

Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

Threat, Mobilization and Gender Norms

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Cover quote: representative of Colombian women's organization, 2018 (author interview), presented in poem form

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*Dedicated to the victims
of conflict-related sexual violence
and to the women
fighting for a more equal
more peaceful
more just future
in Colombia
and the world*

Abstract

Sexual violence is a highly gendered violence. It disproportionately – albeit not exclusively – affects women and girls, and it asserts gendered hierarchies between perpetrators and victims. The widespread rape of women has been reported e.g. in World Wars I and II and in many wars in medieval Europe, but only since the 1990s has sexual violence in conflict moved onto national and international policy agendas. Sexual violence is now globally recognized as a weapon of war and increasingly condemned and confronted by domestic actors. What are the implications of the politicization of conflict-related sexual violence, as a highly gendered violence, for women's agency in conflict settings?

This is the overarching question this dissertation addresses, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Paper 1 shows that women mobilize in response to the collective threat that conflict-related sexual violence constitutes to them as women. Qualitative interviews with representatives of women's organizations and victims' associations in Colombia reveal, in paper 2, that patriarchal structures and societally entrenched gender inequality are at the heart of mobilized women's understanding of this violence. An examination of United Nations peace operation mandates in paper 3 reveals that gender content, including a commitment to women's participation, is higher when sexual violence is widespread in the respective conflict. Paper 4 shows that countries experiencing a conflict with prevalent sexual violence adopt legislative gender quotas sooner and at higher levels than other countries.

Jointly, the results indicate that conflict-related sexual violence makes gender salient in both domestic and international arenas, as a result of which women's agency may be amplified. While women's civil society mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence broadens out to incorporate a more comprehensive and holistic perspective of gender inequalities in society, the international response signifies a narrowing in of the global Women, Peace and Security framework on the singular issue of conflict-related sexual violence. The results are encouraging in that they reveal the previously overlooked nexus between women's victimization in sexual violence and women's political agency, but they also expose the long road yet ahead for gender equality norms.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Sexuellt våld är en starkt könad typ av våld. Våldet drabbar till oproportionerligt stor del – om än inte uteslutande – kvinnor och flickor, och befäster därigenom hierarkier mellan gärningsmän och offer. Omfattande våldtäkter mot kvinnor har dokumenterats exempelvis i första och andra världskriget samt i flera krig under medeltiden i Europa, men det var först på 1990-talet som sexuellt våld i konflikter blev en del av den nationella och internationella politiska agendan. Sexuellt våld är idag ett globalt erkänt vapen i krig som i allt större utsträckning uppmärksammas och fördöms av nationella aktörer. Vilka är implikationerna av denna politisering av konfliktrelaterat sexuellt våld – en typ av starkt könat våld – för kvinnors agerande och egenmakt i konfliktsituationer? Det är den övergripande fråga som denna avhandling undersöker genom en kombination av kvantitativa och kvalitativa forskningsmetoder.

Artikel 1 visar att kvinnor mobiliserar som svar på det kollektiva hot som konfliktrelaterat sexuellt våld utgör mot dem som kvinnor. Kvalitativa intervjuer med representanter för kvinnoorganisationer och organisationer för brottsoffer i Colombia visar, i artikel 2, att patriarkala strukturer (socialt befäst ojämställdhet) är kärnan i politiskt aktiva kvinnors förståelse av denna typ av våld. En undersökning, i artikel 3, av FN:s fredsbevarande mandat visar att resolutioner vars innehåll fokuserar kön, inklusive åtaganden att främja kvinnors politiska deltagande, är mer vanligt förekommande i anslutning till konflikter med ett starkt inslag av sexuellt våld. Artikel 4 visar att stater som upplever konflikter med höga nivåer av sexuellt våld är mer benägna att införa politisk könskvotering på nationell nivå än andra stater.

Tillsammans visar resultaten att konfliktrelaterat sexuellt våld bidrar till att göra frågor om kön synliga på både den nationella och globala politiska arenan, en process genom vilken kvinnors egenmakt kan stärkas ytterligare. Kvinnors mobilisering i civilsamhällesorganisationer, som svar på sexuellt våld i konflikter, har utvidgats till att omfatta ett mer genomgripande och holistiskt perspektiv på könsskillnader i samhället. Samtidigt innebär dock responsen från internationella aktörer en allt snävare tolkning av FN:s ramverk kring kvinnor, fred och säkerhet, vilket betyder ett ökat fokus på sexuellt våld som enskild fråga. Resultaten i avhandlingen är hoppfulla då de belyser det tidigare förbisedda sambandet mellan kvinnor som offer för sexuellt våld och kvinnors politiska agerande och egenmakt, men de visar också på den långa väg som fortfarande ligger framför oss när det gäller jämlikhet mellan könen.

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Introduction

“Many of us women still have not been able to learn how to speak, when they say ‘we’re the spoils of war.’ No. I’m not a tank, I’m a territory. My body is a territory, which they entered; they invaded my territory without permission.”

– *Representative of Colombian victims’ association (author interview, 2018)*

“Sexual violence is devastating in the lives of women, just as other crimes are devastating, but with one special characteristic and that is that it is a violence that affects directly the identity of women and the existence of women.”

– *Representative of Colombian women’s organization (author interview, 2017)*

The 2018 Nobel Peace Prize went to Dr. Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad “for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.”¹ Reflected in the Nobel Committee’s justification is the understanding that widespread sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors poses a fundamental *threat* – to civilians, to communities and to peace itself. Conflict-related sexual violence is known to have many detrimental physical, psychological and social consequences. Its victims – most of whom are women – may suffer injuries or life-long disabilities, trauma, depression, suicidal intentions, and social stigmatization (Stark & Wessells, 2012). It is not surprising, therefore, that sexual violence in conflict is a core driver of displacement, and attendant land dispossession and destitution (United Nations, 2018).

This does not, however, mean that this violence goes unchallenged. The 2018 Nobel Peace Prize directs our gaze also towards *mobilization* as a response to conflict-related sexual violence. As a surgeon in the conflict-affected Bukavu region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dr. Denis Mukwege dedicates his life to repairing the physical damage caused by sexual violence and thus restoring some of the dignity of its victims. But both he and Nadia Murad, who escaped sexual enslavement by ISIS forces, are also activists raising awareness, empowering victims and raising their voices, and lobbying governments and international actors to take on or intensify the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. In their efforts, they are joined by women’s movements, victims’ associations, and international NGOs in all parts of the world. International organizations and states, the United Nations and the United Kingdom primary among them, have also launched large-scale initiatives to fight conflict-related sexual violence. It is safe to say that *international attention* to this violence has never been higher.

The three themes of threat, mobilization and international attention are at the heart of this dissertation, and they come together under the overarching question: What are the implications of the politicization of conflict-related sexual violence, as a highly gendered violence, for *women’s agency* in conflict settings? Politicization

¹ As per the Norwegian Nobel Committee’s justification: <https://www.nobelpeaceprize.org/The-Nobel-Peace-Prize-2018>

encapsulates here, on the one hand, the attribution of political motives to conflict-related sexual violence and, on the other, the centrality of this violence in different kinds of political contestation at the domestic and international levels. Such politicization has occurred in particular with the increasing prioritization of conflict-related sexual violence on policy agendas since the 1990s, encapsulated e.g. in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and most prominently in the Women, Peace and Security framework since 2000 (discussed in more detail below). These patterns make my theoretical arguments most applicable to the period since around 1990, to which the analysis is therefore primarily dedicated.

The dissertation focuses on two different, albeit interconnected, dimensions of women's agency. The first is women's domestic civil society activism in response to conflict-related sexual violence. The second is the implementation of the relatively new global norm of women's participation in international actors' responses to armed conflict. The four papers combine quantitative and qualitative methods to ask different questions about the relationship between conflict-related sexual violence, victimization and women's agency. The statistical analyses aim at identifying patterns and regularities in terms of women's civil society mobilization and international responses across contexts. Qualitative analyses of interviews carried out in Colombia allow an exploration of the causal mechanism underlying women's civil society mobilization while also complementing the abstraction of quantitative datasets and contextualizing the experiences of people living in a conflict setting.

The first two papers explore women's mobilization in civil society. While men, too, are victims of wartime sexual violence (Edström & Dolan, 2018; Schulz, 2018), I leverage the fact that women are generally its primary targets. The risk to civilian women is often acute: in approximately two thirds of all armed conflicts ongoing between 1980 and 2009, rape was reported as widespread in at least one year (Cohen, 2013a: 467). As elaborated in papers 1 and 2, sexual violence is infused with and asserts gendered power relations, targeting women as members of a subordinated social collective. And it targets, as per the quotes preceding the introduction, the very identity of women through attacking their bodies and sexual autonomy. It is, in short, a highly gendered violence that can be understood to pose a *collective threat* to women as women. In response to this threat, I hypothesize, women may mobilize politically. This theoretical expectation is informed by previous literature on collective threat mobilization (Tilly, 1978; Khawaja, 1993; Loveman, 1998; Van Dyke & Soule, 2002; Almeida, 2003; Johnson & Frickel, 2011; Berry, 2015; Shriver, Adams & Longo, 2015) and also builds on and extends feminist research on victims' responses to domestic violence (Schneider, 1993; Connell, 1997; Mardorossian, 2002).

Theorizing a mobilizing potential challenges the common assumption that widespread sexual violence in armed conflict invariably stymies women's participation in society and politics (Hagen & Yohani, 2010: 18–19; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016: 381; Crawford, 2017: 59). In fact, the link between sexual violence victimization in armed conflict and agency is heavily under-researched and under-theorized (Koo, 2017). Although a growing literature has shown that conflict violence may transform political attitudes and behavior, often resulting in increased political participation (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; McDougal &

Caruso, 2012; Luca & Verpoorten, 2015a), the gendered dimension of these patterns has likewise not received due attention. This is puzzling insofar as it is well-established that conflict and conflict violence affect men and women in distinct ways (Jones, 2004; Carpenter, 2006; Ormhaug, Meier & Hernes, 2009; Buvinic et al., 2013). With this dissertation, I thus contribute to this literature, by examining how *gendered violence* may affect *political agency* in equally gendered ways.

Paper 1 shows that Colombian women (both victims and non-victims) organize in civil society and fight to make conflict-related sexual violence visible, help improve access to justice, fight impunity, and seek to improve legal and political responses. These civil society activities encompass, but also move well beyond, concerns with recognition and protection from (sexual) violence. They frequently include more transformative agendas centered on increased sexual autonomy for women, transformations in gender norms, women's active involvement in the peace process, and women's political participation. Colombia is a particularly suitable setting to qualitatively explore the nexus of victimization and agency because sexual violence has been widespread in the armed conflict with its origins in the 1960s, while civil society mobilization is very high. Yet, statistical analyses reveal that the patterns observed in Colombia hold up in cross-national comparison as well: in conflicts with prevalent sexual violence, women's protest and women's civil society mobilization (with international linkages) is more frequent than in conflicts where no or only isolated occurrences of sexual violence are reported.

Paper 2 delves more deeply into why conflict-related sexual violence constitutes a threat to women by examining how politically relevant agents in civil society – representatives of women's organizations and victims' associations leading various interventions against this violence – understand this violence. The analysis suggests that there is no clear-cut dividing line between everyday and conflict-related sexual violence. In the view of the mobilized women, armed conflict exacerbates and amplifies everyday sexual violence, grounded in deep-seated gender inequality, backed up with the power of arms. Yet, conflict may also add a strategic dimension: armed actors instrumentalize the gendered nature of sexual violence and its roots in patriarchal notions – of women as an extension of men and as the glue that holds communities together – to cause harm to the enemy. Strategic sexual violence in conflict is so powerful, the interviews suggest, precisely because it builds on these patriarchal notions that are entrenched in society.

This contextualized understanding of conflict-related sexual violence is not reflected in the way *international actors* commonly perceive and approach this violence, however. This is because at the international level sexual violence has been heavily securitized: humanitarian actors have actively constructed conflict-related sexual violence as a security threat, i.e. they have explicitly linked sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors to war strategies (Mejer, 2016a; Crawford, 2017). Where structural forces of patriarchy are at the heart of Colombian women's understanding of conflict-related sexual violence, the international understanding foregrounds conflict dynamics. The strategically constructed threat is different from the domestically operating threat in two other ways as well. First, it is framed in terms of protecting an "outgroup" – i.e. the international actors are not themselves the target

of the threat, but they respond to a threat posed to others. Second, and relatedly, strategic threat framing often relies on essentialisms because it has to appeal to existing tropes (here primarily that of the traumatized and passive female victim in need of protection by the international community) to evoke sympathy and elicit an international response (Carpenter, 2005). This implies a diminished scope for victims' and women's agency, which I explore in papers 3 and 4. By evoking gendered norms of protection, I argue, international actors are more likely to perceive the need to intervene – and in specific, gendered ways – in armed conflicts in which sexual violence is widespread.

Concern about sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors has indeed come to occupy a particularly important position on the international agenda. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (1993) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1994) set important precedents for the international prosecution of sexual violence crimes in conflict. Donors, in turn, provide large amounts of funding to international or local organizations providing psycho-social or legal support to victims of conflict-related sexual violence or establish their own projects on the ground. The United Nations and the United Kingdom have responded to, and reinforced, strategic threat framing, by launching initiatives with the ambitious goal of ending the use of sexual violence as a “weapon of war.”

While long overdue, the immense attention to conflict-related sexual violence in the last two and a half decades – even provocatively referred to as the “fetishization of sexual violence in international security” (Meger, 2016a) – has had a number of unintended consequences. Sexual violence often overshadows other gender issues in conflict – such as displacement, which also disproportionately affects women – and concerns about women's *protection* often take precedence over international commitments to enhance women's *participation* and influence in conflict-affected societies (Barrow, 2010; Douma & Hilhorst, 2012; Ellerby, 2015; Meger, 2016a; Mertens & Pardy, 2017).

Both the women's protection norm and the norm of women's political participation in conflict-affected settings are formally entrenched in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework composed of a series of UN Security Council resolutions passed since 2000. WPS is the most important international normative framework when it comes to gender issues in conflict-affected states. But what are the implications of a growing focus on the narrow gender issue of sexual violence for the comprehensive implementation of the WPS norms, and in particular for the acknowledgement of and support for women's agency? I theorize that because of the global attention to sexual violence, this violence tends to be viewed as *the* gender issue in conflict. International actors perceive conflicts with prevalent sexual violence as more gendered and, as a result, as being in particular need of a gendered response. Paper 3 shows that gender content in UN peace operation mandates, including references to women's participation, is more likely in response to conflicts with prevalent sexual violence. In paper 4, Mattias Agerberg and I find that gender quotas are adopted, as a result of international pressure and domestic mobilization, sooner and at higher rates in countries affected by conflicts with prevalent sexual violence than in countries affected by other conflict, and than in countries not affected by armed

conflict. In sum, the WPS norms are applied unevenly across different types of conflicts, implemented at higher rates when sexual violence is prevalent. While these patterns indicate a correlation between sexual violence and international actors' promotion of women's agency, the analyses reveal this to have its basis ultimately in a narrow understanding of gendered victimization.

In conjunction, the four papers in the dissertation elucidate the links and the tensions between victimization and agency, and protection and participation, as they relate to conflict-related sexual violence. This introductory chapter situates the papers in the relevant literatures and discusses the underlying theoretical notions at a higher level of abstraction. The next section identifies the research gaps this dissertation seeks to fill, as they pertain to the transformative effects of conflict violence, and the international response to conflict-related sexual violence. After providing an overview of the literature on conflict-related sexual violence and its prevalence, patterns and consequences, I present the core theoretical considerations underlying the papers. Next, I discuss methodological and ethical issues, laying out the benefits of combining multiple methods. The final section summarizes what we learn from the four papers, suggests avenues for future research and reflects on the normative implications of the findings.

Filling the Gaps: Sexual Violence, Threat and Responses

Both individuals and communities are found time and again to demonstrate a high degree of resilience, i.e. adaptation to or recovery from political violence-induced stress and shocks (for a review of this literature see Sousa et al., 2013). During the civil war in Uganda between 2000 and 2012, for example, social capital in the form of generalized trust and associational membership diminished, but it recovered in the years thereafter (Luca & Verpoorten, 2015b). Similar processes have been observed among individuals: while war-related trauma has been found to be more common among women civilians (Pham, Weinstein & Longman, 2004; Johnson & Thompson, 2008; Bunting et al., 2013), previous research has also found high levels of psychological and physical resilience among women and girls who have experienced civil war (Radan, 2007; Suarez, 2013a, b; Grimard & Laszlo, 2014). In poor communities in post-conflict Guatemala and civil war-affected Colombia in the 1990s, for example, Moser and McIlwaine (2001) identify high levels of social capital and social organization, much of it women-dominated, in settings characterized by prevalent violence. In other words, the adverse consequences of civil war are real and plenty, but they do not place individuals and communities on a rigid trajectory towards despair and disintegration.

In fact, the upheavals inherent in civil war may also sow the seeds for transformation. A growing literature is departing from this premise, placing socio-political dynamics at the center of investigation. Wood (2008a) suggests that civil war has the potential of sustainably transforming social networks, i.e. civilian, military, political and economic actors, structures, norms and identities at the local level. Recent studies have established links between experiences of violence and

victimization during conflict and changes in political identities and behavior (Balcells, 2012), increased social cohesion and pro-social behavior in communities (Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii, 2014) and (pro-social) changes in economic behavior (Voors et al., 2012).

Increased political participation and civic engagement have also been associated with higher exposure to conflict-related violence at the community and at the individual level. Bellows and Miguel (2009) observe higher post-war involvement and political participation among communities that experienced more violence during the civil war in Sierra Leone. McDougal and Caruso (2012) present tentative evidence in support of a positive impact of civil war violence on post-conflict political mobilization at the community level in Mozambique. Blattman's (2009) analysis reveals that political and civic participation increased among former abductees in the Ugandan civil war with the number of acts of violence they witnessed during the conflict. Further scrutinizing community-level developments in Uganda from the pre- to the post-conflict period, Luca and Verpoorten (2015a) confirm Blattman's findings of increased political participation as a consequence of conflict-related violence.

This literature successfully uses research designs that exploit exogenous variation in wartime violence in order to establish causality (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; Voors et al., 2012; Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii, 2014; Luca & Verpoorten, 2015a). The exploration of causal mechanisms, by contrast, is lagging behind. Among the possible mechanisms discussed are post-traumatic growth (Bellows & Miguel, 2009: 1145; Blattman, 2009: 244; Bateson, 2012: 572; Luca & Verpoorten, 2015a: 114), instrumental concerns, emotional and expressive motivations (Bateson, 2012: 572), purging and collective coping (Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii, 2014: 613–616). Yet, these mechanisms remain generally untested. Only Gilligan et al. (2014: 613–6) include “suggestive analyses” providing some evidence that purging and collective coping to deal with threat and trauma explain the positive association between community-level exposure to wartime violence and increased social cohesion they observe in Nepal. Overall, the existing literature robustly establishes the transformative potential of civil war violence across conflicts and contexts, while remaining uncertain about the underlying causal mechanisms. In this dissertation, I theorize and empirically investigate a mechanism of collective threat mobilization.

Curiously, the existing research has also rarely discussed gender-differential outcomes of conflict violence (for an exception see Annan et al., 2011) and failed to link theoretically or empirically gender-specific outcomes to gender-specific violence in conflict. This is although gender scholars have shown that civilian women are not merely passive victims of armed conflicts. They also assume new roles in society, generating income for their families, mobilizing politically and engaging in grass-roots peace activism (Bop, 2001; Jenichen, 2009; Berry, 2015, 2018; Tripp, 2015). The (qualitative) gender and conflict literature generally attributes these gains in women's agency to the various social upheavals that civil war creates, primarily male-dominated fighting and the absence of men during and after conflict, changing relations, interactions and dynamics within families and communities, transforming gender relations, and daily struggles for survival requiring creative solutions (Coral

Cordero, 2001; Meertens, 2001; Meintjes, Turshen & Pillay, 2001; Moser & McIlwaine, 2001; Berry, 2015, 2018; Tripp, 2015).

In a rich qualitative investigation, Tripp shows how patterns of men being involved in combat, being killed or seeking to evade conscription led women to assume new responsibilities during the civil wars in Uganda, Liberia and, on a lesser scale, Angola. The result were considerable transformations in everyday dynamics and gender relations. Women mobilized in encompassing movements, making claims for greater representation and influence in politics (Tripp, 2015). In a similar vein, women in post-war Bosnia and Rwanda mobilized in a plethora of informal and formal organizations in response to the dual pressures of demographic imbalances and pressing material needs (Berry, 2015, 2018). In Colombia (Meertens, 2001) and Peru (Coral Cordero, 2001), women demonstrated considerable agency in the private and the public spheres in their efforts to improve conditions for their families and communities, responding to failure by the state and existing institutions to address the population's needs. What is missing from the gender and conflict literature are accounts that theorize and systematically establish empirical links between gender-based conflict violence and expansions in women's agency. This is puzzling in particular as it is well-established that conflict violence is gendered, with men more vulnerable to killings and women often targeted specifically in, or at least at heightened risk of, sexual violence (Skjelsbæk, 2001; Handrahan, 2004; Jones, 2004; Carpenter, 2006; Ormhaug, Meier & Hernes, 2009; Leatherman, 2011).

Papers 1 and 2 of the dissertation bridge the literatures on the transformative effects of civil war violence and on gender and conflict. If, as the former literature has shown, conflict violence affects people's political attitudes and behaviors and if, as the latter has established, women's and men's experiences in conflict differ, then we should expect to observe links between gender-based violence in conflict and gender-specific attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. This merger creates the research gap that I address: how do women respond to conflict violence that targets them specifically as women, i.e. to sexual violence?

In answering this question, I leverage insights from earlier work on domestic gender-based violence that has challenged the predominant view of a victimization-agency dichotomy: Feminist scholars have argued that both victimization and agency form part of the experiences of women subjected to (sexual) violence (Kelly, 1988; Schneider, 1993; Connell, 1997). I apply these insights to conflict-related sexual violence, arguing that the global Women, Peace and Security framework increasingly destigmatizes this violence and facilitates mobilization around it, while demographic upheavals inherent in violent conflict – as discussed – often open up spaces for women's agency in society (Berry, 2015, 2018; Tripp, 2015). Notably, I also extend earlier conceptions of the victimization-agency nexus as it relates to gender-based violence in three ways: 1) by focusing on *political agency* rather than on agency understood as resistance only in the abuse situation itself, 2) by moving from individual to *collective agency*, and 3) by formulating a *causal theory* of collective threat mobilization that links agency to victimization.

In papers 3 and 4, I turn the focus to the international level. Existing research has illustrated how strategic threat framing and securitization have operated with respect

to conflict-related sexual violence. Crawford (2017) shows that different normative actors framed sexual violence in armed conflict narrowly as a weapon of war, even though they are aware of the limitations of this approach given that the perpetration of sexual violence by armed actors can in fact take many different forms. The framing of sexual violence as a weapon, in a larger discourse of this violence posing a threat to international security, served to attract the attention and resources of states and international organizations. Approaching the understanding of conflict-related sexual violence as a weapon of war specifically through a securitization theory lens, Meger (2016a) illustrates just how successful this clamor for international attention has been. She lays out the extent to which international organizations, states and donors have prioritized sexual violence as a concern in armed conflict, much to the detriment of other gender issues and other types of gendered violence that are pressing in armed conflict or the societal context in which these conflicts occur.

In papers 3 and 4, I subject these implications of the strategic threat framing of conflict-related sexual violence at the international level to closer scrutiny. The overarching question is: what does the unprecedented level of international attention to conflict-related sexual violence mean for the implementation of global gender norms? The central premise is that the narrowing in on sexual violence as a central issue in armed conflict makes this the primary gender issue in the eyes of international actors, revolving around the need to protect civilians (especially women) from this violence.

In developing my theoretical argument, I bring in the literature on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework, leveraging in particular insights into the normative contention that exists between more traditional norms of women's protection and more progressive norms of women's participation (Black, 2009; Barrow, 2010b; Puechguirbal, 2010): women's protection, closely tied to conflict-related sexual violence, more and more overshadows women's participation. In brief, I theorize first that sexual violence directly activates the women's protection norm. Second, by spotlighting gender as a salient issue in a conflict, sexual violence raises the issue of a gender-sensitive response. It thus activates also, indirectly, the women's participation norm. From this I develop the expectation that in conflicts with prevalent sexual violence, the international response will be more gender-sensitive than in conflicts with no or isolated reports of sexual violence. How global norms of women's protection and participation are activated and implemented of course also has important implications for women's agency surrounding conflict-related sexual violence on the ground, i.e. for the topics examined in papers 1 and 2 of the dissertation. Table 1 presents an overview of the four papers.

Table 1. Overview of papers in dissertation

Paper	Research Question	Theory	Method	Main findings
1	How does conflict-related sexual violence affect women's civil society mobilization?	Women mobilize politically in response to collective threat of conflict-related sexual violence	Cross-national statistical analysis Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews	More women's protest and WINGO linkages when sexual violence is prevalent Collective threat perceptions
2	How do mobilized women perceive the nature and origins of conflict-related sexual violence?	None: exploratory	Thematic analysis of qualitative interviews	Patriarchy is central to understanding of conflict-related sexual violence, including its strategic manifestations, in defiance of global weapon of war discourse
3	How does sexual violence in conflict affect gender content in UN peace operation mandates?	Sexual violence serves as heuristic for gendered conflict and gendered response	Cross-national statistical analysis	Gender content, including on women's participation, more likely when sexual violence is prevalent
4	Why do women derive political gains in conflict? <i>(with M. Agerberg)</i>	Pressures from above (gendered conflict, gendered response) and from below (women's mobilization) push governments to adopt gender quotas	Cross-national statistical analysis	Countries experiencing conflict with prevalent sexual violence adopt gender quotas sooner and at higher rates than non-conflict countries and countries with low-sexual violence conflict

The WPS framework – and with it the acknowledgements of sexual violence as a global security concern and of the need for a gender-sensitive approach to armed conflict – emerged only in 2000, as the result of transnational activism (Basu, 2016; True, 2016). This shift in policy and in the understanding of conflict-related sexual violence determines the temporal scope conditions of my theoretical arguments. International responses to this violence prior to the 1990s were negligible, while the emergence of a global normative framework has destigmatized this violence and greatly facilitated women's civil society mobilization around it.

Background: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

This section provides some background on conflict-related sexual violence. What do we know about its prevalence, perpetrators, victims, causes and consequences? What remains contested? The answers to these questions have a bearing on how domestic and international actors may confront this violence. While there is no simple account of sexual violence in conflict that applies to every single setting, there are enough common characteristics to approximate a definition. To distill the essence of the existing literature, conflict-related sexual violence is best understood to comprise any form of assault on an individual's sexual or reproductive autonomy that violates consent, primarily through the physical use or threat of force by an armed actor. The *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* dataset (Cohen & Nordås, 2014), for example, includes cases of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization or abortion, sexual mutilation and sexual torture.

Sexual violence has been common in armed conflicts and wars since time immemorial: Brownmiller (1975: 31–78) discusses comprehensive evidence showing how prevalent rape was in World Wars I and II, but considers widespread rape in war as normal practice also in ancient Greece, surrounding the establishment of Rome, and during many wars in medieval Europe. Nonetheless, cross-national data on sexual violence in conflict are available only from the 1980s onwards (and more reliably so from the 1990s onwards, as discussed in the section on methods). This is because a reappraisal of the view of sexual violence as an unavoidable side effect of warring occurred only in the aftermath of the systematic rape of women in the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda in the mid-1990s. Shifting reporting practices and policy priorities have since precipitated the collection of quantitative data. The two currently existing time-series cross-national datasets on sexual violence (Cohen & Nordås, 2014) and rape (Cohen, 2013a) in armed conflict show that sexual violence ranges from no or isolated occurrences to wide-spread or systematic assault, occurs in all regions of the world, and is committed by both government and rebel forces (see Figure 1).

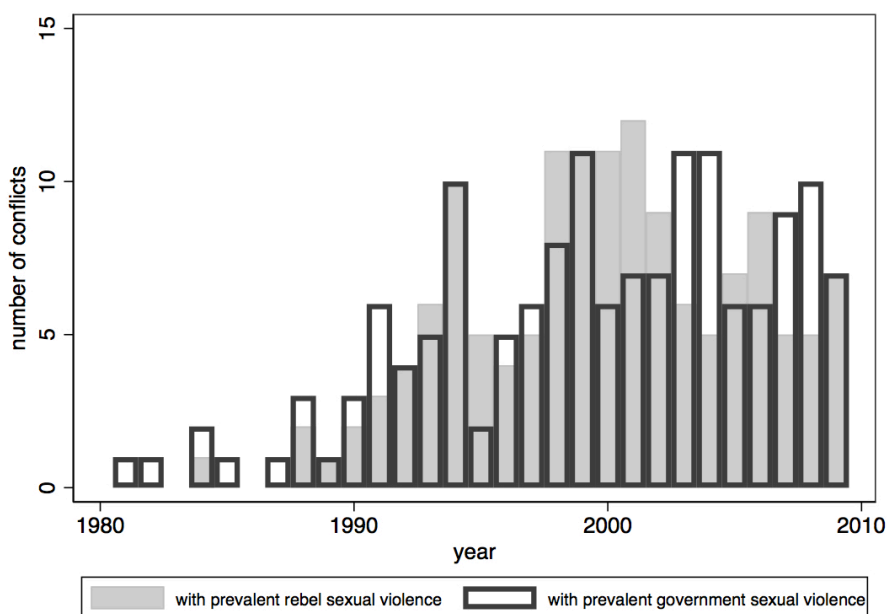


Figure 1. Rape committed by government forces and rebel groups over time (based on data in Cohen 2013)

In-depth and systematic – albeit by no means comprehensive and definitive – insight into perpetration patterns of sexual violence in armed conflict is likewise available only for the last few decades. It is established that warring parties inter alia in Bosnia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have used sexual violence as a war strategy (Skjelsbæk, 2001; Handrahan, 2004; Wood, 2008b; Leatherman, 2011; Turner, 2013: 120–46). While the strategic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war tends to dominate policy discourse and news coverage, academic research reveals a more varied and nuanced picture. Using insight from their extensive field research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Stern and Eriksson Baaz

(2013) urge scholars to move beyond the dominant weapon of war narrative and suggest that many acts of conflict-related sexual violence are in fact crimes of opportunity, resulting from the collapse of discipline and control within military structures. Further dissecting the opportunist-strategic dichotomy, Elisabeth Wood argues that in many conflicts sexual violence takes the form of a pervasive practice that emerges in social processes and, while not officially ordered by military superiors, is tolerated and in this way perpetuated and normalized (Wood, 2014).

Why do armed actors perpetrate sexual violence? This is a question of much debate. Feminist scholars assert a continuum between gendered violence in peace and war, and an escalation of gendered everyday violence during armed conflict: the causes of conflict-related sexual violence are to be found within society itself (Cockburn, 2004; Meger, 2016a). Others have dismissed this perspective as a sufficient explanation for the occurrence of conflict-related sexual violence, as it does not account for patriarchal contexts in which armed actors do *not* resort to sexual violence (Wood, 2009, 2014). It cannot, in other words, account for variation in prevalence. Accordingly, Dara Cohen (2013a) finds in her statistical analysis of 86 civil wars from 1980 until 2009 that standard indicators of gender inequality are not related to the prevalence of wartime rape. Instead, many scholars have turned to group, individual and interactive processes as explanations for the observed variation in the prevalence of sexual violence across conflicts, including group dynamics in territorial conflict (Hayden, 2000), principal-agent theory applied to military organizations (Butler, Gluch & Mitchell, 2007), individual and inter-organizational norms in interplay with strategic considerations (Wood, 2009) or socialization processes within military units composed of forcibly recruited combatants (Cohen, 2013a, 2016).²

What emerges from these debates is that structural gender inequalities cannot *on their own* explain where conflict-related sexual violence occurs and where it does not. At the same time, Davies and True (2015) suggest that structural factors may give insight into *why* armed actors use *sexual* violence rather than a different type of violence. Paper 2 shows that, in the perspective of women mobilized in Colombian civil society, patriarchy goes a long way towards explaining why sexual violence is part of armed groups' repertoire of violence in the first place and how armed conflict may exacerbate everyday sexual violence.

While the focus in this dissertation is on women, it is important to note that the use of sexual violence in conflict cannot be universally reduced to a male perpetrator-female victim dichotomy. Increasingly, scholars draw attention to male victims (Oosterhoff, Zwanikken & Ketting, 2004; Carpenter, 2006; Jones, 2006; Grey & Shepherd, 2013; Dolan, 2014; Schulz, 2018) as well as to female perpetrators (Cohen, 2013b; Sjoberg, 2016) of sexual violence. Yet, sexual violence against men in conflict is commonly understood as aiming to feminize and humiliate the male victim and the (ethnic) group he represents while asserting the hegemonic masculinity of the perpetrator and his (or her) group (Skjelsbæk, 2001; Jones, 2006; Alison, 2007). Following this understanding, sexual violence directed against men or perpetrated by women is also an indicator of gendered conflict. Accordingly, Loken (2017) finds that a greater share of women in armed groups does not reduce the occurrence of rape, but

² For a comprehensive and nuanced review, see Koos (2017).

that the militarized masculinities and misogynist organizational structures in these groups explain the perpetration of rape. These nuances surrounding the perpetration of sexual violence are important to bear in mind.

In sum, conflict-related sexual violence is a highly gendered violence. Leatherman (2011) discusses common characteristics of gender polarization, breakdown of (social) institutions, and loss of women's safe places and safe havens in both public and private in different societies affected by prevalent conflict-related sexual violence. Those targeted may experience tremendous physical, mental and social consequences. These include e.g. infection with sexually transmitted diseases, physical injury or disability, depression or suicidal intentions, and social stigmatization (Stark & Wessells, 2012). In his recent appraisal of the existing literature, Koos (2017: 7–8) provides a detailed discussion of the negative societal consequences of conflict-related sexual violence identified in the existing literature, especially in terms of stigmatization and disrupted family and community relations. Paper 2 touches upon how patriarchal relations in society underlie or exacerbate many of these negative consequences for the victims. In problematizing women's active responses to conflict-related sexual violence, I am mindful of the negative consequences of sexual violence, but challenge the notion that victimization and agency are mutually exclusive.

Theoretical Considerations

This section introduces core concepts and considerations that underpin the theoretical arguments developed in the dissertation, although they are not theorized in the papers as such. First, I present my rationale for focusing on women. Then I discuss existing literatures on victimization and agency generally, and relating to domestic and sexual violence specifically, and how my theory of collective threat mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence relates to these. The section concludes with a discussion of women's protection and participation norms in the Women, Peace and Security framework and how I theorize that the growing international focus on conflict-related sexual violence relates to their implementation.

Women as a Category

This dissertation is concerned with sexual violence against women, with women's mobilization in response to this violence, and with the international response to armed conflict in terms of women's protection and participation.³ The reasons for the exclusive focus on women are two-fold. The first emanates from the historic and persisting marginalization of women in conflict resolution, peace processes, transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction processes (Sørensen, 1998; Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Shekhawat, 2015; Shekhawat & Pathak, 2015; Krause, Krause & Bränfors, 2018). This merits a focus on women as a category that still enjoys less power and political clout in conflict-affected societies than men. Hence, the first two papers in this dissertation are concerned with how women seek to enhance their social and political influence through collective mobilization and what role sexual violence

³ This includes in principle all who self-identify as women, i.e. both cis- and trans-women, even though I am not in this dissertation able to subject the distinct experiences of trans-women to a separate analysis.

plays in this mobilization. Second, I approach the question of responses to conflict-related sexual violence through the prism of the global Women, Peace and Security framework, which constitutes the umbrella under which all UN Security Council resolutions pertaining to conflict-related sexual violence have been subsumed and which also affect international responses. Papers 3 and 4 examine the implications of the normative contention between women's protection and participation norms, in relation to sexual violence, for the implementation of the WPS framework.

Of course, women are not a monolithic entity. Their gender identities, and hence their experiences intersect in myriad ways with e.g. their ethnicity, class or sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1990; Skjelsbæk, 2006; Bose, 2012). While it is important to acknowledge the complex set of identities individuals hold, I depart in this dissertation from an understanding of women as an overarching category. The first reason for this is to be found in the WPS framework, which is used as an anchoring point for this dissertation. WPS is premised on the notion that women in conflict have in common certain situations and experiences *as women* – experiences distinct from those of men. This does not mean that women necessarily self-identify as part of a social collective of women with shared experiences (their self-identification may emphasize e.g. their ethnicity or class), but rather that women occupy similar positions in “the material organization of social relations” (Young, 1994: 733). Nonetheless, these shared positions and experiences may become *salient* for (a subset of) women, as a result of which they may develop a collective consciousness as a social group, join forces and politicize gender (Young, 1994: 735–738). In papers 1 and 2, I provide evidence that conflict-related sexual violence is a previously overlooked factor that can make gender salient and spark collective mobilization.

Second, there are theoretical and pragmatic reasons for treating women as a category. Advancing a new theoretical account of women's mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence, I invariably need to engage in some abstraction. What kinds of women mobilize how and under what conditions are certainly important questions to address moving ahead, but before we can dedicate our energy to examining variation, it is first imperative to establish the overall patterns. This is what papers 1 and 2 set out to accomplish. Ultimately, my financial and time resources as well as safety considerations did not permit a scientifically sound exploration of the role of different intersectionalities (i.e. based upon a demographically representative sampling strategy) alongside the development and testing of a new theory of women's mobilization. Finally, in papers 3 and 4, the theoretical framework of international responses to conflict with prevalent sexual violence and the aggregated macro-level nature of the data used preclude considerations of intersectionality. In sum, this dissertation takes as its point of departure the situations and experiences that unite women, while leaving variations along different lines of intersectionality as areas for future research.

Finally, men are obviously also victims of conflict-related sexual violence. That the pertinent UNSCR resolutions (1820, 1888, 1960, 2106), with one exception⁴, discuss conflict-related sexual violence only with respect to women is a major

⁴ UNSCR 2106 acknowledges that conflict-related sexual violence “also affect[s] men and boys” even though it “disproportionally affects women and girls” (United Nations, 2013: 1–2).

oversight that ultimately reinforces a simplistic male perpetrator-female victim dichotomy. One can only hope that the international normative and legal framework will catch up with the growing body of scholarship that is shedding light on sexual violence against men and boys in conflict (Oosterhoff, Zwanikken & Ketting, 2004; Carpenter, 2006; Jones, 2006; Grey & Shepherd, 2013; Dolan, 2014) and highlights their active silencing as victims (Schulz, 2018). That international criminal tribunals have also focused on men as victims of conflict-related sexual violence is an important development in this regard, even though legal scholars have raised concerns about whether existing definitions of rape are truly gender-neutral (Isaac, 2016). I hope my work can enter into dialog with emerging and future work on how men respond to conflict-related sexual violence (Edström & Dolan, 2018; Schulz, 2018), how this response differs from that of women, and to what extent international actors incorporate men into their work related to conflict-related sexual violence.

Domestic Responses: Victimization and Agency

The literature on conflict-related sexual violence exhibits a tendency to dichotomize victimization and agency. If scholars allude to conflict-related sexual violence in relationship to (political) agency at all, they generally speak of this violence as inhibiting women's voice and participation (Hagen & Yohani, 2010: 18–19; Kirby & Shepherd, 2016: 381; Crawford, 2017: 59). And even where it is not explicitly formulated, the lack of attention to women's active responses to conflict-related sexual violence in the literature is noticeable. For example, Meger (2016a), who applies a critical lens to the unintended consequences of the international approach to conflict-related sexual violence, including a distortion of the variation in women's experiences, makes no mention of women's agency and active responses to this violence. In a comprehensive review of the existing literature, Koos (2017) laments a general lack of attention to the agency of victims of conflict-related sexual violence and flags the collective coping of communities and self-help groups as an area for future research. This acknowledgement of the agency of victims (and their social support networks) constitutes an important challenge to the notion that victimization and agency are phenomena fundamentally at odds with each other. Where Koos conceives of agency in the rather narrow sense of overcoming trauma and stigma, I extend the focus in this dissertation to women's, including victims', collective *political* agency in the fight against sexual violence and for women's rights.

In exploring the nexus of victimization and agency surrounding conflict-related sexual violence, this dissertation aligns with efforts occurring in related literatures. In anthropology, Robbins (2013) has called on the discipline to move from the “anthropology of suffering” (2013: 458) that has been dominant since the early 1990s towards an *anthropology of the good*, i.e. to study the ways people exert forward-looking agency in an attempt to improve their lives and their world, even under dire conditions and considerable constraints. Similarly, Agustín (2003: 30) emphasizes that migrants exert agency, even if under structural constraints, in defiance of “a growing tendency to victimize poor people, weak people, uneducated people and migrant people”, i.e. “everyone on the lower rungs of power.” Critical voices within criminology spotlight the dangers of unquestioningly subscribing to traditional victim

frames associated with passivity and helplessness: this may undermine, deny or even take away the agency of vulnerable groups, such as those detained in immigrant detention centers (Grewcock, 2012) or domestic violence victims (Cubells & Calsamiglia, 2018).

In the research area of violent conflict specifically, scholars have approached the intersection of victimization and agency from different vantage points. In the field of transitional justice, Mac Ginty (2014) has introduced the concept of everyday peace in an effort to counter dominant top-down approaches and the focus on the active (international) expert as the harbinger of change and peaceful transformation in conflict settings. Everyday peace focuses on inter- and intra-group social practices that maintain day-to-day peaceful interactions in deeply divided settings. Its central goal is to make visible individual and collective local agency in conflict settings that occur in tandem with international efforts, but are commonly ignored by the latter. A community-driven transitional justice approach that brings the local community and victims into transitional justice processes as active agents has likewise emerged (Arriaza & Roht-Arriaza, 2008: 157–64; Lundy & McGovern, 2008: 112–119; Madlingozi, 2010).

In a less institutionalized setting, Meertens (2001) scrutinizes the agency of internally displaced people in Colombia and finds that they – especially internally displaced women – exhibit considerable agency in their daily struggles, in terms of ensuring survival, re-envisioning their life projects and even transforming gender roles. Similarly, Coral Cordero (2001: 155) asserts that conditions of crisis in which neither the state nor the rebel group in Peru (*Sendero Luminoso*) were able to represent and address the needs of the population facilitated civilians, particularly women, moving “[f]rom passive victims to social actors.” Explicitly aiming to overcome the dichotomization of victimization and agency, Utas (2005: 408) introduces the concept of victimcy “as a form of self-representation by which agency may be effectively exercised under trying, uncertain and disempowering circumstances.” Based on the experiences of a woman during the Liberian war who was in different ways both victim and perpetrator of violence, he illustrates tactical agency in the form of strategically presenting as a victim to ensure safety and survival. While these studies illustrate that victimization and agency can and do co-occur, they do not advance theoretical explanations for these patterns, i.e. for how or why individuals and groups would move from victimization to agency.

Papers 1 and 2 examine more specifically the process of moving from victimization to agency, with victimization understood in terms of a collective (women) being targeted in a specific type of violence (conflict-related sexual violence). In developing my theoretical argument, I build on the literature on domestic violence dating back to the 1990s (discussed in more detail below). I extend these earlier accounts by introducing *political* agency, by moving from individual to collective victimization and agency, and by formulating a causal theory linking victimization to agency/ mobilization. The next sections outline these dimensions in greater detail.

From Victimization to Agency

The concepts of victimization and agency that I discuss in this section underpin my theoretical argument of women's mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence. They are not, as such, theorized and empirically tested in the papers. In this dissertation, I use the term victimization to describe the phenomenon of unjustly experiencing violence at the hand of another (Leisenring, 2006: 317).

In discursive practice, “we find that the victim is also depicted as generally lacking ‘power’, ‘inner force’, ‘responsibility’, ‘capacity for initiatives’ or ‘agency’. Victims are ‘not participating in their own history’, ‘weak’, and ‘passive’” (Dahl, 2009: 393). These patterns are prominent in the area of domestic violence as well as in relation to conflict-related (sexual) violence. Thus, practices in international law tend to “reproduce discourses of sexualisation and incapacitation at international courts” (Henry, 2014: 101). This aligns also with Madlingozi's (2010) more general observation that what he calls transitional justice entrepreneurs make a living out of representing and speaking on behalf of victims – and undermining victims' agency, reinforcing victimhood and even producing victims in the process. How victims are narrated, perceived and constructed as weak and passive diverges fundamentally from the more technical definition of victims as individuals who have experienced harm at the hands of another. The problem is the *projection* of a passivity-agency dichotomy (which in reality is arguably more of a spectrum) onto a victimization-non-victimization dichotomy. The victimization-agency dichotomy is, in other words, artificially constructed.

The actor or survivor trope (for a critical discussion, see Dahl, 2009), which emerged in response to the negative associations with the word victim, all but erases the victimization experience, precisely because agency is treated as the inverse of victimization (Connell, 1997: 118). Thus, in terms of the tropes available in popular discourse, you can be a victim *or* you can be an actor/ survivor. Unsurprisingly, several studies show that women who have been subjected to sexual or other violence struggle to place themselves and their experiences in either trope. While many reject a “victim identity” because they do not view themselves (and do not want to be viewed) as weak and passive, the actor narrative does not do justice to the fact that they have been harmed, have had their rights violated, and deserve recognition and support (Schneider, 1993; Leisenring, 2006; Stjernholm, 2015). Accordingly, Skjelsbæk's (2006) narrative analysis of interviews with victims of wartime rape in Bosnia reveals that even women describing themselves primarily as survivors also see themselves as victims. In *Surviving Sexual Violence*, Kelly (1988) illustrates the complex responses of women victims of domestic violence, sexual violence or incest who have sought help in support groups in the UK: responses include adverse psychological reactions, resistance, heightened political awareness of gendered violence and – occasionally – collective action.

What is needed therefore, is an understanding that allows for victimization and agency to co-occur, without imposing the constraints associated with either the victimhood or the actor tropes, i.e. without projecting passivity onto victimization or erasing the victimization experience from agency. A victim should be perceived as having been harmed, needing help and support even while she takes active steps of

resistance against her abuser (Connell, 1997). Schneider (1993: 387–88) most articulately and explicitly challenges the existence of what she calls “the false dichotomy of victimization and agency,” which she describes already in the early 1990s as “a central tension within feminism.” She emphasizes that neither the representation of victims as passive nor the conceptualization of them as agents, acting in isolation from social constraints and systemic factors, does justice to the complexity of violence against women. Instead, victimization and agency are “interrelated dimensions of women’s experience” (Schneider, 1993: 395). This is precisely the perspective from which I approach conflict-related sexual violence in my dissertation.

Political Agency in Response to Victimization

What does it mean to acknowledge women’s agency in the context of victimization? Most fundamentally, agency denotes “[t]he capacity possessed by people to act of their own volition” within the structural constraints they face (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). As per Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory, agency comprises the four dimensions of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness: individuals make deliberate, goal-oriented choices guided by anticipated outcomes under condition of their own efficacy.⁵ How one envisions the agency available to women who are victims of (sexual) violence thus depends on how one assesses not only their cognitive capacities and motivations, but also how one evaluates the situational and structural constraints in which these women make choices and how these affect their efficacy.

It is not surprising, then, that different scholars of violence against women have advanced different scopes for agency. For Henry (2014: 103–4), for example, testifying at international courts about experiences of conflict-related sexual violence is an expression of agency. Baines (2015) illustrates vividly, on the example of the life story of a Ugandan woman, that a victim of multiple types of violence, violations and harms is still able to exert agency in the form of “speaking out the truth” to the researcher and through small acts of resistance, such as foiling her oppressor’s attempts to make her laugh. In the context of domestic violence, scholars discuss a woman’s agency as comprising exit or actively resisting her abuser, but also making conscious choices *not* to resist in order to protect herself or her children, or just having the perception of having some amount of control in the abuse situation (Schneider, 1993; Hydén, 2005; Leisenring, 2006; Lamb, 2015). Where this existing research has theorized and analyzed expressions of women’s agency in the situation of experiencing violence, vis-à-vis their abuser, women’s *political agency* in response to victimization has not received commensurate attention. Why, to what extent and how do women exert agency focused on political and social issues in response to victimization in sexual violence?

In examining this question, I diverge from Baines’s (2015: 320) contention that “[w]here victims are the subject of repressive rule and violent threat, participation in public sphere political resistance is unlikely.” My dissertation rests instead on the

⁵ While one might object that a definition of agency encompassing intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness is very demanding, I consider it suitable to capture *political* agency, with which I am concerned in this dissertation.

assumption that victims can and do exert political violence even with the threat of violence looming over their heads, as was the case for women victims of sexual and domestic violence who took to the streets in the 1970s to protest these forms of violence and the impunity of their perpetrators (Mardorossian, 2002). Of course, extreme levels of oppression, such as those previously exercised by the Taliban over Afghan women, may inhibit women's political agency. Generally, however, I theoretically align with the literature showing that the social upheavals characterizing most violent conflicts may actually enhance the scope for women's individual and collective agency (Wood, 2008a; Berry, 2015, 2018; Tripp, 2015). In addition, I argue that the WPS agenda, and in particular the resolutions on sexual violence (1820, 1888, 1960, 2106), facilitate women's civil society responses to conflict-related sexual violence because they increasingly destigmatize this violence. The dominant weapon of war framing (Crawford, 2017), which attributes a strategic dimension to this violence, further makes this violence easier and less controversial to politicize than sexual violence in the private sphere. Overall, my approach allows for an understanding of victim that "[means] being a determined and angry (although not a pathologically resentful) agent of change" (Mardorossian, 2002: 767).

My focus in this dissertation is on the collective agency (Bandura, 2000) of women, i.e. their mobilization in civil society. Inspired by previous research on threat mobilization (Tilly, 1978; Berry, 2015), I theorize in paper 1 that women in conflict situations mobilize in response to the collective threat that sexual violence poses to them *as women* (Kreft, 2019). The underlying assumption is that women who are not direct victims of conflict-related sexual violence may recognize their potential victimization by virtue of being women and mobilize in response to this collective threat. Coming to understand sexual violence as part of a continuum of violence, i.e. of a spectrum of women's (violent) oppression grounded in patriarchal structures (Kelly, 1988; Cockburn, 2004), I theorize that women mobilize in response to this violence, but their mobilization may also extend to a broader range of women's issues with the goal of transforming socio-political conditions. While the collectives that mobilize certainly comprise victims of conflict-related sexual violence, as papers 1 and 2 show, collective threat mobilization as theorized here applies potentially to all women.

Women's responses to conflict-related sexual violence may of course play out also in ways that are not examined here, e.g. women may run for office, engage in different forms of political participation (supporting campaigns, petitioning government officials, voting etc.), or – as politicians – adopt gender and women's rights priorities. Future research may extend the focus to women's responses to conflict-related sexual violence in these other spheres. The civil society responses of civilian women to conflict-related sexual violence, meanwhile, can take different forms: the articulation of anger or frustration, e.g. demonstrations or (social) media campaigns; the establishment of self-help groups; or the pursuit of longer-term transformative agendas, especially in the context of more formalized civil society organizations. Paper 1 looks empirically at women's non-violent protest events and linkages to international women's NGOs, as an indicator of more formalized mobilization in civil society. The fieldwork components in paper 1 and paper 2 focus on formalized civil

society mobilization in women's organizations and victims' associations. Thematically, women's collective mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence can take different forms: more narrowly, the fight for recognition and compensation, and more broadly, a transformative feminist agenda. In paper 4, Mattias Agerberg and I theorize a domestic mobilization falling in between: women's demand for political representation. This goes beyond concerns with mere recognition, but stops short of more comprehensive societal transformations in gender roles and patriarchal relations.

In sum, my theoretical contribution to the existing literature on victimization and agency pertaining to gender-based violence is three-fold. First, I extend the focus from agency in the abuse situation itself to *political* agency that seeks socio-political change. Second, I shift the focus from the individual victim to the collective of (potential) victims, i.e. to women as a group. This allows me, third, to develop a theory of collective threat mobilization that causally links the concepts of victimization and agency. I apply this theory to sexual violence committed by armed actors, arguing that the potential for women's mobilization in response to sexual violence is particularly great in armed conflict. Finally, I speak to the previously discussed literature on the transformative effects of conflict violence, which has established links between conflict violence and increased political participation (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; Luca & Verpoorten, 2015a). My contribution to this latter literature consists in 1) scrutinizing the gender dimension of the previously identified trends and 2) proposing and presenting empirical evidence in favor of a theory of collective threat mobilization causally linking conflict-related sexual violence and expansions in women's civil society activism.

This theory of threat mobilization is distinct from the accounts in (feminist) security studies theorizing and demonstrating the strategic framing of normative actors in order to appeal to and mobilize state and other international actors (see e.g. Carpenter, 2005; Hirschauer, 2014; Meger, 2016a). First, I am interested in the mobilization response of the women *directly affected* by the threat of conflict-related sexual violence rather than in threat that mobilizes state and international actors in support of an affected "outgroup" (civilians in war, refugees etc.). Second, I depart from the assumption that the threat that sexual violence poses to women *objectively exists* and becomes (more) salient and may be politicized under certain conditions, such as when this violence is widely perpetrated in armed conflict.

Finally, it is worth noting that the question of women's mobilization responses to conflict-related sexual violence can be approached from different angles. One might e.g. engage the mobilization literature and theorize and examine the role of conflict-related sexual violence relative to other factors that have a bearing on (women's) collective mobilization to ask: what are the causes of mobilization? I, however, approach the question from the perspective of the effects of war literature, i.e. I ask: *what are the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence? How can they be studied from an agency perspective?* This means that I do not engage in any in-depth discussion of other drivers of women's collective mobilization in war.

International Responses: Participation and Protection

At the international level, conflict-related sexual violence has been strategically framed as a threat with the goal of attracting the attention of different security actors, principally states and international organizations (Crawford, 2017). Strategic framing commonly involves simplifying a more complex phenomenon, a process that relies on essentializing and othering those affected by it, thus appealing to existing tropes or stereotypes in order to motivate action by third actors (Carpenter, 2005). In the case of conflict-related sexual violence, the resulting discourse decontextualizes and homogenizes this violence and reduces it to one specific manifestation: the “weapon of war” frame (Meger, 2016a). Armed actors are understood to employ sexual violence against civilians strategically as a weapon of war; sexual violence in armed conflict that falls outside this narrow understanding eludes international attention. Simultaneously, victimhood – whether in relation to conflict-related sexual violence or more broadly – tends to be feminized (Carpenter, 2005; Schulz, 2018).

This yields a gendered view of protection, in the form of a female victim-male protector dichotomy, which also restricts the conceptional space for women’s agency (Young, 2003). Especially in situations of crisis, traditional views of women in need of protection continue to have greater traction than women’s agency as a normative imperative or perceived reality. Åse (2015) persuasively illustrates this phenomenon on the example of how the Stockholm Syndrome was constructed in the wake of a hostage situation unfolding in the Swedish capital in 1973, which is worth recounting in some detail. Two armed captors held three women hostage in a bank in Stockholm for several days, demanding a substantial amount of money for their release and the provision of an escape car. When in a telephone conversation one of the hostages asserted that she trusts the captors and pleaded with the police not to intervene, observers pathologized this request as a mental disorder. This, Åse argues, is because they could neither fathom the limitations of the state as masculine protector, nor view the request as the result of the women rationally analyzing their own predicament and formulating their own conclusions based upon such an assessment. Drawing on statements made by the women after the hostage situation was resolved, Åse illustrates that they in fact feared that the uncertainty involved in a police intervention could compromise their safety; they hence preferred the stability of the status quo. Åse’s analysis is a prime example of how the active male protector-passive female victim dichotomy can play out in practice, even in the comparatively gender-equal society that Sweden already was in the 1970s – and what the implications are for perceptions of women’s agency in situations of crisis.

Such notions of female victim and male protector persist into the present. Kronsell (2016) finds evidence of the two frames within public presentations of the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union, allegedly a normative actor in the international system and committed to gender mainstreaming. In turn, civilian protection advocates have been found to strategically frame protection in terms of “women and children,” because appealing to culturally entrenched gender essentialisms increases the likelihood of attracting resources and directing attention to civilian populations in need of protection (Carpenter, 2005). The construction of the female protectee, in short, does not sit easily with perceptions of women’s agency.

This is in part because of a feminization of victimhood, which – as discussed in previous sections – tends to be associated with passivity.

The tension between women’s victimization/ protection and women’s agency becomes apparent in the articulation of women’s protection and participation norms at the international level. The most important documents relating to the situation of women in conflict settings are United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) from the year 2000 and the follow-up resolutions subsumed under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) umbrella. UNSCR 1325 marked the culmination of years of transnational activism to highlight the differential impact of conflict on women and to actively involve women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict (political) orders (Basu, 2016; True, 2016). UNSCR 1325 was the result of a long process of inserting gender concerns into the international human rights framework and onto international agendas, which included the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Beijing Declaration (1995) and the Namibia Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action (2000). With UNSCR 1325, the “soft” issue of gender was for the first time linked to the “hard” domain of domestic and international security through formal recognition by the Security Council (Tryggestad, 2009).

UNSCR 1325 highlights, first, the gender-differential effects of conflict and conflict-related violence on women and calls for measures to ensure women’s *protection*; second, it acknowledges women’s marginalization in all dimensions of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and derives from this a call for greater women’s *participation*. It was this focus on women’s participation that made UNSCR 1325 truly revolutionary.⁶ The resolution “[u]rges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict” (United Nations, 2000: 2). The resolution also calls for women’s involvement in the implementation of peace agreements, thus expressing a commitment to an active role of women in post-conflict reconstruction processes. A pledge to support women’s local peace initiatives as well as a reference to female ex-combatants (United Nations, 2000: 3) further acknowledge the reality of women’s agency in conflict settings. Follow-up resolutions 1889, 2122 and 2242 reiterate and expand UNSCR 1325’s calls for women’s increased participation, including in peace processes and political and economic decision-making in resolution 1889 (United Nations, 2009) and in countering terrorism and extremism in resolution 2242 (United Nations, 2015). In sum, by 2015 the Security Council had articulated a robust norm of women’s increased participation in conflict-affected states, with the potential of “shifting the emphasis from ‘women as victims’ of conflict to women as agents of transition” (Reilly, 2007: 156). In practice, this norm has increasingly entered into competition with the more traditional norm of women’s protection, aided by a growing global attention to conflict-related sexual violence.

⁶ The focus in this discussion is on participation as it relates to the women living in conflict-affected states. UNSCR 1325 and the follow-up resolutions also contain provisions for women’s participation within UN missions and the larger international security architecture.

Crafted in the aftermath of massive sexual violence in the conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda in the early 1990s, UNSCR 1325 (United Nations, 2000) specifically addresses sexual violence in conflict in two ways: in terms of protection (paragraph 10) and in terms of prosecution and legal recourse (paragraph 11). Here, it is important to bear in mind that sexual violence is discussed only with regards to women and girls.⁷ Within the WPS framework, the UN Security Council in subsequent years passed a series of resolutions dedicated specifically to conflict-related sexual violence, its prevention, monitoring and handling (1820, 1888, 1960, 2106). The most prominent is Resolution 1820 (2008), which condemns the use of sexual violence as a strategy of war and calls on all parties to prevent and combat sexual violence in conflict (United Nations, 2008). Resolution 1888 set up the office of the *United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict* in 2009. In these WPS resolutions, the relative weight given to women's protection overshadows women's participation, while in the resolutions that have expanded the call for women's participation, women's protection from sexual (and other) violence always figures prominently. Meanwhile, international attention to conflict-related sexual violence – involving the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, states, aid agencies and non-state actors (Kirby, 2015: 457–458; Meger, 2016a; Davies & True, 2017a) – has reached unprecedented levels. The global concern with sexual violence in conflict tends to displace other conflict violence as well as other gender issues in society or in conflict from international agendas (Douma & Hilhorst, 2012; Henry, 2014; Meger, 2016a; Mertens & Pardy, 2017).

Relatedly, Barrow (2010) criticizes the very essence of the WPS framework as not radical enough to effect significant change in traditional conceptions of gender in international law, where the view of women as victims worthy of protection remains predominant. Different studies have found that it is primarily language relating to women's protection that has increased in UN Security Council resolutions (Black, 2009), peace agreements (Ellerby, 2015) and UN peace operation mandates (paper 3 in this dissertation). Meanwhile, in UN Secretary-General reports on peacekeeping operations, women are primarily presented as vulnerable in and victims of conflict, largely stripped of agency (Puechguirbal, 2010).

In sum, the women's protection norm increasingly overshadows the women's participation norm in the WPS framework, aided by high levels of global attention to conflict-related sexual violence. Sexual violence has quickly morphed into *the* gender issue in conflict. Papers 3 and 4 are based on the theoretical expectation that international actors use gender-sensitive approaches primarily in conflicts that are “visibly gendered,” i.e. when sexual violence is prevalent rather than viewing women's protection and women's agency as a normative imperative in all conflicts.

⁷ This framing was not corrected until Resolution 2106 was passed in 2013, which makes one reference to sexual violence “also affecting men and boys” while emphasizing that it “disproportionately affects women and girls” (United Nations, 2013: 1–2).

Selective Application of Global Gender Norms

In theorizing the international response to conflict-related sexual violence, I align with previous arguments that gender norms are not fixed, but evolve in and of themselves and in relationship to other norms (Towns, 2010; Krook & True, 2012). Specifically, I develop my theoretical argument from the insights that 1) a growing emphasis on women's protection norms overshadows women's participation norms, and 2) that international actors have focused especially on sexual violence as a protection and gender issue in conflict. As I argue in paper 3, the women's participation norms articulated in UNSCR 1325 and WPS are not fully consolidated but find themselves in the norm cascade process (see also Tryggestad, 2018). This makes them more susceptible to be sidelined by women's protection norms, which have been around longer and have moved heavily into the spotlight due to the immense focus on sexual violence in conflict.

The theoretical argument for the normative contention between women's protection and participation norms and its implications is more comprehensively elaborated in papers 3 and 4. Here, I sketch the argument in concise terms and discuss its implications. I argue that given the immense interest in and attention to sexual violence in UN Security Council resolutions, policy circles and the global news media (Meger, 2016a), sexual violence has transformed into *the* gender issue in conflict, pushing other gendered violence and harms from the radar. Sexual violence, then, serves as a heuristic for international actors to determine whether gender is salient in a conflict, such that a *gendered response*, i.e. an activation of the WPS framework, is also necessary. In this way, sexual violence not only invokes the women's protection norm, but also the women's participation norm. Consequently, in a conflict with prevalent sexual violence, international actors pay greater attention to different gender issues in their response and increase their pressure on the government to introduce gender-sensitive policies. This implies also that in conflicts with no or low sexual violence, women's protection and participation norms are less likely to be activated. The result is an uneven application of global gender norms, conditioned by conflict-related sexual violence.

The empirical evidence in papers 3 and 4 supports my theoretical expectations. Gender content in UNPKO mandates, including provisions for increased women's participation, is more likely when the corresponding conflict is characterized by prevalent sexual violence, and countries with high-sexual violence conflict adopt gender quotas earlier and at higher rates than other countries. While in some sense, the activation also of women's participation norms in conflicts with widespread sexual violence is a positive development, the overall patterns are normatively problematic.

First, they indicate that the universality of women's participation norms, and also of women's protection norms, is undermined. Women should be protected also from non-sexual forms of violence in conflict, and their political participation matters in all armed conflicts, regardless of sexual violence prevalence. Second, the narrow concern with sexual violence disregards the many other ways in which all conflicts are gendered, including the displacement of civilians and other gender-based violence. Third, these patterns reinforce conceptions of victimization as "feminine" with empirically inaccurate overtones. There are two dimensions to this: first, the

perception of women as victims rather than *women as actors* (the subject of this dissertation) and second, the view of women as victims rather than *men as victims*. Civilian men are at disproportionate risk of being killed in conflict (Jones, 2004; Ormhaug, Meier & Hernes, 2009). Yet the feminization of victimhood, and in particular in conflicts with prevalent sexual violence, distracts from this vulnerability of men in conflict.⁸ The silencing of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence (Schulz, 2018) also has to be seen in this light. The results of this dissertation thus feed back into the literature on gendered conflict and suggest that current international responses may further amplify the gendered patterns of conflict and transitions to peace.

Studying Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Using Multiple Methods

This section describes the mixed-methods approach employed in this dissertation, discussing how combining quantitative and qualitative methods allows me to ask and answer different questions. I then move on to discuss the limitations of the quantitative data on conflict-related sexual violence used in this dissertation, motivating the mixed-methods approach. Next, I elaborate my rationale for selecting Colombia as a case to explore in greater depth.

A quantitative-qualitative gulf runs through the scholarship on conflict-related sexual violence (Boesten, 2017). Many of the scholars concerned with isolating causal effects use or have a favorable view of quantitative data and statistical analysis of conflict-related sexual violence (Butler, Gluch & Mitchell, 2007; Cohen, 2013a; Cohen & Nordås, 2014, 2015; Cohen, 2016; Koos, 2018), although some also carry out qualitative work (Hayden, 2000; Wood, 2008b, 2009; Cohen, 2013b). The release of the first two time-series cross-national datasets on wartime rape (Cohen, 2013a) and sexual violence in conflict (Cohen & Nordås, 2014), as well as disaggregated quantitative data collection efforts within individual countries, have transformed the study of conflict-related sexual violence and precipitated an increase in large-n statistical analyses of the causes and consequences of conflict-related sexual violence in the last few years (Cohen & Nordås, 2015; Butler & Jones, 2016; Cohen, 2016; Green, 2016; Rustad, Østby & Nordås, 2016; Hultman & Johansson, 2017; Johansson & Sarwari, 2017; Kreft, 2017, 2019; Kreutz & Cardenas, 2017; Loken, 2017; Koos, 2018; Nagel, 2019).

Other scholars, critical feminists central among them, are at home in the qualitative tradition, and are critical of quantitative analyses of conflict-related sexual violence – on epistemological grounds and due to concerns about data quality (Meger, 2010, 2016a, b; Boesten, 2017; Davies & True, 2017b, a). This does not mean that they dismiss the merits of quantitative analysis altogether, but they are wary of its limitations and challenge the idea that conflict-related sexual violence can be studied using *only* quantitative methods. Boesten (2017) acknowledges that quantification is

⁸ These patterns are borne out in a working paper based on survey experiments: individuals are more likely to perceive women as victims of conflict than men, regardless of the prevalence of sexual violence, while also perceiving women as less likely to be agents in civil society during conflict than men (Agerberg & Kreft, 2019).

necessary because it informs policy-making and facilitates prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence as war crimes. At the same time, she argues that the “epistemological assumptions underlying a focus on numerical evidence ... are arguably incompatible with critical research, and certainly with qualitative research, that would insist on contextualization” (Boesten, 2017: 4). If pursued exclusively, quantitative research of conflict-related sexual violence thus risks undermining “gender as a useful analytical category” (Boesten, 2017: 2), as it reinforces the exceptionalization of conflict-related sexual violence, delinked from structural factors and the continuum of violence that give rise to it.

In this dissertation I adopt a mixed-methods approach with the goal of exploiting the strengths of both methods. First, I leverage existing findings, both quantitative and qualitative, that patriarchal structures and culture do not help us understand *where* and *when* sexual violence occurs on a large scale in armed conflicts (Wood, 2009; Cohen, 2013a, 2016). For the purposes of identifying the consequences of (i.e. the responses to) conflict-related sexual violence, this exogeneity of wartime sexual violence in a cross-national perspective is “good news.” I am thus able to examine in cross-national statistical analyses whether women mobilize collectively in response to this violence (paper 1), and how the UN Security Council responds to conflicts with prevalent sexual violence (paper 3). In paper 4, Mattias Agerberg and I combine the theoretical insights from papers 1 and 3 to analyze how conflict-related sexual violence affects the development of gender-sensitive policies in the form of gender quota adoption.

Simultaneously, I agree with Davies and True (2015) that structural factors may be key to understanding *why* armed actors use *sexual* violence, rather than another kind of violence, on a large scale. In this sense, what Cohen and Wood (2016) refer to as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the occurrence of sexual violence – patriarchal culture and entrenched gender relations – are worthy of investigation in their own right. I qualitatively analyze original interview data to illustrate the causal mechanism of collective threat mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence in paper 1, and to lay out the centrality of patriarchy, according to mobilized women, to the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence in paper 2.

Ultimately, then, each method is suitable to answer different kinds of questions and fill in different parts of the puzzle: quantitative analysis allows exploring patterns across contexts and making generalizable claims, while qualitative analysis elucidates causal mechanisms and contextualizes conflict-related sexual violence (Table 2).

Table 2. Research aims, methods, papers and dimensions

Aim	Method	Papers	Dimension
Generalizable patterns and claims	Quantitative	1: Mobilization	Domestic
		3: UNPKOs	International
		4: Gender quotas	International + domestic
Demonstrate causal mechanisms	Qualitative	1: Mobilization	Domestic
Contextualize conflict-related sexual violence	Qualitative	2: Women's perceptions	Domestic

Quantitative Data Limitations

The quantitative analyses in this dissertation make use of Cohen's wartime rape data (2013a) as well as the *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* (SVAC) dataset (Cohen & Nordås, 2014), both of which code sexual violence on an ordinal scale (0=no reports, 1=isolated reports, 2=widespread, 3=systematic or massive). While these are the most comprehensive and best cross-national datasets on conflict-related sexual violence currently available, they are not without their limitations, meaning that the results of the statistical analyses have to be treated with some caution. The (potential) limitations of the sexual violence data fall in four broad categories: inaccuracies in reporting, the sources used, the coding rules, and the aggregate nature of the data.

Inaccuracies in reporting. Documenting sexual violence, whether in conflict settings or beyond, is fraught with difficulty. Underreporting due to stigma, shame, fear and expected impunity for the perpetrator, continues to be a significant problem – although in some settings more than in others (Cohen, 2016: 137–8, 175–6; Davies & True, 2017b). Even in Colombia, where women's mobilization around the gendered dimension of the conflict is extensive and reporting of sexual violence is generally high, my interviews reveal that many victims are hesitant to report and talk about what was done to them out of fear or shame. Neither are discrepancies in reporting in all cases driven by shame and stigma – they can have political dimensions and causes as well, e.g. when greater visibility, attention and recognition is given to sexual violence crimes that fit the dominant “sexual violence as a weapon of war” narrative (Buss, 2009) or that are perpetrated by a specific armed group (Davies & True, 2017b).

Such inaccuracies in reporting make an approximation of the absolute number of acts of sexual violence committed an impossible task. In this sense, an ordinal coding of conflict-related sexual violence is preferable. Aggregating the sexual violence in conflict data to the national level – as the wartime rape and SVAC datasets do – also to some extent alleviates within-country variation in reporting, as the highest recorded level in any part of the country and perpetrated by any armed actor is captured.

There are also apparent temporal differences in reporting in the wartime rape (Cohen, 2013a) data. Underreporting was a significant problem especially in the 1980s (Figure 2), making the data unreliable for that period. The main country-year analyses in papers 1 and all analyses in paper 4 are therefore limited to the period from 1990 onwards. In addition, different model specifications using country-year reports as well as the highest-ever reported sexual violence over the course of a conflict mitigate concerns about possible temporal inconsistencies in reporting. Nonetheless, reported levels of sexual violence in the data may under-estimate actual levels in those cases where underreporting is a systematic and persistent problem.

Another problem arises, paradoxically, from the possibility of *overreporting* of sexual violence – as a survival strategy, for personal gain or even in revenge – which has been observed in parts of the DRC (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2010: 51–55; Douma & Hilhorst, 2012). It is unclear, however, what the extent of the problem is even in the DRC and whether it is a substantial problem elsewhere. At any rate, I would venture that such overreporting can become a noteworthy problem only in settings in which reports of sexual violence are so high to begin with that sexual violence becomes, horrible as it sounds, normalized and exhibits the patterns of “fetishization”

discussed by Meger (2016a), including extensive international support and resources provided for the victims of conflict-related sexual violence. Overreporting in such situations would, the many negative social and political implications aside, have no bearing on the coding of these high-sexual violence conflicts on the 4-point ordinal scale. Overreporting (in the form of carelessness in fact-checking) can, however, also result from the high-pressure and competitive environments in which NGOs operate (Cohen & Hoover Green, 2012). In sum, the reported levels of conflict-related sexual violence may be empirically inaccurate for some country-years (either under- or overreported), which means that the statistical findings should be interpreted with some caution.

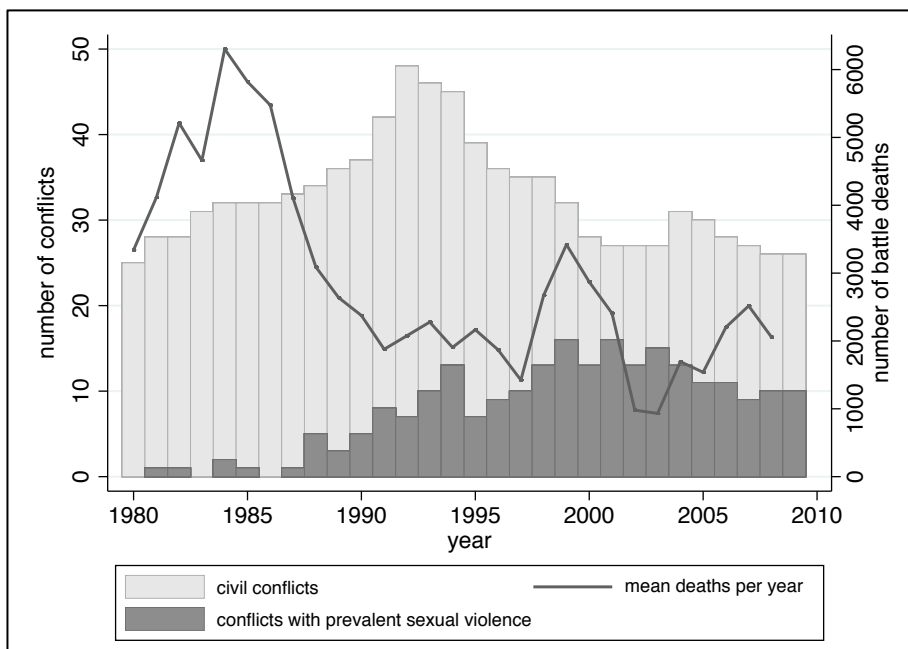


Figure 2. Reporting of sexual violence in conflict over time (based on data in Cohen 2013)

Sources used for coding. In evaluating the quality of the data, it is important to consider not only what is reported but also who reports it. Cohen’s (2013a) wartime rape data are coded based on reports by the U.S. State Department, whereas the SVAC data (Cohen & Nordås, 2014) are coded based on reports by the U.S. State Department, Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW). Coding data based on a very small number of sources can be problematic, but the triangulation of reports by AI and HRW, the two most prominent international human rights organizations, with U.S. State Department reports in the SVAC dataset should at the very least guard against systematic bias. There is high agreement between Cohen’s wartime rape data and the SVAC data (Cohen codebook p. 4-5), even though the two capture somewhat different things.⁹ In sum, there is no evidence that the wartime rape

⁹ Whereas Cohen records conflict-related rape regardless of perpetrator, SVAC (Cohen & Nordås, 2014) records any form of sexual violence (defined as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization or abortion, sexual mutilation and sexual torture) that is associated with a specific armed actor.

data coded only on the basis of U.S. State Department reports exhibit systematic bias. Relying on the same source(s) to code all observations in a dataset is probably also the best way to ensure a high degree of cross-case consistency. It may nonetheless compromise accuracy. Disparities exist e.g. when one turns to other sources, e.g. a country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.¹⁰ Discrepancies between different data sources are not uncommon when working with quantitative data, of course. Complementing quantitative and qualitative data and analysis, as I do in this dissertation, is one way to enhance confidence in the findings.

Coding rules. The coding rules raise some concern about the ordinal structure of the wartime rape and the SVAC data. For the systematic rape/ systematic sexual violence category, the coding criteria comprise elements of the *extent* of wartime rape ("massive scale") as well as its *purpose* (e.g. intimidation, terrorizing populations, punishment), making it impossible to tease apart the scale and the function of sexual violence.¹¹ For example, if there are a handful of cases where sexual violence is used to punish individuals for civil society activism, the conflict would receive a coding of 3, just like a conflict in which armed actors rape everyone they come across during incursions. There are two additional problems. First, it is difficult to establish an objective and definitive dividing line between qualitative descriptors of scale, such as "widespread" and "massive" sexual violence. Second, scholars have pointed out that the purposes of sexual violence (e.g. weapon of war, displacing populations) are often inferred from observed patterns rather than empirically gauged from articulated intent (Wood, 2014: 470). The line between widespread and systematic sexual violence in the data is, therefore, blurred. In the statistical analyses in papers 1 and 4, I (we) address this particular limitation by running either the main models or the robustness checks with a dichotomized variable (no reported or isolated sexual violence vs. widespread or systematic sexual violence).

Aggregate data. The aggregation of data to the national level precludes more fine-grained analyses of sub-national patterns and relationships. Considering that many civil conflicts are regionally concentrated within a country (e.g. those in India, Indonesia, Russia or Peru) and that civil conflicts commonly exhibit considerable within-country variation in intensity, macro-level analyses may actually underestimate the results. It is important to note that it is not only the sexual violence data that lack sub-national coverage, but the data on women's protest (Murdie & Peksen, 2015), WINGO linkages (Cole, 2013) and gender quotas¹² do as well. Data availability only at the national level may thus ultimately depress coefficients and statistical significance levels.

In sum, there are a number of (potential) problems that arise from working with the available quantitative data on sexual violence in conflict. For papers 3 and 4, which test the international theoretical framework, in which the *visibility* of sexual violence in conflict is key, discrepancies between actual and globally reported sexual violence

¹⁰ For example, the TRC in South Africa mentions several reports of sexual violence in the civil conflict that resulted in the fall of the apartheid system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2002), probably meriting a coding of 1 on the ordinal scale, but Cohen's (2013a) dataset has a coding of 0 for the conflict.

¹¹ See codebook for Cohen (2013), p. 10.

¹² Which Agerberg and I coded based on the Global Database of Quotas for Women (available at quotaproject.org).

are of less concern. When it comes to examining the relationship between conflict-related sexual violence and women's mobilization (paper 1), by contrast, concerns about empirical inaccuracies in reported sexual violence are more acute. I opted for a mixed-methods design combining cross-national statistical analysis with qualitative, fieldwork-based research in order to overcome these limitations as much as possible – and to elucidate the causal mechanism of collective threat mobilization.

Case Selection

Having chosen a mixed-methods design that adds in-depth qualitative insight to the statistical analysis of macro-level patterns of women's responses to conflict-related sexual violence, I had to choose a location for the case study. "Case study" may be a bit of a misnomer, as the unit of analysis shifts from the country to women's organizations and victims' associations, and their members, once I enter the field. In this sense, Colombia constitutes a research setting rather than a case. My criteria for selecting Colombia, however, operated very much at the macro-level (prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence and degree of women's mobilization in civil society). Throughout this section, I therefore use the term case selection.

There are two major theoretical reasons for choosing Colombia as a case to study. First, Colombia constitutes a pathway case (Gerring, 2006: 122), i.e. one with prevalent conflict-related sexual violence and extensive women's mobilization, whose aim it is to elucidate the causal mechanism of mobilization in response to collective threat. Owing to the limitations of the available quantitative data on conflict-related sexual violence discussed above, I relied on qualitative criteria for case selection rather than pursuing a nested case study as proposed by Liebermann (2005), i.e. rather than selecting a case that "falls on the regression line." This means that I based my case selection on my qualitative knowledge of different intrastate conflicts. The very long duration of the Colombian conflict, which began in the 1960s, amplifies the relationship between conflict and women's civil society activities, as the latter has had time to develop and mature.

Second, the response to sexual violence in the Colombian conflict has been driven primarily by domestic actors, in the context of a vibrant women's movement that has developed in the country over the past decades. Of course, the vast majority of women's organizations existing in the world are transnational in some way, e.g. because they have ties to movements in other states or because they receive financial or technical assistance from international organizations or from NGOs, governments or donors in other countries. Colombia is no exception: several of the organizations represented in my interviews receive financial contributions or technical support from UN Women or from governments or NGOs in North America or Europe. Some have developed ties or cooperation with victims' associations or initiatives e.g. in the Balkans or in Africa. Nonetheless, the impetus for the establishment of Colombian civil society organizations – many of which have been around for decades – as well as the development of agendas and programmatic priorities has been predominantly domestic, as civil society representatives and international diplomats alike consistently emphasized. International actors, in other words, did not come in and found NGOs, social movements or victims' associations, which Colombian women

then joined. UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda have, moreover, played a comparatively modest role in women's mobilization – partly because the government has not developed a National Action Plan for the resolution, thus depriving civil society of the opportunity to use such an NAP (and hence UNSCR 1325 and the WPS framework) as a launching board for their activism. For these reasons, Colombia is a particularly suitable case to explore the domestic civil society response to conflict-related sexual violence without being too concerned about international agenda-setting acting as a major confounding factor.

Of course, there are other factors that since the 1960s have generated and facilitated Colombian women's mobilization in civil society. These include the constitutional process resulting in the 1991 constitution, which has created openings for civil society activism and for the government's responsiveness to civil society organizations (Domingo, Rocha Menocal & Hinestroza, 2015). A very patriarchal societal context in South America, characterized by unusually high levels of violence generally and violence against women specifically (Essayag, 2017), has also sparked transnational mobilization of different kinds. Of note here is e.g. the campaign *NiUnaMenos* under whose umbrella women in different Latin American countries have protested gender-based violence both online and offline. And in the context of the armed conflict, Colombian women's mobilization revolved not only around sexual violence, but also occurred – as mentioned in paper 1 – in response to, inter alia, displacement and the forced disappearance or killing of (male) relatives. While the focus in this dissertation is on conflict-related sexual violence, I am therefore not claiming that this is the only – or even the most important – driver of women's collective mobilization. Rather, the aim is to study responses to conflict-related sexual violence from an agency perspective.

In this context it is worth emphasizing that papers 1 and 2 examine the causes and contexts of women's civil society mobilization, as they pertain to conflict-related sexual violence. The question of the effectiveness of this mobilization falls outside the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, there are several indications that women's collective mobilization has yielded important transformations in Colombia. The incorporation of a comprehensive gender dimension into the peace agreement between the government and the FARC, which made this the most gender-sensitive agreement globally, has been a major success at the national level. So is the explicit acknowledgement of sexual violence as a crime exempt from amnesty provisions in the agreement. At local levels, many of the interviewees emphasized, women have played fundamental roles in conflict resolution, reconciliation and reconstruction in their communities. Civil society activism as well as active involvement in drafting bills have further contributed to constitutional and legal improvements for women, including laws criminalizing sexual violence and the introduction of legislative gender quotas (Domingo, Rocha Menocal & Hinestroza, 2015). Colombia is, in short, a complex and interesting case to examine women's civil society mobilization.

Ethical considerations, too, played a role in case selection. By selecting Colombia over other cases that may have been more obvious choices, I sought to avoid possible exploitative dynamics between researcher and interviewees (Henry, 2013). Given my interest in examining women's mobilization in response to and around conflict-related

sexual violence during conflict, it was prudent to select a topical case, i.e. an ongoing or recently ended conflict. The most obvious choice would have been the Democratic Republic of the Congo, given its infamous description as the “rape capital of the world” and the high level of international attention and involvement. Much of the recent literature on conflict-related sexual violence is in fact based on the DRC (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2010; Autesserre, 2012; Douma & Hilhorst, 2012; Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2013; Meger, 2016a; Mertens & Pardy, 2017). The extremely high levels of sexual violence, both conflict-related and among civilians, have attracted not only extraordinary numbers of humanitarian and aid organizations, but also a steady inflow of researchers. I myself have been encouraged on more than one occasion to carry out my fieldwork in the DRC – in part because access for scholars is easy given the existing research networks and infrastructure on the ground and in part because people, including victims, are “used to” speaking to researchers. Rather than being yet another researcher interviewing the same organizations and individuals and contributing to research fatigue among participants (Boesten & Henry, 2018),¹³ I opted for a less obvious and less well-studied case with the rationale that I as a researcher would be better positioned to make a contribution to the communities I am studying by amplifying their voice. Also in the interest of aggregating scientific knowledge and avoiding oversaturation, it seemed preferable to branch out beyond the DRC and other African cases (like Rwanda or Uganda) that have also received considerable attention.¹⁴

In addition, it is worth noting that, as has been relayed to me by several Colombia-based researchers, Colombians are generally more willing to speak to foreign researchers than to their domestic counterparts. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but probably have to do with greater perceived prestige as well as reduced concern that the researcher acts on behalf of the government or one of the armed groups. While an unfortunate situation for local researchers, it is a further benefit of my role as an outsider studying sexual violence in the conflict. Nonetheless, it transpired during my second fieldwork visit to Colombia that the country has recently seen an influx in foreign researchers. Several representatives of women’s organizations, government entities and international actors indicated to me and others that they receive many requests from PhD students in particular. International diplomats even said that they were overwhelmed by requests. This surge of interest probably has to do with the signing of the peace agreement in 2016 and its uniquely gender-sensitive nature.

Ensuring the safety of my interviewees, my research assistants and myself was, of course, paramount during my fieldwork. Any travel within Colombia occurred only to areas for which the Swedish and German authorities had not issued an explicit travel warning. Access to the major cities is easiest and air travel safer than overland travel through/ to remote areas due to ongoing fighting and lack of state presence. Therefore,

¹³ This reflects a critical assessment of the contribution I as an individual researcher working on a PhD project think I can make more than it is a judgement of other researchers operating in the DRC, many of whom are backed up by bigger teams, more substantial funding and a longer-term commitment and presence in the field.

¹⁴ This is certainly not to deny the importance of studying sexual violence in these countries, especially as African states continue to be home to the biggest share of civil conflicts.

my research assistants and I carried out the interviews in the three biggest cities, Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. While violent crime is relatively high in all three, they have been only marginally affected by conflict violence in recent years. Nonetheless, they host sizable populations of people who have been internally displaced by the conflict and have in this way been indirectly affected in considerable measure. Of theoretical significance, most of the biggest and most influential women's organizations operate in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. Nonetheless, I was able to speak also with representatives of organizations operating elsewhere in the country.

Ethics

In the absence of formal ethical review requirements for research carried out by Sweden-based researchers abroad¹⁵, I took pertinent courses, read relevant journal articles, book chapters and guidelines, and consulted with colleagues and supervisors who have done research on sensitive issues to address various ethical concerns. Careful preparation with respect to the ethical dimension of research on sensitive issues is of tremendous importance, as fieldwork in conflict-affected settings and research on sexual violence harbor several risks and challenges. These may include the danger of causing harm to victims in the process of interviewing them, e.g. through re-traumatization, “outing” individuals as victims through their contact with a researcher known to study sexual violence, increasing the danger of exposing victims to further violence in the form of retribution because they are known to speak to the researcher, exposing your research assistants and yourself to physical and psychological harm, raising unrealistic expectations in interviewees that something will be done about their daily struggles, and exploitative practices between researchers and research participants, where researchers inject themselves into a context, extract the information they need and then leave without any benefits accruing to the communities they study (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Wood, 2006; Pottier, Hammond & Cramer, 2011; Lake & Parkinson, 2017; Boesten & Henry, 2018).

The risk of causing harm to my research assistants or to the interviewees figured most prominently in my ethical considerations. I discussed upfront with my research assistants what my project involves, what kinds of questions I am interested in answering and what kinds of interviewees I hope to speak to. This way, they were able to decide whether they felt able to carry out the tasks or not. That said, experiencing psychological harm in the form of vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, which may affect researchers, research assistants and translators, can never be ruled out (Coles et al., 2014). The best I was able to do was to be as transparent as possible towards my research assistants about the content of my research and talk through some of the issues arising during “heavier” interviews afterwards. None of the research assistants I worked with reported any negative reactions.

The potential ethical challenges with putting interviewees at risk I minimized by working only with women organized in women's organizations or victims' associations. This I did in order to mitigate concerns about outing them as victims –

¹⁵ The Ethical Review Act/ *Lag 2003:460 om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor* applies only to research carried out within Sweden.

through contact with a researcher working on sexual violence (although I also never presented myself in this way in public) – and about re-traumatizing them. All the victims I spoke with were involved in civil society activism and used to speaking about sexual violence in that capacity. In the interviews, I asked about the interviewees’ general perceptions of and organizational responses to conflict-related sexual violence. I never inquired about any violence the interviewees themselves may have experienced, although several brought it up on their own. In this context, it is also worth noting that some consider the risk of re-traumatization in interviews to be small and that not broaching sensitive topics for discussion out of an exaggerated fear of re-traumatization may in fact be a form of silencing (Skjelsbæk, 2018: 501).¹⁶ All information that would allow identification of interviewees has been removed in cases where I directly cite passages from the interviews.

Prior to my interviews, I consulted with my supervisors, one of whom (Inger Skjelsbæk) is a trained psychologist with experience interviewing victims of conflict-related sexual violence, about the content and set-up of my interview guide. In all interviews with victims, I worked with a research assistant who had a psychology degree. My research assistants and I used careful judgement to ensure that the interviewees and particularly the victims we spoke with were comfortable with the questions and the overall interview situation. In a few cases, interviewees became emotional during our conversations, but they also emphasized how important the experience of participating in my research was. For all interviews conducted in person or over the phone I obtained informed consent, which occurred in writing and in the case of phone interviews, orally.¹⁷ As part of the informed consent, all interviewees were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they may end their participation in my research at any time without any negative repercussions. No interviewee made use of that option.

Despite the growing attention to Colombia as a research site, all of my interviewees were friendly and forthcoming with information, and some (especially those outside of Bogotá) were downright enthusiastic about their participation in my research and about “having their voices heard.” Many requested to be sent the results upon completion. Wanting to avoid exploitative relationships, I plan to publish at least one article or a more accessible policy brief in Spanish. To avoid raising unrealistic expectations among the people I interviewed¹⁸, I always made it clear that I am an independent researcher and that my research will not result in immediate benefits for the interviewees.

Concluding Remarks and Possible Extensions

Sexual violence is – in the words of several of the Colombian women interviewed for this dissertation – the maximum expression of gender inequality and discrimination against women. It is a highly gendered violence that disproportionately targets

¹⁶ A point also made by scholar Harvey M. Weinstein in a PRIO seminar on transitional justice, December 2015.

¹⁷ Two government entities provided responses to my interview questions by email, in which case I was not able to seek informed consent.

¹⁸ On one occasion, I was asked if I had ties to the Swedish embassy and could help secure funding for a civil society initiative.

women, is closely linked to patriarchal norms and asserts gendered hierarchies between perpetrators and victims. What does this gendered nature of conflict-related sexual violence imply for the situation of women in conflict-affected settings? What does it imply, specifically, for women's agency – a core pillar of the Women, Peace and Security framework, which seeks to set the tone for gender-sensitive involvement in conflict contexts?

This is the overarching question guiding this dissertation. Jointly, the four papers reveal that in both domestic and international arenas, conflict-related sexual violence makes gender salient and may, as such, amplify women's agency. As I show in papers 1 and 2, women mobilize collectively in response to conflict-related sexual violence and, by situating this violence in a complex web of gender inequalities and patriarchal structures, may extend the scope of their mobilization to a broader range of women's issues. For international actors, papers 3 and 4 suggest, conflict-related sexual violence serves as a heuristic in determining the centrality of gender in a conflict, which then leads to the activation of the Women, Peace and Security framework, including the women's participation norm.

At first glance, these patterns and processes occurring in the domestic and international arenas appear very similar: conflict-related sexual violence is politicized, gender becomes politically salient, and women's agency is amplified as a result. Yet, in a fundamental way, the domestic and international processes are very different. As the Colombian case shows, domestic mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence may spark and strengthen the development of a gender awareness that situates sexual violence in a complex web of patriarchal structures. At the international level, by contrast, the catalog of women's participation is already formulated in the WPS framework – “gender awareness” has already been programmatically developed – and conflict-related sexual violence merely activates it. This is a selective activation, however, as evidenced by the findings in papers 3 and 4 that conflicts without prevalent sexual violence are less likely to receive a gendered international response. Thus, where domestic mobilization *broadens out* from conflict-related sexual violence to gender concerns more generally, the international response *narrows down* from women's participation and protection norms entrenched in the WPS agenda to conflict-related sexual violence specifically. This shows how brittle international gender norms, and especially the norm of women's participation, still are.

In short, this dissertation shows that very different – in a sense even antithetical – processes of the politicization of conflict-related sexual violence can converge towards similar outcomes. This is in part because gender is still, in a grand perspective, a fledgling concept guiding political mobilization and policy-making. The fact that women's civil society mobilization is higher in conflicts with prevalent sexual violence, i.e. that conflict-related sexual violence is a driver of women's mobilization, reveals that women do not by default recognize gender as an important social and political force. Rather, it takes the extremely gendered crime of conflict-related sexual violence to increase gender awareness – a dynamic that parallels what I theorize for international actors. The fragility of gender norms and of gender issues as a political force, then, drives both domestic mobilization and the international

response to conflict-related sexual violence, but in different ways. While the former may result in the broadening towards a complex concern with gender issues in society, the latter constitutes a narrowing of a formally articulated, rather comprehensive commitment to international gender norms to the single issue of conflict-related sexual violence.

In light of this, future research could delve more deeply into decision-making processes as they pertain to international intervention in conflict-affected states. One question is the extent to which international actors draw connections between women's victimization and women's agency – and whether they conceive of this agency as already occurring in conflict settings or if they see women's agency as something that international actors have to promote and “bring” from the outside.¹⁹ In what ways, in other words, are international gender norms upheld and how well do they correspond with patterns of women's mobilization and agency that occur on the ground? Another interesting question is whether there is variation in the extent and the ways in which international actors turn to conflict-related sexual violence as a heuristic for the “gendered” nature of a conflict and to what extent international actors already integrate a more comprehensive gender analysis into their approaches to armed conflict.

As for the domestic arena, it would be worthwhile for future research to examine women's mobilization also in conflict situations with low prevalence of sexual violence, to explore similarities and variations in how women in conflicts with high and low conflict-related sexual violence understand gender dynamics and structural factors in their respective societies, and to identify how and why women's organizations in different types of conflict succeed or fail to attract international attention and resources for their causes. While the focus in this dissertation is on sexual violence as a highly gendered – possibly even the most gendered – violence against women in war, future research could extend the focus also to other kinds of gender-based violence and gendered harms. For example, displacement also disproportionately affects women and is closely linked to e.g. poverty and land dispossession. Do women mobilize around these gendered harms in similar, gendered ways?

Further, it is prudent to break down the social collective of women and look at intersecting factors going forward. What does it mean for the patterns of women's mobilization if specific groups (e.g. ethnic, religious, class) are explicitly targeted in or particularly vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence? Who mobilizes and on behalf of whom, i.e. what is the social collective in the name of which mobilization occurs? Do women who are less affected by violence mobilize on behalf of more vulnerable women or in close cooperation with them? How is collective threat framed in such cases? Or is mobilization less likely if marginalized groups are the primary victims of conflict-related sexual violence?

The role of contextual, and in particular institutional, factors also deserves future attention. As mentioned previously, Colombia is in some ways an unusual case as the country boasts relatively stable and democratic political institutions, a gender-sensitive constitution and laws that protect women's rights and physical integrity,

¹⁹ Agerberg and I (2019) investigate some of these questions in survey experiments in Sweden, the US and the UK.

including specifically from sexual violence (even though cultural practice does not always align very well with the legal framework). Other conflict-affected states lack one or more of these characteristics. Future studies could examine how stable institutions and the guarantee of (some) civil liberties and women's rights, or the lack thereof, affect the propensity for women to mobilize collectively in response to conflict-related sexual violence.

Future work could also move beyond conflict-affected settings. The theoretical argument about women's mobilization could be broadened to capture sexual violence outside of armed conflict as well. The *MeToo* phenomenon that in late 2017 shook industries from Hollywood to the service sector and societies in different parts of the world is a prime example. *MeToo* provides an indication of the salience of sexual violence and sexual harassment in the daily lives of women the world over, in peaceful societies as well as in those affected by armed conflict. Obviously, in how far the politicization of sexual violence in and outside of conflict diverges, and how women's mobilization may quantitatively and qualitatively differ across war and peace will need to be further theorized and empirically examined. In this context, it is worth noting that papers 1 and 2 highlight the importance of paying attention to both conflict dynamics *and* the societal context and structural factors in explaining conflict-related sexual violence. A common theme in the interviews is that sexual violence was not invented in the conflict. Armed conflict and the power inequalities between perpetrators and victims amplify societal patterns of gendered violence, but the interviewees ultimately locate the source of conflict-related sexual violence in gender and power dynamics in society. Likewise, posts under the *MeToo* hashtag have often explicitly placed sexual violence and assault in the context of persisting gender inequalities, unequal power structures and work environments hostile to women. My dissertation thus opens up for further study into how, why and under what conditions societal patterns of gendered violence are exacerbated in conflict and what conditions lead to women's active responses, in peacetime and during war.

Finally, the very focus on women's gains in agency as the result of conflict-related sexual violence sometimes elicits a provocative normative question: is the conclusion to be drawn from the findings presented in this dissertation that sexual violence is, in some way, good for women? The answer is no. As discussed, the mental, physical and social harms to victims of conflict-related sexual violence (Leatherman, 2011; Stark & Wessells, 2012) – which often takes the form of gang rape (Cohen, 2013a, 2016) – are severe. There is no silver lining to these damaging effects, and there is no scenario in which these negative consequences for the individual should be weighed against the benefits that prevalent conflict-related sexual violence may have for women as a collective in terms of their mobilization or their ability to influence decision-making.

Instead, my perspective is this: despite all the academic efforts in recent years to identify the causes of sexual violence (Hayden, 2000; Butler, Gluch & Mitchell, 2007; Wood, 2009; Cohen, 2013a; Wood, 2014; Cohen, 2016) and despite international efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence (the WPS agenda and in particular its resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1960, 2106; the work of the United Nations; the UK's *Preventing Sexual Violence in Initiative*), this violence is not decreasing. There is even evidence that armed groups have realized the potential to leverage the

perpetration or threat of sexual violence as a bargaining chip (Autesserre, 2012). Put differently, sexual violence against civilians is and will remain a central part of many armed conflicts, despite increased international awareness, activism and initiatives to reduce it. Given that conflict-related sexual violence is here to stay, it is imperative to strengthen local efforts to actively challenge it, deal with its consequences and seek lasting transformations for women (and men). This requires understanding the driving forces of local activism, i.e. of those actors most affected by and most familiar with the violence, the conflict and the society in which these take place – and how these actors, who mostly are women, perceive the nature and causes of conflict-related sexual violence. The urgency of this endeavor emerges particularly strongly from the gaping mismatch between the perceptions of women mobilizing against conflict-related sexual violence in Colombia and the international weapon of war understanding that paper 2 exposes. Initiating a critical reappraisal of how we view and approach civilian women in conflict situations – as victims, as actors, and as both simultaneously – is the primary normative ambition of this dissertation.

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