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Céline Schneidewind

The Body is a Battlefield

A Proposal of Reframing UN Resolution 1820 for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Wolfgang Metzner Verlag

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Contents

1. Some Pre-Thoughts, a Trigger Warning and a Disclaimer

1.1. Some Pre-Thoughts on the Vocabulary Used in This Thesis

It is my conviction that feminism should belong to everybody: all genders, colours, religions, and political convictions. My choice to focus on *women*[1] and not *people* who experienced sexual violence stems from the desire to explore precisely the characteristics, implications and consequences of the careful maintenance of patriarchal gender roles, which consists to a big part, as I will argue, of the threat and reality of sexual violence. I believe that the dynamics in place for victims who don't identify as female should be carefully differentiated and analysed in their relation to respective gender roles and stereotypes. However, my hypothesis derives from UNSCR 1325 and its explicit acknowledgment of the nexus of *female* experiences and security. I hope this suffices – for now – as an explanation why I will from here on speak exclusively of *women* experiencing sexual violence. For further reading on sexual violence towards other genders, see e.g. Touquet & Schulz (2021), Jordan et al (2020).

It is a personal as well as political rhetorical decision how to refer to women who have experienced sexual violence. The core debate usually evolves around the dichotomy of "victim" vs. "survivor". One allegedly suggests helplessness, the other strength. I fully understand women who do not want to be associated with the term "victim", but I am also not too convinced by the concept of "surviving" something that is not actually life-threatening (unless, of course, it is). However, Women Who Experienced Sexual Violence is too long a core term for a thesis that has a restricted number of pages. I will work around this issue by using both terms – sometimes random, sometimes with an implicit connotation.

When using the term victim, I would like to propose overturning its perception by trying to reclaim and put strength back into it. A victim, in the sense in which I would like to use the word, is a person who experienced the loss of control and self-determination in one particular context, without necessarily losing control of how to deal with this experience afterwards. It is therefore a description of someone in a specific time and place, not an identity marker, a judgment, or "worse, […] a life sentence", as V (formerly Eve Ensler) puts it in her play *Necessary Targets. A Story of Women and War* (2001: 35).

[1] including all people who identify as female

For a long time, I could not decide on an adjective to describe societies which are not currently experiencing or emerging from an internationally acclaimed (armed) conflict. The first term that came to mind was "peaceful" – as opposed to "war-torn" or "post-conflict" – but the argument this thesis makes is precisely that countries with no war in them are still not peaceful for survivors of sexual violence. The term "stable" carries a connotation rooted too much in International Relations studies and too little in individual realities, referring in most cases to functioning structures of governance rather than to secure individual surroundings.

Instead, I gladly borrow the term "non-war" from Donna Pankhurst (2008: 295) which she coined due to the same discontent with the word "peaceful" that I explained above.

Lastly, there is no uniform, official name for the phenomenon of sexual violence in crises and conflicts. The United Nations usually use the term "sexual violence in conflict" (SVC) or "conflict-related sexual violence" (CRSV)[2]; the casebook of the ICRC speaks of "sexual violence in armed conflict" (SVAC)[3]; another term popular among scholars and practitioners is "wartime sexual violence". I was therefore left with a rather free choice of which term fits this thesis most. Despite its slightly annoying and cumbersome character, I am convinced that "sexual violence in armed conflict (SVAC)" makes the clearest case of the concept being a certain political specification of mere "sexual violence".

1.2. Trigger Warning

This thesis deals extensively with **sexual violence against women and girls**, especially **rape**, in non-war and **war** contexts.

If discussions of these topics generally trigger you, I dissuade you from reading this thesis at all. If your trigger points are more specific and you want to avoid them without missing out on the thesis (which is – I promise! – a constructive take on the issue and, among other things, aims to offer a hopeful perspective to victims/survivors of sexual violence), the list below provides you with the page numbers where particular topics are explicitly described and which you may omit during reading.

[2] https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/, last accessed 04.01.2024

[3] https://casebook.icrc.org/highlight/sexual-violence-armed-conflict, last accessed 04.01.2024

Topic	**Pages**
Rape	7, 8, 27, 33, 34, 37, 40, 41, 44, 62, 66, 69
Gang Rape	26, 27, 42
Mutilation	7, 33, 34, 53, 66
Victim Blaming & Impunity	24 f., 39, 41 f., 44, 47, 49 f., 52 f., 54, 57 f.
War & Post-War	9, 32, 50, 59

This list will never be exhaustive, and I agree with Roxane Gay when she writes,

> There is no standard for trigger warnings, no universal guidelines. Once you start, where do you stop? Does the mention of the word "rape" require a trigger warning, or is the threshold an account of a rape? How graphic does an account of abuse need to be before meriting a warning? (...) What is graphic? Who makes these determinations? (2014: 151)

I still hope that it is useful to those who know their triggers and want to theoretically engage with the topic nonetheless.[4]

1.3. Disclaimer

This thesis might at times not sustain the objective, i.e. impersonal, tone of voice usually expected from academic texts. This can be related to two reasons.

First, I'm an anthropologist by training and feminist by heart, and therefore believe that the most important task for me as a scientist is to stay transparent about the position, perspective, and context from which I am writing. In anthropological research, ever since the Writing Culture Debate in the 1980s (cf. Clifford & Marcus 1984) so-called objectivity has been eyed more than critically, and I will not pretend to have it.

Therefore, an important factor of my positionality upfront; I myself have experienced rape, and I believe that it was the main driving factor for having written this thesis at all. I myself have experienced and continue to experience sexual trauma as an individual state of war, which was my starting point and personal motivation to explore this felt metaphor in regard to other survivors' experiences, narratives and interpretations of trauma.

[4] I am always thankful for advice on how to construct a more effective trigger warning.

Second, the topic of sexual violence is generally a highly charged and political issue. Some scholars dealing with the subject might choose to balance out its inevitable intimacy by using extra-detached rhetoric, and that is respectable.

But this thesis wants to be and must be political. If I am looking at international frameworks approaching sexual violence, at the reality that derives from them, and at the potential future of the issue, I am doing so to make an impact, however small, on the course we are taking. Hence, while the reader may expect careful academic research and clean methodology, they may also expect an opinion, emotional stakes, and righteous rage.

1.4. Further Notes

This thesis is written in British English, American English has been kept when occurring in direct quotes.

2. Introduction

The process of researching for this thesis brought me to the verge of mental instability on a regular basis. Every day for months, I ploughed through hundreds of pages of testimonies, reports, resolutions, and articles describing, in numbing repetition and gut-wrenching detail, acts of sexual violence against women in war and non-war contexts, crimes of sexual torture, rape, forced impregnation and abortion, sexual slavery, mutilation, and coercive prostitution, and was petrified by "the enormity of it all: the staggering numbers of women (…), [t]he unconscionable acts of depravity" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: vii). The thousands of violated bodies marched through my mind, alternately putting me into a state of utter conviction or blanking doubt that this is the topic that I want to spend my life working on.

For it easily fills a lifetime's work, so much is for certain. Sexual violence (hereafter SV) in- and outside of armed conflict is ubiquitous, timeless, ever-pervasive. The scientific corpus on the topic has so much as exploded over the last couple of decades. Numerous conceptual and political milestones regarding the handling of SV have been achieved locally and globally, legally and socially. One of the most impactful watersheds was UNSCR 1325 which, in 2000, for the first time officially linked women and their wellbeing with the concepts of international peace and security, bringing into being the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (cf. Coomaraswamy 2020: 3). Eight years later, the follow-up resolution 1820 constituted another milestone as it explicitly framed SV as a tactic or weapon of war (United Nations 2008: 2). This was a revolutionary acknowledgment of the classic feminist claim that the personal is political (Hanisch 2006 [1970]), opening the mandate of the UN Security Council to the individual experiences of countless harmed women (Crawford 2017: 105). Or so it seems: for ever since I started thinking about the framework of UNSCR 1820, there was something about it that put me off, and for the longest time, I could not put into words what it was, let alone define it scientifically.

In his groundbreaking article which will form the theoretical background of this thesis, philosopher Donald A. Schön states that "the making of generative metaphors involves a developmental process" (1993 [1979]: 142).

Generative metaphors, deriving from metaphor analysis as a primarily linguistic school of thought, are defined as "a special version of SEEING-AS" (ibid: 138). They are metaphors which not only provide "a perspective or frame, a way of looking at things" (ibid: 137) but carry with them the feature of generativity – not only interpreting existing phenomena, but activating "new perceptions, explanations,

and inventions" for them (ibid: 142). A generative metaphor hence becomes useful as "an interpretive tool for the critical analysis of social policy" (ibid: 138 f.), especially if social policy is seen as a field which "has more to do with problem setting than with problem solving" (ibid).

According to Schön, said process of making a generative metaphor starts with "only an unarticulated perception of similarity" (ibid: 142) between two phenomena, merely feeling or noticing that A and B might be compared without being able to say in which regard (ibid). Making a generative metaphor – which is what I attempt to do in this thesis – therefore starts with only the intuition that *there is something there,* a fertility of a connection not yet made.

Fascinatingly, my writing process followed precisely these steps. First, something about UNSCR 1820 bothered me, and it had to do with my own experience of SV. I never quite understood the artificial differentiation between SV and SV *in armed conflict* (SVAC): What difference does the larger political context make in the individual experience of being raped? Which feature of the *immediate act* can be said to be imminent to only wartime rapes, or only non-war rapes, and to so many of them that it convincingly serves as a classifying trait?

The classification of SV into these two neat categories seemed rather ridiculous as soon as I attempted to look for typical characteristics on the basis of which I could sort them. Rather, I realized, it was possible to compare any two individual experiences of rape, independent of the political context, with regard to a number of criteria that exist in war and non-war alike (such as ideological vs. opportunistic motivation, number of perpetrators, relation between victim and perpetrator, severity of physical injuries, level of support in the aftermath, etc.).

The common, and seemingly natural, explanation for the utility of this differentiation is that SVAC, unlike non-war SV, has political implications, can impact the course of events in a conflict: The damage is larger. – Larger to whom, though? Does the experience of rape feel less outrageous to the individual having suffered from it if they know that it didn't contribute to losing a war? I dare to highly doubt that.

We are not talking about cold facts here: How much weight is given to an experience of SV depends on the actor ascribing the value, not on a fixed, absolute value stored in the experience itself. And in the case of UNSCR 1820, the actor in question has been the Security Council, not survivors of SV. While it is entirely legitimate for an international political organ to prune an issue according to its mandate, this prioritisation creates an interesting tension of logic regarding UNSCR 1325: For the core assertion of this resolution is what Carol Hanisch has argued as early as fifty years ago (cf. Ch. 4): that "personal problems are political

problems" and that there are "no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution" (Hanisch 2006 [1970]).

Before I worked through this acrobatic thought process, however, the general connection of SV and weapons of war already made great sense to me. This was at first only a personally felt experience, an intuition: sexual trauma made me constantly feel as if living in a war zone. This may sound utterly presumptuous to anyone actually having lived in a war zone. What was it that constituted the sensation of war in me despite never having experienced one?

At this point, I can only speak for myself: I felt in a constant state of danger and threat, as if to righteously expect harm being done to my physical integrity at any moment. I felt that there were only enemies around me, and that I lacked shelter. I felt that the world I lived in did not follow any predictable system of rules which I could rely on to protect me; that it was instead a chaotic, violent mess consisting of an erratic bunch of lurking catastrophes. And, finally, I knew that there was nothing that I could do on a level of personal adjustment to end this state, and "nowhere to go to leave it behind" (Solnit 2020: 47).

Then, during the many years of reading about SV, I started to notice a certain thread of rhetoric which I found very helpful – and familiar: metaphors of war weave through autobiographies, feminist essays, testimonies, and scientific papers on the topic (cf. Ch. 5). (It would surely be useful to ask why so many survivors of SV choose war metaphors. But I soon understood that I could not answer this additional question empirically within the scope of this thesis, and so had to settle – for the time being – with the fact that they do, and start exploring from there.)

This common thread strengthened my "unarticulated perception of similarity", and I decided to write my M.A. thesis on the usefulness of a new analogy for SV and war, "reconceptualising" sexual trauma or in some way comparing SV in war and non-war to show the uselessness of UNSCR 1820's differentiation thereof.

However, all these endeavours were doomed to fail, for I could not explain convincingly – not even to myself – which concepts I was comparing on which empirical basis, and which outcome I hoped for. It was only when I discovered Schön's article that what I had worked on so far suddenly made sense, and all the elements fell into place.

Reading UNSCR 1820 as a generative metaphor of *sexual violence as a weapon of war* makes it possible to critically assess its "problem-setting story" (Schön 1993 [1979]: 146 f.). The framework which it creates at no time draws on specific criteria of war weapons to prove their comparableness to SV. Instead, the document carefully selects, from the complex and multifaceted reality of SV, the "'things' of the story – what the story is about" (ibid), names and frames them (ibid) and

thereby creates a "normative force" (ibid: 147) which leads to a specific, seemingly natural route of action within the WPS agenda. The problem-story of the Security Council tells of evil villains systematically abusing communities' women to win wars and make profit, of helpless victims as the sport of international politics, and of noble institutions' struggles to end SVAC to reach a better, more peaceful world.

This cynical account is not to say that all of these aspects do not exist; they do. But instead of an adequate image of the complexity of SV and SVAC, we see here the simplistic result of a problem-story following the normative dualism of war vs. peace (cf. Ch. 3.1).

The main objective of this thesis is therefore twofold: (1) to show in which ways UNSCR 1820's generative metaphor of sexual violence as a weapon of war makes an insufficient problem-story for achieving its immediate goal of tackling SV as well as the long-term goals set by UNSCR 1325, and (2) to propose the alternative generative metaphor of sexual trauma as personal war, using a feminist narrative approach and exploring its possible implications.

The outcome I wish for is neither the construction of a generally valid account of sexual trauma, nor a detailed analysis of each of my sources. Rather, I am aiming at writing a new problem-story made of a canon of voices of survivors within diverse contexts, places, and points of time, and to test the problem-story's conceptual sustainability and practical potential. In this process, I am explicitly not following criteria of political science, let alone psychology. Instead, I attempt to find an inductive answer to the question of how victims of SV use metaphors of war – what role the concept of war plays in their reception of reality, and how this can be transformed into a more useful generative metaphor for implementing the WPS agenda.

After giving a brief overview of the theoretical and methodological framework wherein I position this text in Ch. 3, Ch. 4 sets out to show the conceptual development of the UNSCRs relevant to my argument, to critically assess the wording (Ch. 4.1), the impact (4.2) and the shortcomings (4.3) of their problem-stories. Ch. 5 as the centre piece of the thesis builds the generative metaphor of sexual trauma as personal war with aspects of mind-body relations (5.1), social embeddedness (5.2), myths and memory (5.3), and safety and freedom (5.4). In Ch. 6, the possible implications of implementing this new generative metaphor in peacebuilding policies are explored; these include inclusivity in peacebuilding processes (6.1), the generation of safer spaces and leverage of coping strategies (6.2), and the emergence of a global network of solidarity and peer learning (6.3). In Ch. 7, I outline my hopes for the opportunities this metaphor might generate as a framework for research, activism, and policy design.

The vision of this thesis is to feed into a paradigm of genuine feminist peacebuilding by proposing a new concept for an old kind of making peace: something like a personal form of peacebuilding, encompassing all the ways in which women across time and space have contributed to peaceful societies through overcoming traumatic experiences of one of patriarchy's oldest and most powerful weapons, sexual violence.

3. Positioning This Thesis

The phenomenon of sexual violence is as pervasive as it is complex. Maybe more than any other scientific issue rooting in the field, the respective thematic focus and methodological approach towards SV change fundamentally depending on the researcher's background and intention. It is as much a political matter as it is one of medicine, law, or social work. The context in which I intend to make an impact is that of transitional justice (TJ), its interdisciplinary character suitable for my own diverse academic background.

As an anthropologist, linguist, and mediator by training, it took me a moment to assess which take on the issue of SV I could righteously dare, and which theoretical and methodological tools would be legitimate. Then I realized that there is a common thread shining through the disciplines in which I feel at home which also surrounds the issue of SV, and it is that of narration; plotting, streamlining, and sequencing one's experiences and expectations, deliberately choosing certain words and images for specific purposes is something that every human being, but also most groups and institutions, do instinctively as well as consciously to make sense of a chaotic multitude of realities through language.

3.1. Theory: Generative Metaphors

The basic conviction underlying this thesis is one of social constructionist thinking, working with the belief that, instead of representing reality, "every utterance to some degree constructs the world in accordance with the cultural world being referenced in the linguistic constructions used" (Winslade 2006: 502). A certain branch of social constructivist research focuses on the intersection of stories by individuals and broader discourses by asking "how individuals' stories draw on, repeat, and perhaps disrupt master narratives or shared discourses" (Heavey 2015: 431). This intersection is what I will focus on.

While metaphors in a general sense are "central to the task of accounting for our perspectives on the world: how we think about things [and] make sense of reality" (Schön 1993 [1979]: 137) through transferring frames between different domains, generative metaphors have the special power of not only producing a solution to a problem, but a *different problem* altogether. Schön argues that through using normative dualisms in the rhetoric of telling a "problem-story", the direction of solutions seems obvious and natural, which it is indeed not (ibid: 138 f., 148).

He illustrates this with an example from two different social policies regarding the slum in a city: In the first problem-story, considering the slum a "blight" and calling for a "renewal" of the community points toward a normative dualism of health and disease in which the slum is something that needs to be erased in order to return the community to its original, healthy state (ibid: 145). The second story talks of the slum as an organically grown, but disintegrated space which means home to many people who make up the community and which needs to be preserved, if reintegrated.

In this sense, the generative metaphor of *sexual violence as a weapon of war* implies a clear normative dualism of war and peace, but also sets the scene of the problem-story in definite ways as it "selects and names different features and relations which become the 'things' of the story" (ibid: 146), cf. Ch. 3.

The particularity of this – and any other – metaphor-making process is that both SV and war weapons are already-named phenomena which invoke certain images and features. By being reframed, the material reality of SV does not change, but will be perceived differently as everything one knows about war weapons "has the potential of being brought into play" in the dealings with SV (ibid: 141). It is the same logic I will apply in Ch. 5, proposing my own generative metaphor.

The alluring aspect of Schön's claim is not that using metaphors alters perceptions as well as actions; that point would be, in linguistic terms at least, a no-brainer. It is instead his argument that humans use generative metaphors without necessarily being aware of them, and that becoming critically aware of which problem-story we are following can heavily influence our future course of action in policy making (ibid: 137). The task, then, is not to choose a certain problem in reality and assign a fitting generative metaphor to it, but rather to discern and analyse existing generative metaphors before discussing possibilities of altering or exchanging them.

3.2. Methodology: Feminist Approach, Narrative Lens

Narrative truth is one of the four notions of truth recovery, a process in TJ that is used for widescale reconciliation (Fischer 2011: 411). This subjective take on understanding the past ties in well with feminist TJ strategies of "women-centredness", placing lived experiences at the base of building theory from consciousness-raising (Ní Aolaín 2013: 55). Feminist methodology in social research can be defined as a perspective containing a multitude of methods which are guided by feminist theory, the goal of social change, a connection to the people studied, and a

high level of self-reflexivity and sensitivity for diversity (Richardson 1993: 913 f.), making it strikingly similar to basic features of the anthropological mindset.

In this context, a narrative approach focussing on a polylogue of experiences enables a "more complex (…) understanding of women's agency in conflicted and repressive settings" (Ní Aolaín 2013: 61 f.) and has been rendered "the most natural and appropriate means available" for studying "real-life human affairs" (Freeman 2015: 30). It acknowledges the making rather than understanding of history through clustering and relating events to one another (ibid: 28) and presents itself as a method of contextual interpretation rather than a search for a "definitive account" (ibid: 29). Or, as Susan Brison states from the academic background of philosophy, "feminist ethics (…) [accept] subjective accounts as legitimate means of advancing knowledge" (2022 [2002]: 25).

Especially regarding rape, a social phenomenon that is globally shrouded by conflicting subjective accounts, myths, and gendered beliefs, I believe that analysing narratives and particularly metaphors is a fruitful endeavour, as "many conceptual metaphors are largely universal, particularly in cases where the metaphors are based on recurring bodily experiences" (Gibbs, Jr. 2017: 39).

The body as the central venue of SV is simultaneously the vessel of "embodied narratives" which construct the "multiple, flexible, and diverse meanings of the individual body" as more than "a fleshy object that begins and ends at the boundaries of that individual's skin" (Heavey 2015: 444). Understanding trauma not only psychologically, as an individual disorder, but also culturally, as "a breakdown of meaning and of the narratability of experience" (Zolkos 2014: 163) adds a promising twist to the existing body of research on collective memory and trauma, making the feminist mappings of sexual trauma a collective of its own.

One challenge I had largely dismissed during my writing process and returned to while revising this thesis for publication is that of the universality of experiences. Intersectional feminism has early, and righteously, criticised white feminism for its narrow and entitled view on female realities. It may easily sound as if I am throwing a large amount of uncomparable experiences of SV into one conceptual pot, picking only those aspects which fit into my claim and disregarding the impact that race, class, age, and yes, political context can have on experiencing rape. There is a tension here that needs to be addressed before continuing.

On the one hand, rape did not emerge as an issue of the feminist agenda because somebody decided it should be in a top-down manner, but precisely from drawing one common story from many voices: "it became an issue when women began to compare their experiences, and realised sexual assault was common" (Connell and Wilson 1974: 3, quoted in Serisier 2018: 10). Hanisch as one of the first activists

publicly discussing "body issues" such as SV describes how, in consciousness-raising groups, "[a]t the end of the meeting we try to sum up and generalize from what's been said and make connections" (Hanisch 2006 [1970]).

On the other hand, this generalisation can certainly be dangerous, especially when it is done by only a small group of privileged people in a specific context. Susan Brison writes about the diverse members of her self-help group: "We all struggled to get from one day to the next, but our struggles were not the same" (Brison 2022 [2002]: 30). I acknowledge that I am writing about an experience that I shared with many other women from a point of view that I don't share with many of them: I am a white academic living in a democratic, wealthy country; my situation has been privileged measured against the global condition of living conditions and even more so regarding women's rights, and I enjoy a loving, supporting circle of people who believe in the relevance of what I am trying to do.

Having disclosed my positionality, I would like to argue – and prove – through the vast corpus of accounts used in this thesis that the canon of voices of survivors is large and diverse enough for the common thread to withstand a complete deconstruction. Instead, I am hoping for my generative metaphor to enter a process of evolving through critical feedback, of diversification and refinement, just like feminism did through the legitimate critique of marginalised voices.

3.3. Relevance: Transitional Justice From Below

As persuasive as the narrative approach seems, it has not been extensively applied for analysis in the field of TJ. "Social discourses and national narratives" have rarely been dealt with to assess the attitudes of individuals influenced by TJ models; rather, this knowledge is "based primarily on assumptions and anecdotal evidence" (Backer 2009: 67, quoted in Fischer 2011: 414).

This thesis aims to lay the conceptual groundwork for subsequent empirical research on women's narratives of SV in war and non-war by making conscious the existence of generative metaphors in this realm and critically analysing the "analogies and 'disanalogies' between familiar descriptions (…) and the actual problematic situations confronting us" (Schön 1993 [1979]: 139). The fresh possibilities of analysis which follow the proposal of a new generative metaphor could shed a new light on women's activism as "transitional justice from below" (Ní Aolaín 2013: 47). A widened reference frame of peacebuilding strategies regarding SV is urgently needed in places where there is "the need for a massive psychosocial programme of trauma counselling, which we are utterly unprepared for" (Rehn &

Sirleaf 2002: 36). “Where is it ever going to come from?”, asks one woman in the UNIFEM report (ibid).

The relevance of this thesis lies in its attempt to open the conceptual gateway to research on how survivors’ own competences and strategies of solidarity and endurance could be implemented systematically and efficiently into TJ measures, exploring the untapped potential of low-maintenance, low-threshold, sustainable, female personal peacebuilding.

4. Revolutionary Reframings? The WPS Agenda

There is always something revolutionary about the coining of a concept by giving a name to an existing phenomenon, like inventing a new language; through a generally accredited signifier, the signified becomes consensually visible. The feeling of those who perceived the phenomenon of gender-based violence (GBV) before its christening, who may even have suffered under it long before anyone corroborated its existence, and may therefore themselves have been incapable to speak about it is described emphatically by Rebecca Solnit:

> It was a kind of collective gaslighting. To live in a war that no one around me would acknowledge as war – I am tempted to say that it made me crazy, but women are so often accused of being crazy, as a way of undermining their capacity to bear witness and the reality of what they testify to. Besides, in these cases, crazy is often a euphemism for unbearable suffering. So it didn't make me crazy; it made me unbearably anxious, preoccupied, indignant, and exhausted. (2020: 53)

Unfortunately, the process of "undermining [women's] capacity to bear witness and the reality of what they testify to" (ibid) quite literally remains a pressing reality in TJ measures up until today (see Ch. 4.3.1). This shortcoming, and others, of the contestably ground-breaking reframings that constitute the WPS agenda will be assessed in Ch. 4.3, after taking a closer look at the intention of the resolutions' problem stories (Ch. 4.1) and at the impact they had on the course of action (Ch. 4.2), drawing in large part on Crawford's concise analysis of UNSCR 1820 as a framework, *Wartime Sexual Violence* (2017). I argue that said shortcomings exist due to a narrowness of the frames used, and that the implementation of the WPS agenda might be expedited by a new problem-story or generative metaphor.

4.1. The Wording: Norms and Frameworks

For decades, the leading narrative on SVAC – if there was one – was driven by the paradox idea of SV as ubiquitous and therefore inevitable, as "taboo and as commonplace, stifling effective political and legal discussion and action" (Crawford 2017: 1). Today, the leading narrative states the opposite, namely the strategic and deliberate aspect of rape as a weapon (medica mondiale 2019: 8) with the intention to destroy bodies, futures, and communities. Though this can be seen as an

enormous achievement for the feminist agenda, the "things" of this problem-story are still inherently patriarchal, as the relevance in the reframing comes not from the inherent ghastliness of the crime, but derive from the term "weapon" as a matter of war and military strategy that must be taken seriously (Crawford 2017: 3).

4.1.1. UNSCR 1325

As the Security Council's "first attempt to address the broad spectrum of challenges facing women in war, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction (…) unprecedented in its direct focus on gender dynamics related to conflict prevention and peace processes" (Crawford 2017: 94 f.), this cornerstone document of the WPS agenda is only three pages long, therefore leaving lots of space for follow-up resolutions to fill in concrete interpretations and implementations. In recognizing that "effective institutional arrangements to guarantee [women's and girls'] *protection and full participation in the peace process* can significantly contribute to the *maintenance and promotion of international peace and security* (…)" (United Nations 2000: 2, emphasis added), it ensures the direct connection to the Security Council's mandate while leaving open for discussion what protection and full participation in peace processes may entail.

UNSCR 1325 has a strong focus on "empowerment and agency" (Crawford 2017: 99), i.e. calling on the support of "local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution", involving women "in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements" (United Nations 2000: 3). However, neither the form of support nor the nature of the implementation mechanisms are further detailed.

The groundwork for UNSCR 1820 is laid out in paragraph 10, which "[c]alls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse (…) in situations of armed conflict" (ibid). This is the first time in a long series of follow-up resolutions, articles, and reports on the subject that GBV is compartmentalized to SVAC, making both the sexualized nature and the conflict-ridden context of the violence necessary presuppositions to handle it as an international security issue.

4.1.2. UNSCR 1820

In the evolution of UNSCR 1820, two frames contested with each other on the way to the passing: one of SVAC as "a women's human rights issue rooted in gender norms", the other of SVAC "used as a weapon of war" (Crawford 2017: 4). We

know which one won, and it is a momentous course of events: Feminist lobbying very deliberately strove to leave the "soft issue" arena of human rights and instead board the serious, hard-nosed business of security because they knew exactly what huge difference this labeling would make in the financial, advocational, and political impact on the topic. Carol Cohn, skillfully elaborating on the topic in her book *Women and Wars*, gives this powerful example of the impact of gendered symbolism: Even containing similar modules and structure, university degrees called "conflict studies" or "security studies" have far more prestige and, even more important, far more resources than their counterparts named "peace studies" (Cohn 2013: 36 f.).

UNSCR 1820 notes that civilians are particularly affected by armed conflict and that women and girls are particularly targeted by

> the use of *sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate* civilian members of a community or ethnic group; and that sexual violence perpetrated in this manner may in some instances *persist after the cessation of hostilities* (2008: 1 f., emphasis added)

The tactical intentions of SV, notably laid out in detail, include *humiliation, domination and instillation of fear*, all effects of both wartime and non-war SV; two conceptual spaces are being opened in this paragraph; one, SV can *include* being a tactic of war, but is not reduced to it; the other, mentioning that this specific kind of SV can continue after the termination of armed conflict, blurring the temporal lines of the "weapon of *war*" frame. Another concept that might be challenged in this context is that of "civilians"; initially a useful distinction when most war victims were those who (were) signed up to kill and die, with up to 75 % civilian casualties at the end of the 20th century (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 3) the question of which bodies are legitimate targets of war violence seems even more cynical than it already was.

After reaffirming the importance of women in "all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" (United Nations 2008: 2) that already starred in UNSCR 1325, UNSCR 1820 comes to one of the most interesting statements in the WPS agenda as it shows itself

> [d]eeply concerned also about the *persistent obstacles and challenges* to women's participation and full involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts *as a result of violence, intimidation and discrimination*, *which*

> *erode women's capacity and legitimacy to participate in post-conflict public life, and acknowledging the negative impact this has on durable peace*, security and reconciliation, including post-conflict peacebuilding (…) (ibid, emphasis added)

This paragraph essentially admits that violence, intimidation and discrimination are the cause for women's eroding capacity and legitimacy to participate in public life, which in turn has a negative impact on durable peace, which would make it a truly revolutionary contribution to the feminist agenda. However, adding to this problem-story terms such as "conflict", "post-conflict", and "peacebuilding" recreates the differentiation of SV and SVAC, as if the material experience of SV was fundamentally different depending on the declaration of a war or the signing of a peace agreement.

UNSCR 1820 continues by stressing that SV – but *only* as a tactic of war or "as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations" – can "significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security" (ibid). The resolution consequently affirms that in turn, "effective steps to prevent and respond to such acts of sexual violence can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security" (United Nations 2008: 2) – but at the same time limits its mandate to these occurrences *in the context of conflict.* This is mainly due to the underlying liberalist paradigm which perpetuates states' primary agency in the international context; only framed as a weapon of *war*, SV is "within the scope of potential threats to the state and its immediate interests" (Crawford 2017: 8) and deserving of their response. Logically, the use of SV itself must also be "systematic, strategic, tactical" and therefore "directly serve (…) the interests of an armed group or the state" (ibid: 14) to be of interest to international security agendas.

Lastly, UNSCR 1820 again mentions consultation with women and women-led organizations (2008: 4) as one "appropriate measure" to protect civilians from SVAC, alongside "debunking myths that fuel sexual violence" (ibid: 3) demonstrating for the first time a conscious handling of the aspect of narratives in this regard.

4.2. The Implications: WPS' Influence on Peacebuilding Politics

When the UNIFEM report on women, war and peace quotes Dr. Kelly D. Askin, Director of the International Criminal Justice Institute, it points out in sharp juxtaposition the role that SVAC used to have in comparison with other war legalities:

> Treaties have been drafted outlawing, in excruciating detail, everything from particular kinds of bullets to the destruction of historical buildings, while maintaining enormous silence or providing only vague provisions on crimes against women (…) provisions are needed in international humanitarian law that take women's experiences of sexual violence as a starting point rather than just a by-product of war. (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 89)

This chapter will discuss two main points in which the WPS agenda has pushed the discourse on the subject further into the direction of Askin's demand. First, the WPS resolutions have moved the phenomenon of SVAC from a mere women's issue to a matter at the hands of the Security Council and thereby into the attention of international donors and peacebuilding actors, mobilizing human, financial and academic resources (Ch. 4.2.1). Second, the WPS resolutions opened a space of legitimacy for victims of SV and their allies to confidently address this topic on a world stage and share their stories in all their gravity with less fear of being silenced through nonrecognition, which in turn activates energy to commit to the subject in more effective ways (Ch. 4.2.2).

4.2.1. Attention and Mobilisation

The frame of an issue, according to Crawford, is "not simply the wording used to discuss it", but rather "the driving force behind states' and [IOs'] political will and ability to act" (2017: 93). Its effect lies not only in a heightened acceptance by the international community, but in states' policy crafting and IO's work routines (ibid: 6 f.). UNSCR 1325 has in this regard been described as "a watershed political framework that makes (…) [the pursuit of gender equality] relevant (…) to every single Council action" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 3).

UNSCR 1820's "weapon of war" metaphor "allowed civil society and embedded advocates to gain unprecedented access to the agenda of states, the Security Council, and other IOs, [which] allowed advocates, over time, to incrementally expand the range of recognized individuals and forms of violence" (ibid: 182 f.). It

mobilised "meaningful political responses" as well as "financial resources, institutional mechanisms for monitoring and response, human resources" (ibid).

Following ground-breaking legal reforms and adapted procedural standards (starting with evidence and investigation rules of the ICTY [Fischer 2011: 412]), ethical standards have been introduced to researchers and interviewers in peace processes (United Nations 2012: 17). Pankhurst (2008: 17) argues that the analytical tools to undertake relevant data processing already exist and merely require political willingness to be brought to a meaningful implication; that in these cases, "it might be possible to develop some elements of a top-down gender-aware approach to a range of policies" but that a bottom-up approach is usually considered "the most obvious way" of gender mainstreaming.

4.2.2. Confidence and Self-Advocacy

Women's "[particular vulnerability] to specific forms of violence and degradation" (Fineman & Zinsstag 2013: 2 f.) has for the longest time been contested by feminists and survivors of SV themselves (cf. Engle 2005), navigating through the tensions between victimhood and agency. Throughout the development of TJ discourse (cf. Federer et al. 2019: 7; Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 10), voices commenting GBV against civilians became more assertive, with UN bodies publishing statements such as, "[women's] bodies become a battleground over which opposing forces struggle" (ibid). While such forcefulness had been present in feminist discourse for decades, the Security Council's admittance to its legitimacy on a conceptual level led to an inability to ignore it in situations of everyday politics on the ground (cf. Crawford 2017: 109 f.)

Before UNSCR 1325, which "has given political legitimacy to a long history of women's peace activity" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 3), a pledge for an "international [TRC] on violence against women in armed conflict to (…) fill the historical gap that has left these crimes unrecorded and unaddressed" (ibid: x) might have been scoffed at or taken out of the report due to a perceived absurdity. The accusation that wartime violence against women "does not happen randomly" but is "determined and deliberate" (ibid: 88) might have started and ended in thin air. But a differing conceptualisation is now being established that how "the history in which victims of rape play a part (…) is told matters – both to the women victims and to the country that is emerging from the violent past" (Phelps 2013: 183). Their experiences and tellings thereof are now not only permitted to be relevant to themselves, but officially considered influential to the country's peaceful future by an entity that historically has limited its mandates to the "hard issue" of security.

UNIFEM's introductory appeal to the reader for a "determination for change" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 8) is driven and amplified by this emerging self-awareness, showing an unusual emotionality and legitimating feeling uncomfortable, desperate, angry – but most importantly, calling for feminist frameworks and solidary action (ibid).

4.3. The Shortcomings: "On the Ground"

While this introductory text will give a brief overview on facts and figures regarding the status quo of women and peace, the conclusion that this chapter is determined to reach is rooted in a conceptual understanding. The following subchapters will examine which influence the problem-story of the WPS agenda has regarding *victimisation*, comprising the ways in which survivors of SV are constructed by themselves and others (Ch. 4.3.1); *sensationalisation*, critically assessing how, by whom, and to which effect stories of SVAC are selected and told (Ch. 4.3.2); and *compartmentalisation*, touching upon the consequences of treating SV in war and non-war as two fundamentally different phenomena in the WPS framework (Ch. 4.3.3).

The WPS agenda is essentially about linking gender equality, conflict prevention, and women's agency in making peace, therefore constructively "striv[ing] to end the structural forces that lead to violence against women, in both wartime and peacetime, and to violence in general" (Crawford 2017: 116). However, despite ten UNSCRs and over a hundred NAPs dedicated to WPS, the meaningful inclusion of women in peacebuilding has largely failed, at least by statistics (Fal-Dutra Santos 2021: 9; Ní Aolaín 2013: 52 f.). "Gender advisors" have been established within UN bureaucracy, but their limited resources cannot possibly meet the multitude of tasks they are expected to orchestrate. Programmes of intervention are often underfunded or their institutionalisation chronically slow. The notion that "persisting patriarchal norms underlie most of these challenges", such as the perception of women as "non-political beings" has repeatedly been uttered by women working in the peacebuilding nexus (Fal-Dutra Santos 2021: 1); there are "substantial gaps in the dominant narrative [of the resolutions] that have consequences for real human lives" (Crawford 2017: 183), which the following pages will explore.

4.3.1. Victimisation

Over the decades of TJ development (cf. Fischer 2011: 407), the role of the victim has increasingly taken centre-stage in post-conflict measures such as reconcilia-

tion, remembrance, or fact-finding (ibid). One goal of truth commissions (TCs) is an explicitly deep and painful national confrontation with the past to create a sense of public ownership, understanding, and accountability that leads to social change (ibid: 410). In this endeavour, the woolly term "victim" includes any person that can – and dares to, as we shall shortly see – publicly share some narrative or "truth" of conflict-related suffering, allegedly "contribut[ing] meaningfully to the future of their country" and "transforming their suffering from a burden into an asset" (Girelli 2017: 25).

To understand what the treatment of victims as actors on the TJ stage implies, we first must recall what it implies to be a person who experienced things that are "bad enough" to be of relevance to a country in reconstruction. To be a victim of SVAC usually means suffering from severe trauma and being offered little support to overcome it; this is complemented by insufficient security measures for witnesses and the everyday proximity to their perpetrators (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 462), oftentimes making them rethink their choice: "words are (…) a luxury. It takes courage for anyone at all to speak up about sexual abuse in any form. For many, many women, speaking up is lethal. For every woman, it takes guts" (Abdulali 2018: 25).

One widespread way of approaching the complex state called victimhood is that of essentialising it, "reinforc[ing] patriarchal perceptions of women as inherently vulnerable" (Girelli 2017: 18). Then there is the unhealthy correlation between the severity of trauma and the credibility of the story – due to the unfathomable brutality of certain events on one hand and to the assumed inability of the traumatised witness to remember and retell coherently on the other – making the process of testifying respectively more traumatising (Phelps 2013: 179). In other words, the better a victim you are, the more you will be victimised. Sohaila Abdulali calls this "The Lose-Lose-Rape Conundrum",

> a subversive little thread that often weaves itself into any discussion of women actually speaking out and taking space to claim their histories of sexual violence. (…) It unwinds like this. If you talk about it, you're a helpless victim angling for sympathy. If you're not a helpless victim, then it wasn't such a big deal, so why are you talking about it? If you're surviving and living your life, why are you ruining some poor man's life? Either it's a big deal, so you're ruined, or it's not a big deal and you should be quiet. (2018: 61)

Who makes a good victim? According to one participant at the Guatemalan people's tribunal, it should be someone "you can put in front of the camera and who can dare to say what happened" (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 470). A good victim provides a story painful enough for the audience to empathise and morally judge the evil done (ibid: 474). On the other hand, following the Lose-Lose Rape Conundrum, it should most definitely be a story of *victimhood*, not resistance or activism (ibid: 476, 484), lest the witness is driven by some obscure political agenda. Each story still needs to fit into the overarching frame of the nation's wounds – a "selected dominant narrative" which overlooks "the complex, multifaceted character" of experiences (Girelli 2017: 27).

The degradation, discrediting, intimidation, and indignities of women witnesses during legal trials on SV and the dismissal of any psychological support (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 95) have regularly discouraged future witnesses from testifying against rape (ibid: 97, Phelps 2013: 179). Contrary to the linguistic notion of story ownership that the status of witness to an event entitles the victim as "owner of the narrative" to tell their story, legal contexts are prone to alter these narratives through cross-examination – without, however, acknowledging the resulting "co-construction" of the story (Ehrlich 2015: 296). In simpler words, a victim who testifies frequently loses control of their narrative's original meaning without being able to ascribe this alteration to the legal institution's responsibility (ibid: 294).

To sum up, the elements in UNSCR 1820's problem-story of SV and victimhood constrain the view on the diverse realities of people considered "victims", and therefore, their agency in peacebuilding measures.

4.3.2. Sensationalisation

One implication of the concept of SVAC is that "opportunistic" or "domestic" rape is kept distinct from wartime rape as not severe enough to "fit within the 'weapon of war' frame" (Crawford 2017: 70). This frame aims to "simplify a concept so that it motivates a response" (ibid: 34); this simplification, in the case of SVAC, is generally equivalent to a reduction to the most graphic details, as they obtain the strongest responses in the audience. The graveness of a SVAC narrative can "provide a selling point for securitisation attempts" (Crawford 2017: 64), rather than expressing indignation on behalf of those affected. Thus instrumentalised as a political strategy, wanton depictions of SV can serve as a public selling point for humanitarian or war intervention to a hesitant population (ibid: 62).

Images portraying women as victims "huddling pathetically in doorways, crying and cradling their injured children" in order to evoke empathy (Rehn & Sirleaf

2002: 103) cover the diversity and nuances of gendered horrors with a homogenised silence, carefully selecting only certain aspects of experience; there are accounts of journalists who, during the war in Bosnia, requested interviews "only with those who had been gang-raped" (ibid). This voyeurism contains a "dualit[y] of hypervisibility and occlusion" (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 463) and constitutes one side of a dilemmatic question: "What stories are we willing to hear [and how] does this desire preclude or constrain the other stories women survivors may want to tell?" (ibid: 475). Is an account of rape just "a bit of color, a paragraph of vivid, gutsy writing" (Brownmiller 1975: 115) to mellow the dryness of a history book, or is it required for building awareness?

Either way, attention can never be given equally (Crawford 2017: 5) to all accounts of SV, as this might show "dots so close they're splatters melting into a stain" unconnected and unnamed (Solnit 2013). Keeping these dots apart is a deliberate effort in SVAC policy frameworks, as the next subchapter argues.

4.3.3. Compartmentalisation

While UNSCR 1820 at least acknowledged that its central subject, SVAC as a threat to international peace and security, may still continue *after* a conflict officially ends (2008: 2), it fails to address conflict as a "particularly brutal [phase] in a *continuum* of violence" against women (Girelli 2017: 24, emphasis added) which makes *conflict-related* SV such a cheap and effective weapon (United Nations 2012: 49) in the first place.

Why could the Security Council be convinced to take SV onto its agenda of maintaining international peace and security, but spared no effort to delineate an artificial conceptual boundary around its occurrence *specifically* in the context of armed conflict? According to Crawford, a thus limited frame "alleviat[ed] some council members' fears of overreach and excessive involvement in domestic affairs or human rights issues" (ibid: 104).

To me, this Security Council's perception seems like a flawed workaround which superficially solves a problem of transgression but elicits a number of avoidable misconceptions and misjudgments in the implementation of the WPS agenda. For the ground-breaking element in the UNSCR's analogy of SV as a tactic of war was not the "tactic of war", but the *sexual violence*. It is the Security Council's uncontested mandate to deal with matters of warfare; it had *not* previously counted SV into this sphere. UNSCR 1820 was the result of the revolutionary decision to state that the act of SV *in itself* deserves to be framed as a weapon – "arguably more powerful and less expensive than a gun" (United Nations 2012: 49). It is only

through and after this rhetoric correlation of SV and war that "SVAC" emerges as a concept.

This brings us to several implications. The "almost obsessive preoccupation with rape as a weapon of war" (Girelli 2017: 17) disguises that GBV in armed conflict is "neither exceptional nor temporary, but rather constitutes an embittered perpetuation, in a more public and more visible sphere, of ongoing violence women suffer in apparently ordinary times" (ibid), produced and backed by patriarchal norms and beliefs (cf. Enloe 2017). These beliefs as the base line of GBV are not a natural force, but socially produced and therefore changeable, which makes every endeavour to tackle only a part of the problem, such as SV *in conflicts*, doomed to fail (medica mondiale 2019: 11).

The blurred lines of SV and SVAC lead to at least two further difficulties in the design of peacebuilding policies aligned with the WPS agenda. First, it remains unclear which acts of SV exactly fall under UN missions' responsibility, and how to assess this responsibility; limited definitions of political violence within TJ processes routinely "ignore accounts of the violence which women experience and import a sharp version of the public/private divide squarely into transitional justice discourses" (Ní Aolaín 2013: 48). Second, the compartmentalisation into war and non-war SV impedes an unconditional solidarity across victims of SV which could unleash unused potential of coping mechanisms; instead, it reproduces the notion that "one rape is worse than the other", as Abdulali writes. She continues by asking, "why do we insist on ranking sexual assault?" (2018: 175 f.) Thinking about rape in war and non-war, I repeatedly caught myself considering rape in a "peaceful" society as being somewhat privileged to wartime rape, which felt like an utterly crooked notion.

I soon discovered that here lies one of the largest conceptual pitfalls of the SVAC discourse: While there is no doubt that the context of armed conflict makes the *overcoming* of rape incomparably more difficult and is frequently accompanied by numerous other forms of violence, adding up to a multi-layered trauma, there is simply no convincing system of criteria classifying the *immediate impact* on mind and body, social situation and positioning in one's own life and the world according to war or non-war context.

This becomes the more lucid the more one works to set up such a classification in one's mind: Gang rapes, might be argued, are "worse" than being raped by a single perpetrator, but both phenomena occur in war and non-war societies alike. Strategically raping for a certain purpose seems to be more cold-blooded than "opportunistic" rape, but a victim will seldomly know the perpetrator's political intentions in the moment of the act. The same goes for widespread rapes – which,

looking at statistics of SV (cf. Seager 2018) are also not restricted to conflict areas. And so on and so forth.

Instead of artificially constructing morbid, untenable factors of differentiation, Chapter 5 will discern the common threads in survivors' narratives and their striking metaphorical similarities regardless of time, space, and political context.

5. The Longest War: A Generative Metaphor of Sexual Trauma

> *"What else should we call this then?"*
> *Because war… is a state of hostility.*
> (Faith 2014: 26)

Before UNSCR 1820, as elaborated in Ch. 4.1, SVAC was perceived as an accumulation of unrelated casualties, an unfortunate, random by-product of war (Kelly D. Askin, quoted in Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 89). UNSCR 1820 let a strong pattern emerge which could be framed as the generative metaphor (seeing A as B) of "sexual violence (A) as a tactic/weapon of war (B)" by connecting the individual dots of experience through a rhetoric of militaristic warfare, a mere redescription of reality. (For a visualisation of this argument, see annex.)

UNSCR 1820 at no point explains which definition of a weapon underlies its metaphor; likewise, you should not expect any given definition of war from which I would derive my metaphor (even though Rebecca Solnit attempted to do this in her essay which provided the title of this chapter[5]). Rather, building a metaphor requires transferring an already-named phenomenon to a context in which a problem is to be solved, "restructuring the perception of the phenomena" so that we are able "to call metaphor what we might otherwise have called 'mistake'" (Schön 1993 [1979]: 141).

What exactly are the "things" of the problem-stories? In the "SV as a weapon of war"-story, there are commanders and perpetrators of rape as actors; communities or the "social fabric" of the enemy as the target which is being attacked *via the bodies of women*; and the act of rape as a weapon which can be deployed in a systematic and widespread manner. These features are then placed "within the frame of a particular context" (ibid): the Security Council's frame starts within a *militaristic* concept of war, where aggressors use weapons to destroy the enemy. Through UNSCR 1820, it places women and their experiences of SV inside this understanding of war – just nowhere near the centre of the analogy.

The "sexual trauma as personal war"-story which I suggest as an alternative features the embodied experience of sexual trauma as an individual state of constant threat and hostility; the individual perception of this state as the starting point for needs and possibilities to overcome this state of being; and women who struggle

[5] https://tomdispatch.com/rebecca-solnit-the-longest-war/, last accessed 04.01.2024

– and succeed – to do this as peacebuilders in their own realm. This story turns around the context in which the Security Council's story is embedded: It starts from the embodied and narrated experiences of individual women and therefrom derives the notion of a feminist reading of war.

Problem-stories depending on such generative metaphors "describe what is wrong and what needs fixing" (ibid: 138). In the Security Council's story, sexual violence (A) is the violent act of a perpetrator, and the problem-solving actor is the international community. How can it fix the problem of a weapon of war (B)? It can condemn the weapon, it can judge or convict those who use it; it can set up resolutions prohibiting the weapon and investigate in cases where this prohibition was infringed. It is, however, unable to eliminate the weapon's existence or ensure its non-use.

In my story, sexual trauma (A) is a painful state of being; the problem-solving actors are the women themselves; what can they do with this problematic state of being if it is called war (B)? They can do peacebuilding – in numerous, diverse, surprising ways, on all the levels of multi-track diplomacy. They can survive the war. They can struggle to keep their loved ones safe from the war and try to prevent it from happening again. This, I argue, is a much more effective, future-oriented, and holistic perception of the complex reality of SV in war and non-war than the one we are currently using, and thus a much more apt strategy of implementing UNSCR 1325.

Again: My attempt to shift the revelance ascribed to events of SV from the political to the individual level is not (and cannot be) an objective revision of the phenomenon itself. I am not trying to compare implications of SV versus SVAC, claiming that *in fact,* rapes in war and non-war are the same and should therefore be given the same relevance. As I made clear in the introduction, the comparison of two (made-up) classes of rape are as sensible as a comparison of two (made-up) races of humans, whereas two cases of rape, two individual people can be reasonably compared regarding a whole catalogue of criteria which appear across the whole spectrum of possible political contexts.[6]

To sum up, my proposal of reframing does not intend to describe the problem in a better way – it aims at building a framework that is more *useful* in the search

[6] If you are interested in how the biologists Uwe Hoßfeld and Karl Porges used this line of argument to deconstruct – in fact, to annihilate – the concept of human races, I invite you to have a look at the revolutionary Jena Declaration (2019):
https://www.uni-jena.de/unijenamedia/universitaet/abteilung-hochschulkommunikation/presse/jenaer-erklaerung/jenaer-erklaerung-en.pdf, last accessed 04.01.2024

for solutions. To quote a survivor from the former Yugoslavia, "I survived the war, but how can I survive in peace?" (medica mondiale 2015: 5).

The next four subchapters are an attempt to inductively paint the picture of the "personal war" that is sexual trauma, according to the canon of victims' voices.

5.1. The Inner Dimension: Mind-Body Relations

No space of this thesis need be used to discuss the fact that rape is a physical crime. It is maybe due to its mythical character as a social phenomenon that Sohaila Abdulali feels obliged to clarify, "rape is not a metaphor. It is most definitely physical" (2018: 95 f.).

However, phenomenological theory argues that the body "is a condition of selfhood" which "governs our perception of the world and our experience of self and others" (Heavey 2015: 430). Throughout cultural contexts, the reciprocity of mind and body becomes clear in descriptions of mental hardships. For example, as the concept of rape does not exist in some Mayan languages, the translators in the Tribunal of Conscience in Guatemala worked with literal translations of the crime such as "'They left the illness in all of my body and mind' or 'Who can repair this damage in my heart?'" (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 469). The dedication of the *AIDS-Free World* report on Mugabe's campaign of SV reads, "For the brave women who told us their stories. May their bodies heal and their spirits mend (…)" (2009: 3). The indissoluble interconnection of mind and body has also found its place in a TJ project called the "peace-through-health approach" which links healing and rehabilitation to social reconciliation and peacebuilding (Zolkos 2014: 165). This is only logical, as van der Kolk explains: "Our sense of agency (…) is defined by our relationship with our bodies and its rhythms: (…) In order to find our voice, we have to be in our bodies – able to breath fully and able to access our inner sensations. This is the opposite of dissociation, of being 'out of body' and making yourself disappear" (2014: 398).

It is notable that van der Kolk uses the term "finding our voice" as a metaphor for overcoming trauma. Stories, writes Heavey, "cannot change the physical realities of the storyteller's body" but make them meaningful through acknowledging, accounting for, and exploiting them (ibid: 444). To look at bodies through narratives or at stories through the bodies that tell them means to explore the repair work of narrating a bodily crisis which can disrupt "a person's life and sense of self" and to explore the multiple possibilities of mediating lived experiences through bodily

metaphors which have been identified by Lakoff et al (1991, quoted in Gibbs, Jr. 2017: 36).

Heavey also discusses the making of discourses about bodily idioms through the interaction and presentation of our own bodies and those of others; quoting Goffman (1968: 9), he argues that exposing non-normative body parts can lead to their stigmatisation based on conventions of "normal bodies" and the disqualification of some bodies "from full social acceptance" (Heavey 2015: 431). Reading this paragraph, I pondered on how SV creates a special sort of socially unacceptable bodies: a physical deviance which usually comes without a visible handicap. This is a bodily disqualification which is (re)produced entirely through its narrative construction – by survivors as well as those around them.

5.1.1. Narratives of Trauma: Obsession, Weakness, Threat, Loss

I now want to examine different aspects of the "psychological impact of war [which] can severely diminish the quality of life" (ibid: 36) which I have inductively drawn from the diverse literature of SV experiences and clustered into experiences of obsession and self-doubt, weakness, a sense of threat related to the imperilment of bodily integrity, and the partial or total loss of self or features related to the self.

Like in war, where the acute brutality of a battle may at times seem bearable compared to the gnawing, ever-lurking threat of invisible, yet inevitable danger, sexual trauma leads to a feeling of being unceasingly exposed to "a finger on the trigger. No matter how hard we try, there's no way to step out of the line of fire" (Gay 2014: 153). Just like war violence, the threat of which "inscribe[s] itself into the structures of the living body", the conditions of this personal war also "[change] patterns of behaviour in everyday life and consequently [transform] habitual body memory" which "[outlive] the end of the war itself" (Beck 2014: 192).

Survivors constantly fight an internal battle not only against painful memories (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 468), continuous fear that the future might hold similar experiences (ibid; AIDS-Free World 2009: 30; Abdulali 2018: 176 f.) and traumatic symptoms that are hard to pin down and control (cf. medica mondiale 2015), but also against the sentiment that they should not be feeling this way, that they are probably abnormal and "going crazy" (Abdulali 2018: 100). Alice Sebold provides one example showing the pervasiveness of such thinking as she describes a fantasy which she obsessed over every single night years after her rape:

> I woke up in cold sweats. Sometimes I screamed. I would turn over and lie facing the wall. Enter the next step: Awake now, I consciously played out the intricate plot of my almost death. The rapist was inside the house. He was climbing up the stairs. He knew, on instinct, which steps would betray him by a noise. He was loping down the hall. A breeze came through the front window. No one would think to question it if they were awake in the other rooms. A light scent of another person, someone else in the house, would waft into them, but like one small noise, it would warn no one but me that something was going to happen. I would feel then my door opening, a sense of another presence in the room, the air changed to allow for a human weight. Far away, near my wall, something was breathing my air, stealing my oxygen. My breath would grow shallow and I would make a promise to myself: I would do anything the man wanted. He could rape me and cut me and take off my fingers. He could blind me or maim me. Anything. All I wanted to do was live.
>
> Resolved, I would gather my strength. Why was he waiting like this? I would turn slowly around in the dark. Where the man stood so vividly in my imagination, there was no one, there was the door to my closet. That was all. (2002 [1999]: 236 f.)

The constant drain of energy and physical impact that comes with not only such obsessions, but also with the simultaneous, ongoing inner debate of how to feel and act normal is painfully described by Roxane Gay:

> When I see men who look like him or his friends. When I smell beer on a man's breath. When I smell Polo cologne. When I hear a harsh laugh. When I walk by a group of men, clustered together, and there's no one around. When I see a woman being attacked in a movie or on television. When I am in the woods or driving through a heavily wooded area. When I read about experiences that are all too familiar. (...) When I'm having sex and my wrists are unexpectedly pinned over my head. When I see a young girl of a certain age.
>
> When it happens, a sharp pang runs right through the center of my body. Or I feel sick to my stomach. Or I vomit. Or I break into a cold sweat. Or I feel myself shutting down, and I go into a quiet place. Or I close my fingers into tight fists until my knuckles ache. My reaction is visceral and I have to take a deep breath or two or three or more. (...) It has gotten better over the years. It gets better until it doesn't. (2014: 147 f.)

This kind of obsession and self-doubt comes with a perceived and actual weakening of the body and mind; the actual weakness expressed through the inability to get out of bed (Miller 2019: 92), sleep deprivation (Baker 2016), stomach aches, or constant crying (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 154); the perception of weakness entailing, at times, a certain anger at oneself: "I have become a little barnacle always needing to be at someone's side (…) It is embarrassing how feeble I feel, how timidly I move through life, always guarded (…)" (Baker 2016); or, for other survivors, the pressure to prove one's strength to others: "I was trying to prove to them and to myself that I was still who I always had been. I was beautiful, if fat. I was smart, if loud. I was good, if ruined" (Sebold 2002 [1993]: 37).

The physical and mental exhaustion described above is enhanced by a perpetual sense of danger; Brownmiller, in her uncompromising rhetoric, calls rape "the ultimate physical threat by which all men keep all women in a state of psychological intimidation" (1975: 254). This statement has often been misquoted as a militant "all men are rapists" sort of sentiment, but I believe that quite the opposite is her point; as Solnit puts it, the horror lies not in the "single brutal attack" that actually does happen to some who are unlucky, but "in the pervasiveness of this violence" (2020: 56), the constant notion of "It could have been me" (ibid: 55). SV contains an ambiguity unbearable for many women, the paradox of randomness and therefore unpredictability on one hand, and the character of a hate crime toward the group you as a woman happen to belong to on the other (Brison 2002: 13). Solnit elaborates Brownmiller's thought by framing GBV as

> a reminder that even after you cease to be a frequent target you're vulnerable. Each death of each woman was a message to women in general, and in those days I was tuned in to survival with a kind of dread and shock at finding out that I lived in an undeclared war. I wanted it declared, and I have to the best of my ability declared it myself from time to time. (2020: 55)

She goes on, "I had a sense of dread in those days, a sense that the imminent future of my body might be excruciating and horrifying. There was a mouth of rage that wanted to devour me into nothing, and it might open up almost anywhere on earth" (ibid: 56). This mouth of rage could harm "a little – by insults and threats", or it could harm "more by rape, or more by a rape-kidnapping-torture-imprisonment-mutilation, more yet by murder, and the possibility of death always hung over the other aggressions" (ibid: 48).

These hardships of body and mind culminate, for many survivors, in a deep feeling of loss – of their selves, their bodies, their futures. The feeling of one's

body having been taken over – like a piece of land in war that gets invaded by the enemy – "buries the self" and makes survivors "lose sight of how and when [they] are allowed to occupy space" (Miller 2019: 250). Miller describes in her victim statement how she decided, "I don't want my body anymore. I was terrified of it, I didn't know what had been in it, if it had been contaminated, who had touched it. I wanted to take off my body like a jacket and leave it at the hospital with everything else" (Baker 2016). One survivor in Zimbabwe told the organisation *AIDS-Free World*:

> I just feel like my body no longer belongs to me. I have lost my self-worth and self-esteem. I don't feel like my old self, because in my heart I feel like a different person who has been raped. It's like losing a sibling, when someone in your family dies. It's like losing someone and you will never get them back. (2009: 29)

Unlike loss through actual death, there is the possibility of recovery, of refinding oneself. After "being made a victim" through news coverage and revictimisation in the context of a lengthy trial, Miller forced herself to "relearn [her] real name, [her] identity": "To relearn that this is not all that I am" (Baker 2016). One woman wrote to V (Eve Ensler) after participating in *The Vagina Monologues* this simple and powerful sentence of gratitude: "I lost my body and now I know I will get it back" (Ensler 2001 [1998]: 143). How this process can be impeded by external and internal factors of mind-body relations will be depicted in the following subchapter.

5.1.2. Obstacles to Healing: Body Memory and Health Support Failure

Studies show that half of all survivors of SV in war and non-war contexts suffer from long-term mental symptoms such as insomnia or anxiety (medica mondiale 2019: 30) and from chronic physical grievances such as vaginism (ibid 2015: 12). An explanation for this can be found in trauma theory, which defines one prerequisite for sustainably overcoming the consequences of a traumatically dangerous situation as for the danger to be over (cf. van der Kolk 2014); this means that remaining in a hazardous context where the perception of threat is related to actual danger considerably hampers the process of healing. Unfortunately, GBV and particularly SV happen to be a ubiquitous and everlasting "real" hazard, making it consistently difficult for survivors to transform their mental state. As Miller puts it, it "doesn't expire, doesn't just go away after a set number of years. It stays with

me, it's part of my identity, it has forever changed the way I carry myself, the way I live the rest of my life" (Baker 2016).

This is enforced by the peculiar role the body plays in making and storing memories: even when the brain has shut out the memory of a traumatising event, the immune system, nervous system, and muscles all "keep the score", making the survivor "re-enact her trauma", sometimes with "no narrative to refer to" (van der Kolk 2014: 156). Beck elaborates on a slightly different problematical aspect of said body memory in the context of TJ: Behind certain spectacular crimes receiving extended coverage, there are "uncounted minor but repeated occurrences, which force people to adapt their everyday lives and which, thus, create habitual memories of war and oppression" (2014: 193). She refers here to war violence in general, but the same could be said about SV in war and non-war and its existence on a continuum from tolerance to outrage.[7] Beck makes an important distinction between combatants and civilians in this essay. While soldiers and armed forces prepare and transform their bodies "to create a readiness for and expertise in exercising violence as well as resilience to being exposed to it" (ibid: 191), civilians – and hence also women in allegedly peaceful contexts – need to change their habitual behaviour in indispensable everyday life activities "while being exposed to the risk to suffer violence" (ibid). Beck continues:

> The central problem is that embodied memories of violence cannot easily be expressed in speech. Different from representational memories, they cannot be 'dealt with' in techniques of disclosure and verbal expression or in social processes of re-interpretation. Without being linked to particular marking events, they cannot be brought into a narrative structure (…) (ibid: 193)

This structure, however, is a precondition for trauma to be resolved through TJ measures such as TCs (ibid), through peacetime jurisdictions such as court procedures, or through private measures of storytelling.

Then there is the bleak reality of actual physical grievances such as chronic pain, impregnation (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 38), abortion, injuries, or STDs which not only weaken the body but also serve as a recurring or constant reminder for something that must be put in the past in order to continue a life worth living. Therefore, "[v]irtually every report on women and conflict highlights the need for health

[7] Ta-Nehisi Coates makes the exact same argument in his autobiographical essay "Between the World and Me", describing to his son how he will learn to carry himself, move his body through the world in specific ways, always guarded, always vigilant against the possibility of racist violence (2015: 90 f.).

programmes to be specifically geared towards women, including excombatants, as a pre-condition for social recovery" (Pankhurst 2008: 24). There is a direct correlation between the tendency to neglect gendered health needs and the diminishing of women's ability to "participate in public life" (ibid). To summarise, the body and the mind play an intricate duet when it comes to handling trauma, and health support systems are rarely equipped with sufficient amounts of resources or staff who are aware of the importance to holistically tend to mental and physical problems of rape survivors. Awareness, as we shall see in the next chapter, is one of the most powerful tools when it comes to influencing the consequences of SV.

5.2. The Social Dimension: Visibility and Silence

> *Hang your dirty laundry on the line*
> *Like a flag.*
> *Consider it clean.*
> (Sheridan Gallagher 2014: 10)

Aleida Assmann reminds us that "human beings do not live in the first person singular only, but also in various formats of the first person plural" (2008: 51 f.). She argues that belonging to different "we's" entails adopting social frames of values or narratives (ibid). Shared practices and discourses of each group define boundaries and therefore the "principles of inclusion and exclusion" (ibid). SV therefore must not be assessed as an "individuated experience of bodily harm" but rather as a "deeply structural and relational" one (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 472). In any context, cultural and social stigmas as particularities of Assmann's social frames "affect [women's] ability to protect [themselves] or seek protection" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 17). The immemorial idea, for example, that a raped woman is merely the damaged good of a male (Brownmiller 1975: 18; Phelps 2013: 179), and that "in war as in peace, (…) the property herself is culpable" (Brownmiller 1975: 40) is widely distributed (ibid: 124) and entangled with patriarchal and capitalist norms; "No nice boy is ever going to want me (…) Nice boys don't ask rape victims out!", yells Alice Sebold at her father (2002 [1999]: 78). The sentiment is so pervasive and powerful that it is being consciously utilised against men via women: "We're not going to kill you (…) [instead] we're going to rape your wife", is one perpetrator's statement reported by *AIDS-Free World* (2009: 21). The stigma of rape is a self-propelling force with two sides: the victim who never tells and the surrounding which never asks (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 39). This social taboo encompasses all

societal and international realms (Crawford 2017: 13), enables rape to be mischaracterised as a private crime when it is a political one (Wasonga 2013: 266 f.), and defines the implications of attention to the victim/survivor.

Exercising questions of guilt and accountability and obsessing over causes and meanings of violence endured is typical for most survivors of all kinds of traumatic events. It is one of the major objectives of TJ to clarify these doubts on an individual level to enable a society to heal and continue, and TJ instruments have been continuously adjusted in their respective sophistication. I place the metaphor of sexual trauma as war in this common necessity of transferring these objectives to face the crime of SV in war and non-war alike.

This chapter will further elaborate on the two sides of visibility and silence, especially regarding the aspect of agency: One can either decide to speak up or be exposed, can either decide to remain silent or be muted. These complex dynamics of external factors, such as victim blaming and their rootedness in patriarchal belief systems, and internalised versions of these factors, such as self-blame and shame, will be analysed through survivor's narratives. Although deeply intertwined with myths on gender and sexuality, this chapter focuses specifically on the ambiguous *impacts* of visibility and silence – self-imposed, chosen, or forced upon – on the survivor's place in her social universe.

5.2.1. Narratives of Trauma: Self-Blame, Shame, Isolation

The survivors' statement anthology of the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC) resumes that it is mainly women who are the target of SV and its consequences: "It made women feel guilty and worthless, it put mothers in a position to not be able to take care of themselves and their children, and it made young girls feel unworthy of being loved" (2021: 129). All these impacts take effect in the realm of social relations and usually spring from somebody learning about what happened, either through the survivor or others. Sebold reflects how "[a]fter telling the hard facts to anyone from lover to friend, I have changed in their eyes. Often it is awe or admiration, sometimes it is repulsion, once or twice it has been fury hauled directly at me for reasons I remain unsure of" (2002 [1999]: 69).

These reactions from others, sometimes confusing and often painful, can lead to an internalisation of patriarchal beliefs and hence to self-blame: "'I was in the wrong place, I should have fought harder, I should have …'" (Phelps 2013: 178). One explanation for this is self-protection, as "it's easier to think that it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't worn that shirt than that people might just hurt you

because they feel like it and there isn't a damn thing you can do about it" (Abdulali 2018: 55).

The "sad historical truth" that "sexual shame has been traditionally heaped upon women" (ibid) is what profoundly differentiates SVAC from other war crimes; it is also what makes it so effective as a weapon of war (ibid). "Even though what happened was against my will, I still felt guilty", reports one survivor to the OSRSG-SVC (2021: 136). While TJ discourse traditionally deals with the dilemma of victims also being perpetrators and vice versa, as well as with possibilities of handling this complexity, SV is the only crime where a person can be allegedly guilty in the same crime of which she is the victim – and this is a solid continuity throughout war and non-war.

In any context, helping survivors to "transfer the guilt they carry on their shoulders to the actual perpetrators responsible for the crime" (ibid: 129) is essential for the "individual milestone for survivors" to understand that "what happened is not their fault" (ibid). Where no such help exists, however, thoughts of self-blame can lead to a deeply internalised sense of shame, as "the meaning of rape is currently on a continuum with rape as a crime of honor, resulting in dishonor, something to be silent about and ashamed of, on one end of the continuum" (Phelps 2013: 183). This shame can result in remaining silent altogether, as was the case with most survivors of the comfort women system during WWII (Cheah 2013: 160); or it can result in survivors testifying somewhat around the crime:

> When women do speak, they tend not to speak about what happened to them but about what happened to their families, their husbands, their sons and their communities, or about the destruction of their homes, crops and animals. Even where sexual violence has been highlighted (…), women tend not to speak about it in the first person. It is suggested that shame – both personal and of the family and/or community – is at least partially responsible for this self-silencing. (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 461)

Shame related to the fear of external reactions is commonly known in war and non-war contexts; Chanel Miller "lived with the paranoia that my entire hometown would find out and know me as the girl who got assaulted" and accused her perpetrator of making her hometown "an uncomfortable place to be" (Baker 2016). Brownmiller describes "[t]he reluctance of Dame X to have the story of her humiliation set in type and publicized" as "far from an unusual attitude, even for our present day" because "[a]fter all, she had to live in Compiègne for the rest of her life" (1975: 48). What is rarely discussed, however, is the feeling of shame that

spring from the excruciating details of the experience, memories that survivors themselves want to shake off, not to reproduce by including them in their narrative: the "colours and smells and the full horror of the hands pulling off your shoes" (Abdulali 2018: 175 f.); this is e.g. "reflected in the ICC's finding (…) that the victims of rape and other acts of sexual violence are often reluctant to discuss their 'experiences in explicit terms'" (Sikulibo 2019: 172).

Abdulali and Sebold both describe the paradox of remembering all the explicit details and deliberately not telling them as it would only evoke unconstructive discomfort in themselves and those around them; "I know what they did and I know what I felt and I know how bad it was", writes Abdulali (2018: 175 f.). "They had no idea, because I had not told them, what had happened in that tunnel (…) I knew exactly what had happened", writes Sebold (2002 [1999]: 69). She continues, "But can you speak those sentences to the people you love? Tell them you were urinated on or that you kissed back because you did not want to die?" (ibid) This brings us right back to the dilemma of awareness vs. voyeurism, to the question if we are "in a position really to hear the stories of pain and suffering" (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 474 f.) or if there is "an argument to be made that 'some things are better left unsaid'" (ibid) – and to the question who is to decide this.

Self-blame, shame and fear of stigma oftentimes make victims of SV isolate themselves, which can be self-protective, but at the same time significantly impedes the return to normality (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 117). "I tried to push it out of my mind, but it was so heavy (…) I didn't talk, I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't interact with anyone, and I became isolated from the ones I loved most", writes Chanel Miller (Baker 2016). In this isolation, an interesting interpretation can be made regarding the connection of war and non-war SV. What unites a war-torn society in which virtually most women were raped and a non-war society in which only some were raped, but most are afraid of it and act accordingly, is the silence weaving around the topic that makes a scenario possible in which each woman is alone with her experience even though she is part of a pandemic.

5.2.2. Obstacles to Healing: Victim-Blaming, Incredulity, Rejection

Obstacles to putting agency into the concepts of visibility and silence and thereby utilising them as healing strategies are manifold. Serisier describes the underlying dynamic of retrospectively losing control over what happened:

> 'First a victim, then a survivor, then a witness, and now, a news source… I simply couldn't believe that I didn't have access to something I basically

> saw as mine. My life, my family, my rape. How could the story not be mine?' (Ziegenmeyer 1992, p. 145). In a very real way, Ziegenmeyer's role was reduced, as Alcoff and Gray (1993) caution, from the owner of and authority over her own narrative to the provider of 'raw experience' in a story told and interpreted by others. (2018: 27 f.)

This loss of control in the attempt to either hide an experience of SV or to make a self-chosen narrative out of it is regularly perpetuated by mechanisms of victim-blaming, including the doubt of credibility, and rejection, including ridicule.

There are countless accounts of victim-blaming from all times, places, and contexts. The underlying baseline is usually that there is a reason which renders the rape a legitimate act rather than a crime, an explanation why this particular woman *deserves* to be raped. In war, these reasons are often drawn from political rhetoric. "Unless you love ZANU-PF, we are going to kill you because you don't listen. That is what we're raping you for", told ZANU-PF militia one survivor in Zimbabwe (AIDS-Free World 2009: 18). One group of perpetrators was, according to them, "left with no option but rape" when a woman had refused to convert to ZANU-PF (ibid) – the victims are being "fixed" (ibid: 23).

This is the victim-blaming imposed by the perpetrators belonging to a political enemy. Meanwhile and often in addition, the survivor's "own side" does their fair share of blaming. In Guatemala, indigenous women were blamed to have "broken internal community structures, ordering and power" by being raped: "There goes the soldiers' woman", is a sentence one of them often heard from her surroundings (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 472). When the perpetrators are soldiers from their "own side" rather than the enemy's, survivors are not taken seriously or are told, "You smiled at them, you were drinking with them, you were asking for it" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 48). If this sounds all too familiar to victim blaming in non-war contexts of SV, it is precisely because the rape is reframed from a political crime – where the woman-as-victim serves as a perfect representation of the community-as-victim and therefore feeds the enemy-as-perpetrator narrative – to a private crime which lies not within anyone's responsibility but the victim's.

The doubt of a survivor's credibility is likewise voiced by the perpetrator's as well as the victims' sides (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 118). If the evidence surmounts until discrediting the victim is no longer an option, ridicule is the method at hand to disparage her: In a fact-finding mission of the ICTR, defence lawyers

> were found to have degraded and discredited women by demanding that they name, unnecessarily and in extreme detail, sexual organs and how they were

> used during violations. A number of women have reported that lawyers for the accused and judges have mocked and humiliated them by joining in the general laughter at their embarrassed responses. (ibid: 95)

Sebold recalls how a girl in her college who had filed charges against a gang-rape in a fraternity was driven out of school by the frat members and their friends:

> By the time I visited Penn's campus she had withdrawn. In the elevator of my sister's dormitory was a crude ballpoint drawing of her with her legs spread open. A group of male figures were waiting in line beside her. The caption read, "Marcie pulls a train." (2002 [1999]: 63)

Another, more explicit variety of driving a survivor of SV to leave her familiar surroundings and support systems is to simply reject her, by words or actions. Abdulali writes in her article as the first rape victim to publicly speak up in India, "Time and again, people have hinted that perhaps death would have been better than the loss of that precious 'virginity'" (1983: 18). Around the world and in any time of history, survivors of SV are turned away in disgrace by their loved ones (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 14; Sikulibo 2019: 166 f.; AIDS-Free World 2009: 8, 30).

The indissoluble entanglement of actors and actions in reacting to SV makes clear the necessity to redraw the battle lines in narratives of war and rape. Despite the suggestion of essentialised narratives of morality, support, and decency towards survivors of SV in no way depend on the side of a conflict, or on a conflict at all. Considering the universality of destructive patriarchal norms and beliefs which are targeted *always* against the victims of SV, it becomes preposterous to maintain any notions of a war between communities in which victims of SV are embedded, and instead evoke an image of a war with victims of SV on one side, and those who are turning against them through mechanisms described in this chapter – regardless of their political relation to the victim – standing on the other.

5.3. The Cultural Dimension: Myths and Memory

The aforementioned mechanisms are based on certain gendered myths around SV which are surprisingly universal. As Phelps notes, "[s]exual violence against women has always had a communicative and symbolic function" (2013: 173). Assmann offers two definitions of the term *myth*, one from historiography, where the word is "an index to what is to be exploded and debunked", and one from memory studies, where it refers to "an idea, an event, a person, a narrative that has acquired

a symbolic value and is engraved and transmitted in memory", that is, a "collectively remembered history" (2008: 68). In this sense, myths are the base for memory and vice versa. Both definitions of myths as well as the concept of memory supply useful analytical tools for the phenomenon of SV and its perception and management in war and non-war.

Susan Sontag argues that „[w]hat is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating" of certain representative artefacts, such as photographs widely known: "that this is important, that this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds" (Sontag 2003: 85–86, quoted in Assmann 2008: 49). Freeman generally agrees with this argument (2015: 35), but also confirms Assmann's point that "larger social groups (…) do not 'have' a memory – they 'make' one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs" (2008: 55). However, as anthropologists would argue, nothing different happens in the memory of an individual; in that sense, all retrospective narratives, collective or individual, are a fiction of sorts. Only, collective memory is necessarily a homogenisation of a plethora of individual stories, turning a diversity of experiences into one large canon (ibid: 65).

This chapter will take a closer look at the impact of sexual trauma in the nexus of myth- and memory-making. As the effects of trauma are widely understood to "reverberate throughout the community and society at large" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 75) as well as throughout generations (medica mondiale 2019: 9), healing it on an individual and societal level has long been a major objective of TJ. I argue that, just like a war-torn nation draws on the making of a collective memory to rebuild its cohesion and stability, survivors of SV as a whole might be in need of their own collective narrative; as "the experience of women is always suspect, and discounted" (Brownmiller 1975: 115), it might be "[o]nly when all accounts of rape are collected and correlated [that] the true underside of women's history emerge[s]" (ibid) – and the establishment of such a history might be a strong counterpoint to patriarchal myths and rape cultures, working as a powerful bulwark against the effectiveness of SV as a tactic of war.

5.3.1. Narratives of Trauma: Story Ownership, Exploitation, Amnesia

The OSRSG-SVC notes that "[r]ape was used as a brutal tactic designed to wipe off an entire population, or at least dishonor it – to rip it off everything that entails human dignity: worth, respect and pride" (2021: 122). The reason for the powerful effects of SV can be found in the persistent patterns of meaning-making around the violation of female bodies. Brownmiller calls SVAC "casual and retaliatory (…)

men getting even with men through the vehicle of a woman's body" (1975: 153). Abdulali points out the aspect of honour, of "men's duty to protect women from other men" (2018: 71). Depending on which social frame is being attached to an act of SV, the interpretation of the act itself, the actors, and its consequences can be fundamentally different: In Boesten's useful analysis of the blurred lines between "domestic" (non-war) and "political" (wartime) SV during the 1980–1997 internal conflict in Peru, she describes how a girl who was raped by soldiers in the "private" context of a party struggles to narrate her experience in social frames that make her experience an "acceptable story":

> After all, the rape she and the other girls were victims of was not enforced with a gun to her head. It was not part of torture. It was not done in her house with other family members present. The stigma attached to being raped during a party where food and alcohol was served and music and videos played must have encouraged Sonia to emphasize her resistance against these practices. (2008: 220)

Unlike other victims of war violence such as torture, women who experienced SV are placed within a narrative of their own in war, post-war and non-war contexts alike: the narrative that "good girls don't get raped; bad girls can't get raped"; that says that "either it didn't happen to you, or you deserved it" (Abdulali 2018: 192). This narrative may be played out in the victim's own head, her immediate social surroundings, or in institutional structures intended to serve justice rather than reinforce these destructive notions:

> In both the Čelebići Camp trial and the Furundžija trial at the ICTY, we witnessed the use of patriarchal narratives all too familiar from centuries of rape trials: the lying, undependable woman rape 'victim' and the crazy woman rape victim. (...) her memory was too flawed; she wasn't credible. (Phelps 2013: 177)

The aspect of credibility brings us right to the nexus of myth and memory. There are myths *about* memory, as the one above; myths which *influence* memory as the narration of past events always includes "assuming the form of a *plot,* a constellation of meaning that holds together" (Freeman 2015: 28); and memories, collective and individual that *turn into* myths as defined by Assmann (2008: 68) through constant reproduction and homogenisation. "Memory", writes Beck, "is the modus in which past events make themselves known in the present" (2014: 185). What

power lies in a representative general narrative that can be referred to is described by Chanel Miller, who reflects on the impact of her victim statement and at the same time touches upon the workings of victim blaming through common rape myths:

> The statement had created a room, a place for survivors to step into and speak aloud their heaviest truths, to revisit the untouched parts of their past. If I had come out with my identity the room would have collapsed, its roof weighted by distractions; my history, ethnicity, family. Instead, I became the lady with blue hair, the one with the nose ring, I was sixty-two, I was Latina, I was a man with a beard. *How do you come after me, when it is all of us?* One of the greatest dangers of victimhood is the singling out; all of your attributes and anecdotes assigned blame. In court they'll try to make you believe you are unlike the others, you are different, an exception. You are dirtier, more stupid, more promiscuous. But it's a trick. *The assault is never personal, the blaming is.* (Miller 2019: 252, emphasis added)

To create such a survivor's collective memory, however, it needs individuals speaking up and telling their stories – and this requires breaking through the old myths around rape in the first place. After war, "[i]mpunity (…) may leave a historical "no man's land" in which there is "both an official and an unofficial version of events" (Ntsebeza 2000: 165); both in war and non-war, women's experiences of SV are usually on the "unofficial" side. That this is not necessarily due to the survivor's own felt shame can be seen in the case of the comfort women: When, due to the lack of official international prosecution, a coalition of NGOs established the people's tribunal called "Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery", what drove seventy-five survivors to testify was "the wish to tell their story before it was lost to history" (Rehn & Sirleaf: 90).

Sometimes, however, memory is indeed missing. The loss of control over who tells their story and how can be a deeply retraumatising experience for survivors of SV: "I was warned, because he now knows you don't remember, he is going to get to write the script", writes Chanel Miller about her court trial. "My memory loss would be used against me. My testimony was weak, was incomplete (…) His attorney constantly reminded the jury, the only one we can believe is Brock [the perpetrator], because she doesn't remember" (Baker 2016). Susan Ehrlich provides us with a fascinating article on how witness narratives are further shaped by defence lawyers, turning the resulting testimony in a "dual-authored text" which appears as if the survivors, who are officially treated as "the only ones entitled to

narrate their experiences of violence" were the primary tellers (Ehrlich 2015: 296). Ehrlich demonstrates how "[the accounts'] original meanings can be lost as they are shaped and constrained by institutional and ideological forces and appropriated by authoritative institutional actors" and argues that these reshapings are "not innocent acts" but rather shed a light on "wider patterns of gendered inequalities" (ibid: 294).

I argue that, just like post-conflict societies are rebuilt through measures of dealing with the past by truth-telling and the making of a national narrative, patterns of SV in war and non-war – if we are to take UNSCR 1325 seriously – require similar processes of survivor-centred story-telling and myth-building lest they become an ulceration keeping families, communities, and societies from peaceful coexistence, stability, and functioning.

5.3.2. Obstacles to Healing: Persistence, Retellings, Incomprehension

Just like trauma can only be managed effectively when the dangerous situation has been escaped, stories are hard to tell when one is still in the midst of the plot. This temporal perseverance is one major obstacle to constructive narratives when it comes to the ubiquitous phenomenon of SV as a "never-ending story":

> Memoirs at their most conventional are stories of overcoming, arcs of eventual triumph, personal problems to be taken care of by personal evolution and resolve. That a lot of men wanted and still want to harm women, especially young women, that a lot of people relished that harm, and a lot more dismissed it, impacted me in profoundly personal ways but the cure for it wasn't personal. *There was no adjustment I could make in my psyche or my life that would make this problem acceptable or nonexistent, and there was nowhere to go to leave it behind.* (Solnit 2020: 47, emphasis added)

"The war will never end for us – the survivors of sexual violence during the war", tells one survivor to the OSRSG-SVC's anthology (2021: 138). And Sikulibo quotes Jill Trenholm who referred to mass rape in war as "the bomb that continues to explode" (2019: 153). The missing distance to what happened can lead to a weakness or gap in survivors' narratives which are then easily filled in with patriarchal interpretations in court retellings (Phelps 2013: 172 f.). Sebold describes her insecurity during the trial in which she should have been the owner of a story with a clear offender:

> [The defense lawyer's] tone (…) had changed. There was now not even a trace of respect in it. Seeing that he had not yet gotten the best of me, he had switched into a sort of hateful overdrive. I felt threatened by him. Even though, by all measures, I was safe in that courtroom and surrounded by professionals, I was afraid. (2002 [1999]: 132)

Miller describes the probation officer's recommendation of a year in county jail for the perpetrator as "a mockery of the seriousness of his assaults, an insult to me and all women. It gives the message that a stranger can be inside you without proper consent and he will receive less than what has been defined as the minimum sentence" (Baker 2016).

This statement points towards the missing acknowledgment which would be needed for a strong narrative to succeed; if a story an individual tells is constantly challenged, diminished, or proven inconsequential, the narrator's voice will soon fade out as there does not seem to be a point in speaking up. This becomes especially clear when comparing it to the social embeddedness which serves other narratives of injury:

> The former Marine David J. Morris, author of a book on post-traumatic stress disorder, (...) wrote me, '(...) according to the New England Journal of Medicine, rape is about four times more likely to result in diagnoseable PTSD than combat. (...) *And because there are currently no enduring cultural narratives that allow women to look upon their survival as somehow heroic or honorable, the potential for enduring damage is even greater.'* (Solnit 2020: 49, emphasis added)

The NGO *medica mondiale* states that to become aware of, manage, and correct stereotypical attitudes and myths towards SV, it is not enough to declare human rights violations on paper by establishing conventions and resolutions; instead, it is necessary to look into one's own history, both individual and on a collective-societal level (2019: 4). Embedding narratives as truth telling into the TJ context of reconciliation, Pankhurst notes that there are considerable differences in what, or whom, people mean when talking about mutual forgiveness (2008: 10). She criticises: "There is considerable international and national discussion about whether and how reconciliation might be possible (Bloomfield et al. 2003), but there has been virtually no discussion about 'gender reconciliation'" (ibid). It might be a fruitful endeavour to identify and transfer instruments of enabling effective

narration from the compartmentalised realm of post-conflict to the wider category of survivors of SV in war and non-war.

5.4. The Political Dimension: Freedom and Safety

"Security does not just mean the end of war, it means the ability to go about your business safely, in a safe environment, to go to work, to go home, and to travel outside your home knowing that your family is safe and will not be harmed", stated mediator and UN's former Special Representative in Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 117). Freedom and safety have traditionally been highly controversial buzz words in the political realm, and have frequently been considered mutually exclusive (especially in the context of defending election programmes and political promises to constituencies). I agree with Brahimi's statement in that between the lines of security (in the sense of remaining unharmed) lies the notion of freedom (in the sense of the ability to do things).

Brownmiller hypothesises that "man's violent capture and rape of the female first led to the establishment of a rudimentary mate-protectorate and then sometime later to the full-blown male solidification of power, the patriarchy" (1975: 16 f.). While this is a radical and debatable idea, it touches upon interesting dynamics of interplay between individual needs and political systems. Even without the feminist lens, it appears logical that security and freedom can and must be broken down to an individual level. Theissen describes how "[i]n cases in which most citizens have experienced arbitrary violence, even small improvements in the security situation will strengthen confidence in the peace process and legal system" and recommends that justice should "follow a minimalist approach and take into account the basic needs of people who have been locked in protracted conflict" to then arrive step by step at "a maximalist approach (…) ensuring comprehensive protection of social and political rights (Pankhurst 1999)" (2004 [2000]: 12).

The mandate of the Security Council, officially to "maintain international peace and security", has been restricted to a liberalist sentiment of state security, as if the state were not made of countless experiences and convictions by individuals, half of which are usually women; even formally, it is easy to orchestrate alleged "individual" female experiences of insecurity into a global issue: the five most frequent causes for women to flee are war, sexual violence, honour killings, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (Charité Berlin 2017, quoted in medica mondiale 2019: 5). Despite its acknowledgment through UNSCR 1325, this explicit framing

of a connection between women's and international security remains to have difficulties taking off in its implementation in IR policies.

This chapter addresses the question why this difficulty persists by analysing the political character of sexual trauma through individualised experiences of freedom and safety.

5.4.1. Narratives of Trauma: Vulnerability, Hypervigilance, Constraint

In the context of conflict-related violence and TJ, Fischer defines security as "personal or collective safety and well-being" and "a constitutive part of reconciliation" (2011: 417). In a post-conflict community where atrocities were committed between neighbours, friends or even relatives, it is easy to imagine that regaining a minimum of trust and finding "reason to believe they can look forward to living together without one side threatening the other" (Kriesberg 2007: 253, quoted in Fischer 2011: 417) can be extremely difficult for adversaries.

The same mistrust is deeply felt by survivors of SV as well as women affected by vicarious trauma in war and non-war; they are usually directed towards men-as-probable-perpetrators: a role which is continuously confirmed and reproduced by statistics of violence, stylised images in pop culture (cf. Solnit 2020: 50–52), and dynamics of masculinity (cf. Connell 2005 [1995]: 67 ff.). This felt and factual vulnerability exceeds the post-conflict issue described by Fischer in its omnipresence. "There was no chance to escape, I realized", writes Sebold (2002 [1999]: 225): "From now on this would be it. My life and the lives of those around me. Rape." There is no safe place "outside the conflict zone" for women who experienced SV "as such crimes frequently provoke a sense of permanent insecurity for the victim" (Zinsstag 2013: 203):

> Women are exposed to physical and sexual violence in camps, on the street or in their homes. Perpetrators may be returning combatants, neighbours or family members. Women have nowhere to turn: law enforcement agents, military officials, peacekeeping forces or civilian police may be complicit or themselves guilty of these acts. (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 89)

The fear of known perpetrators walking free after conflict is one specific scenario: "How can I go back when I can see them sitting in cafes drinking coffee and watching us? Who is going to protect me?", asks one woman from Srebrenica to the UNIFEM report (ibid: 28). *AIDS-Free World* reports that "those [women] still residing in Zimbabwe live in constant fear for their safety and twenty-six of the

women received threats from the ZANU-PF after their rapes. One woman is afraid to go outside of her house alone" (2009: 30). But in allegedly peaceful societies alike, the permanent sense of threat makes it difficult for survivors and people with vicarious trauma to move freely through their lives:

> It felt ubiquitous then. It still does. (…) You could be erased a little so that there was less of you, less confidence, less freedom, or your rights could be eroded, your body invaded so that it was less and less yours, you could be rubbed out altogether, and none of these possibilities seemed particularly remote. All the worst things that happened to other women because they were women could happen to you because you were a woman. (Solnit 2020: 48)

Katie Baker, the journalist who first published Chanel Millers widely noticed victim statement, covered a rape case in Tuscaloosa where the perpetrator was from "a very prominent [local] family" which made it extremely difficult for the victim to return to her familiar surroundings: "[S]ince being back she cannot stop crying, scared at night, having to get up and leave classrooms due to her feeling overwhelmed with anxiety and fear" (Baker 2022).

Survivors take to numerous strategies to cater to, live with, or overcome these feelings. Measures to feel safe, however, often evoke a sense of betrayal and fakeness: "The illusion of safety is as frustrating as it is powerful", admits Roxane Gay in her essay on living with sexual trauma (2014: 151). She continues,

> I don't believe in safety. I wish I did. I am not brave. I simply know what to be scared of; I know to be scared of everything. There is freedom in that fear. That freedom makes it easier to appear fearless – to say and do what I want. (...) I have thought, *You have no idea what I can take*. (ibid: 152)

This defiantness is shared by many survivors of SV in their attempt to face the constantly perceived danger and transform the powerlessness which comes with it into something well-fortified. Solnit describes walking through the streets at night a young woman with a mindset which "was itself a desire for war, a hypervigilance that was a high, a readiness for anything, an armor made out of attitude" (2020: 74). Sebold paradoxically felt the safest – or, maybe more accurately, the most comfortable – in dangerous places:

> New York meant violence to me. In the lives of my students, in the lives of those on the street, it was commonplace. All this violence had reassured me.

> I fit in with it. The way I acted and thought, my hypervigilance and nightmares, made sense. What I appreciated about New York was that it didn't pretend to safety. (2002 [1999]: 249)

She compares this reaction to war veterans which are reported to move to surroundings reminding them of their surroundings during battle (ibid). What is more, the constant hypervigilance which is inherent to PTSD – in itself the mental health issue most commonly linked to war veterans and rape victims – is a feature widely found in people who experiences war or rape. Sebold describes a situation in which she, a survivor of SV, and her friend, a war veteran, had experienced a situation where they both felt threatened without a visible, logical cause:

> Both of us were amped up, went through the course of events a dozen times, shared our perception of it, talked about threat and how you could sense it. How we were lucky for war and rape because it gave us something no one else had: a sixth sense that turned on when we felt danger near us or those we loved. (ibid: 246)

Another strategy to deal with a constant sense of insecurity which can be used instead of or in alternation with defiantness is withdrawing and constraining oneself from the possibility of danger. Where hypervigilance symbolises a certain trust in one's own strength and ability to fight back, a desire to actually confront the lurking threat, withdrawal reflects the exhaustion that is the other side of defence, a tiredness of being continuously on guard: "One woman said simply, 'I would like to live without fear'", reports *AIDS-Free World* (2009: 31). Solnit describes this curtailing of freedom in much starker words: "[R]efraining was the only form of safety offered from the slaughter" (2020: 49). The extent to which everyday life can be influenced just to create the feeling of relative safety becomes clear in Sebold's account on safety measures in the time shortly after her rape:

> I would stay out of the park and my father would get on the phone and write letters to get me a single in Haven Hall, the only all-girls' dorm. I would have a private phone installed inside my room. I would ask to be escorted by campus security guards if I had to walk after dark. I would not go to Marshall Street alone after 5:00 P.M. or hang out. I would stay out of the student bars. This didn't sound like the freedom college was supposed to promise, but then, I wasn't free. I had learned it, as my mother said I learned everything, the hard way. (2002 [1999]: 100)

Of course, these descriptions do not necessarily provoke the same emotional reaction as accounts of women meeting war criminals in cafés of their hometowns. In fact, most women, regardless of having experienced SV or not, are likely to report similar safety measures without finding them very dramatic. Solnit writes,

> last summer someone wrote to me to describe a college class in which the students were asked what they do to stay safe from rape. The young women described the intricate ways they stayed alert, limited their access to the world, took precautions, and essentially thought about rape all the time (while the young men in the class, he added, gaped in astonishment). The chasm between their worlds had briefly and suddenly become visible. (Solnit 2013)[8]

These are, as Abdulali puts it, "some non-life-threatening but highly inconvenient side effects of rape" (2018: 158). While trauma literature usually describes PTSD in flashy colours and dramatic flashback situations, she points out that "triggers can also be just pains in the ass, a constant eye-rolling bore to deal with. Ask any survivor. (...) This is not dramatic. It's just tedious and energy-sapping" (ibid). Abdulali concludes as follows:

> Reading about things like 'Cognitive Triad of Traumatic Stress' makes it seems like trauma is always highly colored. But sometimes the reality is closer to the opposite: a draining of colour, a detraction from living fully, and an enslavement to weird patterns. (ibid)

What applies to all these experiences, then, is the perfidious way in which freedom needs to be restrained for safety to be felt – safety, as we remember from Brahimi's statement, that might in turn be framed as a precondition for freedom.

5.4.2. Obstacles to Healing: Impunity and Rape Culture

One obstacles to overcoming these constraints in political and judicial measures comes to mind which is also very familiar in the general TJ discourse: Impunity, which "strengthens powerlessness, guilt, and shame" (Ntsebeza 2000: 165). In

[8] I discovered this college class, which has become something like an urban myth, to be originating in Susan Brison's 1992 course on violence against women (Brison 2022 [2002]: 18).

post-war settings, the impunity of sex offenders reflects a particular intersectional aspect of the broader issue of accountability and justice for war crimes:

> Access to justice is a deep open wound for us, given that there hasn't been a single conviction for all the documented cases of sexual violence during the war in the past twenty years. The impunity for the perpetrators has kept the survivors in anguish for all this time, and only when justice will be served, they will find peace. (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 128)

That this justice is something women rarely have access to is reported by *AIDS-Free World*: "I felt hopeless; there was nothing I could do to those people who raped me", says a woman in Zimbabwe where perpetrators walked freely in their communities for years after the war (2009: 26). The process of making peace with what happened can be tedious as it is, but will be considerably prolonged or hampered if no judicial consequences follow the atrocities the women experienced. Eight years after the Rwandan genocide, a survivor told the UNIFEM report,

> We feel great pain to know that our attackers, the people who killed our husbands and male relatives, who tortured, raped and mutilated us, have not been punished (…) Many of these people are in exile. It is as if they are being rewarded for the crimes that they committed. They deserve to be punished. And what is happening to us here? We have been reduced to suffering, begging and misery. It is as if we are the guilty ones. We would like you to be a voice for us, by asking the United Nations and the international community for justice. Then we can rebuild our lives. (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 95)

AIDS-Free World analyses that the "continuous thread" of systematic rape as a political weapon in Zimbabwe was only possible due to the "historical lack of accountability for it" (2009: 14). In addition, failures in disarmament mechanisms and the concomitant remain of weapons in private households "turn women's neighborhoods into war zones" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 114).

But also in non-war societies, the lack of accountability is a powerful structure which feeds into freedom constraints and insecurity among women and survivors. Sebold describes how she accidentally encounters her rapist on the street six months after her rape:

> He had no fear. (…) He was laughing because he had gotten away with it, because he had raped before me, and because he would rape again. My devastation was a pleasure for him. He was walking the streets, scot-free. (...)

> He was shooting the breeze, so sure of his safety that he felt comfortable enough, right after seeing me, to tease a cop. (2002 [1999]: 111 f.)

The patriarchal system applying to war, post-war and non-war societies alike and under which such incidents can be subsumed has been coined rape culture and can be described as "social frameworks which shape such perceptions [of women's rights] and make a certain interpretation of rape, sexual abuse, and domestic violence possible, tolerable, or even legitimate" (Boesten 2008: 223). These frameworks "need to be scrutinized, questioned, turned upside down, and finally, changed" (ibid) as they make it possible "for the police not to investigate, for the prosecutors not to prosecute, and for Zimbabwe's neighbors to pretend these crimes against humanity are the internal affairs of a sovereign state" (AIDS-Free World 2009: 12). According to Brownmiller, they also make it possible for already active sex offenders to proceed or even escalate their endeavours (1975: 199). She offers a poignant analysis of prominent discourses' uselessness regarding the achievement of safety:

> According to (...) statistics, the street, the home and the automobile emerge as dangerous, high-risk places, so what is left? Good locks on doors and windows and admonitions against hitchhiking and walking alone at night in deserted places are the usual palliatives, but they do nothing to affect the rape ideology, or to increase our understanding of the crime.
> Rape begins in the rapist's mind, and *place* may be irrelevant. (ibid: 186)

46 % of the women interviewed by *AIDS-Free World* "did not even attempt to report their rapes to the police because the police 'do not do anything', 'there was no point in reporting'" (2009: 26). These structures are worth to be researched in theses of their own, which is why I only briefly touch on them here despite their richness of interpretation. What is left to be mentioned is "the thirst for justice and the hunger for peace" that Pramila Patten finds noteworthy (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 4) which entail the desire for reparations, recognition, and safety (ibid). One survivor from Burundi shares her powerful statement in the same report:

> I'm on my healing journey. It is not easy because until today, women's bodies are still used as battlefield by the opposition party in my country. Nothing changed after 30 years. Women are raped and abused in different ways but there is still no justice. I hope that one day, we will be free and live in a world without rape and injustice. I'm calling all survivors to break the silence and

> speak out for the sake of our justice and a better future for our kids. (ibid: 21)

Rebecca Solnit is one of the allies to break the silence and declare the war she perceives, but she laments this necessity: "There are other things I'd rather write about, but this affects everything else. The lives of half of humanity are still dogged by, drained by, and sometimes ended by this pervasive variety of violence" (2013). She continues by making the central point that I would like to get across in this chapter:

> Think of how much more time and energy we would have to focus on other things that matter if we weren't so busy surviving. Look at it this way: one of the best journalists I know is afraid to walk home at night in our neighborhood. Should she stop working late? How many women have had to stop doing their work, or been stopped from doing it, for similar reasons? (ibid)

My subsequent question, directly deriving from UNSCR 1325, remains: What would happen in the realms of international peacebuilding if these restrictions specific to the female experience were declared as a war of its own, and all attempts to resist or change them were perceived, assessed, and leveraged as personal peacebuilding? Having built the generative metaphor of sexual trauma as personal war, this is the thought experiment which the following chapter will explore.

6. Implications and Potentials of a Reconceptualization

I have outlined the significant shortcomings in the inclusion of women, particularly victims of SV, in the making of peace. UNSCR 1325 has done the first step towards change by acknowledging the importance of their participation for sustainable peace. Now, the challenge lies in the effective implementation of the WPS agenda. Peacebuilding – considering that most of its definitions contain conflict *prevention* – should reasonably not start only after war has broken out and women have been systematically assaulted. Rather, I propose conceiving the state of war and peace as a flexible continuum which develops through reciprocal interaction with the people in it and their wellbeing or hardships. This would also mean to seriously consider, in processes of international peace policies, what the WPS index and other sources are claiming: that there is a straight correlation to be drawn between women's individual wellbeing and the level of peacefulness in a society.[9]

The stigma of rape, as well as health issues, psychological trauma, and essentialised views on women make it impossible, difficult or unrewarding for victims of SV to contribute to peace, inside or outside of war (cf. Ch. 5) – which does in no way mean that there is a lack of will or competence to contribute (Dayal & Christien 2020: 85). Needs in this regard have been identified by women organisers as "safety, resources, political space and access to decision makers" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 85). Fal-Dutra Santos further demands "formalised but flexible spaces for transfer of knowledge and recommendations between different tracks of peace processes" (2021: 10). The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security calls for a "holistic, survivor-centered and human rights-based" prevention and response to GBV, ensuring "health care and comprehensive support (…) of acceptable quality".[10]

But even where none of these alleged preconditions exist, traumatised women need to somehow manage their everyday lives, to hold themselves, in war and non-war; and there are moving accounts of empowering experiences of victims that are as diverse as their contexts. The stories of rape victims from the former Yugoslavia tell as much about "a peoples' suffering and hardship" as they "unfold a truth about strength, determination, and a terrific vigor to bring back normalcy, create stability, and restore peace" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 125). In Ch. 5, I have tried to dissolve the

[9] https://www.cfr.org/blog/anticipating-instability-untapped-potential-women-peace-and-security, https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wps-index/, last accessed 04.01.2024

[10] https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/issue/sexual-violence/, last accessed 04.01.2024

conceptual borders that separate wartime sexual trauma from non-war sexual trauma, focusing on the individual lived experience which oftentimes symbolises the tendency "to seek transformative change in a way that conceptualizes peace beyond the cessation of hostilities and the disarmament of warring troops" (Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security 2015, quoted in Dayal & Christien 2020: 74). In this chapter, I will explore areas in which the leverage of these experiences could foster the WPS agenda, focusing on deeper inclusivity (Ch. 6.1), support for victims through safer spaces and coping mechanisms (Ch. 6.2), and the broader interpretation of peace as global solidarity and the establishment of peer-to-peer formats (Ch. 6.3).

6.1. Inclusivity in Peacebuilding Processes

The better part of researchers examining the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of actors in peace processes have narrowed their definition of "actors" to conflict parties and "peace processes" to Track 1 negotiations. These certainly are important and fertile reflections (e.g. Lanz 2011). I do not deny the widening discourse on TCs and conferencing which points toward the political will to include more voices into the national making of memories (Fischer 2011: 410). It is still today a common notion that "building sustainable peace requires working at various levels of society" with multiple initiatives that need to be orchestrated in order to be complementary (Federer et al 2019: 4).

When it comes to SV and the search for justice, however, the "inclusion" of rape survivors in trials is still largely constrained to "a means by which the perpetrator may be punished" (Phelps 2013: 173). The implementation of TCs nobly expands this limited role of agency, but at the same time "will not automatically lead to trauma recovery, healing or reconciliation" (Theissen 2004 [2000]: 16). This is, among other factors, due to the obvious impossibility of letting every single victim of violence be heard at such events.

Especially in the case of women, the obstacles can also largely be found in pre-war sexist domestic laws (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 98) or in sexist social and logistic infrastructures: the lack of money to travel to the court, the lack of time due to caretaking duties, intimidation or delusion by the justice system itself; lacking support or information services as well as inadequate treatment of victims during trials comes in addition to the generally chaotic social and political post-war situation (ibid: 91). Even if a woman overcomes each of these hinderances, her experience of violence may not be taken seriously or seen as relevant for peacebuilding (Ní

Aolaín 2013: 48) and she herself may be essentialised as a mother, wife, or other type of "good woman" which renders her apolitical (Dayal & Christien 2020: 92 f.): "We were always being told, 'This is a discussion on war, so women should not be involved'" (ibid: 85).

So maybe it is time to rethink inclusivity. It is already evident that "participation in formal negotiations is neither the only (…) nor the *primary* way women pursue peace" (ibid: 70). To tap the potential which lies behind this realisation, a systematic mapping of global female initiatives should be implemented and assessed for policy design on a regular basis; also, efforts should be made to reframe the context in which "participation" is considered valid or "meaningful". To do that, it must be analysed where and how these judgments are made, and how they could be altered.

Another critique concerns the narrow definition of trauma through PTSD and its underlying concept of an individual and emotional disorder which *medica mondiale* deems useless in some non-western contexts (2019: 28). If the reality of systemic and long-term consequences of trauma is disregarded in discourses of inclusivity, individual or local efforts to manage these consequences are likewise being ignored despite their assumed level of expertise and strength to heal. This is also closely related to the idea that interventions to tackle trauma should take place as quickly after the traumatic event as possible – which, also, does not apply to many contexts. If, then,

> parties refuse women access to the negotiation table and ignore parallel processes, peacemakers may have to think of more creative ways of working with technical teams, friends of the parties and local communities. The WPS agenda must focus on innovative ways to ensure women's participation despite dogmatic practices and resistance. The local must guide the international, especially as peace processes are increasingly complex. (Coomaraswamy 2020: 5)

Examples exist of how these "innovative ways" may look like, and research on underlying factors which should be considered has also started. Recognition, according to Ní Aolaín, for example, is "an essential component of redress" (2013: 56). It implies women-centred work which seeks to support the "individual female I" and demands "attention to particularity, openness and placement in particular and contextual settings" (ibid). The organisation *Belgrade Women in Black* has "built networks of solidarity (…), created alternative women's policy on the local, regional and global level, entering women's resistance to war and militarism into

alternative history" (2002: 76, see also their website[11]). An art installation called "Thinking of You" issued in Pristina in 2015 which consisted of a washing line of skirts and dresses to "symbolize (…) collective empathy and support for the victims [and call] for solidarity with the survivors (…) significantly contributed to the process of collective healing and encouraged more survivors to come forward with their stories" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 124). Other examples of creating innovative opportunities of participation come from Liberia, where women "encircled the site of the peace negotiations to put pressure on the parties"; or from Japan, where women's groups have set up a people's tribunals for addressing the crimes committed towards the so-called comfort women alongside their experiences as "fighters, survivors of attack and torture, household managers, and community leaders" (Pankhurst 2008: 12).

These cases underline the importance of setting up a global infrastructure that enforces the polylogue of voices; the stories they tell, embedded in an official frame of personal peacebuilding, might create an echo chamber which fortifies and multiplies the informal work of women towards peace. With the matter of SV in particular, the additional layers of shame and compartmentalisation need to be torn down to enable deep inclusivity. To diminish the impact of these alienating categories, I argue in the next subchapter, a multitude of safer spaces and low-threshold ways of sharing coping mechanisms must be fostered.

6.2. Safer Spaces and Strategies of Coping

The consequences of war are pervasive, and trauma affects everyone. Difficulties of dealing with the past may be expressed through alcoholism, anxiety, or aggression among ex-combatants (Pankhurst 2008: 24 f.), turning their homes into unsafe spaces for all other family members. Despite ongoing efforts to establish low-threshold safer spaces such as mobile gynaecological clinics, telephone hotlines, or psychosocial workshops (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 41 f.), women who find settings such as self-help groups in which mental health can be openly discussed are considered fortunate (ibid). Rehn & Sirleaf identify these difficulties in accessing safer spaces as either "not know[ing] such a thing existed" or because "it would be embarrassing to admit they needed help" (ibid). They describe how throughout their research for the UNIFEM report, many traumatised women decided to "speak to

[11] https://zeneucrnom.org/en/about, last accessed 04.01.2024

us, strangers whom she would never see again, as a way to find a brief release not available in her daily life" (ibid). The following two subchapters are a contemplation of what might be needed to enable, design, and find safer spaces in unsafe environments, and which diverse strategies of coping might be worth multiplying and sharing.

6.2.1. The Making and Finding of Safer Spaces

What constitutes a safe space? In the *AIDS-Free World* report on Zimbabwe, one interviewed woman simply says, "I would like to stay in a peaceful place where I don't worry so much" (2009: 30). A safe space might be an actual location that remains unperturbed from danger or stress; it might also be a mental constitution into which one may retreat to escape the anxiety raised by an unsafe environment. Following Shern et al's reflections on factors protecting individuals and communities from toxic stress, a safe space might also be a place, mental or physical, which enhances resilience (2014: 12); through activating individual characteristics such as problem-solving skills, self-regulation, motivation, hope, or autonomy (ibid) or through providing external factors such as responsive and supportive surroundings, prevention programs, or simply green spaces and clean air (ibid).

The first and basic precondition, however, remains a (perceived or real) absence of danger; and this often depends on the people who have access to the space. Rehn & Sirleaf conclude that "sometimes ensuring that women play an important role in building peace requires carving out space and time for a women-only gathering" (2002: 86); among those who design and analyse peace processes the understanding prevails that "spaces (…) need to be constructed that enable women to speak" (Crosby & Lykes 2011: 461). Ensuring the presence of persons which victims of SV feel secure to speak to is essential: "In my culture, it is not common to talk about sex with men, let alone strange men", confides one woman in the UNIFEM report (2002: 69). She continues, "We can talk to you because you are women like us. (…) If only we had female police (…) to whom we can report these horrible things that happened to us" (ibid). Combating patriarchal structures which hinder quotas of female staff to be implemented in institutions providing security should therefore be a priority in non-war times when there are considerably more resources to handle such topics. "Informal, adhoc efforts" such as hotlines, shelters, or advocacy campaigns "need to become routine and institutionalized" (ibid: 17).

The importance of victims' impact on the set up of any scheme of justice or healing is an evident point (Zinsstag 2013: 213) – searching for ways in which this is happening in non-war contexts (to whom victims most likely turn for advice;

which physical spaces in communities provide a feeling of relief; which activities distract victims from their struggles and help them refuel their energy) may provide important insights into the design of safer spaces in war contexts.

6.2.2. 50 Ways to Get Through the Day

A central remedy to sexual trauma are mental coping mechanisms, certain ways of thinking or handling situations which help victims getting through the day. Interestingly, one of the most prevalent obsessions I came across during my scanning of testimonies and autobiographies was the fantasy of getting even. "Vengeance", writes Sohaila Abdulali, "is such a delicious thought" (2018: 167). In a rape affidavit from Colorado, 1879, after giving modest, careful answers throughout the interview, the victim's reply to the last question is as follows:

> Q. – Is there anything further you wish to state?
> A. – No; only that I want to have those [men] taken and killed, and I want to have the privilege of killing Johnson and that Uncompahgre Ute myself. (Brownmiller 1975: 150)

142 years later, a rape victim from Iraq reports that her "conscience was at ease when the death sentence was issued against this criminal" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 116). The wish to have the perpetrators feel what the survivors felt and continue to feel is as prominent in testimonies as its fulfilment is impossible. "He must taste while in prison a little of our suffering", states another woman from Iraq (ibid). Chanel Miller points out, almost in direct reply to this survivor's demand, "I know better than to think my peace arrives when the gavel hits, when the handcuffs click shut. He may sit in a cell, but he will never know what it's like to be unhomed from his own body" (2019: 291). A woman from Zimbabwe reporting to *AIDS-Free World* reflects,

> As for my rapist, I don't know if I could face him. *If I could have my way, I would want to tell him, to show him, to make him feel what I felt.* I would want to make sure he never does such a thing to a human being again. (2009: 34, emphasis added)

In my personal assessment, however wrathful and ungracious this notion might seem to someone who has never been through an experience of utter subjection, it can be a very useful and healing desire: it acknowledges existing power dynamics

as intolerable; it proves a sense of justice and one's entitlement to it; and it is infinitely more productive and energetic to be angry than to be self-loathing.

Another area in which victims may to some extent exercise control, and which often goes along with a newly ignited spark of fury, is that of controlling their story. Speaking out about rape has, throughout history, proven to be one of the most powerful tools in the overcoming of structural violence; amongst its promises are "individual empowerment, wider attitudinal change, and inspiration and support for other victims" (Serisier 2018: 27). This analysis is backed by a statement from Iraq: "In the beginning, I didn't want to tell anyone about what happened. I was scared. But then I thought if I don't tell my story, no one would be able to reach my voice to someone else" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 118). Of course, this is just one story among many; "some experts", according to Zinsstag, "argue that conferencing does not have the weight or power to change the deeply rooted views that allowed or even encouraged the perpetrators to sexually abuse a woman" (2013: 210). Hence sometimes, the power of controlling the story lies in the deliberate omitting of details:

> (...) a way of telling the story in a smooth arc, matter-of-factly, with intonation but no real emotion. It's what we do to keep it slightly at arm's length, and it's a great coping mechanism. It is also rather curative – the more often we tell it, the more manageable it gets (...) (Abdulali 2018: 20)

Alice Sebold describes how she tells the story of her being raped and editing it as she goes, keeping "the narrative linear" and leaving out details like the rapist's tongue in her mouth or having to kiss back. I find it notable that, in retelling the story in a written form, she does include these details, making visible in hindsight the gaps which initially come about through "the breakdown of narratability" (cf. p. 12) of traumatic events. Another way of narrating such experiences after some passage of time is to "essentially tell two stories: one looking back at the ordeal they endured, and the other outlining how they moved forward in its aftermath, which one survivor described as her 'healing journey'" (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 4).

This healing journey can take uncountable forms. Some survivors have described that gathering as much knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon, turning themselves into accredited experts, has helped them feel safer (Abdulali 2018: 177). Transnational feminist projects such as V's Vagina Monologues have carried off hurting women all around the globe: "Since becoming involved in this project, I have learned to respect myself more. I take more chances. I am just a happier person overall, because I feel that I am a part of something so colossal and important and compelling and breathtaking", writes one woman in a thank-you

letter to V-Day (Ensler 2001 [1998]: 153). In V's play *Necessary Targets. A Story of Women and War*, based on her work with Bosnian women's groups, she describes a moment where the women are asked what they are waiting for. They give answers as diverse as, "tomatoes", "to talk to my friends on the telephone", "for it to be quiet", "for someone to respect me, to see me as their own", or simply, "booze" (2001: 70–74). In the same play, a scene is described where a woman called Seada enjoys the warmth of the sun on her face. Getting up and dancing in the sun, she says into the recorder, "Please, I want you to record that Seada is feeling safety on her face" (ibid: 54). Methods of getting by are as diverse as women getting by; it is high time that we map, assess, share, and multiply these methods.

6.3. Global Solidarity and Peer-to-Peer-Formats

Rehn & Sirleaf state in their report that "the circumstances are unique in each country, but the stories are similar" (2002: 19). Why is it that the overwhelming majority of victims feels profoundly alone, respectively experiences coming across another story like one's own as eye-opening (Sebold 2002 [1999]: 81)? One contra-productive, even hypocritical notion which is firmly in place is that of cultural sensitivity. When it comes to state intervention, it is of all things women's interests which fail to be promoted by IOs, lest they might be guilty of overstepping domestic boundaries (Pankhurst 2008: 4). A Kosovar woman told Rehn & Sirleaf how

> when it comes to real involvement in the planning for the future of this country, our men tell the foreign men to ignore our ideas. And they are happy to do so—under the notion of 'cultural sensitivity.' Why is it politically incorrect to ignore the concerns of Serbs or other minorities, but 'culturally sensitive' to ignore the concerns of women? (2002: 125)

The framework of sexual trauma as personal war might counterpose this vicious dynamic and instead foster an umbrella term for the situation under which victims of SV, regardless of cultural or geographical background, could gather. It is well-established how bonding the idea of "fighting the same war" is for troops with a shared enemy, home country, and goal; in the case of sexual trauma, the force of shared experiences becomes apparent any time any two women who don't know each other talk about walking home alone at night – it's the worst cliché, but unfortunately, it is deeply grounded in reality. Instead of wondering if one's own story fits the respective frame, if it is "bad enough" or maybe "too bad", having a term like personal peacebuilding at one's hands could enable women to look at

each other with curiosity instead of shame and ask, "So, how do you do it, what's your strategy?"

6.4. Surviving and Learning Together

There are so many alliances of victims born out of sheer pragmatism that one can only imagine what would happen if these alliances were fostered through a unified framework on a global scale. At the Duhozanye Association in Rwanda, 310 women gathered at the first meeting alone. Without having a set plan of action, they came together under their association's motto (the UNIFEM report translates Duhozanye with "Let's Console Each Other"). After the first meeting was spent crying and sharing stories, the women soon decided that "crying wasn't the solution" and instead started building shelters for each other despite societal norms which forbade women to "go on the roof" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 123 f.). There are countless other examples of women surviving together. Another group from Rwanda explained their impressive display of self-initiative as follows:

> We've always faced uncertainty, but had to carry on with our lives and care for Rwanda's children. Otherwise, what would happen to the next generation? But widows of the genocide in Rwanda are discriminated against and blamed for the HIV epidemic. With little help from the government or local authorities, we have little choice but to rebuild our nation and try to heal the wounds ourselves. (ibid: 77)

A widow's group from Kosovo dedicates itself to political action, demanding investigation on disappearances, and at the same time co-parents their respective children (ibid). In East Timor, a cooperative of victims of SV built a communal house, organises community events, holds regular meetings, farms land, sells produce. Rehn & Sirleaf comment, "The women accomplished all this without outside support, resources or training. It was painfully obvious that, with assistance and guidance, with proper skills and tools, they could achieve much more" (ibid: 122).

This is precisely where a follow-up framework of UNSCR 1820 may open up new pathways of leveraging and systematically implementing the resources brought forward by those who depend on them. To quote the UNIFEM report once more, "even in war economies, women find ways to cope. Their skills and capacities, which have been almost totally neglected, are one of the greatest untapped resources for stabilizing and rebuilding community life" (ibid: 123 f.). By acknowledging the compensation skills of victims of SV who have to "take matters

into their own hands" and by finding ways to structurally expand these skills with a minimal effort-maximum effect sort of approach, victims of SV are recognized not as passive receivers of social services, but as active, creating, forceful designers of their very own peace processes.

Of course, historical and regional contexts shape each individual situation of having to deal with the past (Fischer 2011: 423 f.) and there is no blueprint model of an SV counteraction toolkit to be used in war and non-war times around the world (yet). But lest women with different background stories are paralysed into inaction by the "cultural insensitivity" argument or by the utterly self-defeating concern that "one rape is worse than the other" (Abdulali 2018: 175 f.), it is surely more fertile to officially lay a focus on the force of collective action and solidarity, on the support which the feeling of sameness can give, than on separating factors.

Peer-to-peer education has several advantageous features beside the last paragraphs' points. While it may be difficult to keep girls in school in certain contexts, being around other women is something that can be contained for a much longer time. Framing education in the broader sense of "peace education", then, imparting a certain sense of self, of entitlement, and of support sources, might go a long way in enabling women to "participate effectively in peace negotiations, post-war planning, and public life" (Pankhurst 2008: 25). Peer-to-peer learning is also rendered "psychosocially stabilising" and considerably heightens resilience (medica mondiale 2019: 44). Learning from people whose position and experiences are similar to one's own has a sustainable and encouraging effect on one's self-confidence (ibid); and the person who teaches also heals: Ekhlas Bajoo, then 20, reported after her enslavement by ISIS,

> I have undertaken several trips [back to Iraq and Syria] now, during which I help young people cope with their trauma by teaching them methods that I learnt during therapy. My ultimate goal is to give hope to women who have similar experiences to mine. I want them to realise their strength and convince them to never give up. (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 111)

6.5. Mutual Support and the Force of Solidarity

The knowledge of not being alone is a factor so fundamental, so essential to surviving and healing that it cannot be stressed enough. Even compared to hard-fact measures of support like funding and infrastructure, standing together sustains its essential character: "even activists with very limited resources emphasized that

international political solidarity and messages of support are priceless" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 85). Luz Mendes from Guatemala describes her participation in the 1995 Beijing Conference as follows: "I had felt so isolated during the negotiations in Guatemala. In Beijing, I found many other women sharing the same struggles. I returned invigorated, with new ideas and strategies. And I had an international platform to support my arguments" (ibid: 78). Any exchange among mutual "private peacebuilders" can be "a contribution towards exploding the silence" (Abdulali 1983: 19). Having a term such as "private peacebuilders" or "personal war" instead of "victims of SV" might make it easier for women to find each other, to lift the mantle of silence before decades of muting themselves has sucked their energy and deafened their spirits.

Reframing the issue of comfort women from a Japanese nationalist problem to a global human rights issue made it possible to build a global network of alliances and support from victims and activists alike (Cheah 2015: 161). Organising at the grassroot level is often "groundwork for organising across borders" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 77).

Cheryl Bernard, wife of U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to the UN, describes how the solidary activism of UN spouses played a significant role in the lead-up to passing resolution 1820:

> Life became very uncomfortable for the Security Council members because with so many spouses now engaged on this issue, they could not escape. Every night there is a formal dinner and it's very traditional – man, woman, man, woman – so the ambassadors were surrounded. As soon as they sat down, they would be harangued about mass rape; and forget the rules of polite dinnertime conversation – we spared no details. They heard about reconstructive surgery, women's uteruses punctured by bayonets... It's not what they're used to, (...) but here they were, sitting next to the wives of their colleagues with no choice but to listen politely as they were barraged with, "Have you heard what's happening in the Congo?" (Crawford 2017: 109 f.)

Solidary acts such as this are possible not despite all differences, but precisely due to the lack of them when it comes to the topic of GBV. A survivor from Kosovo shared with the OSRSG-SVC her conviction that

> I would love to share my story with the world. *Not only because that's my trauma and pain, but because that's our universal experience.* This is happening everywhere, and all the time and people are still closing their eyes,

> ears, and minds. But we have the power to open minds, eyes, ears, and hearts. (2021: 152, emphasis added)

A Kosovan female politician identifying as an ally and not a survivor underscores this statement by describing her affectedness through vicarious trauma:

> Personally, it has been very difficult and it distorted my sense of reality. As a woman and a mother of two children it was heartbreaking for me to think that we live in a world where such horrific crimes happen. But I found strength in their strength, in their courage to leave their pain and suffering aside and plead for their right by becoming part of this process. (OSRSG-SVC 2021: 127 f.)

Crosby & Lykes describe a scene during the Tribunal of Conscience in Guatemala in which a survivor of SV and an international judge hug and cry together behind the stage after the former's testimony, despite their discrepancies in language, background, and expected role (2011: 471).

Supporting others and reciprocally being supported helps overcoming the feeling of powerlessness that SV so fiercely evokes (medica mondiale 2019: 23). Finding strength through solidarity boosts the level of resilience, which *medica mondiale* defines "in the context of women's empowerment as the power to be resistant and position oneself against injustice and violence alongside others" (ibid). Van der Kolk summarises resilience as "the product of agency: knowing that what you do can make a difference" (2014: 426).

Aleida Assmann states education to be central in building a nation-state as it is "by learning their history that the heterogeneous members of a population were transformed into a distinct and homogenous collective, conceiving of themselves as 'a people' with a collective 'autobiography'" (2008: 64). It is my deep conviction that through the establishment of the "sexual trauma as personal war" metaphor, complementary to all their diversity and individuality, the universal problem-story of being affected by SV might serve a similar role to women around the world; that, if there was an officially accredited framework in which to place this "history", the power of their "collective autobiography" would revolutionise peacebuilding in all its aspects: in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts and their gendered dynamics.

It is in this spirit that I concludingly quote Sohaila Abdulali who, in her article as the first rape survivor in India to publicly speak out, called on her readers: “Let us stop treating rape as the problem of other women. Let us acknowledge its universality and come to a better understanding of it” (1983: 19).

7. Conclusion and Outlook: A Vision of Feminist Peacebuilding

The reality of the WPS agenda is, however ambitious and noble its onset was 20 years ago, still very much imperfect. Patriarchal structures of power and particularly sexual violence as their most physical, intimately as well as physically devastating weapon – "cheap, easily mobilised, and highly destructive" (Crawford 2017: 189) – remain firmly in place and feed into global dynamics of violence and conflict. Both in war and non-war contexts, retributive justice has not quite delivered the closure which victims of SV require to continue, or start anew, their lives (Zinsstag 2013: 200 f.), in order to meaningfully contribute to peace: acknowledgement and dignity, alongside "information, agency, notification, an enabling environment free of intimidation and humiliation, and protection from stigma and reprisals" (Phelps 2013: 183). Restorative justice has therefore been discussed "rather by default" as a promising alternative (Zinsstag 2013: 200 f.) despite its own inadequacies and shortcomings (ibid: 190); however, in any context of justice, the theory is only ever as good as its implementation – and the implementation is, more often than not, lacking resources, powerful people with the right mindset, and enabling infrastructures.

This is the status quo from where I started to write my thesis: in a sense of urgency, of inevitability. I worked through countless moments of genuine despondency, feeling the kind of envy for other scholars' topics that Sohaila Abdulali has so poignantly described in a chapter titled *A brief pause for ennui*: "Art! Joy! Life! It's so much more inviting than discussing getting gonorrhoea from one's older brother, or rape as a weapon of war. And yet, here we are, in a world that includes both birdsong and brutality" (2018: 166).

My initial question remains: How can women include their experiences of sexual violence into peacebuilding in meaningful ways? Lederach puts emphasis on thinking strategically about social spaces, about relations which link peacebuilding's numerous levels and capacities (Federer et al 2019: 7).

In this thesis, I have explored a feminist aspect of what might be the most linking element in war, and therefore in peacebuilding: namely, threats to physical integrity. I have tried to figure out if anything fertile could be found in the analogy of war and SV and if, used as a complementary generative metaphor for new UN Security Council resolutions, it could widen the reference frame for dealings with sexual trauma in peacebuilding processes. I argued that even within the liberalist paradigm of the Security Council's mandate to focus on states' interests, my focus on individual women's wellbeing is pertinent: for the Security Council itself has

done all the groundwork for this argument by deeming the consequences of sexual violence hazardous to sustainable peace in UNSCR 1325 (cf. Ch. 3).

After depicting the evolution, impact, and deficiencies of the "weapon of war" frame as 1820's revolutionary generative metaphor in Ch. 4, Ch. 5 has mapped, through a feminist narrative lens with a special focus on rhetorics and metaphors, how countless women in war and non-war settings are experiencing direct or vicarious sexual trauma as a personal war. Ch. 6 has argued how this alternative generative metaphor could supply fresh perspectives on old problems in international peacebuilding, such as inclusivity, victim-centred support, logistics of implementation and the leverage of existing forces.

The logic of the argument went as thus: If sexual trauma can be framed as a woman's personal war, then her individual coping mechanisms and strategies of surviving, maybe even thriving, can be framed as a sort of personal peacebuilding – as a tiny but essential piece of the international puzzle called sustainable peace. (The coinage of this concept is not yet finalised. I am looking at the term "personal peacebuilding" as a working title, waiting to be refined in my further research process and open to suggestions for a more precise, self-explanatory term.)

The question which I have thereby raised, but not yet answered, is essentially a constructive, even playful one: Could there be a format which helps women with sexual trauma regardless of context? Which enables them to grow and learn together without rating their experiences according to severity? Which is easily implemented, transferred, and adjustable in diverse settings around the globe? A format which covers the hardships described in Ch. 3 while also rebutting obstacles to healing?

And of course, my final question and simultaneously the starting point for all further research in this vain therefore goes: What is already happening in this regard, and how could it be systematically assessed and taken further? (I plan to make a first attempt to empirically answer these questions in my final research project during an M.A. degree in Anthropology, and hope to conflate the findings of my first and second Masters' theses into a PhD project which will, by that time, probably introduce a whole new bunch of arduous questions.)

A deeper inquiry into these topics could lead to a new level of gender mainstreaming, making gendered experiences "an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres" (Rehn & Sirleaf 2002: 63). Seriously thinking about how to implement a survivor-centred approach, which is defined by the OSRSG-SVC as recognising

> that the lived experience of survivors must guide the search for solutions, including decisions about policies, programming, and resource allocation (…), that survivors are unique individuals (…) seek[ing] to empower them by prioritizing their different needs, perspectives and wishes, paying particular attention to intersecting inequalities, in order to ensure their rights are respected, they are treated with dignity, and are able to make informed decisions about their futures (2021: 2),

could refurbish old "infrastructures for peace" (cf. Federer et al. 2019: 9) or build new ones. The kind of inquiry I have proposed in this thesis is based on the concept of making generative metaphors by Donald A. Schön (cf. Ch. 3) which, instead of searching for new solutions to given problems, aims to search for new "problem-setting stories" (as frames of a complex reality) (1993 [1979]: 155 f.); this sort of inquiry, according to Schön, "does not fit the dominant model of problem solving, we lack a name for it. We risk denying our intuitive capacity because we cannot describe it" (ibid: 151 f.).

I aim for scholarly surroundings in which intuition is to be trusted and which attempts to map the unmappable: the complex, diverse, sometimes unbearable, sometimes shockingly similar, always inspiring realities of women in their encounters with GBV in war and non-war. It is my deep conviction that "[a]s long as women are oppressed in various ways, all women will continue to be vulnerable to rape" (Abdulali 1983: 19). I also share Rehn & Sirleaf's inference that "[w]hen women are safe, so are nations. When women feel secure, peace is possible" (2002: 2). This means that I will continue to carry out the task of

> not just looking at what have been called 'women's issues' – a ghetto, or a separate sphere that remains on the margins of society – but rather moving women from the margins to the center by questioning the most fundamental concepts of social, [legal and political] order so that they take better account of women's lives (Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, quoted in ibid: 6).

In feminist activism's quest to tilt patriarchy, "crafting new feminist concepts" has always formed a crucial element (Enloe 2017: 166 f.), and I seem to have found my vocation in trying to contribute to that endeavour. Or, to quote one of the earliest and bravest feminist analysts of patriarchal order, Simone de Beauvoir (2018 [1949]: 665, own translation): I will continue to demand nothing more than "an adequately organised society".

List of Abbreviations (In Alphabetic Order)

G	
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
I	
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IO	International Organisation
N	
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
O	
OSRSG-SVC	Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
P	
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
S	
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
SV	Sexual Violence
SVAC	Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict
T	
TC	Truth Commission
TJ	Transitional Justice
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
U	
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

W

WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WWII	World War II

Z

ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

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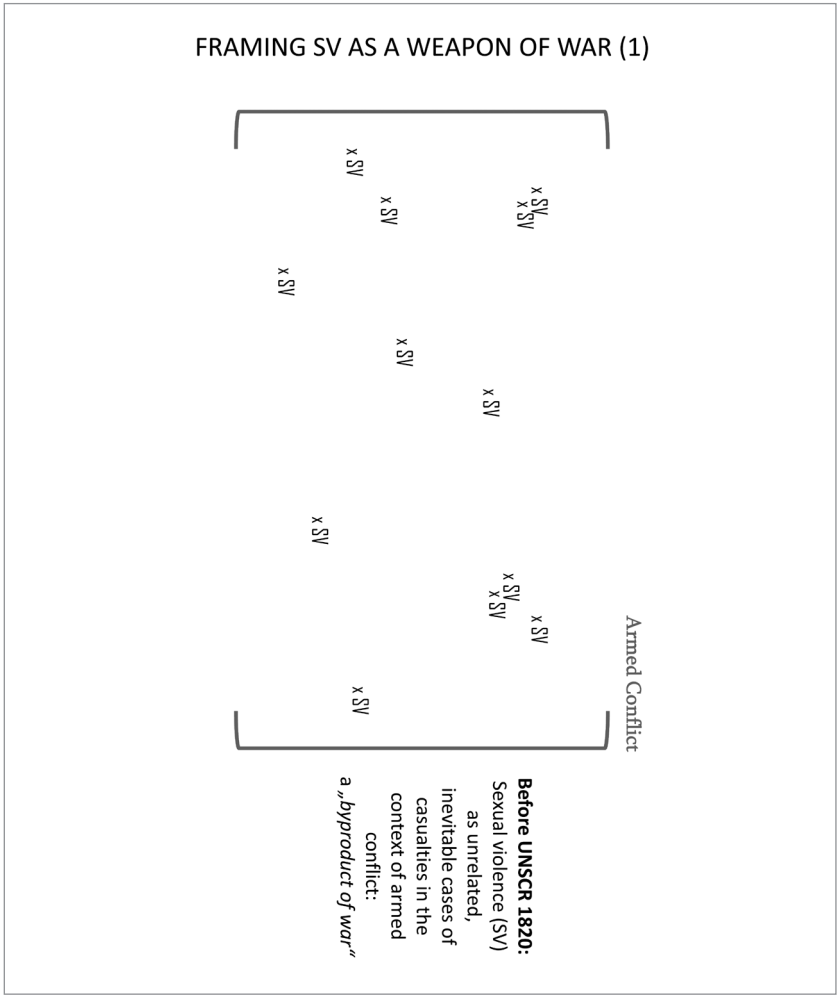
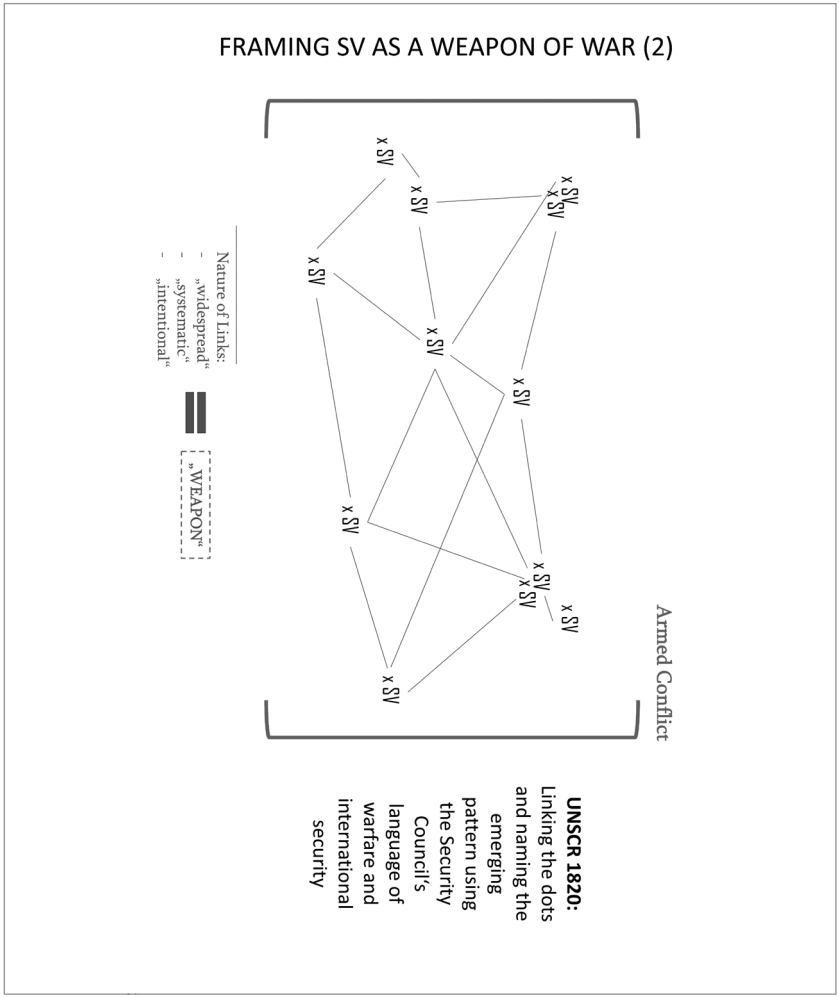
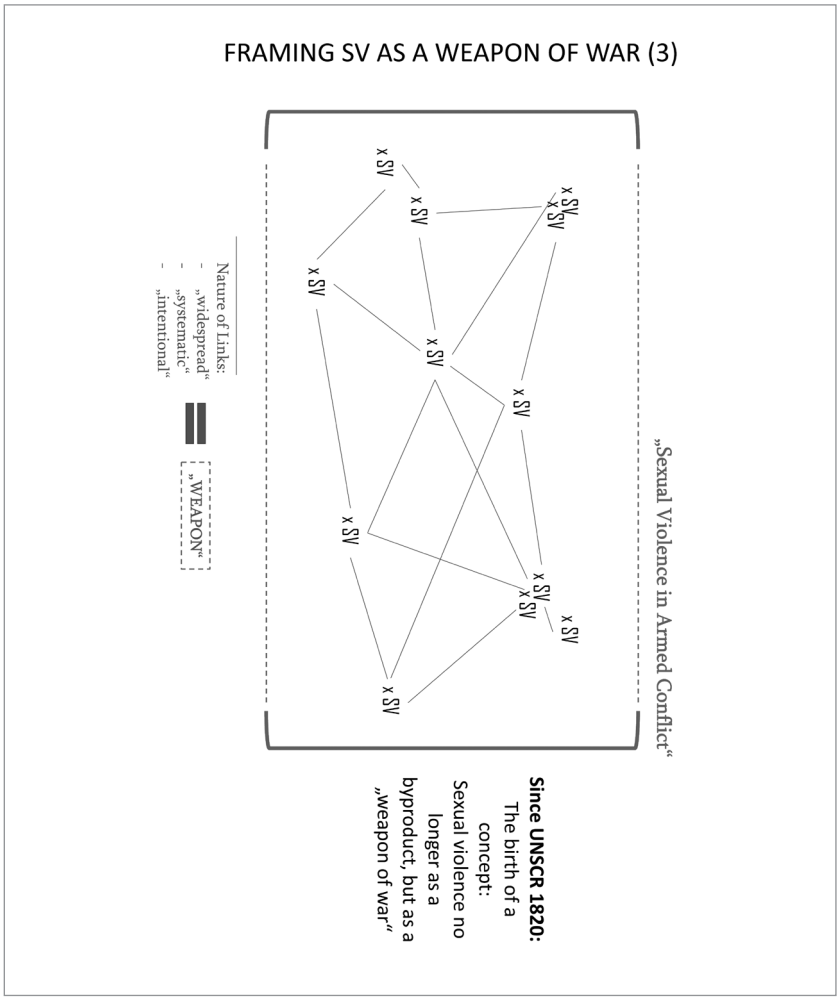
Annex

Visualisation of the two processes:

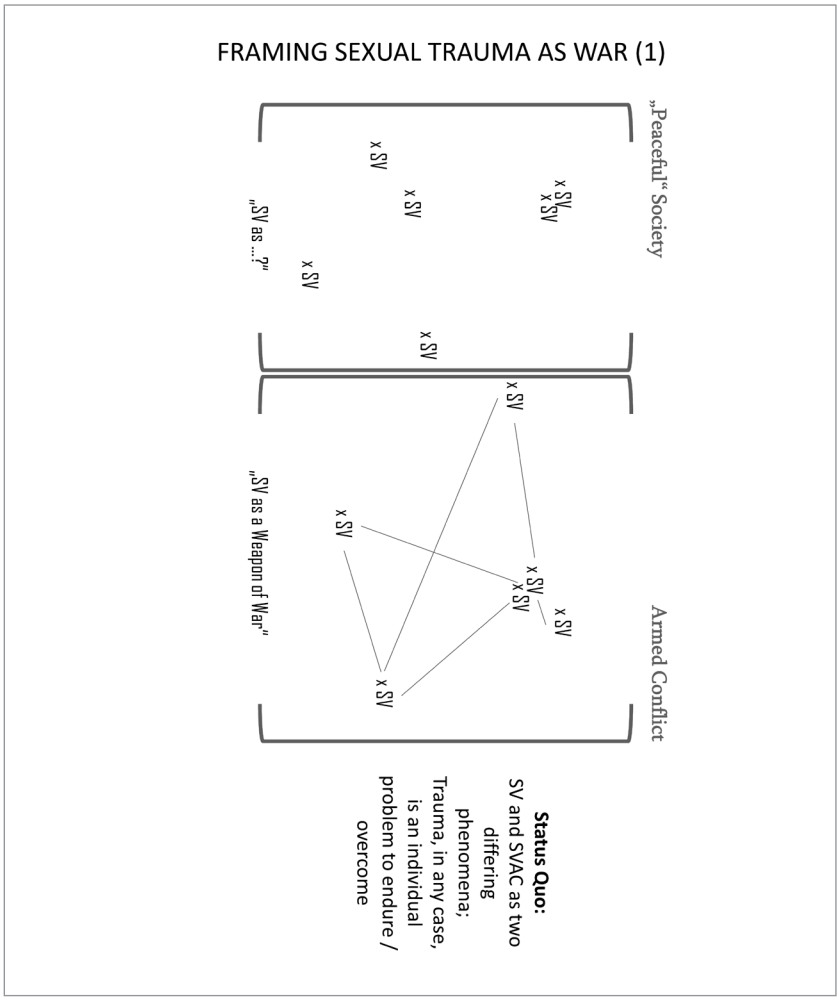
1) Framing sexual violence as a weapon of war (what happened so far)

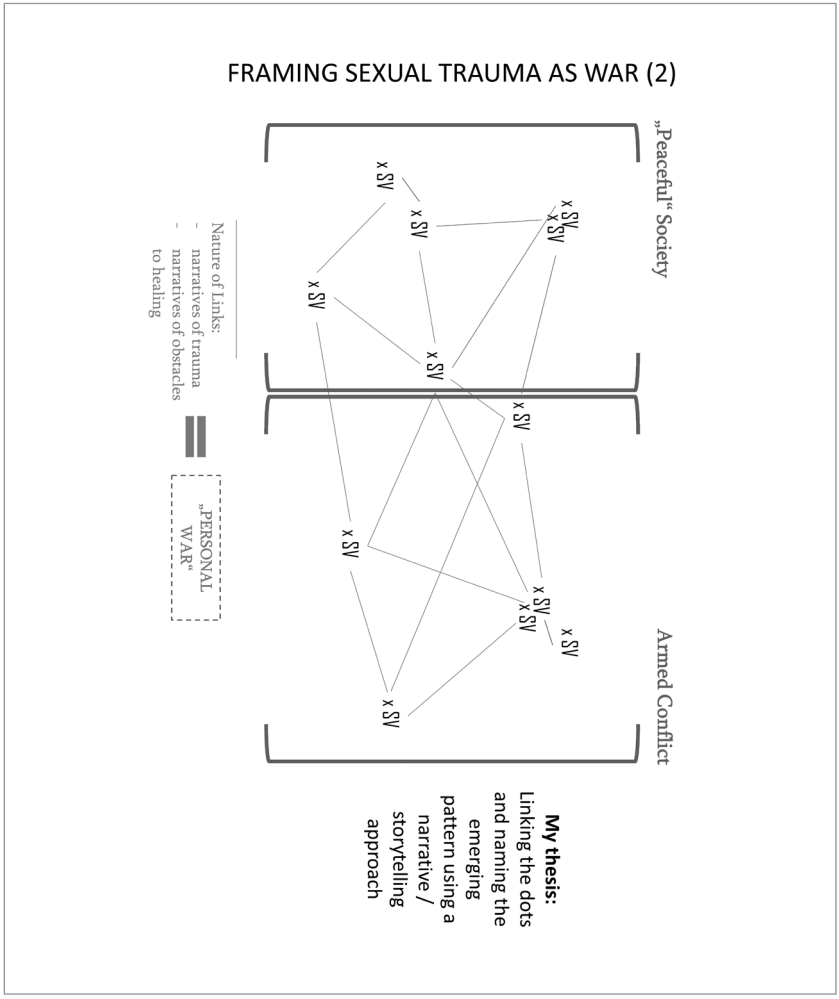


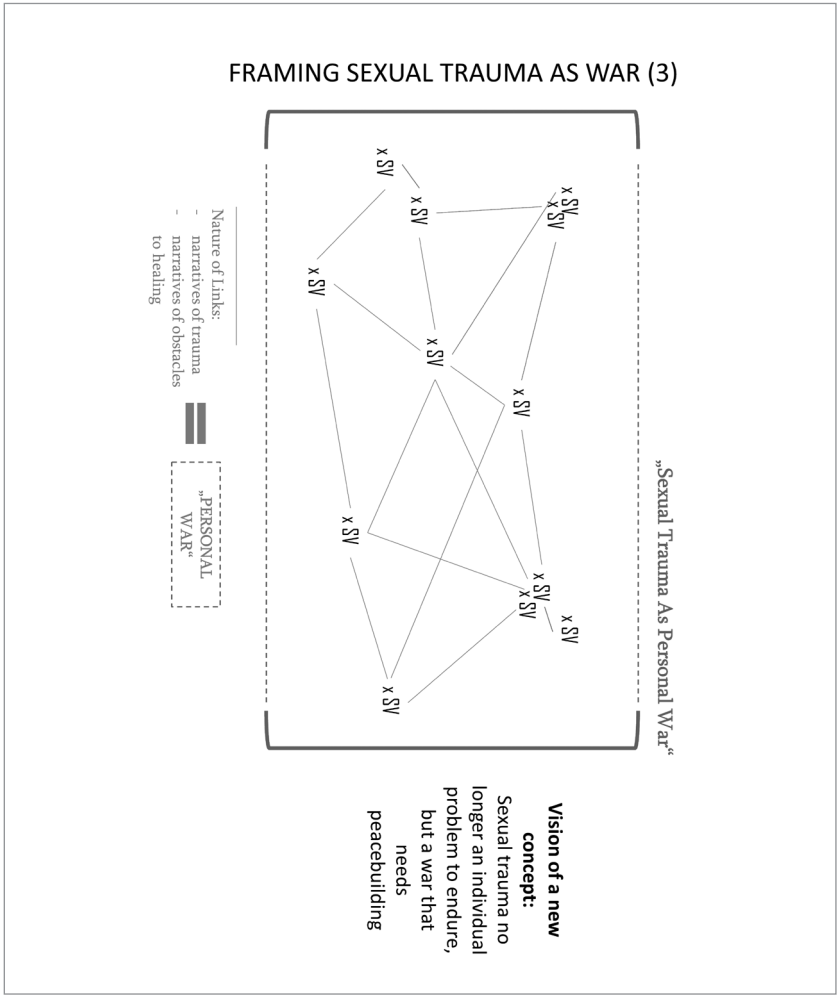

FRAMING SV AS A WEAPON OF WAR (2)
Armed Conflict
AS x SV
UNSCR 1820:
Linking the dots and naming the emerging pattern using the Security Council's language of warfare and international security
Nature of Links:
– „widespread"
– „systematic"
– „intentional"
„WEAPON"


FRAMING SV AS A WEAPON OF WAR (3)
„Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict“
x SV
Since UNSCR 1820:
The birth of a concept:
Sexual violence no longer as a byproduct, but as a „weapon of war“
Nature of Links:
- „widespread“
- „systematic“
- „intentional“
„WEAPON“

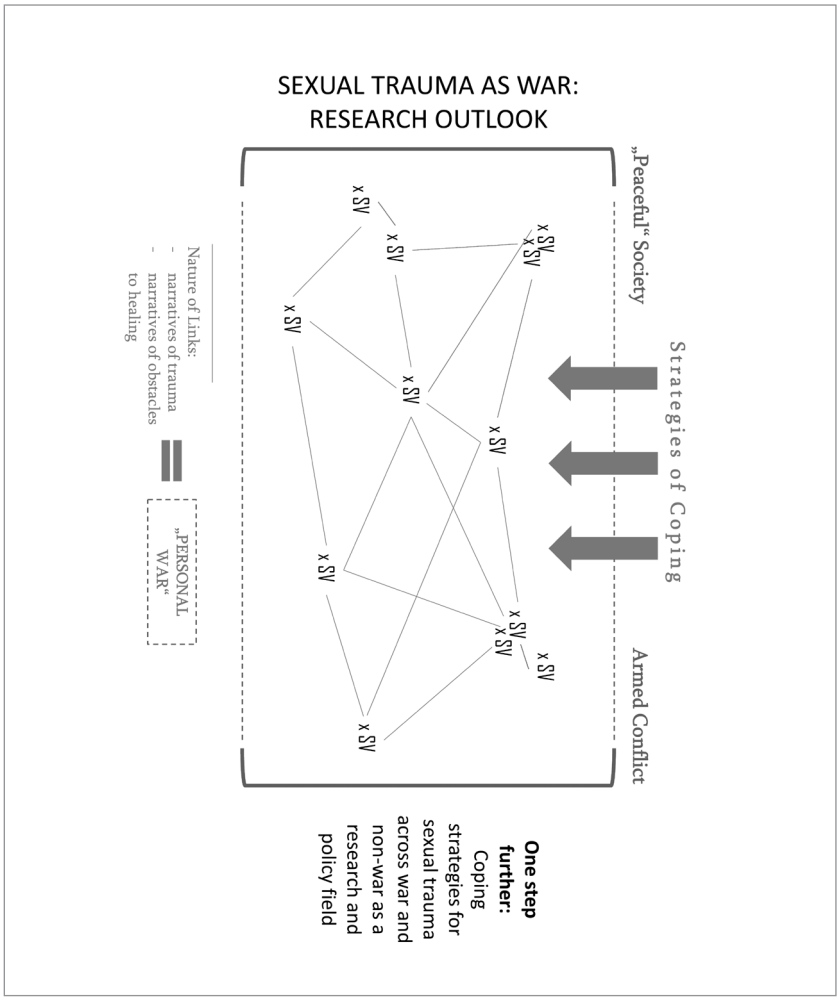
2) Framing sexual trauma as personal war (what happens in this thesis)




FRAMING SEXUAL TRAUMA AS WAR (2)
„Peaceful" Society
Armed Conflict
x SV
Nature of Links:
- narratives of trauma
- narratives of obstacles to healing
„PERSONAL WAR"
My thesis:
Linking the dots and naming the emerging pattern using a narrative / storytelling approach


FRAMING SEXUAL TRAUMA AS WAR (3)
„Sexual Trauma As Personal War“
Vision of a new concept:
Sexual trauma no longer an individual problem to endure, but a war that needs peacebuilding
Nature of Links:
- narratives of trauma
- narratives of obstacles to healing
„PERSONAL WAR“

3) Possibilities for future research



About the Author

Céline Schneidewind holds a B.A. in Anthropology and English from the University of Hamburg, which she completed with a thesis on Jacinda Ardern's strategy of solidarity after the Christchurch attacks, and an M.A. in Mediation and Conflict Management from the European University Viadrina. She is a trained mediator with a methodological focus on training and workshop formats. Her thematic focus is on feminist approaches to peacebuilding, gender-based violence and trauma, and empowerment. Her two great passions outside of academic and practical work are literature and martial arts.