Viadrina-Schriftenreihe zu Mediation und Konfliktmanagement

Céline Schneidewind

The Body is a Battlefield

A Proposal of Reframing UN Resolution 1820
for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Band 45

Viadrina-Schriftenreihe zu Mediation und Konfliktmanagement

Viadrina-Schriftenreihe zu Mediation und Konfliktmanagement

Herausgegeben von
Prof. Dr. Ulla Gläßer, LL. M.
Dipl.-Psych. Kirsten Schroeter

Céline Schneidewind

The Body is a Battlefield

A Proposal of Reframing UN Resolution 1820 for
Sustainable Peacebuilding

Wolfgang Metzner Verlag

Master-Studiengang Mediation
und Konfliktmanagement
    Masterarbeit
    Studiengang 2021/2023

EUROPA-UNIVERSITÄT
VIADRINA
FRANKFURT (ODER)

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 peace-building 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 Aoláin 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