War,” in *Women, Global Protest Movements and Political Agency: Rethinking the Legacy of 1968*, ed. Sarah Colvin and Katharina Karcher (Abdingdon: Routledge, 2018); Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
216. Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation*; Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom”; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
217. Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation*; Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom”; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
218. Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom.”
219. Interviewees 1, 7, 44–48, 52, 54, 64, 65; see also Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom.”
220. Interviewees 1, 2, 8–10, 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 29, 32, 48, 54.
221. Interviewees 1, 2, 18, 32, 48.
222. Interviewee 32.
223. Interviewee 2.
224. Interviewee 4.
225. Interviewees 1, 2, 7, 12, 18, 29, 30.
226. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*; Bloom, *Bombshell*; Cunningham, “Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism.”
227. Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom.”
228. Interviewees 28, 31, 32, 45.
229. Interviewee 59.
230. Interviewee 23.
231. Interviewees 23, 28, 32, 59.
232. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 139–141; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*, 128; Katto, “Landscapes of Belonging,” 544; Parashar, “Feminist International Relations and Women Militants,” 137.
233. Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*.
234. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
235. Ibid.
236. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*.
237. Lobao (1990), 188–189, cit. in Shayne, “Gendered Revolutionary Bridges,” 86; Reif, “Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements,” 147–169; Sajjad, “Women Guerillas,” 6.
238. Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation*; Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom”; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
239. Interviewee 4.
240. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*.
241. Berko and Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism”; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*; Jacques and Taylor, *Male and Female Suicide Bombers*, Victor, *Army of Roses*.
242. Cohen, “Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence”; Ness, “Introduction”; O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?”; Davis, *Women in Modern Terrorism*; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*.
243. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 137; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 145–146, 234; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*, 109; Berko and Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism,” 504–505; O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?,” 707; McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Armed Groups,” 171; Ortega, *Gendered Patterns of Mobilization and Recruitment for Political Violence*, 95; Sajjad, “Women Guerillas,” 6; Von Knop, “The Female Jihad,” 399.

244. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 245; Bloom et al., “Tiocfaidh Ar Mna,” 72; Speckhard, “The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists,” 1003.
245. Gayer, “Princesses’ among the ‘Lions,’” 2.
246. Alison, *Women and Political Violence*; Bloom, *Bombshell*.
247. Ortega, “Gendered Patterns of Mobilization and Recruitment for Political Violence”; McKay, “Girls as ‘Weapons of Terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Armed Groups”; Shikola, “We Left Our Shoes Behind”; Van Hauwermeiren, “The Ogaden War”; Parashar, *Women and Militant Wars*; Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*; Shayne, “Gendered Revolutionary Bridges”; Viterna, “Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded.”
248. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.
249. Reif, “Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements”; Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism*.
250. Eggert, “The Mood was an Explosion of Freedom.”
251. Ibid.
252. Ibid.
253. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.