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## **'Men, too': Wartime sexual violence against men and boys and the politics of silence**

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‘Men, too’: Wartime sexual violence against men and boys and the politics of silence

A Dissertation Presented

by

JENNA NOROSKY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Department of Political Science

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## ABSTRACT

### MEN, TOO: WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS AND THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

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While once referred to as “human rights’ last taboo,” the issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against men and boys is today widely acknowledged at the global level, despite remaining taboo in much of everyday society. I investigate what made this change possible in addition to clarifying why this “landscape of silence” permeated the global level at the first place as well as the change’s broader practical and normative implications. I argue that advocates of male survivors seized an institutional opening for the articulation of male vulnerability to CRSV catalyzed by the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1820, which marked the beginning of a ‘split’ between the issue of CRSV and the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda. Lying at the heart of this puzzling change are state and organizational preferences for re-purposing the framework of CRSV as a ‘weapon of war’ – originally pioneered by feminists – away from its associations with patriarchal violence. This allowed the issue of CRSV against men and boys to surface despite the two primary factors which kept it off the agenda in the first place: the international community’s preoccupation with the overwhelming issue of violence against women and girls, and homophobic and heteronormative assumptions around sexual violence and male survivors. While increased recognition of male

survivors is a welcome departure from the status quo, the language of ‘silence’ and ‘silencing’ which characterizes much of the recent discourse around CRSV against men and boys fuels reductive and harmful perceptions around male survivors as well as competition and antagonism within the broader CRSV issue network, particularly amongst some of those who identify as feminists. As such, this dissertation reveals the limitations of silence as both a conceptual framework and rhetorical tool in awareness-raising efforts. The project draws from 35 in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of professionals constituting the transnational advocacy network on CRSV, participant observation at several international research conferences relevant to CRSV, and analysis of hundreds of both inductively and deductively selected advocacy publications and UN records.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

While once referred to as “human rights’ last taboo,”<sup>1</sup> the issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against men and boys is today widely acknowledged at the global level, despite remaining taboo in much of everyday society. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks of norm contestation and silence, this dissertation investigates what made this change possible, in addition to clarifying why this “landscape of silence”<sup>2</sup> permeated the global level at the first place as well as the change’s broader practical and normative implications. In sum, it argues that advocates of male survivors seized an institutional opening for the articulation of male vulnerability to CRSV catalyzed by the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1820, which marked the beginning of a ‘split’ between the issue of CRSV and the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda. Lying at the heart of this puzzling change are state and organizational preferences for re-purposing the framework for understanding CRSV as a “weapon of war” – originally pioneered by feminists – away from its associations with patriarchal violence. This allowed the issue of CRSV against men and boys to surface despite the two primary factors which kept it off the agenda in the first place: a fixation on the vulnerability of women and girls, and homophobic and heteronormative assumptions around sexual violence and male survivors. While increased recognition of male survivors is a welcome departure from the status quo, the rhetoric of ‘silence’ and ‘silencing’ which characterizes

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<sup>1</sup> DelZotto and Jones 2002; McEachran 2013

<sup>2</sup> Misra 2015

much of the recent discourse around CRSV against men and boys has resulted in unfavorable outcomes: namely, it fuels harmful perceptions around male survivors as well as competition and antagonism within the broader CRSV issue network.

This introductory chapter proceeds as follows. First, it offers some evidence for the increased visibility of male CRSV survivors within the past decade. Second, it introduces the concept of norm contestation as a means of understanding this new discourse and explains why theoretically, that this contestation appears relatively successful is surprising. Third, it briefly discusses the concept of silence which despite its popularity in international relations remains underspecified and difficult to mobilize in empirical research. Fourth, it details and justifies the theoretical approach and methods used to answer the tripartite research question of this dissertation. Finally, it provides an overview of how the dissertation's overall argument will unfold in the remaining chapters.

## **1.2 Empirical Background**

Global attention to conflict-related sexual violence CRSV against women and girls skyrocketed following its systematic weaponization as a tool of genocide during the Balkan and Rwandan wars, resulting in the crystallization of an international norm against CRSV which would become one of the strongest norms governing the conduct of warfare.<sup>3</sup> While evidence also demonstrates the pervasiveness of the sexual victimization of men and boys in contexts such as Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Crawford 2017; Davies and True 2015; Davies and True 2017

<sup>4</sup> Johnson et al. 2010

Liberia,<sup>5</sup> Peru,<sup>6</sup> the Balkans,<sup>7</sup> Syria,<sup>8</sup> and Sri Lanka, where a recent survey even finds that displaced men surveyed were twice as likely as women to experience sexual violence,<sup>9</sup> men and boy survivors of CRSV went unaccounted for amidst this influx of concern.

For example, while CRSV was designated as a war crime and a crime against humanity in the 1998 Rome Statute, female-specific and heteronormative language used to describe CRSV victims as well as specific acts of CRSV hamstrung the ability of international courts to prosecute CRSV against men and boys for years.<sup>10</sup> Further, both Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 – two landmark global agreements related to CRSV – had little to say about men and masculinities, much less male victims of sexual violence. While at some points Resolution 1820 subtly alludes to male survivors by describing CRSV victims as “civilians, particularly women and children” – indicating that there may be others subjected to these crimes – it stops short of stating explicitly that some of these civilians are male, yet again leaving an opportunity to address the issue, but little more, as the document often uses the more gender-exclusive language of ‘women’ or ‘women and girls’ interchangeably with this more gender-inclusive language.<sup>11</sup> As Scully explains, “Resolution 1820 affirms women and girls as vulnerable

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson et al. 2008

<sup>6</sup> Leiby 2009

<sup>7</sup> S/1994/674

<sup>8</sup> A/HRC/21/50

<sup>9</sup> Traunmüller et al. 2019

<sup>10</sup> Lewis 2009; Manivannan 2014; Oosterveld 2014; Zawati 2007

<sup>11</sup> Sivakumaran 2010, 266-267

subjects needing protection; while through omission, it suggests that men and boys do not require protection from male sexual violence.”<sup>12</sup> Dolan goes as far as suggesting that omission of the issue suggests that “many years of important feminist activism were effectively co-opted” to promote a simultaneously binary and patriarchal logic by which only women can be understood as victims.<sup>13</sup>

The absence of male survivors from these high-level tools for addressing CRSV isn't so surprising, given that by the time Resolution 1820 passed in 2008, no major or even peripheral NGOs took up the issue in their advocacy work. The literature on international norms suggests that transnational advocacy networks (TANs) are central to the inception and diffusion of norms, particularly those relating to human rights and other areas that seem puzzling for states to fixate on from a rational actor perspective.<sup>14</sup> While TANs can be made up of all kinds of actors, from government officials to institutional insiders, NGOs are recognized as constituting the bulk of these networks.<sup>15</sup> In an early and oft-cited study, Del Zotto and Jones found that of the roughly 4,000 NGOs which addressed CRSV at the time, only 3% “mention the experiences of males at all in their programs and informational literature,” and none of those which provided services extended those services to men.<sup>16</sup> Although major human rights NGOs uncovered evidence of CRSV against men and boys in the 1990's, this reporting was sporadic and consistently eluded the sexual and gendered elements of the violence, instead opting to

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<sup>12</sup> Scully 2009, 118

<sup>13</sup> Dolan 2014a, 81

<sup>14</sup> Keck and Sikkink 1998 and 1999

<sup>15</sup> Keck and Sikkini 1999, 92

<sup>16</sup> Del Zotto and Jones 2002

characterize it as torture.<sup>17</sup> Advocacy documents sometimes prefaced their reports by saying that men and boys *can* be victims of CRSV but nonetheless resorted to using feminine pronouns on the grounds that either women and girls constitute the vast majority of victims, or that not enough information about male victims is known to warrant discussion.<sup>18</sup>

But despite the international community’s failure to recognize male survivors in the 1990’s and 2000’s, there is a consensus within the more recent literature on CRSV against men and boys that while much work is left to be done, the issue is *far* more visible at the global level today than previously<sup>19</sup> – so visible, in fact, that a group of experts published an article dispelling common myths around male CRSV, such as the ideas that “it’s worse for men” or that male rape only takes place in detention centers.<sup>20</sup> In recent years the subject received substantial attention from NGOs as well as international organizations.<sup>21</sup> For example, in 2018, the Women’s Refugee Commission even launched an initiative dedicated to researching CRSV against men and boys (as well as gender and sexual minorities) in humanitarian settings and formed a Task Team on the issue which includes critical UN arms such the UNHCR and UN Population Fund as well as other major humanitarian NGOs.

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<sup>17</sup> Charman 2018 and 2020

<sup>18</sup> Lewis 2014, 212; Charman 2018 and 2020

<sup>19</sup> Drumond 2019; Gorris 2015; Touquet and Gorris 2016

<sup>20</sup> Touquet et al. 2020

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch 2020; International Committee of the Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross 2022; UN Refugee Agency 2012; Women’s Refugee Commission 2018, 2019, and 2023

But NGOs aren't the only ones changing their tune; there is also a major shift observable at the state and intergovernmental levels. The 2013 thematic debate on CRSV at the UN Security Council resulted in the passage of Resolution 2106, the first of the CRSV-related resolutions to specifically mention men and boys as potential victims of CRSV, albeit briefly. The two 2013 debates on male CRSV saw 16 and then 10 different speakers mentioning the issue (*Table 1.1*). This is a stark departure from the status quo as analyzed by Sivakumaran, who noted that only two state delegates raised the issue by 2010.<sup>22</sup>

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Total Number of State Delegate Statements</b>	<b>State Delegate Statements Inclusive of Male Survivors</b>	<b>Additional (Non-state) Statements Inclusive of Male Survivors</b>
2008 June 18	75	2	0
2009 Aug 7	44	1	0
2010 Dec 16	73	2	2
2011 April 14	15	0	0
2012 Feb 23	46	5	2
2013 April 17	56	16	4
2013 June 24	74	10	5
2014 April 25	56	14	3
2015 April 15	74	15	2
2016 June 2	48	9	2
2017 May 15	69	23	3
2018 April 16	61	22	3
2019 April 23	79	23	5
2021 April 14	59	12	3
2022 April 13	69	18	2

*Table 1.1. Breakdown of all invocations of CRSV against men and boys at thematic Security Council debates on CRSV.*

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<sup>22</sup> Sivakumaran 2010, 262

Male survivors were also surprisingly prominent at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict – the world’s largest international gathering focused specifically on the issue of wartime sexual violence – hosted by the UK Foreign Secretary in London, 2014 as part of their Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI). Several male survivors were invited to speak on stage at the Summit, and in his keynote speech, UK Foreign Secretary Hague even remarked, “We want to draw attention to the hidden survivors of sexual violence, all those who have felt unable to speak out and who have suffered in silence, including men and boys.”<sup>23</sup> For its part, the US also included male survivors in its own initiative to address CRSV called the Missing Peace Initiative (MPI), which collates cutting-edge research on CRSV to inform state policy. The Special Report resulting from the first MPI meeting in 2013 addressed the conflation of victimhood with womanhood as a key misconception, and that same year, the US Institute for Peace (where MPI is housed) cohosted “Men, Peace and Security Symposium: Agents of Change” to highlight men’s multiple roles in conflict, including as potential survivors of sexual violence.

In the following years, intergovernmental attention to CRSV against men and boys remained high relative to the pre-2013 timeframe. The 2017 and 2019 debates on CRSV saw the most invocations of male survivors by delegates to date: at both debates 23 different speakers noted the issue in their speeches (*Table 1.1*), representing one-third and just over 30 percent of all delegate statements, respectively (*Figure 1.1*). Even more impressive is the depth with which CRSV against men and boys was addressed in the language of the German-sponsored Resolution 2467, negotiated during the 2019 debate.

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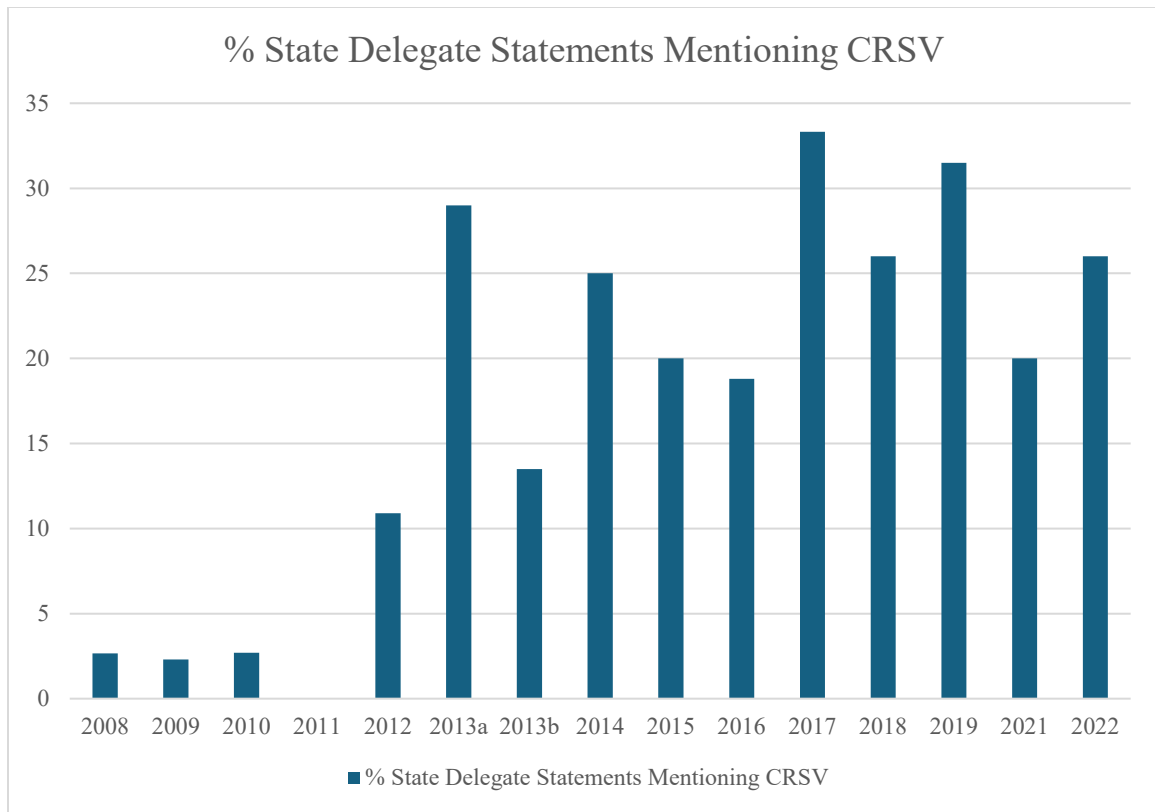
<sup>23</sup> Hague 2014

Resolution 2106 simply states that “sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as groups that are particularly vulnerable or may be specifically targeted, while also affecting men and boys and those secondarily traumatized as forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members.”<sup>24</sup> However, Resolution 2467 contains a full paragraph on the issue, noting that “men and boys are also targets of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in the context of detention settings and those associated with armed groups” and calls on the international community to “protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> S/RES/2106 (2013), 1-2

<sup>25</sup> S/RES/2467 (2019), 9-10



*Figure 1.1. Frequency of male CRSV in state delegate statements at thematic Security Council debates on CRSV over time.*

### **1.3 Statement of Theoretical Puzzle**

At first glance, it would be reasonable to assume that this increased acknowledgment is a straightforward result of the gradual accumulation of evidence for CRSV against men and boys over time. After all, why would anyone direct time and resources towards a problem which they have no reason to believe exists? As mentioned earlier, some evidence for CRSV against men and boys was available even in the 1990's but given that this evidence was never foregrounded, it's not surprising that these footnotes didn't shift the discourse. However, one particular event casts doubt on what effectively functions as this dissertation's 'null hypothesis': Abu Ghraib.

The Abu Ghraib ‘scandal’ unfolded in 2004 following an information leak which included undeniable photographic evidence of US soldiers sexually torturing Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib detention center just outside of Baghdad, Iraq. In this instance, evidence of CRSV against men was not merely available: it was hyper-visible and made even more salacious by the fact that some of the perpetrators implicated in the abuse were women. One particularly arresting photo shows ex-American soldier Lynndie England looking down upon a nude detainee who she holds on a dog leash (*Figure 1.2*). These images circulated in Western media outlets but also became the subject of major uproar throughout the Middle East. All this is to say that ignorance alone cannot explain the initial lack of global acknowledgment of CRSV against men and boys, much less what made it possible for this gap to give way to visibility.



*Figure 1.2. Former US soldier Lynndie England holds an Abu Ghraib detainee on a dog leash. While the full image is widely available, in a small effort to maintain dignity of the victim and work against the intent to humiliate which drove these crimes, I have chosen to crop them out of the photo.*

Conceptually, I understand this recent discourse as a form of norm contestation – and, given the prevalence of this discourse, relatively successful norm contestation at that. More recent literature on international norms underscores their dynamism; rather

than being static and unchanging, this literature suggests that norms can change over time as actors intervene in their meaning.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that far from being the exception to the rule, contestation is in fact a constitutive aspect of all norms, pushing norms research to conceptualize norms “beyond shared understandings, for example, the role of norms as symbols around which identities are shaped.”<sup>27</sup>

Close attention to the ways in which actors increasingly discuss CRSV against men and boys at the global level, as well as the historical background against which these discourses emerged, indicate that the ‘men, too’ discourse can be more fruitfully conceptualized as a form of norm contestation rather than free-standing norm in and of itself. This is to say that while this discourse undoubtedly contains all of the components of a norm – most importantly, a clear, prescriptive action with an underlying sense of moral “oughtness”<sup>28</sup> – it is only intelligible when contextualized within the international community’s fixation on sexual violence against women and girls, ongoing since feminists first won legal recognition for sexual violence in the Rome Statute in 1998. As will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2, amongst these recent invocations of male survivors many contain an implicit and sometimes even explicit critiques of the international community’s longstanding fixation on female survivors.

Relatedly, in a theoretical sense, this recent move towards the inclusion of male survivors at the global level is surprising for the same reasons that it’s *not* surprising that attention to male survivors was absent from global discourses on CRSV in the first place.

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<sup>26</sup> Deitelhoff and Zimmerman 2020; Wiener 2018

<sup>27</sup> Niemann and Schilliner 2017, 48

<sup>28</sup> Jurkovich 2020, 3

The literature on norms indicates that for norms to gain traction amongst actors, they need to resonate with both the existing normative structures those actors are already committed to,<sup>29</sup> as well as actors' broader sociocultural contexts.<sup>30</sup>

First, in terms of existing normative structures, one might assume that emerging in the shadow of a norm against the use of CRSV against women and girls – and in fact a very strong one – would make it relatively simple for the issue of CRSV against men and boys to get integrated into the conversation. However, research suggests that the conceptual adjacency around a nascent issue and an issue which already has a strong norm constructed around it can instead have a dampening effect on this nascent issue, which can happen when the nascent issue threatens the conceptual underpinnings of the more established issue.<sup>31</sup>

A similar dynamic is evident in the relationship between the issues of CRSV against women and girls, and against men and boys. Awareness around the sexual victimization of women and girls during the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides and the subsequent translation of this energy into tools such as the Rome Statute did not take place in a vacuum; instead, these gains were the hard-won culmination of decades of feminist advocacy.<sup>32</sup> The status of women underwent a massive transformation during the 1970's and 1980's as feminists across the globe drew attention to violence against women alongside other gendered injustices such as the pay gap between men and women. In addition to pursuing activism in their own countries and forging solidarity with their

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<sup>29</sup> Florini 1996; Legro 1997

<sup>30</sup> Acharya 2001; Checkel 1999

<sup>31</sup> Carpenter 2014, 144

<sup>32</sup> Halley 2008; Spees 2003

‘sisters’ from across the globe, feminists worked at the transnational level to intervene in the institutions governing war and peace which historically turned a blind eye to so-called ‘women’s issues’ like wartime sexual violence.<sup>33</sup> It makes sense why CRSV against men and boys would not come up in this context; after all, these feminist interventions were necessitated by the fact that men’s experiences had been the implicit focus of global conflict governance prior to that point.

While feminists sought to foreground women’s underacknowledged and gender-specific vulnerabilities during conflict, they also highlighted women’s untapped potentials in the governance of war and peace and demanded their inclusion in these processes. Quickly, concerns mounted amongst feminists that states’ fixation on women’s victimhood could come at the expense of addressing women in conflict more holistically and actively seeking to empower women rather than merely protect them. Very shortly after the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda was codified with the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, the narrative of ‘saving women’ became a crucial component of the ideological underpinnings of the US-waged ‘war on terror’ first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq.<sup>34</sup> In this way the ‘war on terror’ served as a proving ground for the WPS agenda and simultaneously gave credence to antiwar feminists’ fears that the agenda could become coopted. The point here is that states including but not at all limited to the US were heavily invested in framing women and girls as perpetually vulnerable and in need of ‘saving’ – given this, that states would later go on to contest the

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<sup>33</sup> Copelon 1996; Gardam and Charlesworth 2000

<sup>34</sup> Abu-Lughod 2002; Bhattacharyya 2008

scope of the norm against CRSV in such a way that undermines this framing is inherently puzzling.

Second, in terms of the broader sociocultural context, the literature suggests emphatically that sexual violence against men and boys, whether in war or in peace, is highly stigmatized across many different contemporary societies. Indeed, this idea is referenced in the text from Security Council Resolution 2467 quoted earlier when it urges states to “challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence.”<sup>35</sup> CRSV against men and boys is rendered incomprehensible because it challenges the assumption that men can only be perpetrators of sexual violence or protectors of women from sexual violence, and further raises questions about the sexuality of both the perpetrator and the victim.<sup>36</sup> In fact, in legal contexts where homosexuality is outlawed, male survivors may sometimes even be criminalized.<sup>37</sup>

To summarize, that this form of norm contestation is apparently at least somewhat successful – as evidenced by the fact that it appears not only in advocacy discourses but has even made it into Security Council Resolutions – is surprising for two reasons. First, this contestation sits uncomfortably within the discursive framework that originally compelled state actors to take the issue onboard – the emphasis on women’s vulnerability. Second, the cross-culturally pervasive homophobic and heteronormative narratives surrounding sexual violence against men should, according to the literature, make it unlikely that states would even acknowledge the issue. This dissertation seeks to

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<sup>35</sup> S/RES/2467 (2019), 9-10

<sup>36</sup> Javaid 2018; Sivakumaran 2005; Schulz 2018

<sup>37</sup> Onyango and Hampanda 2011, 241-242

understand what made it possible for the observable ‘men, too’ discourse – which I understand as a form of norm contestation – to resonate so widely despite these two dampening factors. In so doing, I contribute to the growing body of literature on norm contestation by closely following a norm over time as it underwent contestation to explore both what made successful contestation possible, and what remains left in the aftermath of this change.

#### **1.4 Unpacking the Black Box of Silence in International Relations**

The literature on CRSV against men and boys describes the topic as “unrecognized,”<sup>38</sup> “invisible,”<sup>39</sup> in “the shadows,”<sup>40</sup> “hidden,”<sup>41</sup> “unmentionable,”<sup>42</sup> “lost in translation,”<sup>43</sup> “an open secret,”<sup>44</sup> and of course, “human rights’ last taboo.”<sup>45</sup> But amongst these metaphors, by far the most common is “silence.”<sup>46</sup> I use the term metaphor very intentionally, as this is what the word silence often functions as – rather than a literal absence of sound, it indicates a haunting trace of something which could or even should be present in discourse, but is not.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis 2009

<sup>39</sup> Gorris 2015

<sup>40</sup> Touquet and Gorris 2016

<sup>41</sup> Apperley 2015; Vojdik 2014

<sup>42</sup> Mouthaan 2013

<sup>43</sup> Sivakumaran 2010

<sup>44</sup> Oosterhoff et al. 2004

<sup>45</sup> Del Zotto and Jones 2002

<sup>46</sup> Edström et al. 2016; Edström and Dolan 2019; Eriksson Baaz 2018, 239; Féron 2015; Glowacka 2021; Misra 2015; Schulz 2018; Solangon and Patel 2012, 419; Stemple 2009, 362; Traunmüller et al. 2019

<sup>47</sup> Jaworski 1993; Schröter 2013

Indeed, silence comes up frequently in the international relations literature. One way silence is employed is to identify and critique IR's disciplinary inattention to gender and race, and how these silences work to normalize gendered and racialized hierarchies and conceal their function in IR.<sup>48</sup> Yet despite the widespread use of this metaphor, what kind of social phenomenon silence stands in as a metaphor *for* is rarely specified, save for a few recent endeavors.<sup>49</sup> This is problematic because even from the brief examples just provided, it's clear that the concept of silence is used to describe many different and sometimes even oppositional meanings and modalities – silence can be both oppression and resistance, it can be a state of being but also an object that *does* something.<sup>50</sup> Ambiguity around what silence is and what it does makes it impossible to understand how these different meanings and modalities might relate to each other empirically. Furthermore, this ambiguity is sustained by negative connotations which typically associate with silence with oppression and disempowerment.<sup>51</sup> While this isn't to say that silence cannot have such normatively undesirable causes or effects – often, it does – blurring discussions of what silence *is* with what silence *can do* hinders any useful mobilization of the concept towards robust empirical inquiry.

I argue that silence is a tantalizing concept but one that if left underspecified runs the risk of having its utility in the social sciences undermined by its attractiveness as a rhetorical tool. Given the prevalence of the language of silence and its commensurate metaphors in the discourse I seek to explain and understand the significance of, this

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<sup>48</sup> Enloe 1996; Hansen 2000; Vitalis 2000

<sup>49</sup> See, i.e., Dingli 2015; Guillaume 2018

<sup>50</sup> See, i.e., Guillaume 2018; Parpart and Parashar 2019

<sup>51</sup> Dingli 2015

dissertation additionally serves as an opportunity to contribute to building stronger conceptual clarity on silence in IR. I do this not by way of a totalizing theory of silence, but instead by offering a one possible understanding of silence that I call silence as a *collaborative structure*. As a collaborative structure, silence is something which rather than simply being identified and critiqued requires mapping across various levels of agency and intentionality to understand what accounts for it. I demonstrate the utility of this particular conceptualization of silence by applying it to the longstanding gap in addressing CRSV against men and boys at the global level. Furthermore, because the language of silence – as well as that of (un)silencing – is not only externally imposed by myself as the researcher but additionally mirrors how the issue of CRSV against men and boys is often talked about, I am able to empirically demonstrate some of the potential implications of using silence as a rhetorical tool. In this way I connect the methodological tensions in studying silence to the normative goals often underlying these scholarly endeavors.<sup>52</sup>

## **1.5 Research Design**

### **1.5.1 Theoretical Approach**

The following research design is rooted within the constructivist tradition of IR, which emphasizes the role of ideas, discourses, and identities – what Wendt refers to as “constitutive factors” – in shaping actor behavior, as opposed to causal factors.<sup>53</sup> However, concurring with Wendt, Norman makes the case that researchers interested in constitutive factors need not throw out causality entirely, but instead must carefully

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<sup>52</sup> Hansen 2019

<sup>53</sup> Wendt 1998

distinguish between the role of causal and constitutive explanations in the stories they tell.<sup>54</sup> Constitutive factors do not *cause* certain outcomes but instead shape the “causal capacities” of actors inhabiting them.<sup>55</sup> This means that constitutive explanations are necessarily embedded in causal ones; while actors be may constituted towards a disposition, this disposition will only become “actualized in behavior” if certain causal factors are also present.<sup>56</sup> A constructivist approach assumes that each element of my tripartite research question cannot be isolated from the others in the form of a separate variable to establish a causal chain. Rather, each process is shaped by the processes which preceded it (logically, not necessarily temporally<sup>57</sup>). I assume that the form and function of the ‘men, too’ norm is conditioned by the silence which preceded it, as are the implications of the norm, and seek to identify the changing ideas and their confluence with causal factors which made new “social kinds” possible.<sup>58</sup>

This dissertation utilizes the method of process tracing. Description is a critical element of process tracing,<sup>59</sup> and while more causally focused means of process tracing excel at eliminating alternative hypotheses and isolating variables, they struggle to provide a detailed account of *how* a process occurs, as well as the “input” and “output” at

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<sup>54</sup> Norman 2021

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>56</sup> Wendt 1998, 111

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 106

<sup>58</sup> Wendt 1998, 107

<sup>59</sup> Collier 2011, 823

either end of this process.<sup>60</sup> By utilizing “thick description,”<sup>61</sup> constructivist approaches to process tracing enable a detailed understanding of how different processes interact with one another. The tradeoff is that larger-N approaches are better suited for “weighting the relative importance of different factors.”<sup>62</sup> Researchers always sacrifice a degree of correlation (and thus, replicability) for robust description, and vice versa, contributing towards different kinds of knowledge production.<sup>63</sup> As such, I do not focus on CRSV against men and boys under the assumption that one could expect other neglected issues to precisely follow its trajectory; rather, the issue’s utility derives from its absence and then subsequent visibility, allowing me to make substantial within-case comparisons<sup>64</sup> towards a highly particular yet empirically robust account of the issue’s trajectory. The findings of this dissertation can thus be read as complementary to larger-N approaches to understanding why, how, and to what effect attention is allocated to human rights issues, rather than in conflict with them.

One challenge inherent to my research question is that there is not a discrete moment where CRSV against men and boys became unsilenced – in fact, I imposed the concepts of silence and (un)silencing at the outset of this project. My pursuit of answers to questions about why specific events occurred, such as the publication of one of the first papers by a UN agency on CRSV against men and boys, are layered beneath a conceptual framing of these events through the silencing/unsilencing paradigm. This framing has two

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<sup>60</sup> Vennesson 2008, 236

<sup>61</sup> Geertz 1973

<sup>62</sup> Vennesson 2008, 236

<sup>63</sup> Wendt 1998, 106

<sup>64</sup> Norman 2021, 18

motivations requiring clarification. First, my immersion in the literature on CRSV against men and boys and preliminary research for this dissertation made evident that this framing is prevalent throughout academic discourse as well as that occurring at the advocacy and policy levels. Second, my own positionality is important for understanding the inception of my research question. By virtue of my academic research and professional affiliations, I position myself as a member of the CRSV issue network that I am studying and writing about. I have been thinking about CRSV against men and boys since my undergraduate career, where I wrote my thesis on the issue in the former Yugoslavia, and maintain a normative desire to redress a gap that I see in addressing the needs of CRSV survivors, including men and boys, and to challenge narratives around CRSV that I find unhelpful or even damaging towards these ends. I choose to foreground this positionality and reflexively factor it into my analysis rather than eschew it. Regarding the rhetoric around silence, which I have contributed to myself, I take a critical stance towards this language and investigate its origins and implications, rather than treating it as a natural or inevitable way of understanding the issue.

### **1.5.2 Data Collection**

Given this methodological orientation, the aim of my data collection is twofold. First, I wanted to capture the nexus of CRSV advocacy and policy to understand in a causal sense how the issue was drawn out of obscurity, with its eventual appearance at the UN Security Council as a focal point. Second, I also wanted to understand how the individuals involved in this process made sense of this change themselves to get at the constitutive factors enabled by these causal processes.

As a necessary prior, I approximated the CRSV transnational advocacy network (TAN), which would later serve as a reference point for deductive and inductive forms of data collection. CRSV is a narrow issue located at the intersection of more expansive networks organized around broader thematic categories such as humanitarianism. My goal, then, was to compile a list of well-known and influential organizations from across these broader networks with specific involvement in the issue of CRSV and who, in turn, maintain ties with one another by virtue of attending the same events, establishing membership in the same professional communities, and collaborating on projects, all related to CRSV. To do so, I began by identifying two advocacy coalitions that, based on their mission statements, could be reasonably assumed to include organizations that are important to the CRSV issue network: the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGO WG-WPS), and the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV-AoR). The NGO WG-WPS coalition is the only NGO routinely invited to speak at Security Council meetings on CRSV.<sup>65</sup> In addition to closely monitoring the implementation of the WPS agenda, NGO WG-WPS “[draws] on the expertise and research of our membership and their in-country civil society networks” to “provide Member States and UN leadership with tailored recommendations on how to integrate the WPS agenda across each country and thematic issue being considered by the Security Council...”<sup>66</sup> The GBV AoR coalition, on the other hand, is made up of humanitarian NGOs as well as UN agencies and focuses on the integration of GBV services into

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<sup>65</sup> Unlike the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council does not grant observer status to any NGOs. Therefore, the NGO WG-WPS has the most direct access to the Security Council compared to other advocacy coalitions.

<sup>66</sup> NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security n.d.

humanitarian protection. Notably, there is significant overlap between the NGO WG-WPS and GBV-AoR in that some organizations are or have been members of both. I compiled a list of all organizations which were ever listed as members of one or both coalitions, and then identified which organizations were likely to be most central to the CRSV issue network based on their mission statements.<sup>67</sup> I eventually ended up with 10 organizations (*Table 1.2*).

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<sup>67</sup> As will be discussed, one of the main purposes of this list was to inform my collection of a sample of CRSV advocacy documents. For this reason, I excluded UN agencies from inclusion in the list. While staffers of UN agencies can – and do, in the case of CRSV – conduct forms of “insider advocacy,” (see, i.e., Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2019) their work is still bound by UN mandates and therefore is limited in terms of what they can and cannot say. However, I did end up speaking in my interviews with people working in the UN, or who had worked for the UN in the past; a lot of individuals with CRSV expertise move between the UN and NGO worlds.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Current or previous NGO WG-WPS membership</b>	<b>Current or previous GBV AoR membership</b>
Amnesty International	Human rights	x	
CARE	Humanitarian	x	x
Global Justice Center	Human rights	x	
Global Network for Women Peacekeepers	Peacebuilding	x	
Human Rights Watch	Human rights	x	
International Rescue Committee	Humanitarian	x	x
Oxfam International	Humanitarian	x	x
Refugees International	Humanitarian	x	x
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom	Peacebuilding	x	
Women's Refugee Commission	Humanitarian	x	x

*Table 1.2. Final list of advocacy organizations I used to approximate the CRSV TAN.*

Once this list was finalized, I embarked on three parallel streams of data collection resulting in the following groups of data: an events dataset, a sample of advocacy documents, and a combination of insider interviews and participation observation. First, the aim of the events dataset is to capture the nexus of CRSV advocacy conducted by TANs and policy produced by states. Doing so allows me to understand how developments at the TAN level shape that at the state level, and vice versa, and to establish a chronological account of how causal and constitutive factors at each level interact. I assigned a numerical code to each discrete event and kept a master list of all codes, organized by year, with a short description of the event corresponding to each code. I uploaded associated documentation of each event, such as conference summaries and media coverage, into the qualitative data software, MAXQDA. I obtained the first chunk of events data deductively by using the United Nations' digital archives to identify all Security Council debates thematically focused on CRSV, ongoing annually

since 2008.<sup>68</sup> I cross-referenced what I was able to find on UN websites with the Security Council Report,<sup>69</sup> an independent monitor providing a digest of all Security Council activities, to make sure that I wasn't missing any meetings and that I was storing all available documentation available from each event, from Concept Notes and debate transcripts to Secretary General reports on CRSV and Resolutions. The second chunk of events data is comprised of extra-UN events focused on CRSV, such as ministerial meetings, practitioner symposiums, and academic articles. I collected this data inductively by referencing the literature as well as my interview data (discussed below), allowing insiders themselves to identify the moments that they thought were pertinent to understanding CRSV against men and boys and in general.

Second, I compiled a sample of advocacy documents which substantively engage the issue of CRSV. While the regular Security Council meetings on CRSV provided a baseline for tracing shifts in state discourse over time, the events dataset captured advocacy discourse somewhat sporadically in terms of temporality, thus necessitating this additional sample that captured adequate variation in terms of date as well as the advocacy organizations in Table 1.2. While this sample is by no means intended to include *all* advocacy work on CRSV, my approximation of the CRSV issue network already described and the data collection strategy which follows make it a representative sample from which broader conclusions about trends in CRSV advocacy can be drawn.

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<sup>68</sup> In 2008 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1820, the first resolution entirely focused on CRSV. As part of this resolution the Security Council agreed to meet annually to discuss progress on the resolution's various goals. In several years, however, multiple thematic debates on CRSV occurred.

<sup>69</sup> Security Council Report n.d.

Utilizing the web archives of the organizations themselves proved to be an inadequate method for longitudinal data collection because many of these organizations tend to catalogue only their most recent publications. For this reason, I instead collected advocacy documents through ReliefWeb, a service provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that archives “the content that is most relevant to global humanitarian workers and decision-makers.”<sup>70</sup> It includes internal reports, thematic and country-level reports, press releases, open letters, and more. ReliefWeb’s search engine enables users to apply Boolean search strings to any one of the 2,000+ organizations in their database.<sup>71</sup> I used the search string (‘sexual violence’ OR ‘rape’ AND ‘conflict’ OR ‘war’) and restricted publication year to 2000 – 2022, and publishing organization.

This search yielded about 1,800 results. I employed an undergraduate research team to harvest and then code the Reliefweb search results for their level of content related to CRSV (‘thematic,’ ‘extensive,’ ‘partial,’ and ‘minimal’), as well as other key identifiers such as date published and publishing organization. To prepare the research assistants, we reviewed journal articles establishing the conceptual underpinnings of CRSV used throughout this dissertation and conducted a round of test coding. Once the coding was completed and I reviewed it myself for consistency and errors, I was able to get a good idea of the amount of engagement with CRSV within the collection and to eliminate organizations which ended up not having a lot of advocacy work which

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<sup>70</sup> Reliefweb n.d.

<sup>71</sup> ReliefWeb catalogues 8 of the 10 advocacy organizations in my final sample; I scraped the websites of the remaining 2 for documents myself, which fortunately each have many of their older documents still publicly available. To accomplish this, I applied the same Boolean search string used for Reliefweb to Google, restricting by the organization’s website domain.

substantively dealt with CRSV. I then removed documents from the dataset which had a ‘minimal’ level of engagement with CRSV (for example, reports that detailed atrocities and mentioned in a one-off sentence that sexual violence occurred) and added in the documents from the 2 organizations not catalogued by Reliefweb, leaving me with 582 documents across 10 organizations.<sup>72</sup>

I then used MAXQDA to identify all documents in the dataset which address CRSV against men and boys in some way. To do this, I used the Text Code and Auto Search function. I ran two searches: one for the phrase ‘sexual violence’ and vernacular variants (‘rape,’ ‘sexually violated,’ etc., as well as more male-specific types of violence, such as ‘castration’), and another for the phrase ‘male’ and vernacular variants (‘men,’ ‘boy,’ etc.). I then ran a Complex Coding Query to code all sentences in which the two previously described codes overlapped. I then read each document which included the new overlap code, and then manually applied a new code for all text discussing sexual violence against men and/or boys.<sup>73</sup> This left me with a final count of 137 advocacy documents.

Third and finally, semi-structured interviews with individuals located within the CRSV advocacy network provide two kinds of insider knowledge, both of which are crucial to my project: 1) processual information (the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘when,’ and ‘where’)

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<sup>72</sup> Initially, the list in Table 1.2 was slightly longer, but through coding the Reliefweb documents I found that some of the organizations I had identified as potentially central to the CRSV issue network ended up not having many publications which substantively engage with CRSV. I eliminated all documents published by these organizations, resulting in this refined list of 137 advocacy documents as well as the list of 10 advocacy organizations.

<sup>73</sup> This included some sentences not identified by the Complex Coding Query, but in almost every instance, these sentences were adjacent to sentences in which the code had registered, indicating to me that the language variation I built into the initial Text Code and Auto Search function had done a sufficient job of identifying discussions of CRSV against men and boys.

and important background context for what transpired, and 2) insight into how these events were interpreted by those involved. To recruit interview participants, I first identified ‘seed’ contacts for each of the organizations in Table 1.2 through publicly available contact information on their websites as well as through my own professional networks. I sought out the individuals from these organizations with demonstrated specialization in CRSV, and where that was not immediately evident, individuals who could provide referrals to those with such expertise. In addition to those who constitute the mainstream of this issue network, I also wanted to speak with “norm entrepreneurs”<sup>74</sup> on the issue of CRSV against men and boys to hear from them in their own words about their advocacy strategies. I identified my initial ‘seed’ contacts for this slice of the CRSV issue network through my extensive preexisting knowledge on CRSV against men and boys. While initially I was implicitly treating these two groups as a binary, I quickly found that in practice, many actors inhabited both positions simultaneously by promoting the issue of CRSV against men and boys within the recognizable and powerful NGOs that employed them. Once I managed to establish connections with some of my seed contacts, I used the method of “snowball sampling” to recruit further participants.<sup>75</sup> This inductive practice grounded my recruitment process in the subjective perceptions of interview participants as a check to the deductive (externally imposed) reasoning informing my collection of seed participants.<sup>76</sup> The slice of the CRSV issue network represented by my 35 participants is deeply heterogeneous in that participants come from

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<sup>74</sup> Keck and Sikkink 1998

<sup>75</sup> Noy 2008

<sup>76</sup> This is beneficial because a deductive approach relying on job descriptions or mission statements misses many of the informal ties between individuals and organizations, and tools such as hyperlink analysis may overestimate the centrality of certain actors to their respective networks (Carpenter and Jose 2013, 10).

various sectors within the broader world of human security, reflecting the crosscutting nature of CRSV as an issue (Figures 1.3 and 1.4).



*Figure 1.3. The connections between each node of the network represented by my 35 interview participants. Each line connecting two nodes represents a relational tie between two individuals. I ascertained these ties based on whenever one participant mentioned another participant during an interview, either on their own accord or at the end of the interview when I asked for suggestions for further participants. This graph was made using the free online data visualization service Flourish.*

Group ● Development ● Humanitarianism ● International law ● Peace and security ● Human rights ● Public health



*Figure 1.4. The connectedness across the six different fields of practice represented by my 35 participants. It references the same data depicted above. This graph was made using Flourish.*

My interest in “gain[ing] an ‘insider’ perspective and develop[ing] a sense of the weight and significance that actors assign to particular events”<sup>77</sup> informed my use of semi-structured interviews, as opposed to, say, survey data. I use the phrase “semi-structured” in the sense of what Soss also refers to as “in-depth” interviews, where “...there is a give-and-take between individuals: Each responds to what the other has said. Because the researcher does not simply move on to the next item on a preset list of questions, an in-depth interview can be as unpredictable as any other conversation.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Norman 2021, 12

<sup>78</sup> Soss 2014, 135

While I referenced a list of departure questions to orient the conversation towards my empirical interests and investigate some of my hunches,<sup>79</sup> allowing participants themselves to help steer the conversation again provides a check to my own prior assumptions about what might be important to explaining the empirical change that this dissertation is focused on.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I attended three conferences bringing together practitioners, advocates, scholars, and government officials on the issue of CRSV. The *Missing Peace Symposium*, held in Washington, D.C. at the US Institute for Peace, took place November 1<sup>st</sup> through November 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2023. Following the conference, I joined the Missing Peace Scholar's Network and attended the *Missing Peace Scholar Workshop* from July 24<sup>th</sup> through July 26<sup>th</sup> of 2024. Finally, from October 21<sup>st</sup> through October 25<sup>th</sup> of 2024 I attended the *Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum* in Cape Town, South Africa. Early in the research process I identified the Missing Peace Initiative (MPI) and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) as two crucial conveners of the CRSV issue network. Importantly, these two entities represent very different types of engagement with the issue of CRSV. MPI is focused squarely on CRSV and is backed by the US and Norwegian governments; it has also, not unrelatedly, been emblematic of a security-centric approach to CRSV. On the other hand, SVRI approaches the issue of sexual violence more holistically and emphasizes both conflict and non-conflict contexts. Inhabiting these two different settings afforded me sharply contrasting perspectives and enabled me to experience for myself the dynamics involved in convening around the crosscutting issue of CRSV. This fieldwork further introduced me

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<sup>79</sup> Brinkmann 2020, 437

to relevant individuals to recruit for participation in my interviews, helped me to get a sense of ‘who’s who’ in the CRSV issue landscape, and familiarized me with the current debates and trends in the field.

### **1.5.3 Data Analysis**

As alluded to earlier, this data was analyzed using a constructivist variant of process tracing. As Norman argues,<sup>80</sup> an emphasis on contextuality and “thick description”<sup>81</sup> can be fruitfully applied to process tracing, even though the method is often associated with deductive reasoning and large-N studies. Constructivist process tracing differs from these other variants in that it places primacy “not only on what happened, but also how it happened.”<sup>82</sup> As stated earlier, this research aims not to throw out causality entirely, but “to account for how changes in intersubjective worlds play into our causal explanations of well-specified social and political outcomes.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, constructivist approaches to process tracing are well-suited to capturing causal complexity.<sup>84</sup> This is particularly suited to my research question given that the change I’m focusing on is not a singular, discrete event, but rather, a gradual discursive shift that I’ve tethered to empirical reality by working backwards from particular moments of visibility, such as the prolonged invocation of CRSV against men and boys in Security Council Resolution 2467. To accommodate causal complexity, I follow Guzzini’s understanding of change as a product of “the temporal intersection of distinctive

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<sup>80</sup> Norman 2015

<sup>81</sup> Geertz 1973

<sup>82</sup> Vennesson 2008, 233

<sup>83</sup> Norman 2021, 16

<sup>84</sup> Checkel 2008, 123

trajectories of different, but connected, long-term processes” as opposed to “the trajectory of a single process.”<sup>85</sup> Overall, in analyzing my data, rather than eliminating hypotheses to arrive at a generalizable theory of change, I instead sought to identify and describe the multiple contingencies which convened to enable the surprising discursive shift at the heart of my research question. In this regard, my primary objectives while analyzing my data with MAXQDA were to trace the presence (and absence) of CRSV against men and boys throughout CRSV’s development as a high-priority global issue, and to understand how both CRSV in general and against men and boys specifically were made knowable by the various actors that invoked them. Close descriptive analysis of these discursive underpinnings provided insight into what made those moments of CRSV against men and boys’ visibility plausible, and on the other hand, what precluded that visibility in the first place.

Additionally, I leveraged MAXQDA to apply codes to my interview data corresponding to specific causal and constitutive mechanisms provided by participants as to the reasons for CRSV against men and boys’ initial absence from the global agenda, its ascent, and the aftermath of this change. As Checkel succinctly puts it, “mechanisms connect things.”<sup>86</sup> In more positivist-leaning iterations of process tracing, potentially relevant mechanisms are hypothesized beforehand based on the literature and then represented as proxies and tested through the coding process.<sup>87</sup> Instead, I developed codes inductively through a ‘grounded theory’ approach, an inherent challenge of which

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<sup>85</sup> Guzzini 2012, 256

<sup>86</sup> Checkel 2008, 115

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 116

is that one cannot know all the relevant codes until all the data has been analyzed. However, the practice of memo writing upon initial review of the data allows the researcher to write up preliminary analyses without committing to the application of a code.<sup>88</sup> I wrote these memos during the initial transcription process, and they then formed the basis for a set of codes I applied systematically to the interview transcripts. My interest was not only in triangulating the factual accounts of my participants to generate an empirical timeline of ‘what happened’ but also to identify their differing subjective understandings about what occurred. In this respect it was particularly important to pay attention to how the varying attributes, backgrounds, and experiences of participants correlated to certain narratives.

## **1.6 Outline of Dissertation**

Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical interventions made in this dissertation as well as the conceptual framework I later use to interpret my findings. I expand on the argument made above about why the ‘men, too’ discourse – which I conceptualize as a form of norm contestation – is surprising. I conclude that given its attributes, exploring the trajectory of the narrower issue of CRSV against men and boys within the context of a broader longstanding norm against the use of CRSV in conflict provides an opportunity to refine the growing body of literature on norm contestation by providing a detailed account of what can render seemingly improbable modes of norm contestation possible. I then review current IR literature on silence and offer my intervention into this literature by advancing the concept of silence as a collaborative social structure. The chapter

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<sup>88</sup> Indeed, according to Charmaz, this is central to inductive coding: “Writing successive memos throughout the research process keeps [one] involved in the analysis and helps [one] to increase the level of abstraction of [one’s] ideas. Certain codes stand out and take form as theoretical categories as [one] write successive memos” (Charmaz 2006, 72).

concludes by connecting the literature on human rights norms to that on silence, setting the stage for the claims and explanations made in the following chapters.

Using the methods just described, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 cross-reference events data including Security Council documentation, insights from in-depth interviews with key actors in the CRSV advocacy network, and a sample of advocacy documents on CRSV. Chapter 3 sets out to clarify what led to the global silence on the issue of CRSV against men and boys and in so doing establish the utility of conceptualizing broad, longstanding silences as collaborative structures. It shows how the two dampening factors ascertainable from the literature on norms – the focus on the vulnerability of women and girls, and heteronormative and homophobic assumptions about sexual violence and male victims of sexual violence – combined to keep CRSV against men and boys off the global agenda. Along these two dimensions, this chapter maps out moments of indirect, passive silencing as well as scarcer but nonetheless consequential moments of direct, active silencing, which take place across various levels of vertically organized power. It contrasts discourses around wartime sexual violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, which were at their height in the years immediately surrounding the passage of Resolution 1820, against Abu Ghraib, showing how while the former was understood as part of a ‘war against women,’ the latter was alternatively made sense of as torture.

Chapter 4 then explains why and how the gap detailed in Chapter 3 eventually gave way to a form of norm contestation advocating for the recognition of male CRSV survivors, focusing centrally on the securitization of wartime sexual violence. It argues that this securitization – embodied in the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 – created an institutional opening that advocates for male survivors successfully

seized. These advocates took advantage of proliferating international spaces to focus on CRSV as an issue distinct from the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda to bring male survivors into the conversation. The chapter then shows how the two dampening factors outlined in Chapter 3 were overcome – in other words, why powerful stakeholders became receptive to an issue which would have previously either fell flat or been met with outward hostility, as had occurred in the past. Overall, invocations of male survivors became useful for various actors as they repurposed the ‘weapon of war’ framework for understanding CRSV originally pioneered by feminist activists. On the one hand, security-minded actors – particularly the US and UK – saw the existence of male survivors as compelling evidence for repackaging CRSV from a ‘women’s issue’ into a ‘security issue,’ in line with their heightened interest in pursuing military solutions for CRSV as opposed to addressing root causes of gender inequality. On the other hand, more overtly socially conservative states came to tolerate discussions of male survivors – and in some surprising cases, actively drew attention to them – because a narrow focus on the conflict context enabled them to dislocate CRSV against men and boys from sticky conversations about gender and sexuality.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores the broader implications of the norm contestation detailed in Chapter 4 by focusing more squarely on the ‘silence’ rhetoric through which CRSV against men and boys was made knowable. Ultimately, it argues that this rhetoric harms prospects for successfully integrating efforts to address the needs of male survivors within the preexisting efforts to address that of women and girls. First, it argues that the language of silence creates a sense of complacency in terms of the stigma surrounding the issue, both reifying the gendered harms male survivors do often experience as well as

obscuring situations where male survivors have felt comfortable enough to come forward about their experiences and seek care and justice. Second, it revisits the narrative that a feminist agenda unilaterally blocked attention to male survivors. The chapter argues that the evidence provided in Chapters 3 and 4 suggests that contrary to this, the feminist advocacy which led to recognition for CRSV against women and girls paradoxically created the possibility for male survivors to be brought to the fore later on, despite also making it easier to sideline that issue in the beginning. Crucially, the ‘silence’ narrative obscures this fact and subsequently has led to tensions within the highly heterogeneous CRSV advocacy network. I show how some feminists mobilize the concept of ‘backlash’ in their own understandings of the recent uptick in attention to male survivors and highlight how the direction of blame towards feminist activism reinforces unnecessary and harmful cleavages between efforts to assist female survivors, and to assist male survivors.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTESTING SILENCE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Overview

In this chapter, I construct and justify the theoretical framework I use to make sense of the empirical findings of this dissertation. I draw from two bodies of IR literature: norms, and the more nascent area of research on silence. While norms scholars have worked hard to more robustly articulate a concept which was fuzzy at its inception, silence, having been introduced as a formal concept very recently (despite being loosely employed for some time now), suffers from some ambiguity, in part due to its popularity as a rhetorical tool. While integrating silence into the more-established literature on norms will be helpful in sharpening clarity surrounding the concept, at the same time, the critical underpinnings of the silence literature cohere with new directions in norms research that seek to destabilize the fixity of norms.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the current state of the literature on norms, beginning by laying the terrain for what constitutes a norm. It then delves deeper into the literature by identifying the attributes that enable norms to be successful, focusing on the need for norms to fit within the existing structure of international norms an actor is already committed to and the actor's cultural context. The section concludes by introducing and unpacking the concept of norm contestation. The second section situates the 'men, too' discourse within the literature previously discussed. First, it demonstrates empirically why it is sensible to understand this discourse as a form of norm contestation. Then it explains that this contestation's success is surprising given that it appears to violate the two dimensions of norm 'fit' addressed in the first section.

The third section turns its attention to the concept of silence and begins by identifying unsatisfactory development of the concept in IR despite its popularity. It then builds on literature on silence from elsewhere in the social sciences to advance an understanding of silence as a collaborative structure. Finally, the fourth section bridges these two discussions and ultimately advances the argument that an understanding of silence as a collaborative structure accounts for the emergence of the ‘men, too’ norm as well as the current state of male CRSV on the global agenda, which despite the discursive shift documented in this dissertation, remains fraught with tension and woefully inadequate.

## **2.2 Norms and Norm Contestation**

Norms scholarship remains a rich area of international relations research, providing opportunities to push various siloes within the discipline into dialogue with one another. One such example is the relatively recent concept of norm contestation. In this section, I set up the construction of my theoretical puzzle by reviewing the existing literature on norms and norm contestation.

### **2.2.1 What Is a Norm?**

This dissertation is premised on the understanding that the changing discourse surrounding the issue of CRSV against men and boys represents a form of norm contestation. Before unpacking this concept, it is first necessary to clarify what a norm itself entails.

Norms and issues are different, though they do overlap considerably. Jurkovich argues that norms are “distinct from other aspects of the moral and social fabric of society”<sup>89</sup> specifically in that a norm is constituted by three aspects: a prescribed action,

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<sup>89</sup> Jurkovich 2020, 1

an actor or set of actors responsible for undertaking said action, and importantly, an “oughtness” which renders not performing said action as socially unacceptable.<sup>90</sup> On the other hand, an ‘issue’ has fewer moving parts – in the most basic sense, an issue the identification of an unresolved problem requiring action and discussion. To further illustrate the relationship between an issue and a norm, Jurkovich argues that the norm to end world hunger failed to take hold because advocates had not specified enough what ‘ending’ world hunger actually meant in a practical sense; it was a call to action, but an empty one. Despite widespread agreement that widespread global hunger constituted a problem (or, issue) requiring action, it remained unclear who was responsible for the problem, making a norm around it impossible to enforce.<sup>91</sup> Many norms involve issues, but not all; for example, norms can simply regulate conduct in a particular setting, such as how diplomats interact with one another.<sup>92</sup> Norms promoted by human rights advocacy groups, however, do tend to be constructed around an issue.

To slightly augment Jurkovich’s definition without changing its core meaning, it should be specified that norms can also be proscriptive, such that the targeted actor ought *not* to perform a particular action. Whether the norm is prescriptive or proscriptive, the logic remains the same. “Gender mainstreaming,” the idea that gender analysis should be foundational to tackling issue areas such as climate change, development, or security – rather than, say, creating special departments for ‘gender specialists’ where they become isolated from the ‘real’ work – is an example of a prescriptive norm.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>90</sup> Jurkovich 2020, 3

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>92</sup> See, i.e., Bátorá 2005

<sup>93</sup> See, i.e., Krook and True 2010

the “nuclear taboo” stigmatizing the deployment of nuclear weapons<sup>94</sup> is an oft-cited example of a proscriptive norm. While traditional accounts of the Cold War understood the lack of nuclear deployment through the conceptual lens of deterrence, Tannenwald argues that a strong norm against nuclear detonation (which proliferated following the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks of 1945) was key in staving off nuclear Armageddon between the US and USSR.<sup>95</sup>

However, while some practical objective lies at the heart of any norm, this objective need not be achieved for a norm to be considered effective in the very basic sense that it shapes state behavior. Notably, scholarship is mixed as to whether the anti-torture norm – another well-known proscriptive norm – has led to a decrease in torture worldwide,<sup>96</sup> especially considering the Bush administration’s undermining of the norm during the so-called war on terror.<sup>97</sup> But regardless of whether states have simply become better at hiding torture or even redefining their actions to fall outside of torture’s conceptual scope, such as through categorizing victims as “unlawful combatants,”<sup>98</sup> it’s undeniable that it has become increasingly untenable for states to openly admit to the use of torture and keep their reputation as ‘civilized’ members of international society intact. Acknowledging this makes the finding that signatories to human rights treaties are sometimes *more* likely to commit human rights violations<sup>99</sup> less puzzling than it may

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<sup>94</sup> Tannenwald 1999

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> See, i.e., Gilligan and Nesbitt 2009; Schmidt and Sikkink 2019

<sup>97</sup> See, i.e., Keating 2014; McKeown 2009

<sup>98</sup> Kinsella 2005

<sup>99</sup> Hathaway 2002

initially appear. While the realist assumption that the twin pursuits of power and security trump all other considerations might turn out to be accurate when push comes to shove, completely discounting the role of ideational forces results in gaps in understanding social dynamics beyond ‘life-or-death’ scenarios such as crisis bargaining.

The earlier works of Margaret Keck, Kathryn Sikkink, and Martha Finnemore are largely credited with catapulting norms into the spotlight of IR but also of legitimizing the notion that traditionally less-powerful actors can make a difference in world politics. While any kind of actor can function as a “norm entrepreneur,” as for norms related to the protection and promotion of human rights, the available literature demonstrates that many such norms originated within TANs.<sup>100</sup> TANs have remained a long-standing feature of constructivist IR scholarship due to their function of promoting “causes, principled ideas and norms,” which often involves “individuals advocating policy changes that cannot be easily linked to their ‘interests.’”<sup>101</sup> These networks can play a significant role in influencing the behavior of states and other powerful actors through their advocacy by reconstituting the identities of powerful actors, and consequently changing their behavior.<sup>102</sup> TANs can be constituted by many differently situated and typologized actors, from civil society, to individuals working within particular INGOs, IOs, or governments, to entire organizations or agencies.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas earlier literature represents TANs as panaceas free from hierarchy, where the problems to be addressed through advocacy appear as largely self-evident, recent

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<sup>100</sup> Avant et al 2010; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Murdie 2014; Nelson and Dorsey 2008

<sup>101</sup> Keck and Sikkink 1999, 91

<sup>102</sup> Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1999; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 2013; Sikkink 1998

<sup>103</sup> Keck and Sikkink 1999, 92

interventions dispute this assumption and interrogate the reasons why TANs pursue some norms or issues and not others. In this sense, the literature is moving towards an understanding of TANs as replete with power, such that empowered actors within a network exert agency in shaping the goals and tactics pursued by others within the network. One such empowered actor is what's known as a gatekeeper. In the context of a TAN, a gatekeeper is defined as an actor made powerful by their centrally located position within a network who then have the power to vet which issues surface in the mainstream of the network's agenda, thus functioning as the link between powerholders and those who wish to influence them.<sup>104</sup> Gatekeepers are likely not the only actors within a TAN empowered to shape issue uptake; Cheng et al. identify other brokerage roles that advocacy organizations can play, including coordinators, liaisons, and itinerants,<sup>105</sup> whereas Eilstrupp-Sangiovanni and Breen shift their focus from networks of organizations onto networks of individuals.<sup>106</sup> While the internal politics of advocacy networks are evidently complex, the point remains that the collective decisions of these networks to launch a campaign – however these decisions are arrived at – are critical in catalyzing the process by which states might, eventually, adopt a particular norm.

### **2.2.2 Attributes of Successful Norms**

A major preoccupation of the literature on norms, inevitably, concerns the questions of *which* norms are likely or unlikely to be successful in achieving their intended outcome. One broad takeaway from the literature is that successful norms

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<sup>104</sup> Bob 2011; Carpenter 2014; Lake and Wong 2007

<sup>105</sup> Cheng et al. 2021

<sup>106</sup> Eilstrupp-Sangiovanni and Breen 2024

typically resonate with preexisting ideas: according to March and Olsen, when norms shape behavior, it is because they establish a “logic of appropriateness” that forges connections between the identities and worldviews of the targeted actors, and a specified action or set of actions, such that those actors feel compelled to conform (or to at least appear to conform) to the prescribed (or proscribed) behavior.<sup>107</sup> Among these preexisting ideas, the literature distinguishes between two broad types which are particularly important: 1) the preexisting structure of relevant international norms that a state is already committed to, and 2) cultural norms at the domestic level that tend to vary more from state to state.

First, Fehl and Rosert offer a typology through which to understand different affinities between norms, or what they refer to as “norm complexes.”<sup>108</sup> “Norm families,” on the one hand, “typically share both values and problem descriptions, and comprise several different (compatible) norms that link these values [...] to a range of behavioural prescriptions.”<sup>109</sup> They contrast norm families to “norm packages,” distinguished by having been “joined together through a political negotiations process without sharing a common heritage in terms of values and problem descriptions (*italics in original*),” and provide the example of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which forged a connection between the advancement of nuclear energy and nuclear disarmament.<sup>110</sup> However, just as norms can have affinities, the opposite is also true. Fehl and Rosert helpfully distinguish between qualitative adverse relationships between norms (“norm conflicts”)

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<sup>107</sup> March and Olsen 2004

<sup>108</sup> Fehl and Rosert 2020

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 9

and quantitative adverse relationships between norms (“norm competitions”).<sup>111</sup> Whereas the former denotes an adverse relationship rooted in incommensurability of prescriptions, the latter denotes the often-overlooked reality of time and resource scarcity.

Constructivist approaches to norms and norm diffusion are premised on the basic assumption that the meanings which end up exerting normative force are socially constructed rather than intrinsic.<sup>112</sup> Because of this, norm entrepreneurs maintain a certain degree of agency in that they are not confined to simply delivering already-existing ideas to the actors most likely to respond positively to them. In the literature, the concept of “strategic framing” has been used to describe when advocates consider the broader system of ideas which their targeted stakeholders inhabit while deciding what significance and meaning to assign to a particular issue.<sup>113</sup> For prospective norms which aim to draw attention to something previously unnoticed or discounted, a crucial initial step is the articulation of a problem. Sikkink observes the following about advocacy tackling violence against women (VAW): “In one sense, international women’s networks literally created the issue of violence against women – they helped construct it as a problem. At first such a claim seems obviously false. No one created domestic abuse, or rape – it’s all too common. But what networks did was create a category – violence against women – that didn’t exist before.”<sup>114</sup> She goes on to explain that the VAW category encapsulates instances of violence from “household brutality to the practices of

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<sup>111</sup> Fehl and Rosert 2020, 14-18

<sup>112</sup> See, i.e., Koslawski and Kratochwil 1994; Onuf 1998

<sup>113</sup> Carpenter 2005; Charnysh and Lloyd 2015; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 897

<sup>114</sup> Sikkink 2002, 44

state security forces,”<sup>115</sup> uniting what may initially appear to some as irrelevant beneath the same conceptual umbrella. But this category, in itself, would have been insufficient to garner state attention. Indeed, genealogies of VAW in global politics document the importance of advocates’ decision to frame VAW as a human rights issue, because the language of human rights held a certain prestige in the hopeful post-Cold War context.<sup>116</sup>

Relationships between norms – both harmonious and conflictual – are similarly constructed. For example, returning again to the level of TANs (within which many human rights norms originate), Carpenter makes the case that among advocacy network gatekeepers, the most salient variable in issue vetting is “when they [issues] threaten preexisting frames, alliances within the wider advocacy network, relationships among issues, or conventional wisdom within a global community of practice.”<sup>117</sup> The ‘world’ in play here is the network of issues and organizations in which they are embedded. Importantly, Carpenter asserts that what matters is “*perceived relational ties* [italics in original],” whether positive or negative, rather than any intrinsic relationships.<sup>118</sup> Carpenter’s case study of the anti-infant male circumcision cause demonstrates this point: the “conceptual adjacency”<sup>119</sup> between infant male circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM) – given that both involve the bodily autonomy of children – may lead one to assume that there would be a harmony between the two issues. Instead, Carpenter finds that these similarities were actually the downfall of the infant male circumcision

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<sup>115</sup> Sikkink 2002, 44

<sup>116</sup> Tinker 1999; Sullivan 2017

<sup>117</sup> Carpenter 2014, 147

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 41

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 144

cause “since to talk of one was interpreted as displacing the other to which the human rights community was already committed.”<sup>120</sup>

Second, many scholars suggest that to diffuse, norms need to resonate within the local ideational contexts of their targeted actors.<sup>121</sup> According to Checkel, the diffusion of international norms hinges on “resonance” between the domestic and international levels, “conceptualized in terms of cultural matches: ‘null’ and, especially, ‘positive’ matches increase the probability that international norms will have constitutive effects, while a ‘negative’ match reduces it.”<sup>122</sup> For, example Acharya offers a corrective to previous research which afforded a privileged status to norms originating in the West by showing how the uptake of certain transnational norms within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was contingent on their ability to be repackaged to fit into existing norms and values underpinning many Southeast Asian societies.<sup>123</sup>

Keck and Sikkink identify a similar dynamic in their early claim that norms about issues “involving physical harm to vulnerable or innocent individuals appear particularly compelling.”<sup>124</sup> A desire to protect the vulnerable is a very broad moral argument transcending the international level that clearly resonates across vastly different cultural contexts. However, Keck and Sikkink provide the caveat that who can be perceived as vulnerable or innocent “may be highly contested.”<sup>125</sup> This is because while the moral

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<sup>120</sup> Carpenter 2014, 144

<sup>121</sup> Acharya 2001; Checkel 1999; Kelley 2008; Klotz 1995

<sup>122</sup> Checkel 1999, 91

<sup>123</sup> Acharya 2001

<sup>124</sup> Keck and Sikkink 1998, 27

<sup>125</sup> Ibid

prescription to defend vulnerable people may be widespread, in the many different contexts where this prescription holds sway it also necessarily interacts with all of the other ideas and norms which define that context and so will be circumscribed by them. For example, the anti-trafficking norm is recognized as holding broad international sway.<sup>126</sup> Despite its broad salience, however, the diversity of the actors who demonstrate commitment to this norm make it challenging to implement collectively given that some of the individuals most vulnerable to human trafficking – gender and sexual minorities<sup>127</sup> – are stigmatized and villainized by some of these actors and thus precluded from being understood as worthy of protection.

### **2.2.3 Norm Contestation**

While traditionally various takes on the norm life cycle assumed that norms are unchanging ‘things,’ Krook and True intervene to suggest a reconceptualization of norms as processes.<sup>128</sup> They argue that a static view of norms is problematic because “it limits the ability to explain how and why norms change as they diffuse, why they travel so widely across borders, and why they often fail to attain their intended goals.”<sup>129</sup> The importance of taking norms’ dynamism seriously is illustrated by the case of the anti-torture norm. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath, the question of whether the anti-torture is ‘dying’ has received significant attention. But it seems as if rather than losing its power, the norm instead changed considerably due to US contestation.

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<sup>126</sup> See, i.e., Brand 2010

<sup>127</sup> Martinez and Kelle 2013

<sup>128</sup> Krook and True 2010

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 106

Norm contestation is a form of argumentation by which actors either dispute the application of a norm while still maintaining reverence to that norm overall or dispute the norm's validity entirely.<sup>130</sup> While previous studies assumed that norm contestation would erode a norm's strength, according to Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, *applicatory* contestation specifically can in fact demonstrate norm resiliency and even increase its power.<sup>131</sup> With respect to the anti-torture norm, many will be familiar with the Bybee Memorandum's legal argument that the US program for apprehending and questioning suspected terrorists utilized "enhanced interrogation techniques," *not* torture as defined by international law. While initially some argued that this move signaled the torture norm's demise,<sup>132</sup> others have since suggested that the Bush administration's rhetoric instead constitutes a reinterpretation of what is, and isn't, torture that still demonstrates adherence to the belief that torture is a bad thing that states shouldn't use.<sup>133</sup> Demonstrating Deitelhoff and Zimmermann's theoretical argument, some even suggest that US contestation failed and that this failure attests to the norm's continued, or potentially even strengthened, influence.<sup>134</sup>

In terms of what leads to contestation, scholars have pointed to the importance of 'trigger events' in catalyzing disagreement over a norm's meaning or validity. According to Sandholtz, "Because rules cannot cover every contingency, and because conflicts among rules are commonplace, actions regularly trigger disputes. Actors argue about

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<sup>130</sup> Deitelhoff and Zimmermann 2020

<sup>131</sup> Ibid

<sup>132</sup> See, i.e., McKeown 2009

<sup>133</sup> Barnes 2016; Hurd 2017, 103-128

<sup>134</sup> Barnes 2016; Birdsall 2016; Keating 2014

which norms apply and what the norms require or permit. The outcome of such arguments is always to modify the norms under dispute, making them stronger or weaker, more specific (or less), broader or narrower.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, a trigger event might be thought of as the emergence of a disruption in dominant modes of thought that temporarily throw those mindsets into question until a new position is settled on.

While the example of US contestation of the torture norm positions norm contestation as regressive, scholars also identify instances where contestation can function as somewhat of a “weapon of the weak.”<sup>136</sup> For example, Global South actors contested the application of the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm following the trigger event of the 2011 NATO intervention into Libya.<sup>137</sup> This contestation resulted in the Responsibility While Protecting initiative spearheaded by Brazil at the Security Council. More broadly, Wiener’s theory of norm contestation concludes that accessible contestation augments the legitimacy of global norms, because they become genuinely co-created rather than imposed.<sup>138</sup>

Noticing that attempts to theorize norm contestation often inadvertently reify the assumption that norms are static – that behind contestation lies some truer, more authentic norm – Niemann and Schillinger propose “[a]ssuming that contestation is a constituting part of norms” in general.<sup>139</sup> However, they also suggest that such a move requires revisiting the “conceptual core” of norm scholarship, specifically, that norms

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<sup>135</sup> Sandholtz 2007, 10

<sup>136</sup> Scott 1985

<sup>137</sup> Hoffman and Suthanthiraraj 2019

<sup>138</sup> Wiener 2014; see also, Paikin 2022

<sup>139</sup> Niemann and Schillinger 2016, 48

constitute “shared understandings.”<sup>140</sup> Concurring with this, De Almagro suggests that in contrast to a constructivist approach, a discursive approach might be better suited to account for the heterogeneity of norm diffusion.<sup>141</sup> Drawing in part from Methmann’s poststructural conceptualization of climate change discourse as an “empty signifier,”<sup>142</sup> Niemann and Schillinger offer an understanding of norms as “symbols around which identities are shaped.”<sup>143</sup>

Conceptualizing norms as symbols appears useful particularly because it coheres with a longstanding tension within norm scholarship: actors often violate the prescriptive content of norms while simultaneously professing their support for them.<sup>144</sup> By reframing norms as potent symbols imbued with social currency rather than shared understandings, it becomes less puzzling why actors would bother signaling support for norms they routinely fall short of; signaling support for a norm is more a way of performing an identity rather than the expression of some sort of deeply-held belief. However, a conceptualization of norms as symbols runs the risk identified by Jurkovich that norms might become undifferentiated from ‘ideas’ more broadly and lose their theoretical value.<sup>145</sup> According to Jurkovich, the difference between norms and “moral principles” is that moral principles lack a defined set of actors with responsibility for those norms.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Niemann and Schillinger 2016, 31

<sup>141</sup> De Almagro 2018

<sup>142</sup> Methmann 2010, cited in Niemann and Schillinger 2016

<sup>143</sup> Niemann and Schillinger 201, 48

<sup>144</sup> See, for example, Hathaway 2002

<sup>145</sup> Jurkovich 2020

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 5

## **2.3 Locating Men and Boys within the Norm against Conflict-Related Sexual Violence**

Having surveyed the existing literature on norms and norm contestation, this section will now establish the theoretical puzzle at the heart of this dissertation regarding the issue of CRSV against men and boys. I will show how the ‘men, too’ discourse I am interested in functions as a form of norm contestation against a female-specific conceptualization of CRSV victims and unpack in greater detail why the reflection of this contestation at some of the highest levels of global governance, most notably the Security Council, is surprising and worthy of inquiry.

### **2.3.1 The Norm against CRSV as a ‘Weapon of War’**

The norm against CRSV is one of the strongest norms governing conflict. Like the anti-torture norm, it is clearly a proscriptive norm – specifically, the action it prohibits is using sexual violence as a weapon of war. Following Jurkovich’s attentiveness to identifying the actor-action nexus,<sup>147</sup> responsibility for ensuring that this action does not occur resides, on the one hand, within states and any other nonstate conflict actors. This is clearly set out in Security Council Resolution 1820:

Demands that all parties to armed conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence, which could include, inter alia, enforcing appropriate military disciplinary measures and upholding the principle of command responsibility, training troops on the categorical prohibition of all forms of sexual violence against civilians, debunking myths that fuel sexual violence, vetting armed and security forces to take into account past actions of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and evacuation of women and children under imminent threat of sexual violence to safety...<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Jurkovich 2020

<sup>148</sup> S/RES/1820 (2008), 3

Here, as part of the overarching (non)action of not using sexual violence as a weapon of war, states and nonstate governing bodies are instructed to take on a host of other positive actions which work towards ensuring the overall goal that sexual violence perpetrated is not perpetrated by the militaries and armed groups they are responsible for. Prior to this, it states the more basic command for “the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians with immediate effect...”<sup>149</sup>

However, states and militant nonstate actors are not the only actors included within the scope of this norm. Resolution 1820 goes on to bring in a host of other actors, such as urging “all parties concerned, including Member States, United Nations entities and financial institutions, to support the development and strengthening of the capacities of national institutions, in particular of judicial and health systems, and of local civil society networks in order to provide sustainable assistance to victims of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations...”<sup>150</sup>

As for the third element of a norm – the moral aspect – this is largely self-explanatory. It is nearly universally agreed upon amongst global actors that utilizing sexual violence as a tool of combat is morally reprehensible, and many actors go as far as to frame it as one of the most pressing issues of our current era.<sup>151</sup> Yet once again, as with the anti-torture norm, this does not mean that all actors who buy into this norm always conform to its instructed behavior. For example, amidst the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and

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<sup>149</sup> S/RES/1820 (2008), 3

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>151</sup> See, i.e., Hague 2014

Ukraine, emerging evidence indicates the prevalence of systematic sexual violence in both cases.<sup>152</sup> Israel and Russia regularly issue impassioned statements condemning the use of sexual violence in war at the Security Council.<sup>153</sup> Highlighting the need to distinguish between different types of norm strength in terms of its direct effects on the prescribed or proscribed behavior, and other behaviors such as denial or virtue-signaling, both Israel and Russia strongly deny these claims.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, the norm against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war hinges on the securitization of CRSV, a framework most clearly articulated in Resolution 1820. At this juncture, a brief explanation of the concept of securitization is necessary. Securitization theory moved beyond rationalist conceptions of security towards an understanding of threats as constructed through social interaction, so that an issue becomes a security issue “not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat” through a process of argumentation that the issue “is more important than other issues and should take absolute priority.”<sup>155</sup> Consequentially, “[t]he way to study securitization is to study discourse and political constellations.”<sup>156</sup> While the traditional approach to securitization pioneered by the Copenhagen School focus on intersubjective speech acts, more recent approaches challenge this emphasis while maintaining the core assumption that “the ‘security-ness’

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<sup>152</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2024

<sup>153</sup> Fascinatingly, in 2016 Russia explicitly called out US soldiers’ perpetration of sexual violence against detainees at Abu Ghraib (PC.DEL/1166/16). This will be explored in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>154</sup> Roth et al. 2024; Plucinska et al. 2022

<sup>155</sup> Buzan et al. 1998, 24

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 25

of an entity does not depend on objective features, but rather stems from the interactions between a securitizing actor and its audience.”<sup>157</sup> In departure from the Copenhagen School’s philosophical approach to securitization theory, Balzacq offers a sociological approach which suggests that “to move an audience’s attention toward an event or a development construed as dangerous, the words of the securitizing actor need to resonate with the context within which his/her actions are collocated.”<sup>158</sup> Whereas the Copenhagen School “insists that the concept of security modifies the context by virtue of a successful application of the constitutive rules of a speech act” almost as if taking place within a vacuum, a sociological approach assumes that successful securitization is contingent on the securitizing actor’s ability to latch onto some “external reality.”<sup>159</sup>

I adopt Balzacq’s definition of securitization as

an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor’s reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development.<sup>160</sup>

Accordingly, the securitization of CRSV hinges on the metaphor of CRSV as a ‘weapon of war’ so potently destabilizing that it should be considered amongst other ‘traditional’ security issues like terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

### **2.3.2 The ‘Men, too’ Discourse as Norm Contestation**

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<sup>157</sup> Balzacq et al. 2015, 496; see also Balzacq 2010, Guzzini 2011, Stritzel 2007

<sup>158</sup> Balzacq 2010, 13

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 13

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 3

The norm against CRSV has received no shortage of contestation from within the academic and advocacy communities. Importantly, these forms of contestation do not seek to undermine the validity of the norm itself, but rather, some of the latent assumptions within the norm that shape its application. Much of the contestation centers around the securitized, ‘weapon of war’ frame for understanding CRSV. While acknowledging the undeniable positives stemming from increased state attention to wartime sexual violence, feminist academics continue to subject the global norm against CRSV to substantial criticism. Many take issue with what Meger refers to as the “fetishization”<sup>161</sup> of CRSV – a tendency that produces problems on both the conceptual and the practical levels. According to some, the hypervisibility of CRSV threatens to overshadow the more mundane, everyday violence that women experience in both war and “peace,” such as domestic/intimate partner violence and the structural violence of economic dispossession, which risks abstracting CRSV from broader patriarchal structures which create the opportunities for it to occur.<sup>162</sup> Relatedly, an emphasis on eliminating the use of sexual violence within the armed forces may work to normalize war and militarism.<sup>163</sup> This intervention mirrors broader feminist concerns about the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda’s ability to be hijacked for the purposes of justifying endless war,<sup>164</sup> which stands in stark contrast to the radical, antimilitarist roots of the WPS agenda.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Meger 2016a

<sup>162</sup> Davies and True 2015; Gray 2019

<sup>163</sup> Wright 2015

<sup>164</sup> Castañeda and Myrtilinen 2022; Gibbings 2011; Otto 2010; Wright and Achilleos-Sarll 2024

<sup>165</sup> Cockburn 2012; Hellawell 2020; Liddington 1991

Others worry that the international community's fixation on the weaponization of sexual violence might perversely provide incentives for armed groups to use the tactic to gain more international notoriety.<sup>166</sup> Others still problematize the hypervisibility of CRSV under the Western gaze, pointing out how racialized depictions of CRSV and women's suffering writ large reproduce asymmetrical power relations between the Global North and South.<sup>167</sup> Finally, critics claim that efforts to garner support for the anti-CRSV agenda often fall back on reductive framings of women as disempowered, perpetual victims.<sup>168</sup>

Many of these academic critiques of the 'weapon of war' framework echo worries expressed amongst women's civil society organizations. For example, Kreft finds through her interviews that Colombian civil society members perceive CRSV, even when used strategically as a 'weapon of war,' as a manifestation of patriarchal violence.<sup>169</sup> Several feminist activists who spoke at the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict raised the concern that the use of sexual violence in conflict will never cease without addressing root causes of war militarism.<sup>170</sup>

Against the theoretical scaffolding set out in the first section of this chapter, I argue that the 'men, too' discourse also represents a form of norm contestation. The sentiments briefly outlined in the introductory chapter, and which will be elaborated in

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<sup>166</sup> Benson and Gizelis 2019; Sjoberg and Peet 2011

<sup>167</sup> Baaz and Stern 2013; Coetzee and du Toit 2018; Norosky 2024; Oruh 2015

<sup>168</sup> Shepherd 2008

<sup>169</sup> Kreft 2020

<sup>170</sup> Wright 2015, 504; Norosky 2024, 556

the following chapters, explicitly link the need to surface men and boy survivors to previous shortcomings of the international community to do so when CRSV first emerged on the agenda. This is illustrated, for example, by Lebanon's statement at the 2021 Security Council thematic debate on CRSV: "When we usually address the issue of sexual violence in conflict, we tend to focus almost exclusively on women and girls. Yet there are many men and boys who are victims of sexual violence in the context of conflicts, and who remain silent due to the extreme shame and stigma surrounding the issue. They too deserve our focus and attention."<sup>171</sup> This idea – prevalent throughout state discourse, but also amongst advocacy organizations and international institutions – is similar to the other arguments just discussed pertaining to the weapon of war framework in that it problematizes latent assumptions in the norm which shape its narrow application. Like the weapon of war framework conceals instances of CRSV that do not conform to the expectation that perpetrators are always combatants, as well as the connections between CRSV and acts of sexual and gender-based violence which occur during peacetime, the conflation of 'womanhood' with 'victimhood' precludes men and boy survivors.

### **2.3.3 What Makes the 'Men, too' Contestation Surprising?**

Having just established that the discourse studied in this dissertation constitutes a form of norm contestation, I will now proceed to explain why this contestation is theoretically interesting by referring back to the two factors discussed earlier which shape the success of norms: resonance with 1) the preexisting structure of relevant international norms that a state is already committed to, and with 2) domestic-level cultural norms.

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<sup>171</sup> S/2021/375, 90

Upon closer examination, the form of norm contestation I am concerned with would seem to violate each of these parameters, and yet as demonstrated in the introductory chapter has been relatively successful, thus making this contestation surprising.

First, the conflation between victimhood/vulnerability and womanhood continues to hold a particular salience amongst powerful actors in global politics and serve as a binding glue across a host of humanitarian and development issues. Given this, discussions around male sexual victimization in conflict fit uneasily within broader institutional and ideational complexes abutting the issue of CRSV.

For example, gendered vulnerability surfaces as a determining factor of who is deemed worth of protection, evident in the gendered underpinnings of the immunity principle,<sup>172</sup> refugee status,<sup>173</sup> and the anti-trafficking regime.<sup>174</sup> Even efforts to promote gender equality which purport to champion women's empowerment and inclusion fall back on these reductive tropes. For example, speaking on Canada's implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, Tiessen argues that "[w]omen continue to be identified as targets or objects of development assistance and programming in fragile states and are largely, if not exclusively, deemed vulnerable bodies in need of charitable acts rather than active agents in the peace and security of their countries and communities."<sup>175</sup> This conflation is also evident in issues which the international

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<sup>172</sup> See Carpenter 2005 and Sjoberg 2006. Importantly, Sjoberg departs from Carpenter in demonstrating how the gendered immunity principle, while reifying women's status as victims, does not do so to the advantage of women in terms of their actual access to protection.

<sup>173</sup> Benslama-Dabdoub 2024; Kreft and Agerberg 2024; Welfens 2023

<sup>174</sup> Andrijasevic 2007; Majic 2017

<sup>175</sup> Tiessen 2015, 99

community prefers *not* to address, such as women's participation in sexual violence.<sup>176</sup>

Relatedly, while in recent years the international community has started to pay more attention to women's involvement in terrorist organizations, even these efforts often fall back on the assumption that these women are unwittingly duped into serving extremist agendas, ignoring the conscious and strategic decisions many women make to joining such groups.<sup>177</sup>

The grip of the 'saving vulnerable women' trope is strong in part due to its embeddedness in foreign policy agendas. In an effort to explain the absence of CRSV against men and boys from the global advocacy agenda, in 2002 Del Zotto and Jones posited that I/NGOs could be structurally inhibited from integrating men and boy survivors into their CRSV advocacy and programming because of Western security states which, post-Cold War, began to construct their identities upon the notion of 'saving women,' and so would have little interest in funding projects which diverted resources to men and boys as victims.<sup>178</sup> While certainly revitalized during the US foreign policy shift of the 1990's and 2000's, these narratives date back to the colonial era, as seen in the crusade of the British and American women's movements to inculcate Western gender norms amongst colonized women.<sup>179</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, these same stories were repackaged in interventionist foreign policy agendas, as exemplified in the

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<sup>176</sup> Sjoberg 2016

<sup>177</sup> Loken and Zelenz 2017; Martini 2018

<sup>178</sup> Del Zotto and Jones 2002; for an extended discussion of the role of post-Cold War politics in shaping discourse on violence against women, see, Harrington 2014

<sup>179</sup> Burton 1992; Coloma 2010; Liddle and Rai 1998

discourse of the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>180</sup> As in the colonial era, such policies and the discourse surrounding them were constructed upon racialized representations of colonized men – which in the case of the ‘war on terror,’ became Muslim and/or Arab men – as particularly prone to gendered violence and sexual backwardness.<sup>181</sup>

Second, one insight from the literature on CRSV against men and boys that remains basically uncontested is that today, the issue remains highly taboo in most (but not all) settings. According to Sivakumaran the issue of male CRSV suffers the “taint” of homosexuality, which is to say that survivors experience a specific kind of stigmatization as a result of society’s conflation of a male surviving sexual violence by another man as indicative of their homosexuality; as Sivakumaran explicates in the case of prison rape, rather than eliciting outrage, in popular culture the issue almost reflexively gets made into a joke.<sup>182</sup> On the one hand, the involuntary physical arousal experienced by some male survivors leads to a form of victim-blaming which doubles as an accusation of homosexuality,<sup>183</sup> but the victim’s bodily reactions aside, the very fact of being sexually assaulted is often interpreted as a form of “feminization.”<sup>184</sup>

In this sense, the narrative that male survivors are “feminized” or “homosexualized” performs the function of protecting the fragility of heteropatriarchal

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<sup>180</sup> Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ayotte and Husain 2005

<sup>181</sup> Bhattacharyya 2009

<sup>182</sup> Sivakumaran 2005, 1303

<sup>183</sup> Sivakumaran 2005, 1291; see also, Bullock and Beckson 2011

<sup>184</sup> Vojdik 2014, 945; see also, Skjelsbæk 2001

logic.<sup>185</sup> The same can be said for the twin narratives that male rape is exceptionally rare or even impossible which pervade even amongst healthcare professionals.<sup>186</sup> This has as much to do with the blame which is often cast against the survivor as it does with the difficulty of narrating the motives of the perpetrator. It is frequently argued that male perpetrators of sexual violence against other males actively exploit the aforementioned logic of humiliation; in the context of ethnoreligious or other identitarian wars, stories of male rape or castration are cast as evidence of the destruction of the victim's broader group and thus might be interpreted as an attack not just on an individual, but an entire community.<sup>187</sup> Yet as Žarkov explains, while "[w]hile castration is the symbolic appropriation of the male Other's phallic power, rape is not."<sup>188</sup> In the Balkan context, Žarkov points out that while prison guards typically performed acts of castration and other genital harm in public, as when they forced prisoners to perform sexual acts on themselves or others, they perpetrated rape in private settings and often killed the victims; Žarkov further contends that this is an attempt to "spare the heterosexual masculinity of the rapist."<sup>189</sup>

It should be noted that as with constructions of gender in general, this contradiction is culturally specific and not universal; for example, the practice of *bacha bazi* practiced by elites is not understood amongst some in the Afghani context as being

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<sup>185</sup> Butler 1990; on this dynamic applied specifically to male survivors of sexual violence, see Javaid 2018.

<sup>186</sup> Bullock and Beckson 2011, 200; Turchik and Edwards 2012

<sup>187</sup> Ferrales et al. 2016, 572-573

<sup>188</sup> Žarkov 2007, 165-166

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 166

indicative of the perpetrator's homosexuality.<sup>190</sup> However, it remains arguable that the stigmatization of male rape as a concept and even more so of male survivors is the most common way the phenomenon is understood. This is ascertainable through research which has been conducted on the experiences of male survivors (of conflict-related sexual violence as well as its 'non-conflict' corollary) around the world, from Uganda<sup>191</sup> to the Balkans<sup>192</sup> to the UK.<sup>193</sup> One study on the experiences of male refugee survivors living in Bangladesh, Italy, and Kenya found that "Refugees across settings were particularly concerned about confidentiality processes, which they cited as the most critical aspect to service uptake" and that "Refugees across settings reported that survivors' primary concern was that their victimization would become known to community and family members, both locally and in their country of origin."<sup>194</sup> Taken together, this literature suggests that the taboo surrounding sexual violence against men cuts across a diverse array of sociocultural contexts.

## **2.4 Disaggregating Complex Silences**

As discussed in the introductory chapter, silence is a salient theme across the varied efforts to draw attention to the issue of CRSV against men and boys, including within academia. The concept of silence manifests in two senses. First, the gap in global approaches to CRSV regarding men and boy survivors is often referred to as an instance of silence. Second, self-conscious efforts to raise the profile of men and boy survivors

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<sup>190</sup> Misra 2023

<sup>191</sup> Schulz 2018

<sup>192</sup> Houge 2008

<sup>193</sup> Lowe 2017

<sup>194</sup> Chynoweth et al. 2020, 8

often understand their work as contributing to ‘breaking’ this silence and ‘unsilencing’ this neglected group. Given the concept’s ubiquity as both a way of understanding an empirical phenomenon as well as a rhetorical tool for garnering attention and sympathy, it is appropriate in turn to investigate this concept as well as the implications of its deployment. This section attempts to do just this.

#### **2.4.1 The Critical Turn against the Silence/Agency Dichotomy in IR**

The body of literature on CRSV against men and boys is far from the only corner of IR to mobilize the concept of silence. As critical perspectives increasingly gain a foothold in IR scholarship, silence has received more and more popularity within the discipline.<sup>195</sup> Importantly, silences of interest to critical IR scholarship are not just absences or lacks; they instead form the constitutive outside of dominant discourse, which is to say that silence can perform a discursive function.<sup>196</sup>

Two main conceptualizations run through critical IR approaches to silence. The first is identified by Dingli as *silence as violence*.<sup>197</sup> As noted by Dingli, Enloe’s work stands out as another exemplar of the silence-as-violence paradigm in IR, casting a critical eye on the exclusion of gender from studies of conflict and militarization.<sup>198</sup> In her chapter “Margins, silences, and bottom rungs,” Enloe states that these three things “express different qualities, but they have as their common denominators lacking public power and being the object of other people’s power.”<sup>199</sup> Silence, then – within and beyond

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<sup>195</sup> Dingli 2015; Dingli and Cooke 2019; Guillaume 2018; Parpart and Parashar 2019

<sup>196</sup> Bhambra and Shilliam 2009; Adler-Nissen 2014, 145

<sup>197</sup> Dingli 2015

<sup>198</sup> Dingli 2015, 7; see, i.e., Enloe 2000 and 2010

<sup>199</sup> Enloe 1996, 187

the discipline of IR – marks a relationship of power where silence on the part of an individual signifies the inability to speak or to be heard within the dominant discourse. Enloe gives an example of Chiapas, Mexico, “a classically marginal political space” that scholars of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would, ostensibly, be better off ignoring.<sup>200</sup> But after delving into a historical account of Indigenous Mayan resistance in Chiapas, she concludes that this “silenced” group, assumed by international relations scholars to be irrelevant to questions of free trade, is in fact crucial for understanding not only NAFTA but the post-Cold War era as a whole:

What has it taken to keep Mayan women off the white rocks? The answer to that question is pertinent to explaining the international politics of beef and coffee, and thus to explaining the intrastate politics of the PRI and Salinismo, and therefore to making sense of the continental politics of NAFTA and consequently the politics of the post-Cold War world. Sound far-fetched? I don't think so. As students of international politics we need to become less parochial, more energetic, more curious.<sup>201</sup>

A significant contribution of those who have worked within this paradigm has thus been to unveil misinterpretations of silence within IR scholarship that produce analytical shortcomings. A similar example can be found in Hansen's intervention in Copenhagen School theories of securitization, by showing how a conceptual reliance on speech acts precludes victims of gender-based violence from articulating their vulnerabilities within this framework.<sup>202</sup> Taking silence at face value – in other words, interpreting silence as the absence of meaning – thus leads to “*underestimating the amounts and varieties of power it takes to form and sustain any given set of relationships between states.*”<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 189

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 201

<sup>202</sup> Hansen 2000

<sup>203</sup> Enloe 1996, 186 (italics in original); see also, Enloe 2014

Within the paradigm of silence-as-violence, excavating discourse for silences destabilizes knowledge that is taken for granted and shows the productive and self-concealing functions of allegedly obvious truths. For example, Kronsell's analysis of Swedish military discourse finds that military documents and literature were silent on the issue of gender – rarely even using the term 'men,' for example, much less 'women' – due to an idea that "conscription and the military profession is for men, and this is so self-evident that it never has to be argued or justified, just confirmed."<sup>204</sup> Kronsell and other researchers concluded that "the complete silence was an *indication* of the norms of hegemonic masculinity embedded in the military institution and the related polity [*italics my own*]."<sup>205</sup> Here, as in Enloe and Hansen's approaches, silence is an invitation to interpret.

Additionally, from Kronsell's intervention it is evident that the silence-as-violence paradigm accommodates an understanding of silence on the part of the powerful, in addition to silence on the part of the powerless. Each instance of silence marks a relationship of power, but from a different perspective. Engaging Toni Morrison, Vitalis suggests that the discipline of IR – from its inception, deeply rooted in the Anglo-American perspective – replicates the "silence and evasion" regarding race and racial in the American domestic context.<sup>206</sup> According to Vitalis, "were US scholars seriously to come to grips with the legacy of white supremacism (and empire) in the invention of international relations"<sup>207</sup> rather than allocating it to these questions to the periphery, this

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<sup>204</sup> Kronsell 2006, 113

<sup>205</sup> Ibid

<sup>206</sup> Vitalis 2000, 333

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 336

would require a rethinking of popular IR narratives within the study of IR, such as the “mythical genealogy for a purported international norm: an ever-expanding standard of humanity.”<sup>208</sup> The function of this genealogy approaches violence because it conceals the continued centrality of racial hierarchies in world politics.

However, recent developments in critical IR have cast a skeptical eye on interpretations of silence as evidence of disempowerment (or, more precisely, an inability to speak) and have led to a series of interesting debates.<sup>209</sup> Dingli identifies a second paradigm of silence in critical IR as *silence-as-resistance*.<sup>210</sup> While this idea is more recent, it draws from a long tradition within feminist theory that challenges and interrogates the urge of Western feminists to give voice to those presumed to be voiceless.<sup>211</sup> Parpart and Parashar’s edited volume includes a series of empirical case studies which call into question the disciplinary boundary between silence and agency,<sup>212</sup> such as a chapter on silence as a form of reflection and healing amongst Trinidadian youth offenders<sup>213</sup> and another on silence amongst indigenous women Jharkhand, India as a means of negotiating with patriarchy.<sup>214</sup> The theme of silence as self-defense arises prevalently in research on conflict-affected women.<sup>215</sup> In light of the marginalization of

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 340

<sup>209</sup> See, i.e., Kabeer 2010; Parpart 2010

<sup>210</sup> Dingli 2015, 11

<sup>211</sup> See, i.e., Abu-Lughod 2002; Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1988

<sup>212</sup> Parpart and Parashar 2019b, 4

<sup>213</sup> Ali 2019

<sup>214</sup> Toppo and Parashar 2019

<sup>215</sup> Boesten and Henry 2018; George and Kent 2017

feminist approaches within IR previously highlighted by Enloe, Duriesmith makes the case for what he refers to as “strategic silence” as a citational practice: the purposeful disengagement of feminist IR from so-called traditional or mainstream IR.<sup>216</sup>

However, Dingli makes the argument that this theoretical move to reconceptualize silence as a means of resistance is subject to many of the same pitfalls as the silence-as-violence paradigm as articulated by Hansen and Enloe, in that it “is nevertheless a further iteration of the argument that silence, whether chosen or imposed, is an indication of violence and oppression.”<sup>217</sup> For Dingli, then, the risk of playing the “ventriloquist” cannot be escaped by merely inverting the power relation because that inversion is still contextualized within a broader narrative of oppression imposed by the researcher.<sup>218</sup> In this regard Dingli takes issue with Parpart’s characterization of Muslim women’s decision to wear headscarves as an act of resistance to colonialism<sup>219</sup> because this “fails to take into consideration that suffering, passivity, docility and submission are all modalities of agency that may manifest themselves as silence. As a result, she imposes her understanding over the self-understanding of the actors she studies, *thus silencing them further.*”<sup>220</sup> In Dingli’s view, the claim that donning the headscarf signifies resistance to colonialism is perhaps better intentioned but still not far off from controversial radical feminist organization FEMEN’s assertion that the Muslim women who rallied in

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<sup>216</sup> Duriesmith 2020

<sup>217</sup> Dingli 2015, 12

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>219</sup> Parpart 2010

<sup>220</sup> Dingli 2015, 11 (*italics added*)

opposition against the group's anti-headscarf campaign suffer from a false consciousness.<sup>221</sup>

Dingli's intervention is important in moving conceptual understandings of silence beyond common disciplinary tropes. For her part, Hansen has responded to Dingli's critiques with the very fair retort that *all* interpretations of silence run this risk of ventriloquism, regardless of whether they fulfill or challenge Western (or patriarchal, heteronormative, etc.) expectations.<sup>222</sup> This reaffirms the idea that any interpretation of silence needs to be grounded in careful, reflexive empirical study. However, broadening interpretations of silence's meaning does not do much to overcome the problem of operationalizing silence in empirical study. In what follows, I argue that metaphorical slippage is a core component of the disciplinary confusion on silence.

#### **2.4.2 The Multiple Metaphors of Silence**

Sociolinguist Adam Jaworski's work<sup>223</sup> has been engaged by much of the aforementioned critical IR literature on silence. An important insight of his missing from these engagements, however, is his care in distinguishing between the different metaphors represented by the same broad concept of silence. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "[w]e use ontological metaphors to comprehend events, actions, activities and states. Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, activities as substances, states as containers."<sup>224</sup> Jaworski argues that this insight can be usefully

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<sup>221</sup> Dingli 2015, 10

<sup>222</sup> Hansen 2019, 34

<sup>223</sup> Jaworski 1993; 1997

<sup>224</sup> Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 30, cited in Jaworski 1993, 81

applied to silence, wherein silence used in the sense of an action, event, or activity functions as a metaphor for an object or substance, and silence used in the sense of a state functions as a metaphor for a container. This marks the difference, respectively, between the following examples provided by Jaworski:

**Silence as object:** “*Maria’s* silence influenced the court’s decision.”<sup>225</sup>

In this example, the event of silence is a thing that can be possessed (in this case, by Maria); it is also something that can influence other things (in this case, the court’s decision). This is subtly distinct from silence as a substance that permeates a setting:

**Silence as substance:** “The room was *filled with* absolute silence.”<sup>226</sup>

But Jaworski’s treatment indicates that these categories are relatively collapsible in contradistinction to the use of silence as a state:

**Silence as state:** “Mother gave her approval *in* silence.”<sup>227</sup>

In this example, Mother’s silence represented as a state of being functions as a metaphor for a container within which she can do something (in this case, give her approval). This sentence could be rephrased as ‘Mother silently gave her approval,’ or ‘Mother was silent when she gave her approval,’ and the same meaning would be retained. However, returning briefly to the first example (“*Maria’s* silence influenced the court’s decision”), a similar rephrasing would not make sense; in this instance, Maria’s silence exists beyond herself because it is going on to shape outside events, thus becoming its own object. However, this object of silence came into existence due to Maria *being* silent as a state.

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<sup>225</sup> Jaworski 1993, 82 (italics added)

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 81 (italics added)

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 83 (italics added)

It is therefore possible and necessary to distinguish in one instance between silence as an object and silence as a state (of being). In addition, within the category of silence as a state, we can further differentiate *being silenced* (passive) from *silencing* (active). While the former is obviously a state of being, the latter is an inherently relational state of doing. According to Thiesmeyer, “Any assumption that there is a static boundary between chosen and imposed silences [...] must also be questioned.”<sup>228</sup> This insight underscores that silences can be complex; they can be comprised of different relationships such as being silenced and silencing, but also, as Dingli points out, relationships beyond the framework of violence such as spirituality.<sup>229</sup>

Furthermore, the manifestations of any of these modalities of silence vary in terms of words actually spoken or written. According to Jaworski, silence appears as everything from a “deafening noise” to a “frozen gesture”.<sup>230</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, Trouillot locates silence in the production of history itself, in “the moment of fact creation,” “the moment of fact assembly,” “the moment of fact retrieval,” and “the moment of retrospective significance.” Each of these moments are not silent in the literal sense (the absence of speech), but they are precisely in the metaphorical sense.<sup>231</sup> For example, the Haitian Revolution retains “the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened.”<sup>232</sup> But to excavate the silencing of the Haitian Revolution, Trouillot

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<sup>228</sup> Thiesmeyer 2003, 8

<sup>229</sup> Dingli 2015, 11

<sup>230</sup> Jaworski 1997, 3

<sup>231</sup> Trouillot 1995, 27

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 73

is not forced to ‘read between the lines’ to identify colonial anxieties – instead, he is able to interpret how the stories being told about the revolution at the time “systematically recast” these events so that they could “enter into narratives that made sense for a majority of Western observers and readers.”<sup>233</sup>

### **2.4.3 Silence as Collaborative**

Although this might seem like splitting hairs, the distinctions Jaworski makes turn out to be incredibly important in operationalizing silence in empirical research, particularly if we want to investigate broader silences that extend beyond an individual and encapsulate communities, cultures, or other discursive spaces. I argue that in such instances, that a silence is collaborative – which is to say, multicausal – should be assumed from the outset and then potentially proven otherwise. Assuming causal complexity additionally primes the interpreter to be open to explanations that they themselves do not bring into the study from the outset but rather discover during the research process.

The phrase ‘break(ing) the silence’ is familiar to most. It appears frequently in activism; for example, *Women Breaking the Silence* is an archive of testimonies by women ex-soldiers who fought for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, created with the goal of drawing attention to abuses of Palestinians and reforming IDF practices.<sup>234</sup> The phrase can also be applied to taboos; take, for example, a taboo prohibiting the discussion of sexuality and sexual relationships in public, or the discussion of wages in the workplace. In each instance, the silence is

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<sup>233</sup> Trouillot 1995, 96

<sup>234</sup> Sasson-Levy et al. 2010

repressive, and functions to serve the powerful (in these examples, patriarchy and employers, respectively). However, though the two are intimately related, women who choose not to publicly discuss sexuality, and the men that do the same, have different reasons for doing so. Women don't discuss sexuality because they fear reprisal in the form of shaming, stigmatization, and so on; men don't discuss sexuality because relegating these issues to the private sphere maintains the status quo which benefits them. Still, even this might be a generalization – within the broad categories of “men” and “women,” surely people within both categories have a spectrum of further differentiated motivations, both conscious and unconscious. Yet by all not publicly speaking about sexuality (silence as state), they contribute to the same overall phenomenon which we perceive as a general lack of discourse (silence as subject/object). It is in this sense that I use the word ‘collaborative.’

As a further example of why this distinction is important, take Lee Ann Fujii's ethnographic work on the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide; during her interviews, Fujii explains that participants were silent on certain stigmatized subjects, such as sexual violence or pillaging. Importantly, Fujii explains that silences in interviews can be collective, individual or a “collaborative effort between researcher and participant.”<sup>235</sup> Fujii recalls that silence on the part of the participant can elicit silence on the part of the researcher; when topics are left out, “such ambiguities are not invitations to probe more deeply, but rather subtle admonishments to the researcher to respect certain topics as ‘off limits.’”<sup>236</sup> In this instance, the researcher and the participant are both being silent, yet his

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<sup>235</sup> Fujii 2010, 239

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 239

silence is not collective, but collaborative, because their silence has different motivations: while the participant is silent because they don't want to discuss the topic, the interviewer is silent because they want to respect the participant's wishes and maintain a positive rapport. However, despite their motivations differing, each of their silences contribute to the same broader *object* of silence; if Rwandans are collectively silent on the issue of pillaging, the researcher colludes in this silence by knowing that pillaging took place but choosing not to bring it up in the interview and then addressing it in their writeup of the research. This is all to say that silence as an object arises from a silent state of being, and that multiple, distinct silent states of being can collaborate to contribute to the same object of silence perceived by an audience.

According to Schröter, “[m]eaningful, communicative silence depends on an intention (to remain silent or to conceal) as much as on (a disappointed) expectation (of speech) which is moderated by relevance.”<sup>237</sup> While the element of a disappointed expectation of speech will be discussed in the next subsection, I will conclude this subsection by making one point of clarification regarding the issue of intentionality. Schröter’s distinction between the intention *to remain silent* and the intention *to conceal* is subtle but very important when discussing broad, complex silences associated with violence and/or disempowerment. I would argue that these two concepts can be nested, with the intention to remain silent as an overarching motive under which the intention to conceal can be grouped alongside a broad host of other motivations for a silent state of being, such as resistance.

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<sup>237</sup> Schröter 2013, 7

Importantly, not all actors who contribute to a silence – or really any of them at all, for that matter – need to have a conscious understanding that they’re contributing to a broader silence beyond themselves for a silence to qualify as truly collaborative. As Schröter asserts, “[o]n a structural level, those who participate in silencing others, e.g. by talking about them rather than talking with them, mostly do so without any specific intention to cause this effect [...]”<sup>238</sup> Of course, someone’s ignorance to the implications of their speech – in this case, “talking about them rather than talking with them” – does nothing to minimize its silencing effects. But nonetheless, the necessary ingredient of intentionality posited by Schröter, which I also follow, needs to be narrowly specified: it’s not an intention to create a particular silencing effect that’s required, but at a more basic level, an intention to *do the action* that amounts to silencing, whether that is literal silence, or a ‘loud’ silence, such as neglecting to mention something. Contrast the example of “talking about someone rather than talking with them” with the examples of being asleep or muteness.<sup>239</sup> In these two latter examples, the individual who is silent because they are sleeping or because they are mute isn’t silent by choice, but is silent as a result of their physiological or psychological condition that hinders their ability to speak. Thus marks the difference discursive and literal silence.

This is where the language of ‘silencing/silenced,’ when used loosely, can become misleading. Referring to someone or something as silenced without context or elaboration suggests an almost conspiratorial effort to purposefully keep something hidden from public discourse. As discussed previously, there’s a distinction to be made between the

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>239</sup> Jaworski 1993, cited in Schröter 2013, 22

passive state of being silenced, and the active state of silencing. But even within this latter, active state, the intention to sustain a silence may not motivate this actor to do whatever it is they're doing. The word 'silencing' alone cannot capture this nuance; as will be discussed in the next subsection, this amounts to conflation of silences cause(s) with its effect(s).

#### **2.4.4 Silence as Structural**

While I have explained what I mean by 'collaborative,' I have yet to specify what I mean by 'structure.' To begin, it bears emphasizing that being silent on an issue often doesn't mean that the individual is not speaking at all; in fact, they may be speaking quite a bit. Jaworski highlights this through the Polish verb *przemilczec* which translates as, "to fail to mention something."<sup>240</sup> Oftentimes, this failure occurs within active speech; this is the difference between asking, "Why isn't anyone speaking?" as opposed to, "Why isn't anyone speaking about...?" In requiring that silence is constituted in part by a disappointed expectation of speech, Schröter suggests that that silence as discourse can only come into being when it is identified by an audience. If there were no disappointed expectation of speech, then the recognition of a silence would not even occur. The expectation is formed from what the audience perceives as relevant, such that "No one could make a scandal out of a politician who forgets to publicly mention the recent death of his or her pet."<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Jaworski 1993, 99

<sup>241</sup> Schröter 2013, 25

Because the construction of a “[m]eaningful, communicative silence”<sup>242</sup> is dependent on both the individual ‘speaking’ silence as well as an audience to interpret this silence, the problem of evading the “horizon of expectation” turns out to be futile. However, I concur with Hansen<sup>243</sup> that rather than attempting to evade this problem, which turns out to be inherent to the study of silence, we should accept it; and I would go slightly further to suggest that this understanding enhances our ability to understand silence empirically. Guillaume proposes to understand the concept of silence as “doing” rather than “meaning,” because philosophical analyses of silence have revealed that “Silence can be oppression, community or resistance, among other things, because it *does something* that has certain effects on the ways in which specific contexts of actions and enunciations unfold [italics in original].”<sup>244</sup> It is in this sense that I use the concept of (social) structure. As a structure, broad silences have two effects on their audience: on the one hand, the silence-as-object disappoints an expectation of a particular speech act, but on the other, it regulates discourse by discouraging open acknowledgment of certain topics. The latter function is what we know as the action of ‘silencing.’

If we understand what Guillaume calls ‘doing’ as synonymous with what Jaworski calls “a state of being,”<sup>245</sup> Guillaume’s framework coheres with my own. Circling back to Schröter’s insistence that speech depends on both a speaker and an audience,<sup>246</sup> it also suggests that we can better work against the “horizon of

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>243</sup> Hansen 2019

<sup>244</sup> Guillaume 2018, 10

<sup>245</sup> Jaworski 1993, 83

<sup>246</sup> Schröter 2013, 7

expectation”<sup>247</sup> pitfall in studying silences by beginning with documentation of the effect that a broad silence has (the ‘doing’ resulting, in part, in a disappointed expectation of speech), and then working in the other direction to understand why something we anticipate discussion about is not being discussed (the ‘meaning’ of the disappointed expectation of speech). The burden of proof is then on the researcher to provide empirical evidence backing up any meaning which can be assigned to silence, and this meaning may or may not cohere with the disappointed expectation of speech. On the other hand, conflating the cause (or, ‘meaning’) of silence with its effect(s) (‘doing’) can lead to erroneous explanations of where silence comes from and what sustains it.

To summarize, a collaborative structure of silence has two defining features: 1) it is expansive enough across time, space, and involved actors to be multicausal (collaborative), and 2) it has the capacity to shape behavior (structural). This behavior can vary vastly, including more regulatory effects (i.e., inhibiting an actor from speaking about something), to, paradoxically, disappointing an expectation of speech such that one is prompted to identify a silence.

## **2.5 Leveraging Silence as a Collaborative Structure to Better Understand the ‘Men, too’ Discourse**

In the previous section I introduced and unpacked the concept of silence as a collaborative structure. What can be gained from understanding the global inattention to CRSV against men and boys as a collaborative structure of silence? While this is not meant to be a totalizing theory of silence, first, I will provide an overview of an argument which will unfold throughout the subsequent chapters of this dissertation that this

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<sup>247</sup> Dingli 2015

conceptualization is a particularly useful way to understand not only the historic inattention to CRSV against men and boys and how this was able to change, but issues which struggle to surface on the international agenda, or ‘non-issues,’ more broadly. Second, I will do the same for a related argument about how this conceptualization can shed light on some unintended consequences of using silence and the adjacent language of unsilencing in awareness-raising efforts. In doing so, I hope to forge a connection across two bodies of literature which at the time of writing remain siloed despite sharing a normative interest in drawing attention to un- or under-recognized injustices.

### **2.5.1 Global Non-Issues as Collaborative Structures of Silence**

Before applying the concept of silence as a collaborative structure, it is first necessary to clarify why it is appropriate for (some) global non-issues to be understood more broadly as discursive silences. It was just discussed that a meaningful silence requires both a disappointed expectation of speech moderated by relevance and an intention to be silent or to silence on the part of some actor.<sup>248</sup> First, to identify an issue which did not surface on the global agenda and interrogate why other issues, and not that issue, gained traction, is precisely to signal a disappointed expectation of speech. Where does such an expectation come from? As Carpenter shows in the case of infant male circumcision, it’s reasonable to expect that this issue would have gained traction if one abstracts from the political context and considers only bare issue attributes. On the other hand, few people would ask why the issue didn’t gain traction within the climate change or disarmament networks; there are no obvious likenesses between those causes. This

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<sup>248</sup> Schröter 2013, 7

isn't to say there's no connection to be made, but such a connection is not self-evident and therefore very unlikely to be "perceived in public discourse."<sup>249</sup>

Second, in terms of intentionality, for a gap in advocacy to be a meaningful silence it would need to be proven that an advocacy 'non-issue' could be reasonably expected to have surfaced but did not. This means that if an advocacy community is/was fully ignorant to an issue, their silence would not be discursive. Building from Carpenter's example of the infant male circumcision issue, if no one in the advocacy world knew that infant male circumcision was an existing practice, it's not mysterious why they didn't launch a campaign about it. On the contrary, Carpenter finds that advocacy gatekeepers *did* know about the practice of infant male circumcision – in fact, norm entrepreneurs actively attempted to convince gatekeepers to take the issue onboard but were rejected.<sup>250</sup> This isn't to say that there weren't many people in the advocacy world *were* ignorant to the practice's existence; in this sense, discursive silence and non-discursive silence can be enmeshed and reinforce one another. It also doesn't mean that non-discursive silence isn't interesting and worthy of empirical investigation, but simply that it's a different kind of phenomenon requiring different methods of investigation.

To summarize, not all non-issues would qualify as discursive/meaningful silences. The case of infant male circumcision, however, is an example of a non-issue which would fulfil this criterion: it is an issue which *should* have surfaced based on relevancy, but also *could* have surfaced because there were empowered actors who were aware of the issue's existence, rendering its absence from the global agenda intrinsically puzzling,

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<sup>249</sup> Schröter 2013, 7

<sup>250</sup> Carpenter 2014

and therefore, instructive about why it is that some issues see the light of day while others do not. I will now return to the specific issue that this dissertation focuses on – CRSV against men and boys – and provide a preview of my findings as a means of justifying the conceptual utility of silence as a collaborative structure.

Understanding norms as processes as opposed to static things<sup>251</sup> and silence as *doing* rather than *meaning*<sup>252</sup> are two complementary theoretical moves which insist on the nonfixed and co-constructed nature of discourse. Just as empirical research on norms suggests that fixed-meaning approaches conflict with the observed hybridity of norms,<sup>253</sup> peering briefly beyond the manifestation of silence as singular object reveals that a silence which may at first seem relatively straightforward to explain is, in fact, the product of a complex network of actors and interactions. The use of silence as a conceptual metaphor often conjures images of silence as some sort of impenetrable wall – but when we look deeper into how large silences are sustained, we can see that they often contain many moving pieces. This is very much the case with the issue of CRSV against men and boys. Chapter 3 builds on the two dampening features introduced in this chapter which render the apparently successful norm contestation – the ‘men, too’ discourse – puzzling, and shows how they combined to create what Misra aptly calls a “landscape of silence” surrounding CRSV against men and boys.<sup>254</sup> These two broad factors (a focus on women and girls’ victimization, and homophobic/heteronormative ideologies surrounding sexual violence and male victims) layer atop on another to create an intricate landscape

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<sup>251</sup> De Almagro 2018; Krook and True 2010

<sup>252</sup> Guillaume 2018

<sup>253</sup> Niemann and Schillinger 2016

<sup>254</sup> Misra 2015

sustained by a wide variety of differently situated and motivated individuals. A few moments of more direct silencing in which actors *actively* attempted to keep the issue of male survivors off the global agenda are enmeshed within more frequent *passive* modes of silencing motivated by the history of women's exclusion from global governance, especially as it relates to conflict and security, in addition to subconscious assumptions about what constitutes sexual violence.

This more complex picture stands in contrast to how the metaphor of silence is sometimes deployed within the literature on CRSV against men and boys to the effect of making the silence appear more totalizing and singular than it may actually be. For example, Lewis adopts the language of "systematically silenced" to describe CRSV against men and boys, first used by male survivor advocate Chris Dolan in a 2011 interview with journalist Will Storr.<sup>255</sup> Yet Lewis's analysis itself suggests that this silence is more tenuous than systematic. Importantly, building from Derrida's concept of disappearance, Lewis argues that male survivors appear as a "trace" within sexual violence discourse, and notes a few instances where CRSV against men and boys is raised, only to disappear "almost instantaneously" due to, for example, the document falling back on the use of female-specific pronouns to refer to survivors.<sup>256</sup>

I will now return briefly to the theoretical puzzle previously articulated in this chapter regarding the unlikelihood of the resonance of the 'men, too' norm contestation. From one angle, the multitude of factors keeping CRSV against men and boys off the global agenda could be read to mean that this is a particularly impenetrable silence. But

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<sup>255</sup> Lewis 2014, 206, citing Storr 2011

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 212-213

read differently – and with the benefit of hindsight, given that CRSV against men and boys is no longer wholly absent from international spaces to address CRSV – this complexity can also be interpreted to suggest that because so many moving parts sustain the silence, it is in fact unstable and vulnerable to giving way to discourses which undermine the silence. Chapter 4 shows this to be the case in tracing how an institutional opening initiated by Security Council Resolution 1820 and shifting stakeholder preferences around conceptualizing wartime sexual violence created a window of opportunity for advocates of male survivors.

The tradeoff, however, of the surprising ease with which CRSV against men and boys defied theoretical expectations (as well as common sense) and slipped through the cracks is that the tensions which initially kept the issue off the agenda in the first place are far from resolved. I will conclude this chapter by previewing the afterlife of these tensions, may have even been exacerbated by the ‘men, too’ discourse.

### **2.5.2 The Perils of Unsilencing**

The language of silence is a useful rhetorical tool in eliciting sympathy for male survivors of sexual violence by positioning the international community’s inattention to their plight as a secondary harm. It also issues a moral charge on the international community to work to ‘unsilence’ this neglected group. But Chapter 5 of this dissertation explores how this language inadvertently reifies the heteronormativity- and homophobia-induced stigmatization experienced by many male survivors by positioning their experiences as fundamentally anomalous. What’s more, the attending mantra that men and boy survivors are so stigmatized (or, silenced) that they never come forward to seek services precludes empirical evidence for what practices and policies can encourage men

to come forward. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle: based on the assumption that men and boys are too ashamed to seek medical or psychosocial care, or justice, or any other type of assistance which a survivor might need, attempts to make these processes more accommodating to male survivors' needs are foregone from the beginning.

The invocation of silence also creates hierarchies of victimhood – or, as Touquet et al. put it, “a hierarchy of gendered harms, stigmas, and barriers.”<sup>257</sup> As the authors explain, one particularly potent “myth” suggests that that men experience more barriers to accessing services, and face greater stigma, than women. In Chapter 5, I show how this idea is a result of the silence narrative which surrounds the issue of CRSV against men and boys and elicits a comparative dimension to CRSV against women and girls, and suggests, usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly, that women and girl survivors somehow benefit as survivors based on their gender. Such a claim is particularly contentious in a context where funding earmarked for women and girls is dwindling, and women and girl survivors continue to struggle accessing resources in many contexts, despite the visibility, and sometimes hypervisibility, of violence against women and girls. As shown in Chapter 5, this narrative creates resentments and cleavages within the issue network that work against the interests of all survivors of CRSV.

Another related (and similarly unhelpful) idea which evolved out of the silence frame is the implication that feminists' efforts to direct attention to women's experiences in conflict, particularly pertaining to sexual violence, are responsible for silencing male survivors. This isn't an entirely false premise, but it is one that needs to be specified incredibly carefully at the risk of misdiagnosing the problem but also, as with the

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<sup>257</sup> Touquet et al. 2020, 29

previous point, damaging relationships within the heterogeneous CRSV issue network. Chapter 3 finds no evidence that feminist advocates conspired to block acknowledgment of men and boy survivors. Instead, in the instances where the issue was raised, some actors – particularly but not only feminists – understood it to be outside the scope of the immediate concern of rectifying the decades-long status quo of treating violence against women as an unremarkable and inevitable byproduct of conflict. As discussed in this chapter, collaborative structures of silence are not only sustained by those who wish to silence, but rather emerge from overlapping processes, many of which may have little to do with what is being silenced.

One important finding of this dissertation explored in Chapter 5 is that some feminists within this network interpret the narrative that men and boy survivors were silenced as a form of anti-feminist backlash. This clearly has negative implications for a united effort on behalf of all survivors and instead functions to create siloes. The irony of placing the blame for the international community's delayed uptake of the issue of CRSV against men and boys on feminism is that it was feminist advocacy in the first place which enabled male survivors to eventually emerge – and his irony is not lost on many of the feminist advocates I interviewed.

## CHAPTER 3

### A “LANDSCAPE OF SILENCE”<sup>258</sup>: MAPPING THE GLOBAL SILENCE ON CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS

#### 3.1 Overview

In this chapter I further demonstrate the utility of my novel conceptualization of silence as well as the veracity of my empirical claim that the silence surrounding CRSV against men and boys should not be understood as a singular, totalizing moment of silence or silencing. I do this by offering a comprehensive mapping of the moments of silence which coincided to keep CRSV against men and boys off the global conflict and security agenda, from the inception of widespread attention to CRSV, up to the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1820, the document widely recognized as signifying CRSV’s status amongst state actors as a bona fide security threat. In sum, I show that the reasons for the longstanding gap in attention towards CRSV against men and boys are layered, mutually reinforcing, and flow through various channels of agency and responsibility amongst both state and nonstate actors. I identify two important factors in this process: the location of early CRSV advocacy in complementary discourses about gender inequality, and the cross-cultural stigmatization of male CRSV survivors. Importantly, I do not suggest that male survivors are *quantitatively* more stigmatized than their female counterparts, but rather, that the male survivors’ stigmatization manifests in a *qualitatively* distinct way due to the crime’s unfathomability within prevailing hetero-essentialist and patriarchal norms, in contrast to the normalization of violence, sexual and otherwise, against women.

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<sup>258</sup> This is the title of Amalendu Misra’s expansive book on CRSV against men and boys (Misra 2015).

Section I critiques one of the most prominent understandings as to why CRSV against men and boys was initially absent from the CRSV issue agenda, which is that the stigma surrounding male survivors is so great, that it inhibits them from coming forward, resulting in a data gap. I highlight two reasons that suggest the need to reevaluate this claim: 1) women also experience barriers to reporting, and 2) anecdotal evidence suggests that nonreporting is not universal amongst male survivors. Section II demonstrates and historicizes the importance of gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination to the construction of CRSV as an issue of concern and suggests this as a key reason for why the question of male survivors largely didn't occur to advocates working on the issue nor to the large human rights organizations which were starting to take it up as well. It also suggests that the focus on surfacing the neglected experiences of women and girls in conflict coincided with the additional factor of heteronormative understandings of what constitutes sexual violence. These arguments are constructed upon the contrasting examples of CRSV in Eastern DRC, and at Abu Ghraib. Section III begins by providing additional evidence beyond Abu Ghraib suggesting that CRSV against men and boys was not an unknown phenomenon. Beyond the awkward fit of CRSV against men and boys into the available frame which conceptualized CRSV as a 'war on women,' this section shifts its focus to agency at the NGO level by bridging the previous discussion of the legacy of feminist advocacy behind the visibility of CRSV to continued shortcomings in meeting the needs of women and girls. In contrast, Section IV then focuses on the influence of state actors who blocked recognition of sexual violence against men and boys due to homophobia, representing an instance of purposeful, active silencing

### **3.2 Examining the Overlapping ‘Stigma’ and ‘Data Gap’ Theories for the Absence of Male Survivors from the CRSV Issue Agenda**

When asked why they believed the issue of CRSV against men and boys took some time to surface, many participants raised the issue of a data gap which intersected with the reality of limited resources. As one participant explained, it’s difficult to get buy-in for an issue when there’s a weak evidence base; NGOs work under immense pressure to get on the ground and ‘get it done’ as quickly as possible and with the sparsest of resources.<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, in accounting for this lack of data, many participants brought up the role of stigma in inhibiting men from coming forward. This explanation was similarly reflected in the advocacy documents, accounting for the vast majority of explanations provided as to why little is known about CRSV against men and boys either in the specific context discussed in the document, or in general.

However, this assertion can be interpreted as inappropriately placing the onus on male survivors themselves to come forward and identify themselves as having experienced sexual violence, rather than on the institutions for reforming their practices to create more conducive environments for men to come forward. While this will be addressed at greater length in Chapter 5, for now, it’s necessary at this point to discuss (non)reporting as an explanation for the global silence surrounding the topic.

On the one hand, there is a kernel of truth within this sentiment that cannot be disregarded. As mentioned in Chapter 2 and as will be expanded upon later in this chapter, homophobia and heteronormativity undergird representations of sexual violence (both during and beyond conflict) against males across many, many cultural and historical contexts. Given this reality, it is reasonable to suspect that a great deal of male

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<sup>259</sup> Interview with author, Participant 31, April 25, 2024 (virtual call)

survivors do not seek support – in terms of healthcare, legal resources, etc. – out of fear of social backlash. Indeed, this came up quite a bit during my interviews. One participant explained that victim-blaming towards male survivors is often underpinned by attacks on their sexual and gender identities. “You know, if it's the woman, of course... ‘What were you looking for?’ They [say], you know, ‘How are you dressed?’ You know, those... insensitive questions that they ask such victims. If it is a man, the question would be like, ‘What are you then? You're not a man. How can you be raped? What were you doing? Why didn't you fight back?’”<sup>260</sup> That same participant shared an anecdote where a male Ugandan political figure had been sexually assaulted in public. “[D]o you know what they do?” the participant said of the public’s reaction. “They go on social media and they make jokes about it, and they laugh about it.”<sup>261</sup>

What’s important to note, however, is that backlash is not an experience of male survivors alone. Very few would suggest outright that women don’t face similar barriers to reporting, yet the refrain that men don’t report due to stigma implies that it is a greater issue for men. As indicated by the participant just quoted, survivors of all genders are at risk for social ostracism and mockery. Further, as noted by Touquet et al, “[s]urvivors often encounter different access barriers and forms of stigma, depending in part on their gender and sex, but also their context, culture and the individual.”<sup>262</sup> As, such interpreting low rates of male reporting in an area where external evidence suggests that the problem may be larger might be more productively read through the constraints of that particular

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<sup>260</sup> Interview with author, Participant 1, August 24, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>261</sup> Ibid

<sup>262</sup> Touquet et al 2020, 29

context, as opposed to an inherent tendency amongst male survivors. For example, in countries where same-sex activity is illegal, the conflation of male survivors' experiences with homosexuality can lead not only to mockery, but to legal reprisal.

What's more, multiple participants with experience working directly with male survivors cast doubt on the assumption that male survivors rarely come forward. Chris Dolan, an advocate for male CRSV survivors whose advocacy will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4, recounted an experience screening a film about CRSV against men in villages throughout northern Uganda. "And people would say, 'Me too!' Bloody hell, I thought it was a taboo topic and here are people standing up in front of their whole village."<sup>263</sup> In addition to those who disclosed publicly, some individuals followed up after the screening in a more private setting: "In a week we had about five people in our offices saying, 'Me too. Me too.' So it raises lots of questions [of] like, where's the blockage actually?"<sup>264</sup> Another participant – speaking of a project they were running on experiences of male survivors in South Sudan – mentioned that they actually had to ask their research assistant to stop recruiting participants because enough people had come forward that they reached a point of data saturation.<sup>265</sup>

To summarize, the idea that men do not report sexual violence due to stigma holds little water as an explanation for why the issue was left off the global agenda, for two reasons: first, men and women share many of the same barriers to reporting; and second, evidence suggests that the tendency towards non-reporting is not a universal

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<sup>263</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>264</sup> Ibid

<sup>265</sup> Interview with author, Participant 32, June 6, 2024 (virtual call)

experience amongst male survivors. Thus, if an evidence gap drove the global silence, this gap would have to be a byproduct of the systems in place for collecting this data. However, I argue that while the idea of an evidence gap figured prominently in many practitioners' understandings of why the issue took so long to surface, this explanation only tells a small part of the story. While evidence on CRSV against men and boys has improved greatly in recent years thanks to the work of organizations like Women's Refugee Commission, it's ahistorical to suggest that no evidence for sexual violence against men and boys existed during the time when the frame was limited to women and girls. Additionally, as will be touched on in Chapter 4 and then discussed at length in Chapter 5, the idea that women and girls make up the "vast preponderance" of CRSV cases, as one participant put it,<sup>266</sup> remains prevalent to this day. This is reflected not only in the personal viewpoints of practitioners, but also in the language of more recent advocacy documents and state rhetoric. This casts doubt on the data gap explanation because despite the fact that CRSV against men and boys is better reflected at the global level, there is still a widespread belief, as there was before, that the issue is very rare. In the following sections, I will show that the 'data gap argument' is a heuristic for a much more complex relationship wherein preferences for associating the CRSV issue with women and girls on the one hand, and heteronormative beliefs about sexual violence on the other, converged to create a global silence on the issue of CRSV against men and boys.

### **3.3 Torture at Abu Ghraib vs. Sexual Violence in Eastern DRC: Divergent Frames for Making Sense of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence**

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<sup>266</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

Having justified skepticism towards the ‘data gap’ explanation, I will now establish and defend my own explanation for understanding the absence of CRSV against men and boys from the global agenda as an instance of collaborative silence driven by two factors: the context of heightened concern with violence against women and girls from which attention to CRSV emerged, and homophobia/heteronormative beliefs about male rape. To do so, I will rely on two historical examples of CRSV that were both heavily covered in advocacy work as well as the mainstream media: that in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and at the Abu Ghraib detention center in Iraq. These examples contrast in that they represent two very different frames for understanding CRSV, one applied to that against women, and the other applied to that against men. Importantly, this latter frame does not represent CRSV *as such* – instead, crimes of an overtly sexual nature were understood by advocacy organizations through the lens of torture. Together, these examples show how that the dominant frame for understanding CRSV precluded male survivors due to a broader focus on gendered violence against women and girls. Consequently, when evidence of CRSV did emerge, it was framed not as CRSV, but as torture.

For better or for worse,<sup>267</sup> the conflict in Eastern DRC – technically ongoing since 2004 but traceable back to the exodus of Hutu militants into DRC following the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 – has become almost synonymous with the concept of rape as a weapon of war. While the concept was developed in the 1990’s in response to the use of genocidal rape in Bosnia and Rwanda and was later invoked by human rights

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<sup>267</sup> Some literature problematizes the West’s hyper-fixation on rape in Eastern DRC for its role in perpetuating racist and colonial stereotypes and exploiting the trauma of rape survivors for the emotional gratification of a Western audience; see, i.e., Baaz and Stern 2013; Mertens 2017; Mertens 2019; Oruh 2015.

organizations regarding conflicts such as those in Sierra Leone<sup>268</sup> and Myanmar<sup>269</sup> (formerly Burma), it was Eastern DRC that the press gave the unfortunate title of “rape capital of the world”<sup>270</sup> as well as “the worst place to be a woman.”<sup>271</sup> Of the documents comprising the sample of advocacy on CRSV analyzed for this research, nearly one fifth of those documents (107 of 582) were focused on DRC, with the bulk of the documents published between 2008 and 2013.<sup>272</sup>

Another issue which received significant attention from human rights organizations is the abuse of prisoners by US forces at Abu Ghraib. In January of 2004, Sergeant Joseph Darby provided his supervisor with two CD’s worth of photos of grotesque abuses committed by US soldiers at a prison in Abu Ghraib, just West of Baghdad, which US forces had been using to detain an interrogate Iraqis since its invasion of Iraq in 2003. While murmurings of allegations of torture at Abu Ghraib were ongoing since 2003, in April of 2004, the issue was brought to the attention of thousands

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<sup>268</sup> For example, a 2000 bulletin from Amnesty International explains, “In Sierra Leone the systematic way in which rape and sexual violence have been used, and committed so extensively with impunity, indicates a deliberate strategy to use rape and sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war and to instil[] terror,” see, Amnesty International 2000.

<sup>269</sup> For example, a summary of a 2003 report by Refugees International explains that “Although Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has denied allegations that its military uses rape as a weapon of war, any admissions of rape have been attributed to rogue elements or the occasional unruly soldier. RI's report disputes this. ‘Rape is widespread and committed with impunity, both by officers and lower ranking soldiers. The culture of impunity contributes to an atmosphere in which rape is permissible,’ said Veronika Martin, advocate for RI. The report goes on to suggest that rape is not only widespread, but also systematic in nature” see, Refugees International 2003.

<sup>270</sup> Former Special Representative for the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström is credited for this; see, BBC 2010. According to Mertens (2019), it was also popularized by *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof, who wrote many columns on the topic of rape in DRC.

<sup>271</sup> This possibly derives from a 2011 survey that listed DRC amongst other states such as Afghanistan as the world’s worst places to be a woman publicized by Amnesty International, see, Amnesty International 2011. A Guardian article published in the same timeframe also used the moniker; see, Kahorha 2011.

<sup>272</sup> This does not include documents which focused on DRC amongst other countries or regions, thus slightly understating the prevalence of the context in advocacy.

of Americans and then the world when CBS's program *60 Minutes* released a segment which included some of the photos revealed by Sergeant Darby.<sup>273</sup> Subsequently, Abu Ghraib became a focal point in a US debate about wartime responsibilities to uphold human rights standards, understood by opponents of the Bush administration as emblematic of a systemic problem and by the administration itself and its defenders as simply the work of a few 'bad apples' who could be rooted out. Commentators in the US media fixated particularly on the apparently surprising fact that several of the perpetrators were women,<sup>274</sup> made all the more confounding by the fact that much of the torture depicted in the photos was sexual in nature; male and female soldiers alike posed alongside the naked bodies of Iraqi prisoners, forced to assume sexual positions. Subsequent investigations revealed that sexualized abuses were commonplace beyond the staged photos.<sup>275</sup>

While falling largely outside of the purview of aid organizations, rights-focused groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch followed the Abu Ghraib 'scandal' closely and produced some of their own reports on Abu Ghraib and the broader patterns of US human rights violations committed during its counterterrorism efforts.<sup>276</sup> Yet it wasn't until nearly a decade after Abu Ghraib that global discourse on CRSV started to shift to accommodate male survivors, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In other words, while Abu Ghraib rendered sexual violence against men hyper-visible, this visibility failed to challenge gendered narratives surrounding CRSV. Why?

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<sup>273</sup> Leung 2004

<sup>274</sup> Holland 2009; Tétrault 2006

<sup>275</sup> Taguba 2004

<sup>276</sup> Amnesty International 2006; Human Rights Watch 2004; Human Rights Watch 2005b

One piece of the puzzle in unraveling why Abu Ghraib did not move the needle in the way one might expect, as I have already alluded to, is the legacy of feminist advocacy which initially brought CRSV to the fore as part of a broader effort to redress the historic absence of women’s experiences from peace and security efforts. As one participant explained succinctly, “if that [Resolution 1820 and CRSV] is part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which it is, then just by virtue of it being Women, Peace and Security, you would understand why it wasn't included.”<sup>277</sup> This explanation, while relatively straightforward, is crucial to elaborate on. Viewed in hindsight, the initial absence of men and boys from the construction of the CRSV issue appears as a glaring one – to borrow Thiesmeyer’s phrasing, as a disappointed expectation of speech.<sup>278</sup> However, when considering the context of feminist interventions during that timeframe, I argue it would have been far more surprising were the issue to be centered from the get-go.

It’s important now to step back and provide some context for the attention to CRSV which exploded in the 1990’s. While CRSV was prevalent throughout the Second World War,<sup>279</sup> the issue was barely visible in the wave of post-war institutionalization, including in the tribunals erected to prosecute war crimes where rape was overshadowed by “what they considered greater crimes – murders, mass deportation, and mass enslavement.”<sup>280</sup> CRSV was understood as an unfortunate but inevitable byproduct of conflict, relegated to the private sphere beyond the serious concerns of emergent global

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<sup>277</sup> Interview with author, Participant 5, November 13, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>278</sup> Thiesmeyer 2013

<sup>279</sup> Burds 2009

<sup>280</sup> Kuo 2002, 307

governance designed to uphold peace and security.<sup>281</sup> That the marginalization of women's experiences in war was eventually challenged is largely explained through the work of a broad-based feminist TAN to forge connections between violence against women and increasingly popular post-Cold War discourses about human rights.<sup>282</sup> One major accomplishment for feminist advocacy was the passage of the Rome Statute in 1998; bolstered by a surge in concern from the public about CRSV due to the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990's,<sup>283</sup> feminists ensured that the legal doctrine underpinning the nascent International Criminal Court (ICC) accounted for the specificity and severity of sexual and gender-based crimes so that they could be prosecuted appropriately.<sup>284</sup> Whereas crimes of this nature were largely ignored at the Nuremburg and Tokyo trials,<sup>285</sup> feminist involvement in the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) established a precedent for this recognition which the Rome Statute solidified.<sup>286</sup>

Furthermore, according to Joachim, "the end of the Cold War had led to a redefinition of 'security.' In contrast to a focus on the military strength and defense capabilities of states, the rights and well-being of people were now receiving greater emphasis."<sup>287</sup> In this regard, the ambitious WPS agenda, embodied in Resolution 1325

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<sup>281</sup> Chinkin 1994

<sup>282</sup> Harrington 2011; Joachim 1999; Kelly 2005; Meyer 1995; Tinker 1999

<sup>283</sup> Hansen 2000; Bower and Williams 2009

<sup>284</sup> Halley 2008

<sup>285</sup> Importantly, the complete absence of CRSV from Nuremburg and Tokyo may have been overstated; see, i.e., Sellers and Nwoye 2018.

<sup>286</sup> de Brouwers 2005

<sup>287</sup> Joachim 1999, 151

passed in 2000, both recognizes the gendered violence experienced by women during war as an inhibitor of peace *and* identifies women as active agents of peace rather than merely passive victims.<sup>288</sup> This was another huge win for feminist advocates, who were deeply involved in drafting and raising the profile of the resolution. Regardless, while feminists – especially feminist anti-war activists<sup>289</sup> – sought to bring attention to women’s agency in conflict in addition to their vulnerabilities, the prevention of sexual violence in war nonetheless “part and parcel of this agenda from the outset,” as peacebuilder Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, who was involved in the drafting of 1325 and 1820, put it.<sup>290</sup> She continued to explain: “When, for example, we're advocating on inclusivity and gender responsiveness in ceasefire negotiations, we say ‘Sexual violence and rape have to be part of the forms of ceasefire. It's not just bullets and bombs, it should also be rape that stopped.’”<sup>291</sup>

The feminist origins of CRSV advocacy are crucial to understanding why men and boy survivors were infrequently discussed during the 1990’s and early 2000’s. One participant explained that even today as CRSV is increasingly taken up at the Security Council (as will be explored in Chapter 4), the majority of NGOs who robustly address CRSV are also predominantly focused on women and girls:

[W]e're always struggling with the fact that the majority of victims in a particular situation where there is conflict-related sexual violence, the majority of victims pretty much almost always are women and girls. And so I think it's easy to forget. And the organizations that are doing that work tend to be like my own organization, organizations that work on women's rights. There aren't very many specialized organizations that work on sexual violence, let alone conflict-related

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<sup>288</sup> S/RES/1325 (2000)

<sup>289</sup> Otto 2010, 100

<sup>290</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>291</sup> Ibid

sexual violence. And so they're not coming at it from that lens. They usually coming at it from a women's rights lens, you know. And if you're coming at it from a women's rights lens, then you're thinking about women, and it takes a conscious reminder, and conscious intention to broaden that, [to] remind yourself that there are other victims too.<sup>292</sup>

Building from this participant's point, sexual violence-specific organizations are not necessarily gender-neutral, either; one of the most prominent internationally oriented NGOs which focuses on sexual violence in and out of conflict, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), remains explicitly committed to a focus on violence against women and girls.

Though some would eventually frame CRSV as standalone issue as will be discussed in Chapter 4, early feminist advocates did not understand wartime rape as simply an issue of conflict and insecurity, but instead as an extension of the structural inequalities experienced by women and as part of a broader continuum of GBV.<sup>293</sup> The transnational feminist activism which occurred at the international level around CRSV did not occur in a vacuum – the 1970's marked the beginning of a transnational cultural shift regarding women's rights. In 1975, Susan Brownmiller published her seminal book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, which discussed wartime rape amongst many other instances of sexual violence in both the public and private spheres.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Interview with author, Participant 14, December 13, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>293</sup> While I use the term 'gender-based violence' (GBV) here, it's important to note that this was not the parlance at the time; instead, "violence against women and girls" (VAWG) and similar iterations were more common. This fact was relayed to me by several participants and is reflected in the language of advocacy documents I analyzed. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, GBV's meaning has been the subject of contestation in recent years, with some pushing for more gender-inclusive definitions that account for men as well as LGBTQ+ individuals targeted based on failure to adhere to gendered norms. However, in this chapter, when the term GBV is used, it can be assumed that I am referring to violence against women and girls.

<sup>294</sup> Brownmiller 1975

Brownmiller's central thesis – that rape is about pleasure, not sex – would become widespread. Also publishing around this time was feminist legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon, whose achievements include constructing the legal arguments for pornography as a violation of civil rights and workplace sexual harassment as sexist discrimination.

Brownmiller and MacKinnon both went on to write influential texts on the mass rape of women and girls during the Balkan conflict of the 1990's. MacKinnon even leveraged the Alien Tort Act in representing Muslim and Croatian rape survivors, resulting in the first recognition of mass rape as genocide within the US legal system.<sup>295</sup> MacKinnon's work situates wartime rape amidst a continuum of GBV: "Wartime is largely exceptional in that atrocities by soldiers against civilians are always state acts. But men do in war what they do in peace, only more so. When it comes to women, at least to civilian casualties, the complacency that surrounds peacetime extends to war, however the laws read."<sup>296</sup> Similarly, Brownmiller reacts to a TV talking head's explanation that "This is all about identity" by suggesting that "perhaps the newscaster should have amended his analysis to say *male* identity."<sup>297</sup> As much as Brownmiller and MacKinnon emphasized the particular horrors of the sexual violence which took place during the Balkan conflict due to its widespread and systematic nature, they also emphasized that the rapes were not just a matter of ethnic enmity, but rather the intersection of it with the

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<sup>295</sup> It's worth mentioning that MacKinnon's analysis and activism has been subject to criticism on the basis that it contributes to the demonization of Serbs (see, i.e., Kesic 1994). Kesic's warning that MacKinnon's work will not "help to re-establish any type of civil cohabitation between south Slavic people in the future" (Kesic 1994, 267) unfortunately, rings true as the legacy of the ICTY continues to leave strong cleavages in the contemporary Balkans (see, i.e., Helms 2013).

<sup>296</sup> MacKinnon 1993

<sup>297</sup> Brownmiller 1995

normalization of violence against women which occurs in war as in peace.<sup>298</sup> These arguments cohered with the transnational feminist advocacy leading up to Resolution 1325 which emphasized the unity of women across borders based on their shared experience of patriarchy. Notably, feminist scholarship from the Global South highlights the discord that the ‘global sisterhood’ narrative concealed between Northern- and Southern-based feminists, particularly in terms of the universalism of women’s rights claims.<sup>299</sup> Regardless, this was the tenor of that activism.

Prior to Resolution 1325, feminist advocates were also involved in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by states in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women. While Chapter E of the Declaration focuses on “Women and armed conflict,”<sup>300</sup> Chapter D tackled “Violence against women” without differentiation of the conflict versus ‘non-conflict’ context. It defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”<sup>301</sup> It further highlights the continuum of GBV in which CRSV is located, stating that “[a]cts or threats of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, or perpetrated or

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<sup>298</sup> One of MacKinnon’s articles on the Balkans is indeed titled, “Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace” (MacKinnon 1993).

<sup>299</sup> Basu 2000; De Jong 2017; Grewal 1999; Mohanty 1988; Smith 2002; Thompson 2000

<sup>300</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>301</sup> UN Women 1995

condoned by the State, instil fear and insecurity in women's lives and are obstacles to the achievement of equality and for development and peace."<sup>302</sup>

While the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides initially brought the "strategic and tactical use of sexual violence... front and center into our global discourse,"<sup>303</sup> the conflict in Eastern DRC brought it renewed focus. Having established this important context, I'll return now to the violence in Eastern DRC. Unlike many other instances, this violence very much made its way into the broader public consciousness rather than being known only by practitioners and advocates, as was also true with the Balkan and Rwandan conflicts; as such, it also serves to illustrate the centrality of GBV and women's global inequality to discourse on the issue of CRSV. The first important moment came in 2008 when director Lisa F. Jackson released the award-winning documentary *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo*. The film made rounds throughout (inter)governmental forums as well as the nonprofit world, including featuring in Human Rights Watch's annual film festival. Jackson interviewed survivors, medical professionals, and even perpetrators for her film, and reports to have gained the trust of survivors through sharing the story of her own rape by a group of men who were never identified and brought to justice.<sup>304</sup> On her decision to include the backstory of her own assault in the film, Jackson explained that it was "a way of making the film more accessible, because the whole point of the film is that these women are not 'other.' That

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<sup>302</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995

<sup>303</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>304</sup> Rountree n.d.

we [in this country] experience the same things they do. Within the gradation of human experience, the overlap is a lot more profound than you might think.”<sup>305</sup>

A second important moment was the awareness campaign led by V, formerly known as Eve Ensler, of feminist advocacy group V-Day. V-Day partnered with UNICEF on the global advocacy campaign “Stop Raping Our Greatest Resource”<sup>306</sup> which eventually culminated in the establishment of the City of Joy, described as a “transformational leadership community for women survivors of violence” in Bukavu, DRC.<sup>307</sup> V wrote several articles in well-read publications<sup>308</sup> about her experience working with Congolese survivors alongside Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Denis Mukwege at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu.<sup>309</sup> In an article for the *Huffington Post*, V writes,

I was in Bosnia during the war in 1994 when it was discovered there were rape camps where white women were being raped. Within two years there was adequate intervention.

Yet, in Congo, femicide has continued for 12 years. Why? Is it that coltan, the mineral that keeps our cell phones and computers in play, is more important than Congolese girls?

Is it flat-out racism, the world's utter indifference and disregard for black people and black women in particular? Is it simply that the UN and most governments are run by men who have never known what it feels like to be raped?

What is happening in Congo is the most brutal and rampant violence toward women in the world. If it continues to go unchecked, if there continues to be complete impunity, it sets a precedent, it expands the boundaries of what is

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<sup>305</sup> Rountree n.d. (brackets in original). The country being spoken about is the United States.

<sup>306</sup> UN News 2008

<sup>307</sup> V-Day n.d.

<sup>308</sup> Ensler 2007; Ensler 2009

<sup>309</sup> Dr. Mukwege received the Nobel Peace Prize along with survivor-activist Nadia Murad in 2018. Since being highlighted by V-Day, Panzi Hospital has become world-renowned for its work with rape survivors.

permissible to do to women's bodies in the name of exploitation and greed everywhere. It's cheap warfare.<sup>310</sup>

In the article, V connects the violence directed towards Congolese women, which she equates to “[f]emicide, the systematic and planned destruction of women,” to a broader epidemic of GBV she has witnessed travelling the world with her play *The Vagina Monologues*, during which “scores of women lined up to tell [her] of their rapes, incest, beatings, mutilations.”<sup>311</sup>

This discourse on Eastern DRC exemplified by *The Greatest Silence* and V-Day’s campaign was largely reflected in the broader advocacy world, where the weaponization of sexual violence in DRC was also represented as extending beyond the bounds of the conflict as such to form a broader war on women as a social group. According to a 2007 article by Women’s Refugee Commission highlighting a statistic estimating over 27,000 sexual assaults in DRC during the year 2006, “[a]lthough the war in Congo has officially ended, the war against women has not,”<sup>312</sup> which in a 2008 article CARE referred to as “one of the most appalling wars on women in the world.”<sup>313</sup> Similarly, a 2002 report on CRSV in the DRC by Human Rights Watch refers to widespread sexual violence as “the war within the war.”<sup>314</sup> This language was also used in a campaign launched by the Swedish chapter of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

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<sup>310</sup> Ensler 2009

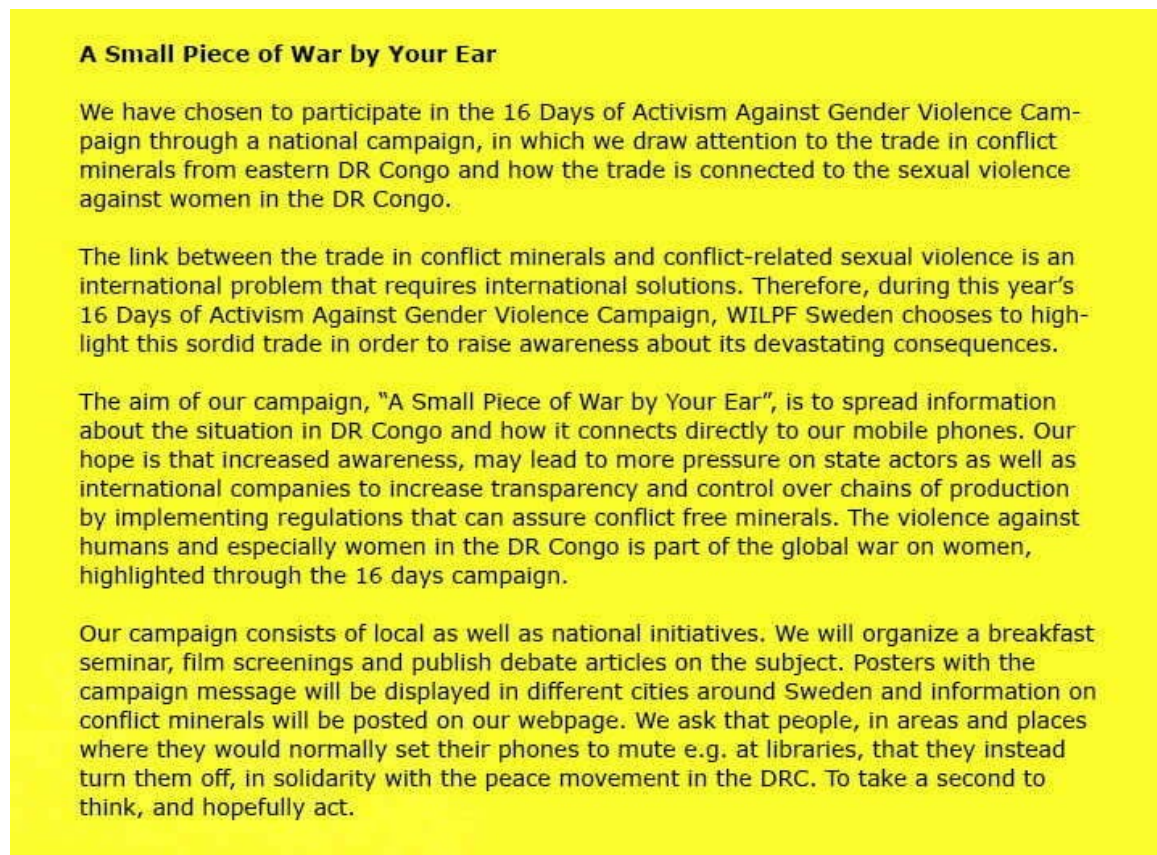
<sup>311</sup> Ibid

<sup>312</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission 2007

<sup>313</sup> CARE 2008

<sup>314</sup> Human Rights Watch 2002c

called “A Small Piece of War by Your Ear” which, similarly to V’s writings, expounded upon the complicity of Western tech consumers (*Figure 3.1*).



*Figure 3.2. A summary of the campaign "A Small Piece of War by Your Ear" provided by WILPF.<sup>315</sup>*

Importantly, WILPF was also attentive to the dangers of depicting the trauma of rape survivors without accompanying these stories with reflections on their courage and agency. In a blog post titled “A message from Congolese women on International Women’s Day,” WILPF writes,

Congolese women are rejecting the victim hood stereotype that is conferred to them by many local and international NGOs. Congolese women, particularly those who have suffered from atrocious human rights violations (sexual violence), want to have some dignity and be known for their mental strength and ability to survive hardship. Congolese women refuse to be used as a propaganda tools by

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<sup>315</sup> Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom 2012

politicians or NGOs, and feel that the pictures of their nudity and poverty as well as that of their children should not be exposed in such a way in America and Europe to draw sympathy and money that will never even reach the recipients. Furthermore, Congolese women deplore the fact that today many international NGOs are using the victims of sexual violence as a commercial tool to build the administrative capacity of their organisations while ignoring completely the need of Congolese women as well as undermining the effort of local grassroots women and disempowering them.<sup>316</sup>

Importantly, this framing of CRSV as a ‘war on women’ was prominent not only in feminist advocacy, but in the broader emergent discourse on CRSV. Feminists brought the issue onto the agenda and so it was through their framing that CRSV came to be more widely known, even by those outside of feminist or women’s rights spaces. Nonetheless, organizations without a gender focus tended to make this connection between the ‘rape epidemic’ in Eastern DRC and systemic gender inequality less frequently than their feminist counterparts. For human rights giants Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, whether gender inequality was foregrounded in discussions about CRSV largely depended upon whether CRSV was the thematic concern of the document or discussed in the context of broader human rights violations. If the latter, connections to the context of women’s unequal status in Congolese society appear infrequently; instead, causal emphasis is placed on factors such as arms proliferation.<sup>317</sup> Even the legal instruments invoked largely depends on whether the document focuses on CRSV specifically or as part of general human rights violations – for example, while a 2002 report by Human Rights on CRSV in DRC highlights the Congolese government’s responsibilities in light of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a report released by the organization that same year which covers CRSV as part of war

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<sup>316</sup> See, i.e., Stemple 2009; Zalewski 2018

<sup>317</sup> Amnesty International 2005

crimes committed in Kisangani does not list CEDAW amongst the relevant legal standards, instead focusing on Geneva Conventions.<sup>318</sup> Two distinct vernaculars for non-feminist organizations to discuss CRSV can thus be observed, one borrowed from feminist advocacy, and another conforming to a more ‘gender-neutral’ approach where CRSV appears as just one type of violence among many, as it did consistently prior to the 1990’s.

Given the centrality of the ‘war on women’ frame and the connections to GBV within this discourse, it makes sense why advocacy on Abu Ghraib would not link the sexual dimensions of the atrocities to CRSV. That narrative made far less intuitive sense to apply to sexual violence against men given its focus on patriarchy. However, this does not mean that feminism cannot account for its occurrence. Many feminist theorists have argued that theories accounting for the subordination of Othered masculine identities (i.e., on the basis of race) are necessary for the pursuit feminist goals,<sup>319</sup> especially given that the preclusion of ‘vulnerable men’ rests upon similarly static notions of inherently vulnerable women, which normalizes violence against women.<sup>320</sup> This observation is closely related to a broader body of IR and IR-adjacent literature critiquing the instrumentalization of instances of violence against racialized women (and sexual and gender minorities) in contemporary Western foreign policy under the framework of security. For example, in the context of the US-waged ‘war on terror,’ representations of women in the Arab world as particularly oppressed by religiously motivated and

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<sup>318</sup> Human Rights Watch 2002a; Human Rights Watch 2002b

<sup>319</sup> See, i.e., Agathangelou and Ling 2009

<sup>320</sup> Helms 2013; Sjoberg 2006

patriarchal male captors provides a convenient ideological backdrop for the security goals of the US and its allies.<sup>321</sup>

Furthermore, there was already a way to discuss CRSV against men at Abu Ghraib: as torture. This brings us to the second puzzle piece in untangling the collaborative structure of silence: heteronormative understandings of sexual violence. The literature notes that one hindrance to redressing crimes of sexual violence perpetrated against men and boys in the context of war is that these violations are often not interpreted as sexual in nature and so get grouped, instead, under the rubric of torture.<sup>322</sup> Indeed, according to one participant, when they first began working on the issue of CRSV against men and boys, they noticed that many people “just paralleled it with sexual violence against women and girls,” assuming that for men, sexual violence would always entail penetrative anal rape.<sup>323</sup> The same participant gave an example from an assessment they were working on:

I kept asking all these health providers, "Are you seeing any male survivors?" "No, we're not seeing any male survivors." And then I realized, I think I'm asking the wrong question, and so I started asking, "Are you seeing any men that are coming in with trauma to their genitalia?" "Oh, yeah. We have a number of those." And so they just did not make that connection that, "Oh, this type of trauma is sexual violence." So it's not being recorded.<sup>324</sup>

The same can be said for other abuses which can constitute sexual harm but aren't treated as such because they don't involve penetration. One participant who has also worked extensively with male survivors pointed out: “Can we even think beyond rape for a

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<sup>321</sup> See, i.e., Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ayotte and Hussain 2005; Bhattacharyya 2009. For a discussion and sexual minorities in this capacity, see Puar 2007.

<sup>322</sup> Charman 2018; Kapur and Muddell 2016; Solangon and Patel 2012

<sup>323</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice note)

<sup>324</sup> Ibid

while? Can we think... in terms of simply stripping a person naked against their will. Can we think about how common that is?”<sup>325</sup> Of course, there is nothing innately sexual about forced nudity; however, the same could be said for any kind of abuse. What makes sexual violence *sexual* has far less to do with the act itself or the body parts involved than it does with the context surrounding it. Abu Ghraib is a perfect example of this: it is safe to say that those detainees were not stripped naked for the sole purpose of causing physical discomfort. This act was perpetrated with the goal of sexual humiliation, and we can say this with near certainty by contextualizing it amongst the other kinds of abuses which took place. Without including the photo, many readers can probably already recall in their minds one of the most infamous photos from the Abu Ghraib leak where nude detainees were positioned to be stacked on top of each other, almost in a pyramid shape. Survivors recounted being sodomized, receiving threats of rape, and being forced to masturbate and perform other sexual acts on themselves and other detainees.<sup>326</sup>

Additionally, the atrocities at Abu Ghraib were perpetrated with racialized logics that worked in tandem with gendered/sexual logics. Occurring to Puar,

...the cultural-difference line has also been used by conservative and progressive factions alike to comment on the particularly intense shame with which Muslims experience homosexual and feminizing acts. For this, the prisoners receive vast sympathy from the general public. The taboo of homosexuality within Islamic cultures figures heavily in the equation for why the torture has been so “effective”; this interpretation of sexual norms in the Middle East—sexuality is repressed, but perversity is just bubbling beneath the surface— forms part of a centuries-long Orientalist tradition, an Orientalist phantasmatic that certainly informed the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Interview with author, Participant 32, June 6, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>326</sup> See, i.e., Hamm 2007; Limon 2007; Mirzoeff 2006

<sup>327</sup> Puar 2004, 15-16

Puar’s intervention here presages the crucial warning provided by Gray that “violences do not objectively fall into one or another neat definitional box, and the task at hand is not therefore to find the objectively ‘correct’ label for each harmful act; rather, our framing and our categorisation of violence is political, and it has important political implications.”<sup>328</sup> There is a evident danger, as identified by Puar, in the labelling of the Abu Ghraib abuses under the rubric of sexual violence (or sexual humiliation, or sexual torture, or any other synonym) as it could be read as perversely reproducing the racist and Islamophobic ideologies motivating the perpetrators. But the point here is not to argue that a certain type of violence should or shouldn’t be understood as sexual; as I will show in Chapter 5, imposing the label of CRSV on sexualized acts of violence against men is a very nuanced topic. Instead, my aim here is to show how the heteronormative assumption that sexual violence always involves penetration – in other words, that CRSV against men would look the same as CRSV against women – worked in tandem with the prevalence of the ‘war against women’ frame to discursively preclude the violence at Abu Ghraib, and similar situations, from being discussed alongside the violence in Eastern DRC as CRSV.

### **3.4 “When your house keeps falling down... it’s very hard to build a better house”: Contextualizing the Absence of CRSV against Men and Boys within the Continued Shortcomings to Serve Women and Girls**

However, while it was certainly the most high-profile, the sexualized abuse against men at Abu Ghraib was far from the only evidence of male-directed CRSV available in the 1990’s and 2000’s. My analysis confirms Charman’s finding that

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<sup>328</sup> Gray 2018, 244

advocacy framings of CRSV against men and boys are highly inconsistent.<sup>329</sup> Amongst documentation of CRSV against men and boys, even at the institutional level, some explicitly drew out the sexual element in the framing. For example, the 1994 report to the UNSC authored by M. Cherif Bassiouni on the genocide and broader war in the Balkans showed that men as well as women had been subjected to sexual violence, which was perpetrated by all sides but particularly and systematically by Serb soldiers against Muslims.<sup>330</sup> Bassiouni plainly framed these acts as rape and addressed them in the same section of the report explaining patterns of sexual violence against women.

Subsequently, one practitioner noted that evidence from the Balkans was poorly reflected in common understandings of CRSV. In 1997 Eric Stener Carlson, who as an affiliate of the NGO Physicians for Human Rights joined the ICTY's Sexual Assault Investigation Team, published an article in the *Lancet* imploring health professionals and investigators to take the phenomenon seriously. According to Carlson, “[m]any physicians and refugee workers are unaware that there are forms of male sexual assault other than anal rape, and are not trained to recognise the physical sequelae or to treat the psychological effects of such assaults. Experts have tended to bury the issue under the general rubric of abuse or torture and in most cases fail to provide adequate counselling for the victim.”<sup>331</sup> In a follow-up article published in the *British Journal of Criminology*, Carlson elaborated that while working for the ICTY, he was “overwhelmed by the repeated mention of sexual assault against male prisoners. Indeed, the reports were so

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<sup>329</sup> Charman 2018

<sup>330</sup> S/1994/674, 57-60

<sup>331</sup> Carlson 1997

frequent and so consistent, that I began to contemplate the possibility that sexual assault against men [...] was, perhaps, not only widespread in war, but that it was also an almost integral part of war-making itself.”<sup>332</sup> It wasn’t just the Balkan context where evidence of CRSV against men and boys emerged early on; in 2000 a group of researchers from the London-based NGO Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (now known as Freedom from Torture) published evidence of widespread sexual violence against Tamil men in Sri Lankan detention centers, which largely entailed trauma to the genitals.<sup>333</sup>

Yet no shifts in framing were prompted by these discoveries which very clearly highlighted the sexual nature of these crimes and connected them to sexual violence experienced by women during war. While surely there are some who genuinely could not fathom what ‘male rape’ would even entail, the availability of evidence – some buried in long reports, but some, like Abu Ghraib, in the headlines – suggests that ignorance alone is an insufficient explanation for the global silence on CRSV against men and boys. This is especially so for those working directly with victims of GBV, many of them feminists; as one participant put it: “Well yes, it's always happened to men. And there isn't a feminist alive, there isn't a GBV service provider alive, who hasn't known that.”<sup>334</sup>

I will now return briefly to the concept of collaborative silence outlined in Chapter 2. As discussed, collaborative silences are sustained by overlapping,

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<sup>332</sup> Carlson 2006. Interestingly, in this same article, Carlson makes the connection between Abu Ghraib and the evidence seen at the ICTY, noting that “what primarily distinguishes some of the abuses in Yugoslavia from those in Iraq is the fact that the fresh-faced young men committing them came from the United States instead of the Republica Serbska.” As elaborated in the previous section though, this connection didn’t catch on.

<sup>333</sup> Peel et al. 2000

<sup>334</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

crisscrossing acts of silence and silencing that stem from varying conscious and subconscious motivations. In light of the existing evidence of CRSV against men and boys, in this section I explain why feminists in particular might not have felt it expedient to raise the issue in the 1990's or 2000's. It would be inappropriate to refer to this as a direct act of silencing – an example of which will be discussed in the next section – because the mobilization around male survivors up until 2008 was incredibly scant, and so there wasn't much *to* silence. Rather, I suggest that the transnational feminist network's silence on CRSV against men and boys can be fruitfully interpreted as an agential act of silence rooted in a sense of urgency to advance progress on women's issues in light of continued shortcomings. This silence was not an act of intentional silencing with the end-goal of keeping the issue in the shadows. Instead, given these shortcomings, even as some feminist practitioners encountered male survivors in their work and came up with solutions to serve them, introducing a conversation about male survivors to the broader global community made little strategic sense.

One participant who was involved in the drafting of the Rome Statute explained this dynamic as follows: “We were working so hard to surface the hidden histories of women and girls in conflict. And at that time, there was not so much attention paid to the experiences of [men] and boys, because it was felt that our project of the moment was to do this surfacing.”<sup>335</sup> This logic is reflected in advocacy not just by feminist organizations, but also general human rights organizations following feminists' lead on CRSV; for example, an Amnesty International report from 2004, after noting that CRSV

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<sup>335</sup> Interview with author, Participant 16, December 19, 2023 (virtual call). This participant borrows the term ‘surfacing’ from Rhonda Copleon’s influential article “Surfacing Gender: Re-Engraving Crimes Against Women in Humanitarian Law” (Copleon 1994).

against men and boys exists, justifies its focus on women and girls because “[t]he assumption that wars are fought between largely male armies has led to women being seen merely as part of the backdrop. Men are viewed as the key protagonists and main actors of conflict, while women are seen as only occasional, ‘collateral’ victims. Because of these assumptions, the stories of women are rarely highlighted in histories of conflict.”<sup>336</sup> Another Amnesty report from that same year on sexual violence in the Central African Republic explains,

The focus of this report on conflict-related violence against women does not mean that AI ignores or under-estimates the abuses that men also suffered during the conflict. In addition to the risks of injury, death or torture, men also suffered from sexual violence in some cases. [...] AI deplures and works to end those abuses as well. However, this report focuses on the abuses suffered by the women of the CAR as a response to the fact that women and girls are now the majority of victims of conflict the world over and that their suffering has often been ignored or misunderstood.<sup>337</sup>

Again, as mentioned already with the example of international legal mechanisms, discussions of this nature were far more common in advocacy documents centered on CRSV, rather than documents on human rights abuses more generally, again demonstrating the inconsistency of large human rights NGOs’ approaches to CRSV.

Even as rhetoric around CRSV exploded amongst mainstream advocacy organizations as well as at the UN following the adoption of the Rome Statute and Resolution 1325, feminists working on the ground often struggled to secure the issue’s consistent prioritization well into the mid-2000’s. One participant said of the 2003-2005 period and “probably later than that as well,” “there was very little attention to sexual violence, we would go into the field and people would say, ‘We’ll deal with the rapes

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<sup>336</sup> Amnesty International 2004c, 8

<sup>337</sup> Amnesty International 2004a, 5-6

later.”<sup>338</sup> Speaking of their work on CRSV which took place in this timeframe, another participant similarly explained:

...we were just trying to get people to understand that it's actually happening in war zones. It's kind of crazy. Now, just to think, just 17 years ago [2007], I used to have to argue that yes, it is happening in every place that we work. And they'd say, "We don't see any numbers. It's not the Congo. I mean, 1 or 2 women get raped. What's the big deal? That happens in peacetime." And it was like crazy-making to have to make this argument... They assured me, 'We've never seen a woman come forward who's been raped in South Sudan. It just doesn't happen there.' In South Sudan!"<sup>339</sup>

Another participant described the disconnect between top-level rhetoric and ground-level implementation as follows:

...when I was in the field, I couldn't care less about what Ban Ki moon at the time thought. What I cared about is, is this camp commander going to allow me to put curtains on my windows so that people can't look inside a center, while we're doing counseling sessions with survivors and they don't care. They don't believe that GBV is an issue. They don't believe that women and girls should have their own space in the camp. They don't believe they should have dedicated resources. They definitely don't believe they should be going to a center to talk about abuse by their husbands.”<sup>340</sup>

This is all to say that it would be highly inaccurate to suggest that high-level rhetoric immediately translated into broad acceptance of a gender-sensitive approach to conflict. While the Rome Statute and Resolution 1325 were important milestones, they represented a first step; even today, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, implementation falls woefully short, from the mindset of the individual aid worker all the way to governmental budgeting. In sum, a paraphrase of a quote by Sara Ahmed<sup>341</sup> shared by a participant encapsulates this dynamic: “When your house keeps falling down because

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<sup>338</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice note)

<sup>339</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>340</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>341</sup> Ahmed 2017

everyone is trying to take down your walls, it's very hard to build a better house. You're just struggling to keep your four walls up. And that's all you can do. And you can't expand it and make it better and make more space for other people, cause you're just trying to keep it standing.”<sup>342</sup>

To add to this problem, integrating men into CRSV work would have been no small task in some fields, as it remains to this day.<sup>343</sup> For example, multiple participants raised the issue of women’s safe spaces in conflict and humanitarian settings. This concept of setting up women-and-girls-only spaces is common throughout the GBV world as a means of protecting female survivors from potentially encountering their perpetrator while seeking services. On a broader level, some women who have been assaulted may find it difficult to feel safe around men in general; one participant explained that for female survivors, “coming into a service filled with men in the waiting room can be incredibly hard.”<sup>344</sup> Another participant put it simply: “we need to recognize and respect that women need space.”<sup>345</sup>

While one response to this quandary might be that the gender-specific safe space concept can simply be reproduced for male survivors – in other words, the creation of a ‘men’s safe space’ – various participants pointed out that this wouldn’t work either. According to one participant, “How do you make a safe space? You have a women's safe space by making sure men don't come in there. So you can't take the safe space thing that

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<sup>342</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>343</sup> These persisting difficulties of integrating male survivors within existing, women-centered approaches to CRSV will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

<sup>344</sup> Interview with author, Participant 24, March 22, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>345</sup> Interview with author, Participant 33, June 13, 2024 (virtual call)

we developed and say this will work for men, too, because how do you make sure there's not a perpetrator in there? You can't.”<sup>346</sup> A 2021 guidance released by the GBV AoR on addressing the needs of male survivors goes into this predicament in detail, ultimately advising against the creation of men-only spaces for male survivors (Figure 2).

**Male safe spaces as an intervention for male survivors of sexual violence are not recommended.**

Perpetrators of sexual violence against men and boys are overwhelmingly male and replicating a gender segregated safe space model for men is not recommended. A male only space will not provide the same safe environment to promote the prevention of violence or allow survivors to safely disclose and receive referrals to other services. A male safe space that is exclusive for male survivors of sexual violence would likely place their confidentiality and safety at risk, and male survivors in many cases prefer to disclose and receive services at non GBV specific service points. In many countries Women and Girl Safe Spaces are the only space where women can congregate in public, but this is not the same for men. In addition, there are more effective, evidence-based options for supporting male survivors’ disclosure and access to services<sup>22</sup>. Male only group psycho-social support, including sessions led by a trained psychologist or mental health professional with experience supporting male survivors, or peer support models may be considered as a response to male survivors of sexual violence depending on the context, these are distinct and should not be conflated with the model of “male safe spaces”. Men have several entry points as listed in the table above including community and youth centres, health and medical facilities and outreach teams.

*Figure 3.3. Excerpt from “GBV AoR Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators: Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination.”<sup>347</sup>*

The sense of urgency to respond to women and girls’ unmet needs and the challenges of integrating men and boys into existing approaches were reinforced by the widespread belief shared not just by feminists but by the international community more broadly – which persists to this day, as I will bring up in Chapter 5 – that CRSV against men and boys is rare, as evidenced by the participant just quoted. One participant directly connected the belief that CRSV against men and boys is comparatively rare to the

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<sup>346</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>347</sup> Gender-Based Violence AoR 2021

ongoing struggles feminists were experiencing in translating high-level rhetoric into actually mainstreaming a gender perspective on the ground as two factors which combined to keep the issue off the global agenda.<sup>348</sup> Another participant who presented their work on CRSV against men and boys while the issue was still not being widely discussed explained it similarly, specifically bringing up the point of limited resources for responding to women and girls' needs:

There is only so much attention that is going to be given. How would you divide up that attention? Is that attention taken away because you're trying to introduce this? Related to that was the question of funding. [...] We have a limited amount of money. How are we to spend that? We have data on conflict-related sexual violence against women. We don't have prevalence, we don't have numbers in terms of men. Why should we spend money, given the limited money that that exists?<sup>349</sup>

Indeed, another participant who was involved in early efforts to account for sexual violence in humanitarian efforts noted that difficulties accessing victims made it impossible to 'prove' that what they were hearing about was actually happening on a broad scale:

I was working in Afghanistan... and in Pakistan, and we knew of the whole issue of the *bacha bazi*, the young boys in the Punjab area. And we talked about that. And we talked about – it was more about in the early marriage and dowry violence and... But not about sexual violence against boys or about men. It was hard enough in Afghanistan to address it with women, right? We were overwhelmed with zero support. So it was on the agenda. We knew it was an issue, but nobody could get access to these kids and a whole big thing with humanitarian response is if you don't have... if you don't have a patient, you can't say it's happening. You need to have the survivor in front of you to count them to say that this is happening. And we've been fighting this for years and years and years, that the data, the numbers, does not tell you the story. You know, it's the whole tip of the iceberg discussion.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Interview with author, Participant 30, May 30, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>349</sup> Interview with author, Participant 5, November 13, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>350</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

To summarize, while the previous section aimed to show the disjuncture between CRSV against men and boys and predominant frame which focused on CRSV as part of a ‘war on women,’ in this section I hope to have demonstrated why the gender-specific conceptualization of CRSV wasn’t challenged even when contradictory evidence emerged. When the issue of male survivors did come up, there was little motivation to move onto a new problem – and a challenging one, at that – when the original problem remained unresolved. Instead, those who directly encountered male survivors in their work did their best to assist them, but did not take their findings as an opportunity to ‘break the silence’ on male survivors.

### **3.5 Gender Trouble: The Role of State Actors in Blocking Recognition of Sexual Violence against Men and Boys**

Despite the continuously unmet needs of women survivors, and the challenges inherent to integrating male survivors within programs designed for women, some feminists *did* attempt to secure recognition for CRSV against men and boys. Once again, this highlights the fallacy of the idea of a homogeneous feminist entity. Just as in scholarship some feminists made efforts to articulate sexual violence against men and boys as a problem of patriarchy, some feminist advocates understood CRSV against men and boys as intrinsically linked to that against women.

As will be explored shortly, one such feminist advocate actively attempted to garner top-level recognition of the issue, but their efforts were blocked. This final section explores pockets of active silencing rooted in conservative ideology which, while less frequent, worked in tandem with the dynamics previously explored. Section II detailed, in part, how heteronormative understandings of rape obscure certain types of sexual violence that men and boys may be more likely to experience than penetrative rape.

However, the other side of the coin of passive heteronormativity is active homophobia – not only concrete, explicit stigmatization of queer people but also of male survivors rooted in the conflation of being a male survivor with homosexuality. In what follows I detail state efforts to block recognition of sexual violence against men and boys which, while coming from a very different place from efforts to center the neglected experiences of women and girls, contributed to the same global-level silence on CRSV against men and boys.

I was able to interview longtime civil society leader Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, founder and CEO of the global network of women peacebuilders International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and who has been involved with the WPS agenda from its inception. Naraghi Anderlini was part of a team of civil society experts who drafted Resolution 1325 as well as the subsequent Resolution 1820. When I met with Naraghi Anderlini, I was surprised to learn that language on CRSV against men and boys was initially supposed to be included in Resolution 1820 – but due to opposition, it was eventually dropped. Naraghi Anderlini explained, “We were in real time giving line-by-line feedback as they were negotiating it. I was giving it to the Italians, the British, and the Americans, adding in language about men and boys as victims of sexual violence. And it was getting crossed out by Libya [who] was on the Security Council at the time.”<sup>351</sup>

What explains Libya’s opposition? According to Naraghi Anderlini, her American and British interlocutors informed her that the Libyans opposed the reference on the

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<sup>351</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

grounds of, “this [CRSV] doesn't happen to men.”<sup>352</sup> For context, homosexuality is criminalized in Libya and has been since 1953. Libya’s rape laws are technically gender-neutral,<sup>353</sup> and the Libyan constitution specifically criminalizes *consensual* same-sex activity.<sup>354</sup> While this would in theory provide a loophole for male survivors who had been assaulted by another man to avoid criminalization, in practice, it doesn’t work this way. If a man is raped as a social punishment for being gay or just for being perceived as such, identification by authorities as plausibly homosexual overrides any claims to victim status and could indeed result in criminalization, deterring male survivors of any sexual orientation from coming forward.<sup>355</sup> Indeed, a UN fact-finding mission into Libya released in 2021 found evidence that “[a] certain idea of sexual and gender ‘normality’ also appears to drive violence directed against people who identify themselves with a different sexual orientation or gender identity, as evidenced by cases of beatings and rape of LGBTIQI people reported to the Mission.”<sup>356</sup>

Given all this, it’s not surprising that Libya would use its Security Council privileges to block recognition of male rape survivors. Such recognition could be understood as opening up pathways for external actors to challenge its own national laws against homosexuality, or simply for acknowledging non-normative gender and sexual

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid

<sup>353</sup> According to the International Commission of Jurists (2025, 20), Article 407, paragraph 1 of the Libyan Penal Code states that “[a]nyone who has sexual intercourse with another by force, threat, or deceit shall be punished with a penalty of imprisonment not exceeding ten years.”

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>355</sup> “Since same-sex marriage is not legal in Libya, 147 and consensual sexual relations outside marriage are criminalized, consensual same-sex sexual conduct is de facto criminalized, and the Libyan authorities use articles 407, paragraph 4, and 408, paragraph 4, to prosecute and punish consensual same-sex sexual relations” (Ibid, 33).

<sup>356</sup> A/HRC/48/83 (2021), 14

identities. If this idea seems far-fetched, this exact logic played out in Uganda during its first wave of LGBTQ+ criminalization and continues to this day amidst a renewed crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights. Chris Dolan recounted that the organization he previously directed in Uganda called Refugee Law Project (RLP) was suspended from working with refugees for nearly a year (February – December 2014) following the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act by the Ugandan Parliament. According to Dolan, “the Ugandan government believed that our work with male survivors was us promoting homosexuality. We were part of a coalition that was challenging the [anti-homosexuality] bill at the time, but they also thought that our work with male survivors was part of that, which they thought was about promoting homosexuality.”<sup>357</sup>

This trend is not specific to African states. Beyond the UN, one participant reported that acknowledgment of sexual violence against men and boys was blocked at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE works on a consensus basis, meaning that all decisions require unanimous agreement amongst its members. According to the participant, in the past the Holy See, representing the Vatican, made a concerted effort to keep the issue of sexual violence against men and boys off the agenda:

...they've [the Holy See] been really adamant about keeping the focus on violence against women and girls only. I think part of it is political because they don't want to open up... any kind of opening for gender identities beyond the binary. But there is a really, really strong push. Usually it's led by the Vatican, but then other countries like Russia and, Hungary, Poland have been hiding behind that. But the Vatican is like, really sort of, "We are not going beyond violence against women and girls." Gender-based violence is a term that you're not allowed to use within the OSCE. I mean, there might be very political, other political actors there, but

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<sup>357</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

it's really interesting how there is that immediate pushback of like, "Oh, we're not going to look at sexual violence against men and boys."<sup>358</sup>

The Holy See is a consistent critic of so-called 'gender ideology' or 'gender theory' challenging a binary, sex-essentialist understanding of gender at the international level, and are not alone in this effort. Policy instruments aimed at redressing violence against women and girls such as the Istanbul Convention, penned by the Council of Europe in 2011, are understood by conservative European actors as a "Trojan Horse to smuggle in gender ideology under the guise of women's rights."<sup>359</sup> For example, religious entities within Ukraine called upon the state to reject the concept of GBV violence as set out by the Istanbul Convention on the basis that Article 14 of the Convention instructs party states to take "the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as the equality between women and men, non-stereotypical gender-roles (...) in formal curricula and at all levels of education' in order to address the structural causes of domestic violence," which they claimed "can make the Istanbul Convention a political and legal tool for popularizing new 'genders' beyond biological sex and same-sex relationships in Ukrainian schools and universities."<sup>360</sup> During the first Trump administration, in addition to passing the 'global gag rule' restricting funding to NGOs which provided abortion services, the US was also active in blocking the word 'gender' from appearing in UN texts and replacing it with 'women and girls' language.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 14, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>359</sup> The Advocates for Human Rights 2021, 68

<sup>360</sup> Zorgdrager 2020, 302-303

<sup>361</sup> Vik and Moe 2019, 35

The goalpost for what constitutes dangerous language is constantly shifting.<sup>362</sup> While the Holy See, for instance, has blocked the term ‘gender-based violence’ in the past, as the participant just quoted pointed out, recent outputs by the OESC which feature it and similar language such as ‘gender equality’ and ‘gender-based violence suggest that the Vatican might no longer be willing to die on the hill of the word gender. However, this is with the caveat that gender is understood as synonymous with biological sex. In a declaration released in April of 2024 and approved by the Pope, the Vatican issues an unequivocal condemnation of “gender theory”:

Regarding gender theory, whose scientific coherence is the subject of considerable debate among experts, the Church recalls that human life in all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual, is a gift from God. This gift is to be accepted with gratitude and placed at the service of the good. Desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel.<sup>363</sup>

The declaration goes on to assert that “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”<sup>364</sup> It should also be noted that there are “fissures” within the Catholic Church, wherein certain “far-right clerical factions and NGOs that perceive the Pope as too liberal” publicly distance themselves from, for example, the Pope’s recent statement emphasizing tolerance for homosexuality.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> As explained by The Advocates for Human Rights, “Religious fundamentalists and politicians tend to use ‘gender ideology’ to describe issues they oppose, such as: homosexuality and legalizing same-sex relations, marriage, and adoption; abortion; contraception; divorce; sex education; gender mainstreaming, women’s empowerment, and; EU integration” (The Advocates for Human Rights 2021, 68).

<sup>363</sup> Holy See Press Office 2024

<sup>364</sup> Ibid

<sup>365</sup> The Advocates for Human Rights 2021, 43

As suggested by the participant previously quoted, one explanation for the Holy See's resistance to acknowledging the issue of sexual violence against men and boys is that this would necessitate a more gender-neutral definition than 'violence against women and girls' which would threaten to serve as an "opening for gender identities beyond the binary."<sup>366</sup> However, another potential explanation – not mutually exclusive to the one just provided – is that attention to the issue could place the spotlight on the Vatican's own complicity in the sexual abuse of young boys in the Catholic Church, which has long been under scrutiny by entities such as the UN Human Rights Council.<sup>367</sup>

Naraghi Anderlini described the negotiation process as a "teasing of language" and compared the issue of recognition of CRSV against men and boys to language on civil society which representatives from Russia and China challenged during the drafting of 1820 on the basis that it risked "eroding the element of noninterference in state sovereignty."<sup>368</sup> With so many points of disagreement, states have to choose their battles – and CRSV against men and boys was just not something the West was willing to fight for. Why?

While the recognition of CRSV against men and boys wasn't *as* overtly threatening to other Security Council members as it was for Libya, it also didn't cohere with the rhetoric of women's equality and violence against women and girls, which their foreign policy agendas were deeply enmeshed in. While the awkward fit between this frame and CRSV against men and boys was already discussed in the context of NGOs, it

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<sup>366</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 14, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>367</sup> Associated Press 2014; UN News 2019

<sup>368</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

takes a slightly distinct form when deployed by Western states. According to Naraghi Anderlini, the focus on women as victims “is so pervasive in the Western framing of these agendas, and it's notable that, when you look at the body of resolutions that have come out in the WPS space, the big ones that the US and the UK have supported have been the ones about women's victimization. They have not been the ones about women at the peace table or women as transformative change-makers.”<sup>369</sup> Feminist objectives were appropriated, some would say cynically, by Western governments during the turn-of-the-century as a means of reconfiguring national identities that were increasingly defined by the distribution of aid.<sup>370</sup> For example the victimization of women and girls, as already mentioned, served as justification for the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though many Western states were weary of evidence of the US ‘overstepping’ that emerged quite early on, the principles of the war were nonetheless broadly supported by other Western governments, including the notion that women in the Middle East needed to be liberated from the patriarchal shackles of Islam by the secular West. As such, from the Western vantage point, sacrificing negotiation capital for a sentence or two on CRSV against men and boys made little strategic sense as the issue didn’t even fit with the narrative they were promoting.

It is important to note that while Resolution 1325 was driven by civil society, Resolution 1820 was more the product of insider advocacy.<sup>371</sup> This is not to say that civil society was not involved; one participant – a civil society leader with close proximity to

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid

<sup>370</sup> See, i.e., Wegner 2021

<sup>371</sup> Crawford 2017

both 1325 and 1820 – said of former US Ambassador to the United Nations Zalmay Khalilzad, “I think he also recognized that the difference in the WPS agenda compared to other agendas covered or addressed by the Security Council is the ownership of civil society, the ownership and leadership of civil society, particularly women peace builders.”<sup>372</sup> When it came to assembling 1820, he took seriously “the need and the fairness of listening to those who lobbied for the agenda and in fact contributed to the drafting of Resolution 1325.”<sup>373</sup> However, the focus of 1820 – and what really garnered the attention of powerful states like the US – was on the securitization of CRSV through the ‘weapon of war’ frame, rather than a more holistic contextualization of CRSV within broader issues of women’s empowerment and inclusion, as was the case with the previous Resolution 1325. In Chapter 4, I will discuss how despite not including male survivors in the text itself, Resolution 1820 catalyzed an opening for an articulation of male vulnerability which advocates capitalized on. Both the US and UK would eventually start to understand male CRSV survivors as a convenient arrow in their quiver to push the CRSV issue out of the women’s rights and empowerment domain and squarely into the security sector.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued for an understanding of the global silence on CRSV against men and boys as a collaborative silence perpetuated by two broad factors: the roots of CRSV awareness in feminist activism focused on women and girls, and heteronormative and homophobic discourses on sexual violence. I showed the gap in

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<sup>372</sup> Interview with author, Participant 33, June 13, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>373</sup> Ibid

attention was not simply a manifestation of passive silence rooted in ignorance, nor could it be completely explained by the few instances of direct silencing by conservative actors discussed in the last section. Instead, the gap was perpetuated by a menagerie of actors with starkly different motivations, perspectives, ideologies, and levels of influence. I demonstrated that the existing frame for understanding CRSV was shaped by both the feminist context from which attention to the issue emerged, and homophobic/heteronormative ideologies, in such a way that precluded male survivors. I then showed in greater detail how each of these distinct logics played out in two examples. Amongst feminist advocates focused on “surfacing” the experiences of women and girls,<sup>374</sup> and the NGOs which followed their lead, CRSV against men and boys wasn’t prioritized given how many issues specific to women and girls remained to be meaningfully addressed despite high-level recognition. The WPS agenda and the goal of ending violence against women were already ambitious *without* including the gendered harms experienced by men and boys; to further expand it would have made little sense and would have been seen as re-centering experiences that had, prior to feminist advocacy, already been centered for centuries prior at the expense of women and girls. In the case of conservative states, their silence can better be described as *silencing*. For these actors, basic acknowledgment of the issue would directly threaten the stability of a heteronormative and sex-essentialist ideology particularly taken up by religiously motivated actors. Western states, concerned instead with highlighting the vulnerabilities of women and girls as a means of justifying neoimperialism, had little interest in the issue of CRSV against the men and boys, and so allowed this silencing to occur.

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<sup>374</sup> Copleon 1994

However, when the text from documents such as Resolution 1820 are taken at face-value, these mechanisms aren't visible; instead, they portray a more unified stance. Although CRSV against men and boys didn't make it into Resolution 1820, Naraghi Anderlini contextualized the language that did end up getting used: "We were then going back and saying, 'Okay, if you can't have men and boys, at least put people, or citizens, or something gender-neutral so that it can be inclusive of men and boys.'"<sup>375</sup> Literature on Resolution 1820 often critiques this gender-neutral language for the very reason that, when seen alongside language that specifically conflates survivors with women and girls, it subtly blocks men and boys from being seen as survivors. However viewed from another perspective this vague language – which in the context of the definition of gender in the Rome Statute, one author calls "constructive ambiguity"<sup>376</sup> – represents a useful compromise that while conceding to the anxieties of conservative state actors around recognition of male rape still kept open the possibility for actors to take up the issue later down the line. Indeed, as I will show in Chapter 4, this did happen.

I mention this here to presage my intervention in Chapter 5 that placing blame for the absence of CRSV against men and boys from the global agenda squarely on feminist advocates precludes the fact that it was feminist activism that opened the door for CRSV against men and boys – a subject shrouded in taboo far before feminists drew attention to CRSV against women and girls – to later be acknowledged. This is in addition to negating the active contributions feminists have made towards the issue of CRSV against men and boys, whether through adapting existing practices orientated towards women

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<sup>375</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>376</sup> Oosterveld 2014

and girls or intervening in policy creation. As I will elaborate, failure to acknowledge this legacy remains a source of tension to this day. This next chapter, however, focuses on how this acknowledgment was able to eventually occur.

## CHAPTER 4

### FROM THE FOOTNOTES TO THE CENTER: EXPLAINING THE INCREASED RECOGNITION OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS

#### 4.1 Overview

The previous chapter explored how as attention to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) exploded in the 1990's and 2000's, men and boy survivors were largely left out of the conversation – although, as I also showed, many actors, including several particularly powerful ones, were aware of the phenomenon. Yet nearly twenty years after the UN Security Council (UNSC) first paid heed to CRSV with the passage of Resolution 1325, the UNSC would pass a new Resolution – Resolution 2467 – which devoted an entire paragraph to men and boys. This Resolution is emblematic of a broader discursive shift whereby CRSV targeting men and boys is increasingly present in global efforts to respond to and prevent CRSV.

This chapter will demonstrate that the increased securitization of CRSV was the primary factor enabling this shift to occur, in two senses. First, CRSV transformed from a topic of concern within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into a standalone issue at the intergovernmental level requiring immediate action. In the practical sense, the passage of Resolution 1820 catalyzed a proliferation of CRSV-specific bureaucracy within the UN, in addition to prompting states to start their own initiatives beyond the UN. Advocates for male survivors took advantage of these openings to target sympathetic high-level gatekeepers within the CRSV issue network. As spaces to discuss CRSV in greater depth proliferated, so too did opportunities to raise the issue of CRSV against men and boys. Although there wasn't coordinated momentum to raise the profile of male

CRSV amongst prominent NGOs in the CRSV issue network, the receptiveness of a few powerful enabled male survivor advocates to fast-track CRSV against men and boys into high-level policy discourse.

Second, discursively, whereas CRSV against men and boys fit awkwardly within the ‘women’s rights are human rights’ framework underlying the initial passage of Resolution 1325 and other activist victories from that time, the securitization of CRSV made it easier – and in some instances even useful – to conceptualize male vulnerability. I argue that this is because the ‘weapon of war’ frame – the discursive foundation of the securitization of CRSV – is ambiguous regarding gender and sexuality and therefore malleable to different conceptualizations. Once this frame was institutionalized at the UNSC, security-minded actors started to pay more attention to CRSV and in fact interpreted its weaponization against men and boys as a signal that the problem was indeed a ‘real’ security issue, rather than a women’s issue. On the other hand, the openness of the ‘weapon of war’ frame enabled other actors without as much investment in the security context to use it to make sense of male survivors in ways that preserved their own ideas about gender and sexuality.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The first two sections set the stage for the causal argument that institutional proliferation around CRSV opened a window of opportunity for the issue of CRSV against men and boys to emerge through. Section I details the proliferation of CRSV infrastructure at the UNSC and beyond, and Section II introduces two key norm entrepreneurs who took advantage of this proliferation. Next, Section III connects the previous two together by describing how attention to CRSV against men and boys increased over time at the global level, fully articulating the causal argument. Given

the diversity of the actors who engaged the issue, the final three sections advance the constitutive argument about what made this widespread uptake possible: the ‘weapon of war’ frame’s adaptability towards distinct and even conflictual conceptualizations of gender/sexuality as applied to CRSV, all of which accommodate recognition of male survivors to varying degrees. Sections IV, V, and VI then explore three different deployments of the frame corresponding to three different approaches to gender/sexuality: the gender-neutral approach, which abstracts from gender inequality; the feminist approach, which foregrounds gender inequality; and the conservative approach, which evades questions of sexuality.

#### **4.2 The Expansion of Anti-CRSV Architecture at the United Nations and Beyond**

The renewed focus on CRSV surrounding the passage of UNSC Resolution 1820 in 2008 created an institutional opening for CRSV against men and boys to surface. In this section I will discuss the details of institutional proliferation specific to the CRSV issue, which ultimately resulted in a splitting-off of CRSV from the broader WPS agenda within which it was initially situated. While this split itself did not *necessitate* that men and boys would eventually rise to the fore, by simply creating more spaces where CRSV could be addressed in greater detail – rather than as one issue amongst many other gendered peace and security problems – it served as a crucial enabling factor in allowing the ‘men, too’ contestation to emerge. This is the key causal implication of the securitization of CRSV which is necessary for understanding the emergence of CRSV against men and boys on the global agenda.

“[C]reated in direct response” to the 2006 Call to Action discussed in Chapter 3, 2007 saw the formation of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, an

institutional coalition of, at the time, 14 entities within the UN with a shared interest in combatting CRSV. Since its inception, UN Action has expanded to include 25 UN entities, with mandates ranging from peacekeeping to environmental protection. UN Action launched its first advocacy campaign, Stop Rape Now, with the backing of celebrity spokespeople such as actress Charlize Theron. As explained by Meger, “[t]heir ‘Get Cross!’ participation appeal encourages Western audiences to photograph themselves making the campaign’s signature ‘X’ gesture with their arms crossed in front of their chest.”<sup>377</sup> While the UN Action website (stoprapenow.org) still bears the hallmarks of this particular campaign, it seems to have fizzled out. Its annual report from 2022 suggests that the entity aimed to pursue the “reinvigoration and/or rebranding” of Stop Rape Now to address budget inadequacies,<sup>378</sup> but as of the time of writing, this has yet to occur.

As Guzzini suggests about securitization in the abstract, the securitization of CRSV did not take the form of one speech act or “a single bombshell event,” but rather, unfolded as a process.<sup>379</sup> However, within this process, the passage of Resolution 1820 can be confidently situated as an important step the securitization of CRSV. Resolution 1820 was the outcome of the UNSC’s first thematic debate on CRSV. Prior to this, CRSV was largely addressed in the UNSC within the context of its annual thematic debates on WPS ongoing since the passage of Resolution 1325 in 2000. Since 1820, the UNSC has continued to hold these thematic debates on CRSV as distinct from, but related to, the

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<sup>377</sup> Meger 2016a, 6

<sup>378</sup> OSRSG-SVC 2022, 13

<sup>379</sup> Guzzini 2011, 335

broader WPS agenda. An energized climate followed 1820, with two more Resolutions passing in 2009 (Resolution 1888) and then again in 2010 (Resolution 1960). Resolution 1888 created the Office for the Special Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), which continues to be a crucial actor in addressing CRSV at the global governance level such as through chairing UN Action. Resolution 1888 also formed the Team of Experts, calling for this group's deployment "to situations of particular concern with respect to sexual violence in armed conflict, working through the United Nations presence on the ground and with the consent of the host government, to assist national authorities to strengthen the rule of law."<sup>380</sup> The OSRSG-SVC, Team of Experts, and UN Action work in close collaboration to advance the agenda to end CRSV.

While particular concern with CRSV had been of great concern for feminist activists for quite some time, Resolution 1820 created an opening at the institutional level where before, there had been none; as discussed, the CRSV issue was lodged firmly within the WPS agenda embodied in Resolution 1325 and thus bundled alongside other issues squarely focused on women and girls, such as increasing women and girls' participation in peacebuilding efforts. Now, CRSV was not just one component of the broader WPS agenda, but an institutional issue in its own right.

The trajectory of approaches to CRSV amongst the UK and US ran parallel to those at the UN in that as an issue, CRSV became its own domain distinct from WPS. In 2012, these two states began their own initiatives on the issue of CRSV: the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), housed within the Foreign, Commonwealth and

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<sup>380</sup> S/RES/1888 (2009), 4

Development Office (FCDO),<sup>381</sup> and the Missing Peace Initiative, housed within the US Institute for Peace (USIP). The PSVI was the flagship project of William Hague, then the UK Foreign Secretary. During his political career just prior to assuming the post of Foreign Secretary in 2010, Hague “began to reframe his conception of the United Kingdom’s identity and purpose in the world, prefiguring changes to British foreign policy” to become more active in promoting British ideals abroad.<sup>382</sup> According to Davies and True, Hague consistently connected CRSV to women’s inequality, aided in part by relationships he formed with gender experts in the NGO community such as Madeline Rees of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>383</sup> However, as Davies and True also elaborate, “Hague was aware of the power of his gender and how his engagement with a ‘women’s issue’ challenged the stereotype that women’s peace and security is a ‘soft’ or non-security issue.”<sup>384</sup>

Mirroring somewhat the split of CRSV from WPS in the Security Council, a year after the start of the PSVI the UK launched another initiative, What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (“What Works”). That same year, the UK and Sweden had launched the global multistakeholder initiative Global Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies which brought together governments, NGOs, and UN agencies; What Works was the UK’s implementation of the Call to Action

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<sup>381</sup> In 2020, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office merged with the Department for International Development to form the FCDO.

<sup>382</sup> Davies and True 2017, 7

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, 17

at the national level.<sup>385</sup> In 2013 the US also announced its own gender-based violence (GBV) initiative, this one specific to humanitarian contexts, called Safe from the Start, while through USIP simultaneously launched the Missing Peace Initiative focusing specifically on collating cutting-edge research on CRSV. In 2014, the US would join the UK to co-lead the Call to Action.

While the 2013 Call to Action on GBV does make linkages to the 2006 Call to Action on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the PSVI,<sup>386</sup> and What Works does have a pillar focused on conflict and humanitarian contexts, CRSV is not a central focus. As one participant familiar with the initiative put it, “even in that pillar, one of the key messages that was coming out actually was that even in conflict-affected settings, intimate partner violence is more prevalent than conflict-related sexual violence.” Increasingly, CRSV would be discussed in contexts separate from broader efforts to address gendered issues in and out of conflict.

#### **4.3 Key Norm Entrepreneurs for the Issue of CRSV against Men and Boys**

Several norm entrepreneurs would go on to seize the institutional opening created by this split of CRSV off from the WPS agenda to advance the cause of gaining increased recognition for men and boy survivors. In the absence of their work to sell the importance of this issue to key stakeholders, it’s possible that contestation of the CRSV norm would not have emerged. As will be revealed in the next section, murmurings about men and boys as CRSV’s forgotten victims picked up quite soon after the passage of 1820. But were it not for direct, targeted advocacy, these discussions may have fizzled out. In this

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<sup>385</sup> Interview with author, Participant 26, April 19, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>386</sup> Call to Action on Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies 2015, 7

section, I will provide some background on two norm entrepreneurs whose names and organizations came up constantly in my interviews, and who I was also able to interview myself. While their work is controversial to some, their centrality to garnering support for male CRSV survivors went uncontested.

The first norm entrepreneur to discuss is Chris Dolan, formerly of Refugee Law Project (RLP), a Ugandan civil society organization. That Dolan and/or RLP were mentioned in one third of the interviews conducted for this project suggests that he is one of the most, if not *the* most, visible and consequential proponents for raising the international profile of CRSV against men and boys.

Dolan came across the issue by chance during some of his earlier research with ex-combatants and refugees. Dolan has a background in development studies with a particular emphasis on conflict and displacement, earning his PhD from the London School of Economics in 2005. While conducting his PhD research, which set out to explain the intractability of the conflict in Northern Uganda, his research participants would raise the issue on their own accord, often outside of the official interviewing process. “And you get to the end of the interview and again and again and again. You finish the interview, you turn off the record and say it's done, say goodbye. And even when they're still walking to the door, they'd say, ‘Oh, there's something else that I want to talk about.’ And it was always... “This government is raping our men.”<sup>387</sup>

By around 2007, he started noticing a pattern. “There are lots of lots of people from different places because now I've got Mozambique, Northern Uganda, and I'm getting refugees from all over the Great Lakes and again and again, it keeps on coming

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<sup>387</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

up. Not hundreds and hundreds at that point, but yeah, individual anecdotes from quite different places.”<sup>388</sup> By this time, Dolan had already joined as the Director of RLP, a nonprofit founded in 1999 and based out the School of Law at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, aiming to promote refugee rights through the provision of legal and healthcare resources. Historically RLP has had an ‘open door’ policy welcoming of individuals of all sexual and gender identities to seek services at their center. It was here that Dolan encountered even more male survivors. While in this new position, Dolan grew disturbed by the fact that the experiences of the men he met during his PhD research and working with RLP were ill-reflected at both national and international levels, and sought out domestic and global venues where he could advocate on their behalf.

RLP’s tolerance towards sexual and gender diversity became increasingly challenging to navigate following two waves of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in Uganda, the first in 2013, and the second a decade later in 2023. In December of 2013 the Ugandan parliament had passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which led to a spate of arrests as well as an exodus of many Ugandan LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies out of the country.<sup>389</sup> As in many other contexts, Ugandan politicians and social leaders framed LGBTQ+ identities as imports of Western influence that distorted Ugandan cultural and religious values and harmed children.<sup>390</sup> In 2014, RLP was suspended as an organization for its provision of services to LGBTQ+ refugees as well as male sexual violence survivors, under the complaint that this work was ‘promoting homosexuality’. At the time

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<sup>388</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>389</sup> Human Rights Watch 2014

<sup>390</sup> Reuters 2023

of the organization's suspension (February 2014) Dolan had begun a brief sabbatical at the University of British Columbia in Canada. While initially advised to stay away due to security concerns, he returned to Uganda in July that year to push for the lifting of the suspension. This took six months, after which he continued his post for a further seven years, developing large-scale screening and intervention programming for refugee survivors of multiple harms of war, including sexual violence. In April 2022 he took up an academic position at the University of Warwick where he teaches on violence, peace, sustainable development and humanitarian aid in general, and conflict-related sexual violence in particular.

In 2023, a second anti-LGBTQ+ bill was introduced which immediately caught the international community's attention for criminalizing anyone identifying as LGBTQ+. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni eventually signed the bill into law once several amendments were made – most importantly, the revised bill distinguished between those identifying as LGBTQ+ and those “actually engaging in homosexual acts,” only criminalizing the latter.<sup>391</sup> In any case, this distinction makes little difference for members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as for the organizations who work with them. While RLP remains active, this development has negatively impacted their ability to provide services to LGBTQ+ and male survivor refugees.

Much like Refugee Law Project, All Survivors Project (ASP) is both a critical and sometimes controversial actor in understanding the increased visibility of CRSV against men and boys. Founded in 2016 by Charu Lata Hogg, who had previously worked with organizations including Human Rights Watch and Child Soldiers International and as an

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<sup>391</sup> Muhumuza 2023

investigative journalist, ASP focuses specifically on CRSV perpetrated against men, boys, and individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. Many participants brought up ASP during interviews as an exemplar of how far the issue of CRSV against men and boys has come; as one participant put it, “the very fact that you have an entity that that is devoted to that issue, I think is a significant step forward.”<sup>392</sup> The organization’s name – *All Survivors Project* – is pointed: it alludes to the longstanding failure of the international community to consider survivors beyond the assumed heterosexual woman or girl. While ASP clearly situates their work as complementary to existing efforts to address CRSV against women and girls, the name resonates more with some than others; as one participant mused, “The name of the organization just drives me nuts because it's like they introduce themselves [as the] All Survivors Project. ‘We're the only organization that's focused on men and boys.’ Huh. All Survivors. Okay. Again, they do good work, but I'm just like, the name is, I don't know, I think it needs a more accurate name...”<sup>393</sup>

Perhaps even more than RLP, engagement with high-level stakeholders is a central component of ASP’s work. According to Hogg herself, “what may come to mind immediately when you think about prevention work is addressing gender norms – community awareness work, preventing the violence from happening by mobilizing public opinion, and resetting culturally the norms that create the enabling environment for such violence. We don't do that work. Instead, what we do is we work with prevention

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<sup>392</sup> Interview with author, Participant 5, November 13, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>393</sup> Interview with author, Participant 15, December 18, 2023 (virtual call)

at the highest level, which is putting in place the legal and policy framework that allows for the recognition of the problem in order to prevent it.”<sup>394</sup>

ASP is dually registered in both the United Kingdom and Liechtenstein. Notably, Liechtenstein was early to acknowledge CRSV against men and boys at the Security Council, first in 2013 and then again in 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022.<sup>395</sup> When I asked her why she chose to work with Liechtenstein specifically, she explained that the state may be “tiny, but they are huge and very high profile, heavy hitters when it comes to international justice and accountability” and had significant involvement in the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanisms on Syria and Myanmar at the UN General Assembly, where evidence of CRSV against men and boys was revealed.<sup>396</sup> ASP also works with other smaller states, including Malta, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Hogg noted that “smaller states sometimes don’t have the same sort of political agendas that the bigger states do. So it is easier to work with them on the issues of gender diversity.”<sup>397</sup>

#### **4.4 A Timeline of Crucial Moments and Increased Visibility for CRSV against Men and Boys**

Having established these two crucial causal factors – 1) the institutional opening resulting from the securitization of CRSV, and 2) the entrance of norm entrepreneurs –

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<sup>394</sup> Interview with author, Participant 36, July 1, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>395</sup> S/PV.6984 (2013), 44; S/PV.7428 (2015), 33; S/PV.7938 (2017), 33; S/PV.8234 (2018), 29; S/PV.8514 (2019), 88; S/2021/375, 95; S/PV.9016 Resumption 1 (2022), 21

<sup>396</sup> Interview with author, Participant 36, July 1, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>397</sup> Ibid

this chapter will now turn to the ‘men, too’ contestation itself, and provide a timeline of the issue’s increasing visibility.

A week after the passage of 1820, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a UN Action member, held a meeting on gaps in addressing CRSV, identifying men and boy survivors as one of two gaps. A paper prepared for the meeting<sup>398</sup> reviews the limited literature available at the time focusing on CRSV against men and boys, some of which was reviewed in Chapter 3.<sup>399</sup> Following this meeting, traces of the issue began to surface at the UNSC. The open debates on CRSV have the objective of discussing the findings of the Secretary General’s yearly thematic report on CRSV. These reports alone, when examined chronologically, show CRSV against men and boys moving from the margins into the standardized definition of CRSV. The 2009 report mentions once that evidence of CRSV against men had been identified at both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, with the caveat that “women and girls are particular targets and are the majority of the victims of sexual violence.”<sup>400</sup> The 2010 report notes that “[s]exual violence against men and boys often becomes part of the repertoire of armed and political violence employed to attack community norms and structures or to extract information during detention and interrogation.”<sup>401</sup> Despite these intermittent call-outs, reports from these first few years immediately following

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<sup>398</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2008

<sup>399</sup> Del Zotto and Jones 2002; Peel et al. 2000; Russell 2007; Sivakumaran 2005; Sivakumaran 2007

<sup>400</sup> S/2009/362, 3-4

<sup>401</sup> S/2010/604, 4

Resolution 1820 use ‘survivors,’ ‘victims’ and ‘women’ interchangeably. As discussed, CRSV against men and boys was far from an unknown phenomenon, but rarely did it receive acknowledgment beyond, as Sivakumaran puts it, being “confined to a footnote.”<sup>402</sup> Citing an article on the topic of male rape more broadly,<sup>403</sup> Sivakumaran observes – writing in 2010 – that “[t]his practice has become so widespread that one commentator is able to categorize authors’ responses to the subject into disclaimers, generalizations, arguments that a discussion of male/male rape is unnecessary in a work about rape, and acknowledgments of the author’s conscious decision not to address the issue.”<sup>404</sup>

Nonetheless, the identification of CRSV against men and boys as a neglected dimension of CRSV led some actors to call out the issue at the Security Council. At the 2010 open debate on CRSV, then-SRSG Margot Wallström called for renewed conceptual clarity surrounding CRSV, noting: “When my Office reviewed the data being collected from the field, it became evident that sexual violence as a tactic or consequence of war was not captured under existing categories. For instance, the rubric ‘violence against women’ does not reflect cases against men and boys.”<sup>405</sup> It was not only UN bureaucrats who were beginning to acknowledge CRSV against men and boys at this time. The first state delegates to mention CRSV against men and boys at the UN were Slovenia, on behalf of the European Union, and Canada, during the UNSC debate preceding the

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<sup>402</sup> Sivakumaran 2005, 1281

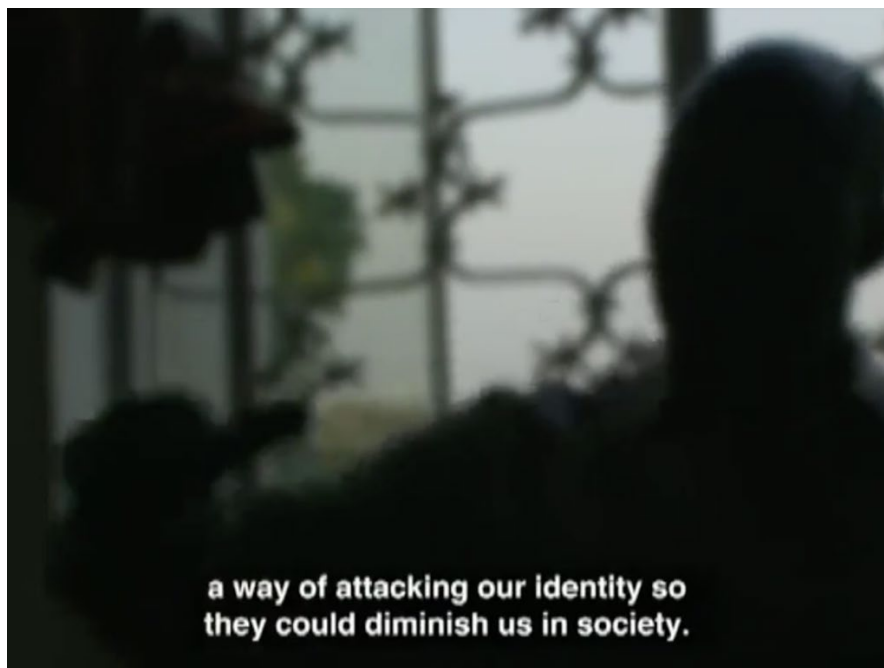
<sup>403</sup> Kramer 1998

<sup>404</sup> Sivakumaran 2005, 1281

<sup>405</sup> S/PV.6453 (2010), 4

passage of Resolution 1820.<sup>406</sup> A year later Mexico also brought up the topic, exclaiming with apparent shock that human rights monitors are “even seeing a trend towards the use of sexual violence against men.”<sup>407</sup>

Around this timeframe, Chris Dolan started gaining recognition for his work with male survivors. In 2009, through RLP, Dolan released the documentary *Gender Against Men*, which included interviews with male survivors, their advocates, and practitioners (Figure 4.1).<sup>408</sup> The title itself was quite provocative for the time, given the omnipresence of the ‘gender=women’ formula in international spaces.



*Figure 4.4. A still from Gender Against Men, the 2009 documentary by Refugee Law Project. The faces of survivors were blurred and their voices mixed to conceal their identities.*

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<sup>406</sup> S/PV.5916 (2008), 33; S/PV.5916 Resumption 1 (2008), 16

<sup>407</sup> S/PV.6180 (2009), 14

<sup>408</sup> Refugee Law Project 2009

Shortly after finishing the film, Dolan managed to screen it at a World Bank event in Washington, D.C. – albeit the screening was far from the main attraction. “I just finished it and I was so excited about it... [T]here was some meeting that I went to and I said, ‘Oh, I’ve got this film, I want to show it to you,’ so they gave me like a slot during the lunchtime when everyone was chowing their sandwiches.”<sup>409</sup> He recalled that there were “mixed reactions,” which “sort of gave [him] a flavor” of the controversy to follow.<sup>410</sup>

However, in 2011, Dolan and RLP’s work gained even broader visibility following the *Guardian*’s publication of an article titled “The rape of men: the darkest secret of war,”<sup>411</sup> which relied primarily on interviews conducted with Dolan and other RLP staffers. It also drew from Stemple’s article “Male rape and human rights,”<sup>412</sup> one of the few academic publications available on the topic at the time. The piece makes use of the topic’s relative neglect in its framing; one RLP staffer interviewed by author Will Storr states that “‘Everybody has heard the women’s stories. But nobody has heard the men’s.’”<sup>413</sup> Dolan provides Storr with his own hypothesis for this gap: “‘The organisations working on sexual and gender-based violence don’t talk about it,’ he says. ‘It’s systematically silenced.’”<sup>414</sup> Storr elaborates that according to Dolan, some actually

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<sup>409</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>410</sup> Ibid

<sup>411</sup> Storr 2011

<sup>412</sup> Stemple 2008

<sup>413</sup> Storr 2011

<sup>414</sup> Ibid

tried to stop the World Bank screening mentioned previously. Storr asks, ““Were these attempts by people in well-known, international aid agencies?”” Dolan replies in the affirmative, adding that, ““There’s a fear among them that this is a zero-sum game; that there’s a pre-defined cake and if you start talking about men, you’re going to somehow eat a chunk of this cake that’s taken them a long time to bake.””<sup>415</sup>

By 2012, things were starting to pick up even more. The 2012 thematic report on CRSV shows a stark change in language: survivors of CRSV are now referred to as ‘women, men and children.’ Interestingly, while there are many areas where specific evidence of CRSV against men and boys in various conflict contexts is noted, this formulation is also used in the abstract, such as in the document’s opening definition of CRSV as “incidents or patterns [...] of sexual violence, that is rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity against women, men or children.”<sup>416</sup> It’s notable that the working definition adopted by the UN by 2012 explicitly disaggregates by gender so as to directly acknowledge male survivors.

Also in 2012, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) published a guidance on CRSV against men and boys in situations of forced displacement in collaboration with RLP.<sup>417</sup> According to Dolan, UNHCR had approached him, explaining that “the UNHCR has these Pre-ExCom gatherings every year. So before their executive committee meets there's a big sort of [meeting] with NGOs... So we [RLP] probably had raised it with

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<sup>415</sup> Storr 2011

<sup>416</sup> S/2012/33, 2

<sup>417</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2012

them several times that there was nothing available for male survivors. And then they came back and asked me to write something which, that's the outcome.”<sup>418</sup> Multiple participants understood UNHCR as a key actor supporter of recognition for CRSV against men and boys. When I asked one participant to explain, from their perspective, what accounted for the increased recognition of CRSV against men and boys, they replied, “if I have to think about where I was finding people constantly asking me about, ‘What about the men? Where are the men? And what about the men and boys?’ That was, the vast majority of cases was UNHCR staff.”<sup>419</sup>

When I asked Dolan for his explanation as for why UNHCR followed up with him years later, he explained, “I think that as an institution they're in that funny position where on the one hand, they kind of need to be ideally, they need to be on the cutting edge of what's being discussed and they need to be able to engage with discussions and be able to show that they're engaged in discussions. On the other hand, they don't necessarily have the internal capacity to do it, so they outsource it.” But he also elaborated, “But I know from that experience and others with UNHCR, there were people inside UNHCR that were interested in the discussion and the topic, and thought it was important. And they were able to use their position to then get ahold of somebody like me to work on it.”<sup>420</sup> It would be inaccurate, therefore, to represent UNHCR – or any of the organizations discussed here – as a monolith. Consistently, participants who brought up

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<sup>418</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, February 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>419</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>420</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, February 14, 2024 (virtual call)

the role of UNHCR pointed to the roles of specific, influential actors within the agency in surfacing the issue by directing resources towards it.

Another key institution that Dolan managed to secure buy-in from at this time was the OSRSG-SVC. In 2011 RLP released a second film on CRSV against men, entitled *They Slept With Me*. The film featured testimony from survivor Julius Okwera, whose home “became the meeting place for other survivors who came and told their stories and received counseling services [from RLP].”<sup>421</sup> These meetings became the basis for the production of *They Slept With Me* as well as the establishment of the Men of Courage survivor support network.<sup>422</sup> Shortly after the film came out, Dolan was able to screen it for the SRSR-SVC’s New York City Office, then led by Margot Wallström. According to Dolan, “I don't think she was particularly interested, but to give her credit, she did actually call her rather small team together at that point and we watched it. And they didn't... they weren't rude about it or anything.”<sup>423</sup>

However, in 2012, Margot Wallström was replaced in her capacity as SRSR-SVC by Sierra Leonean activist and politician Zainab Bangura. Dolan recalled meeting with Bangura during breakfast at first Missing Peace Symposium held in February of 2013 at the USIP headquarters in Washington, D.C. Bangura was a keynote speaker at the conference, while Dolan had been invited as a speaker on a panel entitled “Surviving Sexual Violence” as by this point, he had solidified himself as an expert on CRSV against

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<sup>421</sup> Refugee Law Project 2014

<sup>422</sup> Men of Courage, based in the Acholi region of Northern Uganda is one of three male survivor support groups in Uganda. The other two are Men of Hope, based in Kampala, and Men of Peace, based in Nakivale.

<sup>423</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2024 (United Kingdom)

men and boys. Additional panels were held on the topics of national and international responses to CRSV, perpetration, security from CRSV, and methodological challenges.

Sponsors of the 2013 Symposium included the US Department of State, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Bank, and the OSRSG-SVC. Interestingly, Sonke Gender Justice Network and Equimundo – known at the time as Promundo – also sponsored the event. During my interviews, Sonke and Equimundo were often brought up as a pair and acknowledged as the two most influential NGOs doing what is known as ‘male engagement work,’ or programming engaging men and boys in gender-transformation and as allies in the prevention of violence against women and girls. Equimundo and Sonke are quite well-known in the broader nexus of humanitarian and development work and have received quite a bit of funding – some even think perhaps too much funding when placed in the context of dwindling funds for organizations that work primarily with women and girls. As one participant from the GBV sector put it, “At some point, let's say ten years ago, people were like, ‘Oh my god, these guys are going to take over the whole field.’”<sup>424</sup> Several participants that I interviewed brought up the fact that some feminist advocates and practitioners were slightly frustrated at the success of Equimundo and Sonke. Barker himself told me during our interview that, “We got some pretty quick visibility at UN spaces and elsewhere. And so I think some tensions were around, ‘Wait, these men have been doing this work for five years, and they're getting on the main stage at the Commission on the Status of

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<sup>424</sup> Interview with author, Participant 18, February 14, 2024 (virtual call)

Women. We've been trying to get here for two decades and still have trouble getting there.”<sup>425</sup>

2013 also saw the passage of Security Council Resolution 2106, the first to explicitly acknowledge men and boys as potential survivors. The Resolution states that “sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as groups that are particularly vulnerable or may be specifically targeted, while also affecting men and boys and those secondarily traumatized as forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members.”<sup>426</sup> That a Resolution noting CRSV against men and boys emerged at this time – specifically on June 24<sup>th</sup> – is not so surprising in light of the fact that just several months before, on April 17<sup>th</sup>, the Security Council had held its open debate to discuss the findings from the Secretary General’s annual report on CRSV, which briefly highlighted the issue. This report stands out in that it explicitly called out the issue as one requiring further attention. In the report’s second section, entitled “Current and emerging trends regarding sexual violence as it relates to international peace and security,” it states that

Although women and girls are predominantly affected by sexual violence, men and boys too are victims of such violence. Sexual violence has been perpetrated against men and boys as a tactic of war or in the context of detention or interrogation, including in Afghanistan, Libya, Mali and the Syrian Arab Republic. The social consequences of this violence are acute. More monitoring and information regarding male victims and the types of sexual violence perpetrated against them is required to tailor prevention initiatives, sensitization campaigns, treatment protocols and services for survivors.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Interview with author, Participant 10, December 7, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>426</sup> S/RES/2106, 1-2

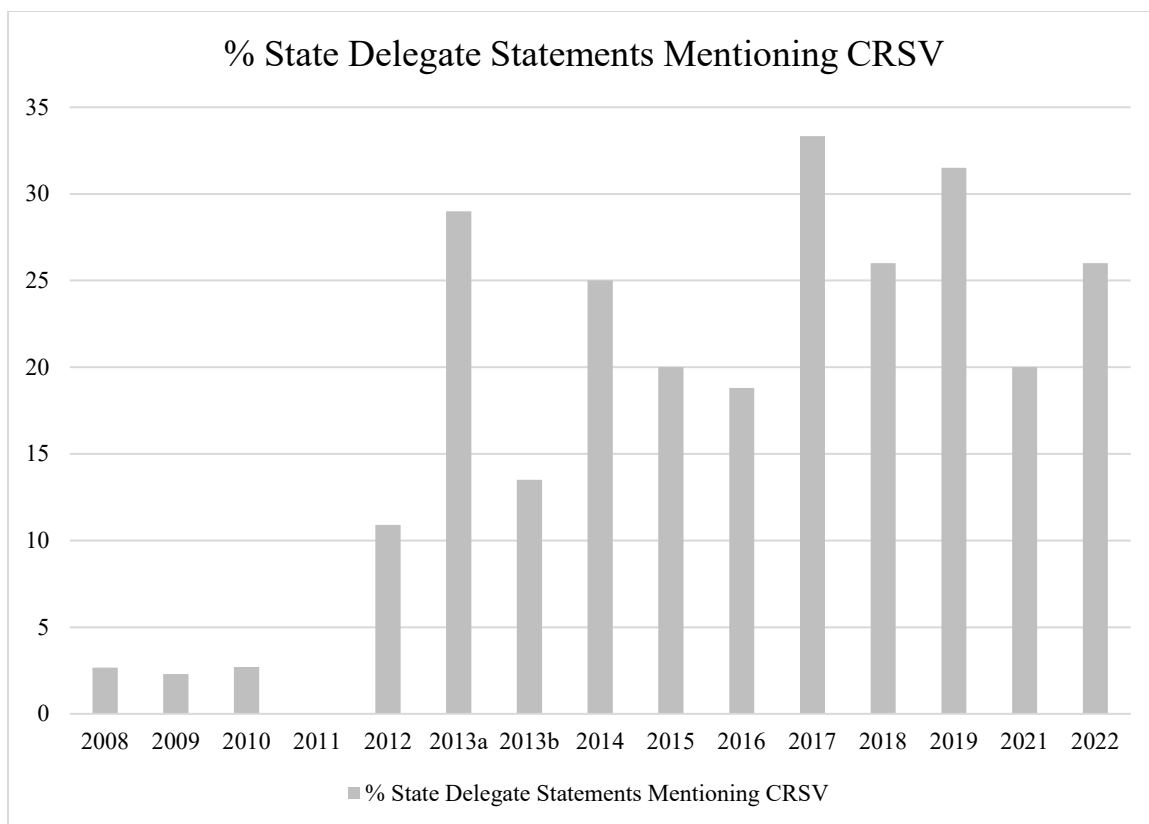
<sup>427</sup> S/2013/149, 3

At the end of the report, in its recommendations to states, donors and NGOs, CRSV against men and boys is noted alongside children born of wartime rape and forced marriage of children in the context of conflict as one of three dimensions of CRSV in need of “resources for further research, monitoring and reporting, prevention initiatives and service provision.”<sup>428</sup>

The two 2013 Security Council debates on CRSV – one to discuss the SRSR’s report on CRSV in April, and one which led to the passage of Resolution 2106 in June – saw a significant increase in the number of states and nonstate actors mentioning CRSV against men and boys in their statements, at 16 delegates and then 10, respectively (*Figure 4.2*). It also led to more focused attention to the issue of male survivors; the connection Dolan made with Bangura at the Missing Peace Symposium turned out to be quite fruitful in that a few months after the Symposium, and after Resolution 2106 had just passed, Dolan would be invited as a briefer for a workshop on CRSV against men and boys hosted by the OSRSG-SVC from July 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> in 2013.

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid, 29



*Figure 4.5. Frequency of CRSV against men and boys in state delegate statements at thematic Security Council debates on CRSV over time.*

While in Canada following RLP’s 2014 suspension, Dolan prepared a paper in collaboration with Plan International and War Child UK, two children’s rights organizations, which served as the basis for a high-level workshop held at the Overseas Development Institute in London on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014.<sup>429</sup> The workshop itself was in preparation for a panel to be held on CRSV against men and boys at the PSVI’s upcoming Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. Indeed, according to Dolan, “the idea was to have it come out in advance of the PSVI conference and put down a marker in the sand, as it were.”<sup>430</sup>

<sup>429</sup> Dolan 2014b

<sup>430</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, February 14, 2024 (virtual)

The Global Summit was massive, bringing together NGOs, professionals in fields such as law and the military, academics, and 70 foreign ministers. Several years after the PSVI was unveiled, the Summit was an opportunity for Hague to flaunt his flagship project's achievements and galvanize other states to join in on the ambitious goal of eliminating CRSV. The Summit resulted in two major formal outcomes: various commitments from governments of both conflict-affected countries as well as aid-providing countries related to CRSV, and the release of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, which was later updated in 2017.<sup>431</sup> The event also functioned as a major awareness-raising campaign. Significant efforts were invested into the Summit's social media presence, and it was covered by major press outlets.<sup>432</sup>

As it embodied a securitized, post-Resolution 1820 approach to CRSV, the Summit was subject to many of the same criticisms directed towards the securitization of CRSV more broadly: namely, that it neglected to connect CRSV to the broader continuum of gendered violence and inequality, and that it perpetuated militarism.<sup>433</sup> But the logistics of the event also sparked controversy. One was the issue of commodification; as Myrntinen explains, “[s]elfie campaigns, hack-a-thons, hot air balloons, hashtags and handicraft sales are probably effective as outreach tools to an extent, but can they really affect hugely complex issues like sexual violence? Perhaps 140 characters are just not enough to capture the depth and complexity of issues, even with

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<sup>431</sup> Dolan was invited to review the document to provide feedback and suggestions on the inclusion of CRSV against men and boys.

<sup>432</sup> *The Guardian* 2014; Cohen et al. 2014; Gyftopoulou 2014

<sup>433</sup> Kirby 2015a; Kirby 2015b; Myrntinen and Swaine 2015; Wright 2015

the help of a selfie.”<sup>434</sup> Further, some questioned the authenticity of the Summit’s commitment to a grassroots and survivor-centered approach. While the UK government’s digital archive of the Summit boasts that the event “departed from the standard format where states develop policy in private and without the direct involvement of experts and practitioners,” enabling it “to open up the debate, allow the widest participation possible and, in recognition of their critical contribution to decision making, give particular prominence to the voices of survivors,”<sup>435</sup> some felt differently. One participant present at the Summit noted that “literally the women and most of the survivors of sexual violence were downstairs in the basement. Angelina Jolie and William Hague were up above. And they made, like, a very brief visit down in the basement to meet the survivors from Darfur and from DRC.”<sup>436</sup> Others felt that asking survivors to speak about their traumatic experiences felt inappropriate. According to another participant, “we were all appalled... why are they bringing survivors up here to talk? This is quite exploitative. They don't have to tell us their story for us to think it's important.”<sup>437</sup>

The issue of CRSV against men and boys garnered further visibility at the Summit. In one of his speeches, Hague declared, “We want to draw attention to the hidden survivors of sexual violence, all those who have felt unable to speak out and who

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<sup>434</sup> Myrtilinen and Swaine 2015, 497; see also, Meger 2016b, Wolfe 2014

<sup>435</sup> Government of the United Kingdom 2017

<sup>436</sup> Interview with author, Participant 23, March 19, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>437</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call). Others found the inclusion of survivors to be hopeful rather than an exercise in tokenism. As Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom put it, “A thought too for the critics, WILPF brought a survivor, as did many others. Their attendance was empowering, reassuring and good. Whatever else may not have been perfect, this is one to be happy about” (WILPF 2014).

have suffered in silence, including men and boys.”<sup>438</sup> The Summit included a session entitled “Sexual violence in conflict: men and boys as victims,” described by the Summit’s program as addressing the following questions: “What is the nature and scale of sexual violence against men and boys? Why do we need to act - and why now? What barriers need to be overcome to improve co-ordination and programming for this group? Where do some of the key responsibilities in the international community lie for taking the agenda forward? Is there a tension between increased attention to men and boys or a continued focus on direct efforts to support women and girls? How can these be mitigated / overcome?”<sup>439</sup> Along with Dolan, the other speakers on the panel were Ugandan and Bosnian male survivors, as well as, interestingly, Gary Barker of Equimundo.

Dolan, recalling the panel, explained that “[u]p to that point, I had never seen Equimundo say anything, ever, about sexual violence against men and boys.” He continued, “it says something about the state of the field, you cast your eyes around and the only person you can find is him.”<sup>440</sup> Barker himself explained during our interview that “our [Equimundo’s] question, our point of entry is, how masculinities, views about what it means to be men, men's power, the complexity of men's power dynamics, how those are affected by, and how they shape conflict, and how they both shape experiences, use of and victimization by sexual violence. So our work has never been framed only as boys and men as victims.”<sup>441</sup> According to Dolan, “Now it would be different. It'd be

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<sup>438</sup> Norosky 2024, 555

<sup>439</sup> Government of the United Kingdom 2014, 13-14

<sup>440</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>441</sup> Interview with author, Participant 10, December 7, 2023 (virtual call)

about a half a dozen instead of one person that's actually written about it and talked about it.”<sup>442</sup> Yet despite the pool of available experts on CRSV against men and boys having been so narrow at the time, an entire panel was dedicated to the topic. Not only that, but Bangura herself – obviously in high demand as the SRSG-SVC at an event about sexual violence in conflict – participated in the panel: Dolan recounted, “she chose amongst all the panels to chair that session. [...] That really pissed off quite a lot of people.”<sup>443</sup>

Another critical moment in the trajectory of CRSV against men and boys was its integration into the 2015 Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence into Humanitarian Action (the “Guidelines”). The first edition of the Guidelines was released in 2005. Around 2013, conversations started happening around revising them, because as one participant put it, “everything ages after a certain point. It's been out there for ten years. We're focusing much more on risk mitigation. We're focusing much more on prevention. We need to go beyond this response part. We need to do something different.”<sup>444</sup> This is another key moment, along with Resolution 2106, in terms of getting language on CRSV against men and boys into policy language. As part of the guidelines for first-line responders to GBV in humanitarian context, this development may be more significant in terms of its direct impact on survivors.

During the drafting period, the representative from UNHCR responsible for working on the revised Guidelines reached out to Dolan to ask for his assistance in

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<sup>442</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>443</sup> Ibid

<sup>444</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2024 (virtual call)

drafting them. He explained that “she knew about the Need to Know Guidance [the collaboration between Refugee Law Project and UNHCR] and you know, I mean she just thought it's an issue. And so she kept on saying in this Inter-Agency Standing Committee, you know we need to have something about working, you know, what do we mean by GBV in emergencies? Does it impact on men and boys? Faced enormous amount of pushback.”<sup>445</sup> RLP would continue its relationship with UNHCR; for example, in 2019, UNHCR and RLP – along with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders) – hosted an event titled “Justice denied? Access to justice for victims of sexual violence” in Geneva.<sup>446</sup>

From its inception in 2016, ASP has remained hard at work targeting high-level stakeholders on the issue of CRSV against men, boys, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Even their earlier advocacy spans across the UN system, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child,<sup>447</sup> the Human Rights Committee,<sup>448</sup> the Economic and Social Council,<sup>449</sup> and of course, the UNSC, where they have engaged its annual debates on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)<sup>450</sup> in addition to those on CRSV.<sup>451</sup> While

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<sup>445</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, February 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>446</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross 2019

<sup>447</sup> All Survivors Project 2018a, “Briefing to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 7 June 2018”

<sup>448</sup> All Survivors Project 2020, “Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee 130th Session, 12 October – 6 November 2020”

<sup>449</sup> All Survivors Project 2017, “Submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights on Central African Republic, 63<sup>rd</sup> Session, 12-29 March 2018”

<sup>450</sup> All Survivors Project 2018b, “Improving documentation and responses to boys as victims of sexual violence in armed conflict: Briefing for UN Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, July 2018”

<sup>451</sup> All Survivors Project 2018c, “Toward a comprehensive approach to conflict-related sexual violence: addressing sexual violence against men and boys: All Survivors Project Briefing for UN Security Council Open Debate, 16 April 2018”

attention to the issue at the annual CRSV debates had dipped slightly since it greatly increased in 2013, the years 2017 and 2018 saw a resurgence in engagement surpassing even 2013 (*Figure 4.2*).

At this point, attention to CRSV against men and boys in the broader advocacy world was increasingly modestly. Within the sample of CRSV advocacy collected (n=582), aside from one outlier in 2004,<sup>452</sup> the two years which saw the greatest number of documents on CRSV published are 2009 and 2014 (*Figure 4.3*). Notably, 2009 is the year after Resolution 1820 was passed. As argued by Crawford,<sup>453</sup> Resolution 1820 was internally driven rather than the outcome of substantial NGO or civil society pressure. Therefore, it makes sense that heightened NGO engagement with CRSV would follow the passage of 1820 rather than precede it. Similarly, 2014 is the year which the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict occurred, which received significant coverage by NGOs, and of course, Resolution 2106 had passed the year previously.

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<sup>452</sup> 26 documents published by Amnesty International substantively engaging CRSV were identified for the year 2004. This number is an outlier both amongst years for Amnesty International (with the average for all other years being 4 documents published), as well as amongst other organizations for that same year (with the average for all other organizations operating during 2004 being 3).

<sup>453</sup> Crawford 2017

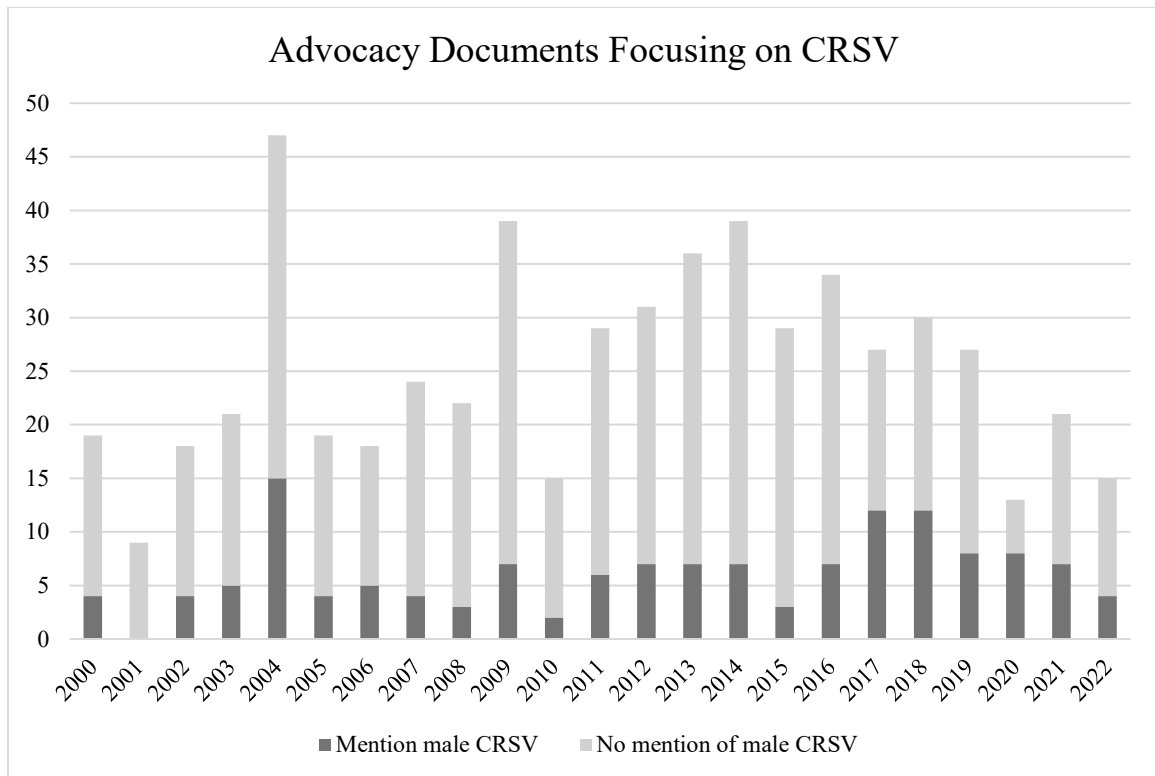


Figure 4.6. All advocacy documents in the sample, by year, according to whether or not they mention CRSV against men and boys.

137 documents in the sample mentioned CRSV against men and boys. It is important to note, however, that much of this engagement is very limited (*Figure 4.4*). Of the 137 documents, only 12.5% address the issue in detail (‘Type 3’) or as the central focus (‘Type 4’). On the other hand, 87.5% of the documents mention the issue only fleetingly, either in legal definition or otherwise in the abstract (‘Type 1’) or in a sentence or two about empirical data as part of a broader focus (‘Type 2’).

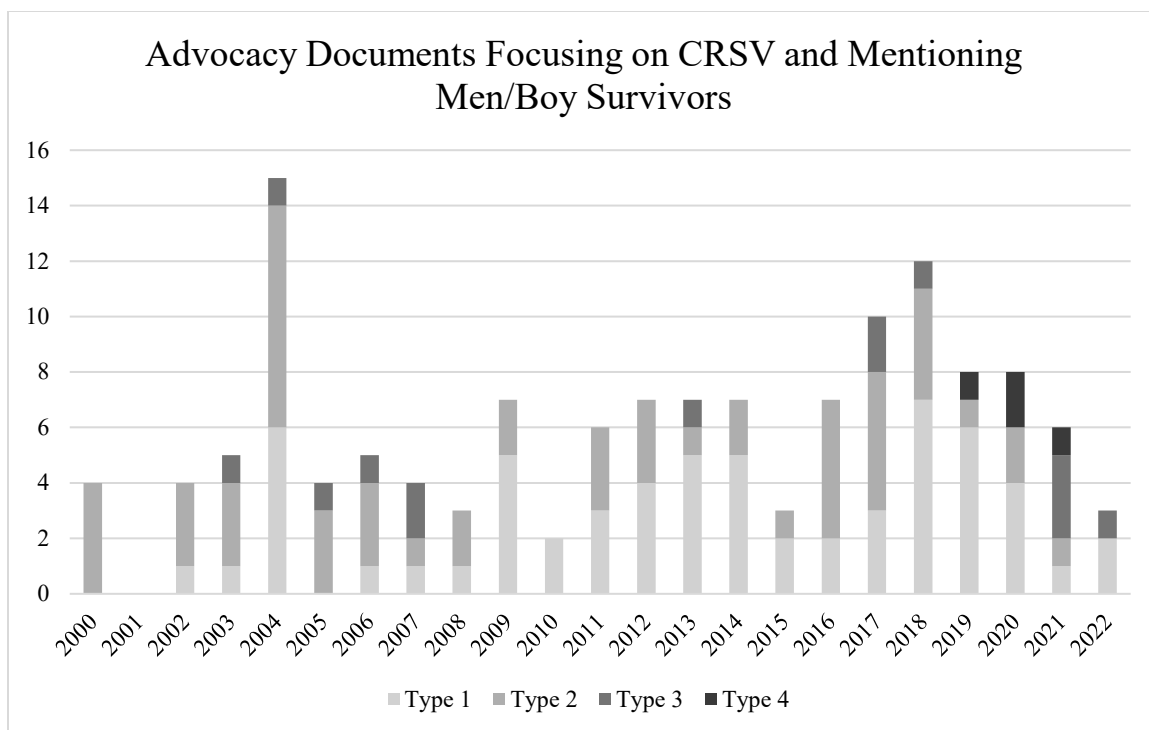


Figure 4.7. All advocacy documents in the sample mentioning CRSV against men and boys, by year. Each document was categorized according to one of the following types. Type 1: Included as part of a legal definition, in the negative (i.e., excluded from the report), or in the abstract (i.e., “women, men, boys, and girls are affected by CRSV”). Type 2: Empirical evidence of CRSV against men and boys mentioned very briefly as part of report or summary (i.e., in a single sentence or in a footnote). Type 3: Substantive engagement with empirical evidence (i.e., may have its own section within a report). Type 4: Document is thematically focused on CRSV against men and boys.

Returning to where we left off in the timeline, a modest but noticeable increase in the proportion of documents mentioning CRSV against men and boys relative to all documents published about CRSV occurs in 2017 and 2018, and overall, advocacy on CRSV from the latter half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more likely to engage the issue of men and boys (Figure 4.4). The engagement is also more detailed; the sample included thematic publications on CRSV against men and boys in 2019, 2020, and 2021. What Figure 4 also shows, however, is that after Resolution 1820 passed in 2008, there is a stark increase in the proportion of Type 1 documents. This may suggest that NGOs may feel more compelled to acknowledge that the problem exists even if they have little else

to say about it due to increasing recognition at the intergovernmental level. The issue was rarely mentioned in this abstract sense prior to 2008; instead, it was raised when evidence of it was uncovered during an investigation. In contrast, a HRW report on CRSV in Tigray from 2021, despite not directly collecting any evidence of CRSV against men and boys, still cited the limited evidence collected by other entities of the problem, and explained the particular stigma attached to CRSV against men and boys which prevents barriers to reporting.<sup>454</sup>

Another NGO, however, went much further. In the Women’s Rights Commission’s (WRC) work prior to 2018, sexual violence against men and boys, conflict-related or otherwise, was only briefly acknowledged if at all. However, in 2018, WRC introduced a focus area on sexual violence against refugee men and boys. While their work is not specific to conflict contexts, their studies focus on many instances of conflict-related displacement, such as Rohingya men and boys living in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, and Congolese, South Sudanese, and Somali men and boys living in Kenya.<sup>455</sup>

Bangura’s tenure as SRSR completed in 2017, when she was replaced by Mauritanian national Pramila Patten, a lawyer and member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) since 2003. Throughout her occupancy of the position, Patten has continued Bangura’s pattern of consistently drawing attention to men and boys. For example, in her statement at the 2018 open debate, she explained that “[m]ale survivors of sexual violence have had their social

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<sup>454</sup> Human Rights Watch 2021, 22-23

<sup>455</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission 2018; Women’s Refugee Commission 2019

status, identity and sexual orientation called into question. In some countries, that can even result in their arrest.”<sup>456</sup> Patten was in office when the UNSC passed Resolution 2467 in 2019.

Of all the moments of visibility for CRSV against men and boys discussed thus far, however, Resolution 2467 might be the most astonishing, and it is reflective of ASP’s extensive advocacy amongst sympathetic state actors, whose work is even mentioned by Liechtenstein during the debate leading to the resolution’s passage.<sup>457</sup> A significant step beyond the lukewarm language of Resolution 2106, Resolution 2467

Notes that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects woman and girls, recognizes also that men and boys are also targets of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in the context of detention settings and those associated with armed groups; urges Member States to protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence; requests further that the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence focus more consistently on the gender specific nature of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations against all affected populations in all situations of concern, including men and boys...<sup>458</sup>

The 2019 debate, along with 2017 debate (by which point ASP was also active in engaging state stakeholders), saw the most explicit references to CRSV against men and boys, each with 23 state delegates mentioning the topic along with 5 and 3 mentions from nonstate participants, respectively.

Resolution 2467, spearheaded by penholder Germany, was contentious from the get-go. Germany had lofty ambitions for what would be included in the final document,

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<sup>456</sup> S/PV.8234 (2018), 5

<sup>457</sup> S/PV.8514 (2019), 66

<sup>458</sup> S/RES/2467 (2019), 9-10

notably a ‘survivor-centered approach’ which, according to Germany, entailed recognition of sexual and reproductive health rights related to CRSV such as abortion, male survivors, and survivors of diverse gender and sexual identities.<sup>459</sup> Unlike the language on male survivors, language on LGBTQ+ survivors and abortion access did not make it into the final draft following significant resistance from conservative state actors, including P5 members China and Russia.<sup>460</sup> Interestingly, conservative actors Poland and the Holy See were actually amongst the 23 states that raised CRSV against men and boys in their statements in the debate. For context, by 2020, dozens of municipalities across Poland would pass laws self-designating as ‘LGBT-free zones,’<sup>461</sup> although these spaces have all but disappeared with the last of such laws struck down by the Polish court system in 2024.<sup>462</sup> The Holy See, on the other hand – the delegate to the Vatican – is notorious for blocking progressive international policies on gender and sexuality,<sup>463</sup> as well as discussions about the Vatican’s complicity in child abuse.<sup>464</sup>

#### **4.5 “A security issue, not a women’s issue”: The Gender-Neutral Approach to Gender**

The previous section detailed the mounting visibility of CRSV against men and boys at the global level. As should already be clear, the different actors who signaled approval for the issue represent a diverse spectrum. The final three sections of this

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<sup>459</sup> Nižnik 2020, 40

<sup>460</sup> Ibid

<sup>461</sup> Ash 2020

<sup>462</sup> Ambroziak 2024

<sup>463</sup> There are many spaces in which this has occurred, but for a recent example, see the debacle at COP29 (Stallard 2024).

<sup>464</sup> Davies and McDonald 2014

chapter explain what made this diverse buy-in possible by exploring three distinct, and in many senses conflictual, deployments of the ‘weapon of war’ framework. As I will show, what unites these three rhetorics is that CRSV against men and boys can be articulated within each of them as an intelligible and legitimate issue of concern. Consequently, the malleability of the ‘weapon of war’ framework with respect to understandings of gender and sexuality is advanced as the key constitutive factor behind increased recognition for CRSV against men and boys.

I call the first deployment of the ‘weapon of war’ framework the *gender-neutral approach*. While most of the actors discussed in this section are also simultaneously invested in a security-centric approach, one actor discussed at the end is not; however, all actors are united in understanding gender as a *freestanding* social construct which can be understood as impacting all individuals in society, albeit in different ways. I emphasize ‘freestanding’ in that crucially, these actors utilize the ‘weapon of war’ paradigm in a way that detaches gender norms from structural gender relations – i.e., patriarchy. This is not to say that such approaches deny the existence of patriarchy, but rather, patriarchy is momentarily bracketed to underscore the fact that gender norms can be weaponized against individuals of all genders, not just women and girls; in other words, it constitutes a gender-neutral approach to gender. The first section of this chapter detailed the institutional splitting-off of CRSV from the broader WPS agenda at the UN, and discussed how the foreign policy initiatives of the US and the UK to some degree mirrored this split. I will show now how the creation of CRSV-specific venues enabled actors to deploy the ‘weapon of war’ framework in a way that backgrounds gender

inequality and foregrounds the purported strategic value of weaponizing sexual violence to the extent that CRSV against men and boys is made more intelligible.

Some of the first links were made between CRSV against men and boys and CRSV's status as a 'real' security issue at the 2012 open debate on CRSV. The delegate for the US explained that

It [CRSV] is also one that very much affects men and boys, as well as women and girls. The report shows that in many places, men are forced to watch as their wives and daughters are being abused. There are numerous cases of men and boys being sexually attacked by other men as a deliberate tactic of conflict. This is a security issue, not a women's issue. We must treat it as such and develop the same strategies of early warning and prevention that we use for other security threats.<sup>465</sup>

While it may seem strange given that the entire basis of the WPS agenda is that women's issues *are* security issues, a negative juxtaposition between these two worlds is evident in this statement. CRSV is elevated above other "women's issue[s]" as a genuine security threat, necessitating that the international community treat it as they would "other security threats." As discussed in Chapter 2, feminists criticize this exact tendency for the reason that it obscures the link between the weaponization of sexual violence and structural inequality between men and women, which implies that CRSV is an issue that can be tackled solely through military reform and establishing a track record of strong punishments for military or armed group leaders who promote or tolerate the practice. Importantly, in this statement, that men and boys can also be subjected to CRSV is advanced as supporting evidence for taking this narrower approach to CRSV; reading between the lines, one can surmise from this statement the belief that men's victimization

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<sup>465</sup> S/PV.6722 (2012), 11

proves CRSV status as a bona fide security threat, rather than being a ‘soft’ issue of gender inequality.

This logic is further demonstrated in UK discourse. While the PSVI consistently makes linkages between CRSV and structural gender inequality, statements made by British delegates betray a sense that ultimately, security issues and women’s issues are understood as separate domains, and CRSV, while related to the latter, belongs squarely in the former. Take, for example, Hague’s statement at the Security Council open debate on CRSV in 2013:

As the international community, we curbed the development of nuclear weapons, heading off a once threatened and unstoppable wave of insecurity. We have binding Conventions against the use of torture and on the treatment of prisoners. We have outlawed the use of chemical weapons and imposed a global ban on cluster munitions. We have made progress in choking off the trade in conflict diamonds, which undermines many fragile countries. Here in the Security Council we adopted historic resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and this year we agreed a historic Arms Trade Treaty, to stem the illegal arms trade that exacerbates conflict and causes such human misery. No country could tackle those vast problems alone, and we have shown that we can confront them together. Today we face another burning need to unite to improve the condition of humanity; together it is time to say that rape and sexual violence used as a weapon of war is unacceptable, that we know it can be prevented and that we will act now to eradicate it, shouldering our responsibilities as national Governments, and collectively as the Security Council. Sexual violence is used to destroy lives, tear apart communities and achieve military objectives, in just the same way that tanks and bullets are.<sup>466</sup>

The likening of CRSV to a bullet or a tank, and its framing alongside issues such as nuclear proliferation, are notable beyond characterizing CRSV as a threat to security.

CRSV is further transformed from an expression of gendered power relations into a tangible object that can be “used,” or as Meger puts it, an “abject ‘thing.’”<sup>467</sup> Specifically,

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<sup>466</sup> S/PV.6984 (2013), 8-9

<sup>467</sup> Meger 2016b, 22

this object constitutes a weapon for the destruction of communities. As an object, CRSV becomes something which can be applied to anyone. Notably, most delegates in their Security Council statements continue to note that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by CRSV. But the fact that CRSV ‘can even’ (as it’s so often put) be wielded against men and boys is interpreted by security-minded actors that in the context of conflict, sexual violence transcends the context of gender inequality such that anyone can become a victim, even men. Elsewhere in British discourse, the argument is explicitly made that the WPS agenda is in fact incompatible with a robust approach to CRSV against men and boys: according to British Army officer Héloïse Goodley (in service at the time of publication), writing for the *Telegraph*, “[f]or male victims to be brought to the fore, conflict related sexual violence needs to be discussed separate from Women, Peace and Security.”<sup>468</sup>

Later the same year that the first Missing Peace Symposium was held in Washington, D.C., USIP would hold another conference entitled “Men, Peace, and Security,” which focused squarely on the connection between GBV and militarized masculinities, highlighting the need to work with men to reform the violent mentalities fueling GBV. In many ways, this interest in sponsoring ‘male engagement work’ ran parallel to the heightened interest in CRSV against men and boys as both issues feed into the ‘gender, not just women’ narrative that became increasingly popular. In a writeup of the event, Ambassador Donald Steinberg is quoted as follows: “This isn’t just a question of women [...] [t]his is a question of men, it is a question of society, it is a question of

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<sup>468</sup> Goodley 2019

equity, it is a question of global peace and security.”<sup>469</sup> The focus on men, whether as perpetrators or survivors, is understood by security-minded actors as a tool for translating the CRSV issue from the domain of ‘women’s work’ into the ostensibly gender-neutral world of security. Again, the implicit contrast between women’s issues and security issues is astonishing given that the WPS agenda from which the focus on CRSV emerged assumes precisely that they are one in the same.

Understanding CRSV as a security issue discursively enables (justifies) the expansion of the US and UK military base networks abroad; for example, during the 2014 Global Summit on Sexual Violence in Conflict, a ministerial meeting chaired by the UK held between Nigeria, its neighboring countries, multiple Western governments, and the African and European Unions convened “to discuss security in Nigeria and the region.”<sup>470</sup> According to the communique, participants “recognised that security and stability can be achieved only through an approach that includes respect for human rights, alleviating poverty and creating jobs, strengthening rule of law and accountable governance, improving education, protecting the rights of women and girls, and including women and civil society in efforts to resolve conflict.”<sup>471</sup> Three of the four ‘pledges’ made by the UK and other Western governments, however, involved extending their commitment to help Nigeria combat Boko Haram and other terrorist groups (the fourth entailed “support for girls’ education in Nigeria and our assistance to the Nigerian and

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<sup>469</sup> US Institute for Peace 2013

<sup>470</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2014

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, 2

other Governments as they ensure that basic services and infrastructure are provided to the populations most menaced by terrorism and instability”).<sup>472</sup>

The SRSG’s Office under the leadership of Zainab Bangura (2012-2017) exhibits similar rhetoric to that of the US and UK just discussed. The emphasis on security is not surprising, given that the SRSG’s Office is entrenched within the Security Council – indeed, the Security Council created this very institution. In framing the impetus behind the SRSG Office’s 2013 workshop on CRSV against men and boys, the subsequent report explains that

Even though the existing policy infrastructure mentioned above was developed to address all victims of sexual violence, including women, men and children, there remains little acknowledgement of the issue of men as victims of conflict-related sexual violence. There has also been limited understanding of the phenomenon itself, or of the different needs of male victims of sexual violence compared to female victims, needs which call for specific programmatic and strategic adjustments. [...] As such, the Women, Peace and Security lens may have inadvertently led to adverse and exclusionary programming practices in the field.<sup>473</sup>

Here, as in Goodley’s analysis, the WPS agenda from which the CRSV agenda emerged is understood as an impediment to the development of an inclusive understanding of CRSV. The report goes on to suggest that within approaches to CRSV, “the discussion about gender has been blurred with and frequently subsumed into a necessary struggle for women’s rights in the face of historical indifference to the widespread subordination of women.”<sup>474</sup> In this conceptualization, gender is wrested from patriarchy; it becomes nothing more than a marker of difference, as opposed to a marker underpinning gendered

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<sup>472</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2014, 2-3

<sup>473</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2013, 7

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, 8-9

power relations. While this implies that articulations of male vulnerability cannot be accommodated by a framework premised on an analysis of patriarchy, feminist scholarship on male rape throws such an assumption into question,<sup>475</sup> and the discourses examined in the next section concur with this.

In her keynote speech to the Missing Peace Symposium, Bangura made a statement strongly echoing that of the US delegate at the 2012 open debate: “Although sexual violence disproportionately affects women and girls, it is important to remember that it is *not a gender issue* [italics added]; also men and boys are victims of this crime. And the shame and stigma surrounding rape and other forms of sexual violence done to men and boys is as common as when perpetrated against women and girls.”<sup>476</sup> She continued to note reports received by her Office about sexual violence used against men and boys in Libya and Syria, primarily in detention centers. The refrain that sexual violence “disproportionately affects women and girls” is not unique to the gender-neutral deployment of the ‘weapon of war’ framework, as will be discussed in the next two sections. In this context, however, the refrain can be read as a sort of caveat that functions to nod to structural gender inequality without fully engaging with it (as entailed by the statement that “it is not a gender issue”).

While this idea might be incoherent – *How could something which disproportionately affects women not be a gender issue?* – this doesn’t actually matter towards the rhetorical end of elevating CRSV’s status as an important security threat. It matters quite a bit for the implementation of the norm against CRSV, which will be

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<sup>475</sup> The approaches highlighted in Zalewski et al.’s (2018) edited volume *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics* are a testament to this.

<sup>476</sup> Bangura 2013

discussed at length in Chapter 5. But for now, it is clear that CRSV-specific spaces, such as the UNSC’s annual open debate on CRSV, facilitate discourses which extricate the weaponization of sexual violence in conflict from its roots in structural gender inequality. To this point, the ‘weapon of war’ framework also enabled buy-in from the ICRC. Amongst some feminist practitioners, ICRC is notorious for their traditionally gender-blind approach to conflict and humanitarian settings. One GBV expert from the humanitarian sector explained, “he’s playing to a friendly crowd. ICRC is an organization infamous for not giving a shit about gender.” They continued, “Most of the people in ICRC don’t even think ICRC should be working on sexual violence. Period.”<sup>477</sup> That surprised me somewhat, and when I indicated as such, they explained, “I would say a big reason for that is because it’s female-coded. ‘We’re not there to do that. We work in prisons. We do prisoner transfers. We don’t need to get involved in this gender stuff.’” They continued, still talking about ICRC,

And this feeds into that whole conflict-related versus GBV thing. They only work in war zones, conflict-related. And it has to be about IHL [international humanitarian law]. And it’s really difficult to prove that sexual violence has anything to do with IHL. And there’s a bunch of women in the organization fighting that and working to dispute that... But what they are interested in is sexual violence in detention centers where it’s men. That’s interesting to them because it’s not run-of-the-mill GBV.<sup>478</sup>

Finally, as discussed, the UNHCR is another important actor that took the issue of CRSV against men and boys onboard. However, while this organization also understands CRSV against men and boys through a gender-neutral lens, it does so without much interest in the ‘weapon of war’ frame itself. UNHCR’s broad mandate – to protect *all*

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<sup>477</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>478</sup> Ibid

refugees, in all of their diversity – made this organization more open to the issue of CRSV against men and boys than, for example, UN Women would have been. During the year prior to the publication of their collaboration with RLP, the UNHCR introduced its Age, Gender and Diversity Policy.<sup>479</sup> The policy recognizes that “[t]he roles of men and boys often change in displacement,” which “can create protection risks that need to be detected and addressed.”<sup>480</sup> In line with this approach, the 2012 guidance (with RLP) makes the case that like women and girls, men and boys can be vulnerable to sexual violence, including survival sex particularly in the context of displacement.

However, the UNHCR is not as concerned with the conflict context itself; rather, CRSV against men and boys falls under their mandate in instances where conflict leads to displacement, and displacement unrelated to conflict is also within their scope. The ‘weapon of war’ frame is only relevant to the UNHCR so far as it the weaponization of CRSV impacts human insecurity. According to the last participant quoted, “the UNHCR, in terms of the terminology, they will always talk about the larger sexual and gender-based violence spectrum because first of all, they are service provision focused on the ground. [...] And you provide services to survivors regardless. You don't ask, ‘Hold on. Was this sexual violence conflict-related?’ If people want to volunteer that information, that can be recorded. But you never ask. That's, you know, that's bad practice.” They continued, “Also, it's seen as taking sides, it's seen as political if it's conflict-related. So they always talk about the larger [picture] and that's how they see it.”<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2011

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 4

<sup>481</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2024 (virtual call)

In any case, at various points the UNHCR has shared a reputation to that of the ICRC. One participant with proximity to the drafting of the 2015 edition of the IASC Guidelines explained that “the person who was representing UNHCR on these issues was very opposed to having an exclusive focus, or even primary focus on women and girls. She was very much like, ‘We've talked about women and girls enough. We need to talk about men and boys.’”<sup>482</sup>

#### **4.6 Getting at the Root of it All: The Feminist Approach to Gender**

Given its roots in feminist activism, it’s not surprising that the ‘weapon of war’ framework continues to be echoed in more contemporary *feminist approaches* to CRSV.<sup>483</sup> Feminism, however, is a very wide tent, and that tent grows even wider as new trajectories in feminist thinking emerge. Distinctions are often drawn between second- and third-wave feminisms, with the former positioned as more sex-essentialist, and the latter as more poised to integrate trans and nonbinary experiences into understandings of patriarchy. This shift is obviously not exclusive to global approaches to CRSV but rather reflects broader societal transformations. When I asked one feminist advocate for their explanation as to why discussions about gender have started to broaden amongst NGOs, they explained that “society’s changing and we’re changing,” and that, for example, “trans people were not very visible when I was younger and so we didn't think about them so much when we talked about women's rights, because maybe we didn't know anyone... we didn't see representation of people. And that's changed a lot and that's for

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<sup>482</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>483</sup> I use the term ‘feminist’ loosely here to describe actors with a focus on gender equality. I make this caveat because I discuss several UN arms in this section which, by virtue of being a part of the UN, cannot be explicitly political.

the better. And we have to integrate that into how we look at the world and how we do our work.”<sup>484</sup>

One participant identified 2010-2012 as a marker for when these new feminist insights started to gain traction in the humanitarian world:

I think there's also a bit of a generational issue there. Not just around sexual violence against men and boys, but also around LGBTQI issues and around us looking at masculinity. So say, again, roundabout 2010, 2011, 2012, talking to aid bureaucrats or UN agencies or whatever, gender was women. So with the newer or younger aid bureaucrats that I engage with now, there's... It's not even questioned that there are non-binary gender identities or that there's sexual violence against men and boys or that masculinities need to be questioned. So there is really sort of a generational shift there as well in a lot of institutions that I've noticed.<sup>485</sup>

As this statement suggests, third-wave feminism is well-equipped to engage the topic of CRSV against men and boys. Unsurprisingly, the way in which the issue is raised through a feminist lens differs starkly from the security-centric approach discussed in the previous section. As mentioned earlier, the feminist NGO Women’s Refugee Commission’s project on CRSV against men and boys is notable as one of the most dedicated NGO engagements with the issue.

WRC evolved out of a working group started by staff of another large humanitarian organization, the International Rescue Committee, who felt that not enough attention was given to women’s needs during emergencies within their organization and within humanitarian response more broadly. Consequently, as mentioned already, earlier advocacy documents published by WRC rarely touch on the experiences of men and

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<sup>484</sup> Interview with author, Participant 14, December 13, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>485</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 14, 2023 (virtual call). It’s notable that one author directly challenges the centrality of generational differences in explaining conceptual contestation around gender-based violence (Michelis 2024).

boys. However, mirroring the broader dissemination of third-wave feminism, in more recent years WRC’s approach has pivoted to take a more expansive approach to gender, although importantly, one which remains firmly committed to the emancipation of women as a driving goal. The approach to CRSV against men and boys undertaken in their 2018 initiative is guided explicitly by feminist principles and situates sexual violence against men and boys within the context of systemic discrimination of women and girls. A core component of this approach is the necessity of maintaining “accountability to women and girls,” which is to say that work with male survivors should not damage efforts to assist women and girls, but beyond that, should be actively engaged in the project of gender equality (*Figure 4.5*).

<b>Feminist Approach</b>	<p>WRC’s work on sexual violence against men and boys strives to prioritize accountability to women and girls. We do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exploring how sexual violence against men and boys impacts the lives of women and girls;</li> <li>• exploring how sexual violence against men and boys intersects with violence against women and girls;</li> <li>• advocating for services for and attention to all survivors, including those with diverse SOGIESC;</li> <li>• dispelling the myth that services and treatment are available for sexual violence survivors who identify as women and girls, but not for men and boys—services and treatment are typically limited for all survivors;</li> <li>• collaborating with feminist organizations, including LGBTQI+ civil society organizations; and</li> <li>• including experts on violence against women and girls on our Global Advisory Committee.</li> </ul>
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*Figure 4.5. Excerpt from the Women’s Refugee Commission’s website. WRC situates its work with men and boy survivors of sexual violence within a feminist approach.*<sup>486</sup>

It is also notable that WRC’s project on men and boys is intersectional in that they focus particularly on men and assigned-male-at-birth individuals who belong to the LGBTQ+ community based on the understanding that this demographic is particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. The approach of grouping together

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<sup>486</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission n.d.

cisgendered, heterosexual men and boys with the LGBTQ+ community is not unique to WRC; some state actors and NGOs also follow this pattern.<sup>487</sup>

Similarly to UNHCR, because their focus is on humanitarian contexts more broadly, WRC does not place primacy on the ‘weapon of war’ framework to the degree that security-minded actors do, and in fact, the phrase rarely comes up in WRC publications on men and boys. Regardless of the jargon used, this understanding of CRSV is included in their work, but crucially, amongst a host of other contexts in which sexual violence occurs. For example, in a 2018 report on Myanmar’s persecution of the Rohingya, WRC explains,

Forcing Rohingya men and boys to witness sexual violence against their female loved ones and community members serves multiple purposes: to inflict terror, humiliation, and anguish on both the female victims and the male observers, and to damage familial bonds, destroy the social fabric, and subjugate communities as whole. Women’s rights groups in Myanmar have documented use of this practice by the Myanmar military against other ethnic communities, noting that the rape of a woman in front of her family members is commonplace and used as a means of psychological warfare.<sup>488</sup>

Elsewhere in the report, it similarly describes genital violence against men as “being used as a tool of intimidation, revenge, and symbolic emasculation” and which “may be genocidal in its intent.”<sup>489</sup> But this deployment of the ‘weapon of war’ framework coexists within WRC’s advocacy work with types of sexual violence not perpetrated by combatants or with any discernable strategic use. For example, in that same document,

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<sup>487</sup> Like Human Rights Watch’s (2020) report on sexual violence against men, boys and trans women in Syria, WRC chooses to study cisgender men and boys alongside trans women not to conflate them but in recognition of the fact that perpetrators often mistake trans women for gay men, and thus, the two groups share similar (though not identical) protection concerns.

<sup>488</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission 2018, 29

<sup>489</sup> Ibid, 22

WRC details the vulnerability of displaced Rohingya men and other individuals of “diverse SOGIESC [sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics]” to sex work, which can expose them to “high levels of violence from clients, family members, community members, and police, including exposure to rape.”<sup>490</sup> Another report situates sexual violence experienced by displaced Congolese, Somali and South Sudanese men, boys and trans women in their conflict-affected countries of origin alongside the violence they go on to experience in Kenya while seeking refuge.<sup>491</sup>

The contextualization of CRSV within patriarchy seems to reflect the position of feminist civil society members who engage the issue of CRSV against men and boys. At the 2019 open debate, civil society delegate Inas Miloud – an indigenous feminist activist from the Libyan-based Tamazight Women’s Movement – repeatedly touches on how men and boys also experience sexual and gender-based violence, noting as others have that they are particularly vulnerable in detention centers<sup>492</sup> although it “primarily affects women and girls.”<sup>493</sup> However, throughout her speech, Miloud continuously brings the conversation back to the root cause of patriarchy. Early in the statement she explains that “rigid patriarchal norms, amplified by the presence of armed groups and the widespread availability of weapons, are the central cause of gender-based violence and lack of security for women” and “gender-based violence exists in a continuum that extends from

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<sup>490</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission 2018, 34

<sup>491</sup> Women’s Refugee Commission 2019

<sup>492</sup> S/PV.8154 (2019), 12

<sup>493</sup> Ibid, 11

times of peace to periods of conflict and from public spaces to private lives.”<sup>494</sup> Notably, situating conflict-related sexual and GBV as part of a “continuum” which extends “from times of peace to periods of conflict” coheres with the articulations put forward by Colombian feminist activists documented by Kreft.<sup>495</sup> Miloud continues to make this connection when she discusses men and boy survivors, noting that “[a] feature of the violence targeting men and boys — and a reason for its stigmatization — is the deeply entrenched assumptions about male invulnerability. Challenging harmful gender norms and attitudes in terms of both masculinity and femininity is therefore essential for addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and militarization.”<sup>496</sup>

Some other NGOs which originally centered on the experience of women and girls are also evolving towards a ‘gender, not just women’ approach. One participant who works for an NGO explained, “I mean, even though our unit has women’s rights in the title, I think we’re getting better at being a gender rights team, rather than only women’s rights. You know, we’re getting better at things like, when you’re doing research on child marriage, you should also ask about boys getting married.”<sup>497</sup> As will be shown briefly here and at length in Chapter 5, this more expansive approach to gender is highly contested within feminist spaces.

However, what is crucial here for the purposes of this chapter is that amongst individuals or organizations that – for whatever reasons – are *not* pushing feminist work

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<sup>494</sup> S/PV.8154 (2019), 11

<sup>495</sup> Kreft 2020

<sup>496</sup> S/PV.8154 (2019), 12

<sup>497</sup> Interview with author, Participant 14, December 13, 2023 (virtual call)

to go beyond women and girls, if the gendered vulnerability men and boys does get brought up, it is most often related to CRSV and the ‘weapon of war’ framework.

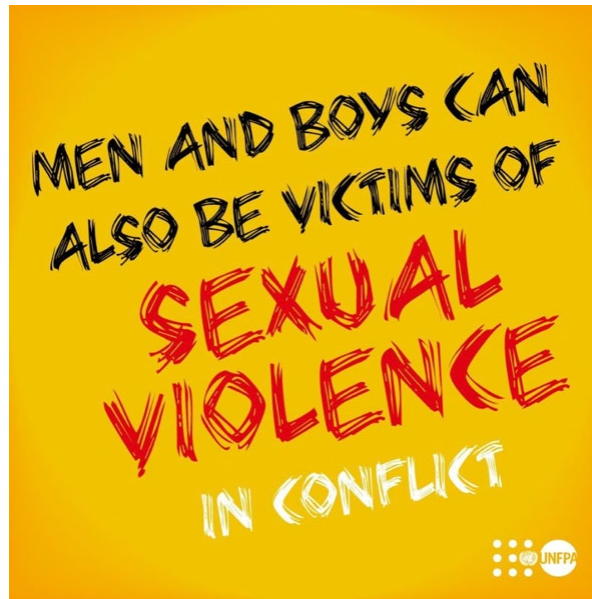
On the one hand, there are structural explanations for this trend related to the institutional breaking-off of CRSV from the WPS agenda. One participant explained about UN Women that the organization doesn’t have “clear guidance on the extent to which” its mandate includes men and boys and that “it’s somewhat left to the interpretation of the individual staff member.”<sup>498</sup> They went on to say that despite this, “it is very clear from the Security Council resolutions, especially the one, I mean, I think 2467 was the most clear that to the Security Council, work on CRSV includes men and boys. And you also see this very clearly in the annual reports from the SRSG on sexual violence and the way that she includes men and boys.” They continued, “if you were to look for a UN Women publication on CRSV against men and boys, you won’t find it.” However, they provided the caveat that when UN Women deploys SGBV investigators, “they absolutely identify, report verified cases of CRSV against men and boys. And it’s very clear that that’s a part of their job.”<sup>499</sup>

Another UN organization with a focus on women and girls – more specifically, maternal and reproductive health – the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), posted an infographic on their Instagram in 2023 that simply states, “Men and boys can also be victims of sexual violence in conflict” (*Figure 4.6*).

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<sup>498</sup> Interview with author, Participant 15, December 18, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>499</sup> Ibid



*Figure 4.6. UNFPA Instagram infographic about CRSV against men and boys. The caption reads, “Male survivors of sexual violence in conflict often have little, if any, support. Many remain silent out of shame. We must end the stigma to make sure all victims receive the care they need.”<sup>500</sup>*

Some feminist organizations include CRSV against men and boys in the sense of a disclaimer. For example, CRSV against men and boys occasionally surfaces in the advocacy of feminist NGO Global Justice Center. However, this is typically in passing, and largely to contrast its prevalence to CRSV amongst women and girls. One document – a news blurb discussing the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers – explains, “The pervasive threat of rape, in and outside detention settings, further exacerbates conditions of life for women. Notably, although security forces torture both men and women detainees with rape and sexual violence, women may be at higher risk outside detention. A woman’s vulnerability increases if she is in an internally displaced persons camp, if she is one of 90,000 Tamil war widows, and if she is ex-LTTE.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> UN Population Fund 2023

<sup>501</sup> Global Justice Center 2016

Another simply states, “Although both women and men can become targets of sexual violence, women constitute the majority of the victims. It has been widely recognized that all survivors experience long-lasting mental and physical harm, but women and girls have unique, gender-sensitive needs.”<sup>502</sup>

To explicate what makes this invocation of CRSV against men and boys coherent within a framework where violence against women and girls is the primary focus, and patriarchy is the key explanatory factor, I will return to the 2015 IASC Guidelines. Ultimately, I argue that CRSV against men and boys sometimes gets understood through the feminist perspective as one of the rare ways in which men’s experiences during conflict can be understood as gendered.

The openness of the Guidelines demonstrates that GBV is a highly contested term, as confirmed by my own interview data. It is perhaps unavoidable to define GBV in defining of CRSV. Depending on who you ask, all sexual violence is GBV, or only some sexual violence is GBV – and this has direct implications for the inclusion of male survivors of CRSV in humanitarian efforts. If CRSV needs to be understood as GBV, this means that humanitarian organizations providing GBV services for women and girls should also, in theory, be accountable for serving male survivors of sexual violence. Multiple participants explained to me that this places a burden on the already underfunded GBV sector.

In defining GBV, the Guidelines state that GBV is “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially

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<sup>502</sup> Global Justice Center 2019

ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females.”<sup>503</sup> Against this broad background, cleavages then appear in the document in terms of what it means for violence to be “based on socially ascribed gender differences.” According to the Guidelines, “The term ‘GBV’ is most commonly used to underscore how systemic inequality between males and females—which exists in every society in the world—acts as a unifying and foundational characteristic of most forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls.”<sup>504</sup> It then goes on to elaborate, however, that GBV “is also increasingly used by some actors to highlight the gendered dimensions of certain forms of violence against men and boys—particularly some forms of sexual violence committed with the explicit purpose of reinforcing gender inequitable norms of masculinity and femininity (e.g. sexual violence committed in armed conflict aimed at emasculating or feminizing the enemy)”<sup>505</sup> as well as to “describe violence perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.”<sup>506</sup> In explaining why CRSV against men and boys occurs, the Guidelines explain that “[t]his violence against males is based on socially constructed ideas of what it means to be a man and exercise male power.”

Overall, the Guidelines are expansive and include recommendations for working with survivors of all genders and sexualities without taking a firm stance on who is technically included in the GBV definition. It’s significant, however, that the document highlights CRSV against men and boys as paradigmatic of male-directed GBV, were one

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<sup>503</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015, 5

<sup>504</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>505</sup> Ibid, 5

<sup>506</sup> Ibid, 6

to take on one of the more expansive definitions. It casts light on the main discursive mechanism by which the issue of CRSV against men and boys can appear so prominently at the global level: the malleability of the ‘weapon of war’ frame. In conceptualizing CRSV against men and boys as strategically used by combatants as a means of “emasculating or feminizing the enemy,” feminist and women-centered approaches can account for the issue in a way that does not contradict one of their central claims that CRSV should be understood as part of a broader peace-conflict continuum of GBV. Indeed, the Guidelines explain that while “[a] great deal of attention has centred on monitoring, documenting and addressing sexual violence in conflict,” evidence also suggests “affected populations can experience various forms of GBV during conflict and natural disasters, during displacement, and during and following return. In particular, intimate partner violence is increasingly recognized as a critical GBV concern in humanitarian settings.”<sup>507</sup>

While this section has mostly discussed nonstate actors, states also utilize the ‘weapon of war’ frame to understand CRSV against men and boys through feminist approaches. Again, reflecting the diversity of feminism, approaches vary even within this category. For example, echoing the Global Justice Center, in 2013 a delegate for Namibia to the UNSC declares that “[a]s highlighted in the concept note [written by the UK], this [CRSV] not only affects a large number of women and girls, but also men and boys. Without downplaying the impact of sexual violence on men and boys, women and girls are often more disproportionately affected because the impact of such acts and the consequences with which they have to live are often much more severe than for men and

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<sup>507</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2015, 6

boys.”<sup>508</sup> In the same statement, the Namibian delegate contextualizes the weaponization of sexual violence in conflict within the broader gender-based violence continuum, noting that “[w]hile this debate is mainly addressing issues of sexual violence, we must also focus our attention beyond the realm of conflict periods.”<sup>509</sup> The delegate for Ireland similarly asserts at the same debate that “[w]hile there has been a welcome shift towards acknowledging conflict-related sexual violence as an issue of peace and security, rather than viewing it simply as a women’s issue, it is undeniable that sexual violence touches women and affects women far more profoundly than men. It is therefore appropriate that women take the lead in driving the necessary national political change.”<sup>510</sup>

While these statements represent an effort to re-center women and girls, other states exhibit more third-wave tendencies. Costa Rica, for example, notes at the 2022 open debate that it “firmly believes in changing the reductionist binary lens through which sexual violence in armed conflict has been addressed for far too long,” continuing that “[f]or a long time, boys and men and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people have been excluded from discussions on this topic. Costa Rica calls upon the Council to broaden the conversation so that all victims are considered.”<sup>511</sup> As with some other feminist approaches discussed in this section, Costa Rica raises the issue of male survivors alongside LGBTQ+ survivors based on the perception that a singular focus on women and girls not only blocks these additional survivors from getting the help they need, but at a broader level, perpetuates the very gender norms which fuel CRSV.

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<sup>508</sup> S/PV.6984 (2013), 52

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>511</sup> S/PV.9016 Resumption 1 (2022), 32

All in all, feminist deployments of the ‘weapon of war’ frame differ from the security-centric deployments previously discussed in that feminists take a much wider lens. As such, sexual violence perpetrated by armed combatants loses the exceptional nature afforded to it in security discourses. Consequently, this shapes the interventions feminists tend to support; rather than focusing on military reform, feminists insist that CRSV will continue to occur if the inequalities between men and women which persist into ‘peacetime’ go unaddressed. As demonstrated, men and boy CRSV survivors are legible in both discourses. However, as should also be clear, these discourses draw very different implications from the fact that combatants perpetrate against men and women alike. Security-centric deployments of the ‘weapon of war’ frame understand the prevalence of CRSV against men and boys to suggest that the perpetration of CRSV has little to do with the gender of the victim, and everything to do with the strategic utility of gender norms during combat. Feminists, on the other hand, see CRSV against men and boys as intrinsically tied to the broader societal oppression of women and girls. As I have also shown, however, just as feminism more broadly takes many forms, so too does feminist engagement with CRSV against men and boys. As will be expanded upon in Chapter 5, the question of male survivors remains a source of debate within feminist circles.

#### **4.7 Strategies for Navigating a “very, very messy world”: The Conservative Approach to Gender**

This final section explores a third deployment of the ‘weapon of war’ framework which stands in even starker contrast to the feminist approach to gender just discussed. That the actors involved in this third deployment – which I call the *conservative approach to gender* – even acknowledge CRSV against men and boys, let alone state

their support for drawing attention to the issue, is particularly surprising. The state actors discussed in this section all adhere to conservative beliefs about gender and, by extension, sexuality. Some, but not all, of these actors tie their hetero- and cis-normative ideologies to religious doctrines. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, homophobia was a key factor in the perpetuation of the global silence on CRSV against men and boys. As such, it's particularly puzzling why conservative actors would engage the issue.<sup>512</sup> To understand what made this development possible, I again argue for paying close attention to the work being done by the 'weapon of war' framework. Specifically, this frame enables conservative state actors to engage male sexual victimization in a way that keeps the gender binary intact and protects the heterosexuality of both the perpetrator and the victim.

Amongst the inflammatory issues raised by Germany in Resolution 2467, the recognition of male survivors was the only one which made it in the final draft. What accounts for this? As a reminder, Germany raised topics such as abortion access and LGBTQ+ rights. Based on her interviews with stakeholders involved both directly and indirectly with the drafting of Resolution 2467, Niznik makes the case that amongst these other controversial topics, "language on male victims was no one's red line." While what she refers to as "conservative states, including Russia and China"<sup>513</sup> challenged a paragraph on men, boys and LGBTQ+ survivors in the initial drafts, the sheer number of sensitive issues raised in Germany's initial draft "required all parties at, behind, and

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<sup>512</sup> While this section does not focus on the US, its absence should not be taken to suggest that the US can be characterized as a progressive state actor, even during administrations that professed to champion feminist principles.

<sup>513</sup> Niznik 2020, 47

beyond the table to focus their resources and their political capital on their absolute top priorities in this negotiation.”<sup>514</sup> For (some) states with conservative gender ideologies, recognition of CRSV against men and boys may have not been ideal; however, it simply wasn’t as damaging to the preservation of a heteropatriarchal understanding of gender which they hoped to inculcate within the resolution. Ultimately, while male survivors made it into the final draft, “language acknowledging people of diverse SOGI [sexual orientation, gender identity] was deleted.”<sup>515</sup>

To illustrate why CRSV against men and boys registered comparatively lower on the threat levels of conservative states compared with abortion rights or recognition of LGBTQ+ survivors, it is useful to shift focus to several state delegates whose raising of the issue of CRSV against men and boys is particularly perplexing. Interestingly, it seems that what could broadly be classed as ‘conservative’ states – in this context, states ideologically opposed to ‘gender-expansive’ thinking as well as feminist ideologies – were not monolithic in opposition to the inclusion of men and boys during the negotiations preceding Resolution 2467. In this regard, a particular statement that sticks out like a sore thumb is one made by the delegate for the Holy See. The Holy See, the diplomatic representative for the Catholic Church, is notorious for opposing progressive language related to gender in UN and other multilateral spaces.<sup>516</sup> Furthermore, the epidemic of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, which has primarily been against boys and adolescent males, was raised at various UN forums (much to the Vatican’s

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<sup>514</sup> Nižnik 2020, 52

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 47

<sup>516</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 14, 2023 (virtual call). For example, at the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), the Holy See continuously blocked an Addendum on the Gender Action Plan.

chagrin).<sup>517</sup> Yet at the 2019 debate, Archbishop Auza notes that “[a]mong the victims are also men and boys — a reality so taboo in some cultures and contexts that it is hidden and shrouded in even greater silence.”<sup>518</sup> Notably, this wasn’t a one-off; the Holy See also included men and boy survivors in its statement at the 2013 Security Council debate on CRSV.<sup>519</sup> If the Vatican is intent on shirking accountability for its complicity in the sexual abuse of boys and adolescent males, why would its delegate explicitly mention men and boy victims at the Security Council?

The Holy See is, notably, a delegate without standing military.<sup>520</sup> Voting members with either zero or limited military capabilities, such as Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Costa Rica regularly participate in and contribute to Security Council debates on CRSV even outside their serving terms. It could be surmised that these states feel especially comfortable in regulating the conduct of armed conflict, given that they themselves would never find themselves in the position of being regulated, and that a similar explanation could apply to the Holy See. When I asked Charu Lata Hogg of All Survivors Project about the Holy See’s statement, she replied, “We didn’t do any advocacy with them. So yeah, it was a bit of a surprise. Sometimes that happens, sometimes, you know, states surprise you and it comes from nowhere.”<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2021

<sup>518</sup> S/PV.8514 (2019), 100

<sup>519</sup> S/PV.6984 (2013), 60

<sup>520</sup> The Holy See does not have voting rights or the ability to submit candidates at the UN but was granted permanent observer status in 1964.

<sup>521</sup> Interview, Participant 36, July 1, 2024 (virtual call)

But the Vatican wasn't the only surprising delegate to make a statement about CRSV against men and boys at the 2019 debate. Poland did the same and had also done so a year earlier at the 2018 debate where they noted that "[t]he devastating effects of sexual violence on male survivors and their families should be discussed openly in this forum" and that "[f]or male survivors, sexual violence remains hidden owing to cultural taboos."<sup>522</sup> Given all the literature emphasizing the intertwining of stigma against male survivors with homophobia, as well as the evidence presented in Chapter 3 that in earlier years some states actively blocked recognition of sexual violence against men and boys, what makes it possible for actors like Poland and the Holy See to support men and boy survivors while simultaneously disavowing LGBTQ+ rights? On the 'weapon of war' framework, gender and development expert Suhail Abualsameed explained, "It allows us to free our issues and personal traumas and assumptions about men and women from where, in everyday society, men cannot be victims of sexual violence." He continued, "I do see that most of our conversation is around conflict contexts. Not non-conflict. That will tell you something. That one, we all understand this exists, but we don't want to acknowledge that it exists in everyday life. So at least we can blame it on conflict."<sup>523</sup> Speaking more broadly about crimes perpetrated against all genders, another participant similarly suggested the following as to why CRSV gets more attention than GBV more broadly: "I think it has something to do with othering and with not being ready to face what's within us and amongst us, without conflict and war."<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> S/PV.8234 (2018), 16

<sup>523</sup> Interview with author, Participant 2, September 9, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>524</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2023 (virtual call)

It's important to note that both the participants just quoted, as well as several others, noted the racialized aspect of the 'conflict country' vs. 'non-conflict country' divide as it gets employed by Western states specifically.<sup>525</sup> In this sense, the conservative deployment of the 'weapon of war' frame in this section and the gender-neutral deployment discussed earlier share a key feature: they each leverage the conflict context to place distance between CRSV and the messiness of gender, but towards different ends. In the case of powerful Western states, this distance reifies both the perceived singularity of the issue (justifying its securitization), and the idea that Western states are progressive norm entrepreneurs rather than complicit in CRSV. On the other hand, the idea of conflict as a zone of exception beyond the 'everyday' indeed enables actors committed to conservative gender ideologies to wrest CRSV from the challenges that sexual violence against men *out* of conflict raises for a heteronormative understanding of how the world works.

Ironically akin somewhat to Brownmiller's influential thesis that rape is about power, not sex,<sup>526</sup> CRSV against men and boys can be safely understood as simply an example of a combatant wielding a weapon like any other. The emphases by the Holy See and Poland on the stigma experienced by male survivors indicates their own sense that the issue carries, as Sivakumaran puts it, a "'taint' of homosexuality"<sup>527</sup> which makes this weapon especially harmful when wielded against men and boys. It also begs the question of whether male survivors in their own 'non-conflict' contexts would receive the

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<sup>525</sup> See also, Norosky 2024

<sup>526</sup> Brownmiller 1975

<sup>527</sup> Sivakumaran 2005

treatment as indicated in Poland and the Holy See's statements, or whether the absence of conflict would deprive them of plausible deniability for accusations of homosexuality and thus lead to victim-blaming as so often happens.

Another participant pointed to the distinction between CRSV and gender-based violence:

I think it's easier... for international actors to draw attention to conflict-related sexual violence, violence that's perpetrated during war by armed actors, when we're focusing on men and boys, particularly men, compared to other times, the myriad of other types of violence perpetrated against boys and men. Because I think for the former there's more justification or rationalization to say, "Okay, yeah, that's bad. Right. And this, this is like a war thing," and sort of silo that issue. Whereas when we're talking about changing gender norms, gender transformative approaches and social norms change that are the root causes of gender-based violence that gets a lot like... "Okay, well, gender-based violence is not perpetrated against boys and men, right? That's only girls and women." So you've got this like, very, very messy world.<sup>528</sup>

This coheres with what was discussed earlier about how some feminist NGOs with an interest in less expansive conceptualizations of GBV have conceded CRSV against men and boys as an instance of GBV. Whether the actor is concerned with preserving heteropatriarchy, or (on the opposite side of the spectrum) women-focused feminist conceptualizations of GBV, amongst the wide array of gendered harms faced by men and boys inside and outside of conflict, CRSV is the one which can be raised unproblematically.

Earlier, I showed how gender-neutral deployments of the 'weapon of war' framework foreground the conflict context and background gender inequality. Conservative deployments of the frame go even further in this regard. Russia, at the 2017 open debate, urges the international community to "avoid attempts to artificially link

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<sup>528</sup> Interview with author, Participant 3, October 19, 2023 (virtual call)

sexual violence with the maintenance of international peace and security and conflict prevention,” continuing to suggest that “there is no convincing evidence that sexual violence is an underlying cause of armed conflict. Rather, what we are talking about here is a repulsive consequence of it.”<sup>529</sup>

This insistence can be explained by Russia’s interest with narrowing the scope of the Security Council as much as possible; the Russian delegate goes on to state: “We need to very clearly distinguish sexual violence as a war crime from sexual violence as a criminal act not having anything to do with the parties to a conflict. We think that the Security Council should be dealing with the issue of sexual violence when it is directly related to an armed conflict in a situation that is on the agenda of the Security Council.”<sup>530</sup> Russia has a strong investment in the ‘weapon of war’ frame for its ability to narrow the scope of what constitutes CRSV, and in fact even criticizes the use of the term CRSV in its statement,<sup>531</sup> ostensibly because the language of *conflict-related* sexual violence opens the door for including a wider scope of violations as within the Security Council’s mandate.

With this in mind, it is possible to interpret Russia’s invocation of male survivors at the 2017 and 2022 open debates as coherent with its broader ideology that sees LGBTQ+ rights as a form of nefarious Western imposition. It’s also notable that for each of these instances, CRSV against men and boys was not brought up in the abstract, as it so often is; rather, both times, Russia raised the issue to accuse Ukraine of perpetrating

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<sup>529</sup> S/PV.7938 (2017), 22

<sup>530</sup> Ibid, 23

<sup>531</sup> S/PV.7938 (2017), 23

sexual violence against Ukrainian nationals sympathetic to Russia.<sup>532</sup> Similarly, following a UK delegate's address on sexual violence in conflict to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2016, Russia stated to the OSCE that "the claim that women and girls suffer most from sexual violence and victimization is not completely true. Men and boys are no less at risk of being among the victims, as, for example, the events at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq demonstrated."<sup>533</sup>

All this is to say that Russia's engagement with CRSV against men and boys likely has less to do with an actual interest in the issue, and more with its function as a resource for condemning its adversaries. In its reply to Russia at the 2016 OSCE meeting, the US concurs with this idea:

Now, I have no objection to raising Abu Ghraib in this forum or any other. And indeed, it is true that among the many types of misconduct that were investigated, and for which there have been multiple prison sentences, there was misconduct found at Abu Ghraib that could be classified, and should be classified, as sexual violence. So there's no objection to raising Abu Ghraib. But I'd just like to point out to colleagues that because the Russian Federation is so committed to making digs like that -- or raising issues like that -- it says things like, "the notion that it is mostly women and girls who suffer the consequences of sexual violence in armed conflict is not entirely correct." And that statement is false. And it robs the victims of sexual violence in armed conflict of their place in our concerns. It is simply the truth that in sexual violence in armed conflict, the majority of victims are women and girls. It is also true that men and boys are victims, but they are a minority. And to allow a political dig to pervert an assessment of truth does not advance the dialogue in this forum.<sup>534</sup>

While the aim is clearly to denigrate Russia for invoking Abu Ghraib by implying that Russia raised the issue of male survivors instrumentally (and with the effect of downplaying the disproportionate impact on women and girls), in doing so, the US also

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<sup>532</sup> S/PV.9016 (2022), 26; S/PV.7938 (2017), 22

<sup>533</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2016b

<sup>534</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2016a

tells on itself a bit. As already discussed extensively, representatives of the US have at various points raised CRSV against men and boys to make an argument about reconceptualizing CRSV as a security issue, not a women's issue. But my point here is not about US hypocrisy – that needs no explanation. States routinely raise issues instrumentally to their benefit and then switch up when the need no longer exists, or it becomes inconvenient. Instead, this exemplifies the precarious position of the issue of CRSV against men and boys. The issue, in and of itself, is of little specific interest to states – save for maybe Liechtenstein, which has made it a prominent component of their UNSC presence through working with ASP. For most other states however, male survivors of CRSV are an occasionally convenient talking point. The 'men, too' rhetoric is a means of reifying CRSV's securitization to some, of signaling inclusivity to others, and for more still, making a "dig" at an adversary. The starkly different ends towards which the issue gets raised signals the versatility of the 'weapon of war' frame as it relates to gender and sexuality, but it also renders it rather unsurprising that 'men, too' is basically the extent of top-level engagement on CRSV against men and boys. Going beyond that threatens to crumble the architecture of half-hearted cooperation upon which recognition of the issue is built.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the securitization of CRSV explains why CRSV against men and boys was able to emerge on the global agenda, in two senses. First, in creating a discursive space for CRSV detached from the broader WPS agenda, its securitization created an institutional opening where it made more sense to look for and question the utility of gaps in the current state of anti-CRSV policy and implementation.

The proliferation of specialized bodies and forums to focus specifically on CRSV aided massively in this, particularly because these spaces operated independently from the WPS agenda and so could afford to look beyond the ‘gender=women’ paradigm.

Second, the ‘weapon of war’ frame which discursively underpinned the ‘weapon of war’ frame was important in its own right. Were it not for the ambiguity and flexibility of this frame, widespread recognition of CRSV against men and boys would be far more challenging. Any of the pieces discussed in this chapter falling away – US and UK investment in the securitization of CRSV, the compatibility of the issue with large swathes of the heterogeneous transnational feminist advocacy network, the issue’s peculiar rationalization within homophobic ideology – could have thrown a wrench in the machine. Opposition at any of these levels could have been significant enough to sharply change the current level of recognition of the issue, and it would also change how the issue is broadly understood. While securitization created favorable conditions, it did not directly necessitate that the CRSV norm’s focus on only women and girls would have been contested. Given that this shift cannot be marked by a discrete ‘watershed’ moment, but rather many smaller moments across many overlapping processes, the aim of process tracing here is distinct from approaches seeking out a single cause. As such what I have shown in this chapter is how this picture plays out, and why the securitization of CRSV and the corresponding ‘weapon of war’ frame are a useful lens for understanding why it played out the way it did.

This chapter focused on the fit of CRSV against men and boys within the ‘weapon of war’ frame as a means of explaining the surprising contestation of a norm that ended the global silence surrounding CRSV against men and boys. It is no longer possible to

say that the issue is totally absent, although as the next chapter will discuss, this does not mean that all the factors discussed in Chapter 3 have been resolved; far from it. The next chapter will more deeply engage the concept of silence and examine it from a different angle: how the language of silence has been used to make sense of the global gap on CRSV against men and boys, and the implications of this language.

## CHAPTER 5

### A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE 'SILENCE' FRAME

#### 5.1 Overview

I think it comes from the patriarchy. I think that it is wrong. [...] I think almost everything that is said about sexual violence against men in emergencies is wrong. I think that the idea that it's silenced, wrong. The idea that it's ignored, wrong. The idea that there's more stigma against men who are raped, wrong. The idea that it's harder for them to report, wrong. The idea that they don't report as much as women, wrong. I think that it's all wrong. The idea that there are no services for them, that nobody's prioritizing them, just wrong. Wrong and wrong again. I think that what happens is that people have normalized violence against women to such an extent, and rape against women to such an extent, that they get to a point where they won't admit it, but they're okay with it. You know, like, it doesn't affect them. They hear that it's happened to a man, and suddenly, you know, the whole world needs to stop and pay attention because now this is happening to men. Well yes, it's always happened to men. And there isn't a feminist alive, there isn't a GBV service provider alive, who hasn't known that.<sup>535</sup>

By now, I have detailed and justified my explanations for why CRSV against men and boys was absent from the global agenda in the first place, as well as what enabled the issue to rise to the fore years later. I have interpreted these events through the conceptual rubric of silence, understanding the initial absence as *a* silence (using silence as a metaphor for an object) and the 'men, too' norm which filled its place as a form of 'unsilencing' (the inverse of silencing, which uses silence as a metaphor for a state).<sup>536</sup> These analyses have revealed that even those silences which seem impenetrable are more precarious than it might initially appear. While scholars, policymakers, and practitioners have continuously emphasized the many factors which make CRSV against men and boys so challenging to acknowledge, the 'men, too' norm managed to emerge despite

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<sup>535</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>536</sup> Jaworski 1993

these factors – but those factors have not become irrelevant. The myth that “it never happens to men”<sup>537</sup> has been largely eschewed from policy discourse, yet CRSV against men and boys is still represented as an aberration stemming from the chaos of war, revealing the remaining imprint of heteronormative logics on global CRSV discourses. CRSV is now increasingly addressed through more gender-neutral frames, yet these frames exist awkwardly against those developed to address patriarchal violence. This has resulted in the inclusion of male survivors being as tenuous as their previous exclusion.

In this chapter, my primary aim is to explore the function of the language of silence itself. I do this because, as I have already claimed and as I will elaborate on shortly, ‘silence’ comes up quite frequently in advocacy and policy alike as a way for making sense of CRSV against men and boys. On a more personal level, I have also used this frame, and while I initially applied it without much thought, I have come through my research to understand it in a much more nuanced light. Overall, I make two claims about the language of silence’s impact on how we engage the issue CRSV against men and boys. Returning to my theoretical discussion in Chapter 2, two distinct implementations of the metaphor of silence are relevant here: silence as a state of *being*, and silence as a state of *doing*, otherwise known as *silencing*. First, understanding male survivors themselves as being silent hinders our understanding of the actual barriers that men face in reporting, how those barriers are different to or similar from those experienced by women, and how those barriers vary from context to context. Second, understanding women-centered approaches pioneered and advocated for by feminists as silencing male survivors enflames the tense and uncertain relationship between male survivor advocacy

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<sup>537</sup> Touquet et al. 2020

and advocacy on behalf of women and girl survivors. In establishing these arguments, this chapter will also accomplish the secondary aim of reflecting on the impact men and boys' increased visibility in CRSV discourse.

This chapter will begin by providing evidence of the prevalence of silence and its approximate metaphors (such as describing the CRSV against men and boys as “hidden”) in discourse on CRSV against men and boys. I show how the metaphor of silence is deployed in distinct ways, leading to different conclusions about what actually explains the initial absence of CRSV against men and boys from the global agenda. I then turn to the first significant consequence of the language of silence, particularly the notion that men and boy survivors are ‘silent’: an oversimplified understanding of how the gender of an individual shapes their experience of stigma and ability to disclose. Next, before turning to the second significant consequence of this language, I provide some necessary context about why some feminists, particularly those working in the GBV in humanitarian action sector, are weary of the increased attention to men and boys as survivors. Having established this context, I then explore how the silence frame exacerbates these aforementioned tensions in perpetuating a narrative that feminists and their work to center the experiences of women and girls ‘silenced’ men and boy survivors which, while not without some degree of truth, fundamentally misunderstands the legacy and ongoing circumstances of transnational feminist advocacy.

## **5.2 The Ubiquity of Silence in Global Discourses on CRSV against Men and Boys**

The concept of silence is a consistent feature of the discursive underpinnings of awareness-raising around CRSV against men and boys. Notably, while discussions about CRSV against men and boys prior to the passage of Resolution 1820 are sparse and

usually without much detail, many of them deploy the concept of silence towards an understanding of the problem in ways that greatly resemble more recent discourse; in other words, this discursive feature is not novel to the increased visibility of CRSV against men and boys, but rather is an older, apparently very sticky narrative that later gained more traction. In my sample of advocacy documents from 2000-2022, the first deployments of the concept appear in 2002 in reports by the Women's Refugee Commission<sup>538</sup> and Human Rights Watch.<sup>539</sup>

Before launching into greater detail about the various conceptual manifestations of silence I was able to identify, it's useful to pause for a moment and consider the general appeal of silence in rhetoric, particularly rhetoric in advocacy efforts. Drawing attention to silence, in its various modalities, may confer a sense of moral righteousness on the part of the speaker. As discussed in Chapter 2, to identify silence is to express a disappointed expectation of speech.<sup>540</sup> Given the common association between silence and disempowerment, expressing this disappointed expectation can function simultaneously as a means of addressing an injustice.

Suhail Abualsameed and I were discussing why it is and to what effect that contemporaneously, many people continue to talk or write about CRSV against men and boys as if they're the first ones to realize that it exists. He drew a comparison to what he's

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<sup>538</sup> Women's Refugee Commission, 2002. "Although mainly girls are affected, boys are involved in smaller numbers; their numbers are less known because discussion of male victimization is more taboo than that of girls" (2002, 5).

<sup>539</sup> Human Rights Watch 2002c. A footnote on a passage describing evidence of the rape of a boy explains: "This is the only case of male rape reported to Human Rights Watch researchers. Because rape is considered even more shameful for a male victim, crimes of this kind are less likely to be reported than those involving female victims" (2002, footnote 144).

<sup>540</sup> Schröter 2013, 7

observed in his work with Muslim sexual and gender minorities, where “every 1 or 2 years, some journalist or an artist who wanted an exhibition decides to come and do a project on queer Muslims” and “do this exposé” as if “revealing this big secret.”<sup>541</sup> He continued to observe that “it seems like it's part of the structure of this kind of work, development work, where it's a business, right? It's a capitalist system where this is where the money is, you go and do the work, and you write a proposal that has a compelling thing and you get the money for it, and then you start doing it.”<sup>542</sup> Abualsameed then connected this example to CRSV against men and boys, continuing to stress the incentives that exist for researchers and journalists to ‘discover’ underacknowledged topics, to the effect of perpetuating redundant work that does little to actually advance knowledge about said topic.

In Chapter 2 I explained that according to Jaworski, the concept of silence is used as a metaphor for silence as both an object and a state of being; indeed, I observed both of these metaphors in discourse on CRSV against men and boys. In the first use of silence which functions as a metaphor for an object, silence is *a* silence: a discrete *thing* that can be possessed, observed, or acted upon. This modality of silence appears most often and as a framing device for the construction of a secondary problem. For example, media headlines refer to CRSV against men and boys as “the darkest secret of war”<sup>543</sup> and “‘human rights’ last taboo,”<sup>544</sup> thus creating a new problem – a silence around CRSV

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<sup>541</sup> Interview with author, Participant 2, September 9, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>542</sup> Ibid

<sup>543</sup> McEachran 2013

<sup>544</sup> Storr 2011

against men and boys – that is layered on top of the first problem of the occurrence of CRSV against men and boys.

This identification of a silence contains within it an implicit ‘call to action’ enlisting individuals to combat this silence, but sometimes this appeal is made explicit. For example, an event on CRSV against men and boys put on by Norwegian Church Aid in 2019 bears the slogan “Breaking the Silence” as its title.<sup>545</sup> Constructing the lack of acknowledgment of CRSV against men and boys as a meaningful and problematic silence – rather than a mere absence – is sometimes explicitly justified, as in this excerpt from a 2017 publication by Amnesty International: “Sexual violence against men and boys in South Sudan’s conflict remains largely invisible, despite indications that it occurs with some frequency.”<sup>546</sup> The addition of “despite indications that it occurs with some frequency” explains why the lack of attention is problematic; after all, if there was no evidence to suggest that CRSV against men and boys occurs at all, it wouldn’t make any sense to bring it up.

I will now move to the second category of metaphor: silence as a state. When used in conjunction with silence as a metaphor for an object, deploying silence as a metaphor for a state can serve as a means for explaining why the object of silence persists. To illustrate this dynamic, take this excerpt from the Office of the SRSG’s 2013 workshop on CRSV against men and boys:

While data on sexual violence against women and girls in conflicts remains inadequate, the view that, in terms of victims at least, SGBV is a women’s issue, is enabled by an even more resounding lack of data on conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys. This statistical silence is itself a product of several intersecting dynamics; first, the serious under-reporting of sexual violence by

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<sup>545</sup> Norwegian Church Aid 2019

<sup>546</sup> Amnesty International 2017, 41

male victims, most of whom fear to be labelled as homosexuals with all the stigma, discrimination and sometimes criminalisation which that entails, and many of whom encounter disbelief and/or ridicule from service providers they attempt to report to; second, the failure by organisations and authorities to document those cases that are reported; third, an under-acknowledgement of those cases that are reported; in some international criminal tribunals, for instance, the sexual nature of violence has been disguised by it being described as ‘torture.’<sup>547</sup>

This excerpt is quite useful in that it shows how different modalities of silence can relate to one another in practice. In this instance, the object of silence – specifically described in this document as a “statistical silence” in reference to the lack of data – is explained as the confluence of two factors: the silence of male survivors (described more specifically as not reporting), and the silence of the international community (described more specifically as negligence in accounting for CRSV against men and boys when it is reported, either by not documenting these reports at all or by obscuring their sexual nature via the label of torture).

The first of these two factors can be represented through the metaphor of silence as a *state of being* where male survivors themselves are understood as *being* silent about experiencing sexual violence. The idea that men and boys don’t report – that they are silent – is one of the most common narratives identified across all the various streams of data collection taken on for this dissertation. The example above resembles an excerpt from a Swiss delegate’s statement to the UNSC in 2019: “Cases of violence against men and boys are rarely reported, as those who have been subjected to such acts are even more fearful of being stigmatized and excluded. Given such gender stereotypes as 'a man can be only a hero, but never a victim', it is difficult if not impossible to break the cycle

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<sup>547</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2013, 10

of silence and revictimization.”<sup>548</sup> As in the previous example, the data gap (an object of silence) is explained as a result of non-reporting on the part of male survivors (a silent state of being). Further, the silence of male survivors is explained as a product of stigma which, as suggested by this delegate, is rooted in gender norms. In Chapters 2 and 3 I showed how the gendered expectation that men cannot be victims – and the derision which male victims can subsequently face – is rooted in the normalization of sexual violence against women and girls and is also suffused with homophobia. This is captured by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in their publication “Men, masculinities, and armed conflict” when they explain that “[t]he intense shame that men and boys can feel in connection with their victimisation, because of the associations between sexual violence and feminisation and/or homosexuality, deter them from reporting it.”<sup>549</sup> In another example, this time from a 2017 blog post, the silence of male survivors is understood as working in tandem with the silence of their perpetrators: “Perhaps male rape is one of the most hidden atrocities of war. This may be so because it is denied or kept secret, given that both the perpetrator and the victim enter into a form of ‘conspiracy of silence’.”<sup>550</sup> Similarly, a 2013 report by Human Rights Watch explains that “[s]uppressed by victims and perpetrators alike, male rape remains a taboo subject and strategies to combat it have been glaringly absent.”<sup>551</sup> Far more commonly, however, silence as a metaphor for a state of being is deployed in these

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<sup>548</sup> S/PV.8154 (2019), 49

<sup>549</sup> Greig 2020

<sup>550</sup> Mental Health and Human Rights Info 2017

<sup>551</sup> Human Rights Watch 2013, 45

documents in reference to the silence of male survivors themselves rather than their perpetrators.

On the other hand, the silence of the international community referred to in the Office of the SRSG's 2013 report, while still being used as a metaphor for a state, can more accurately be understood as representing a *state of doing* – which I will refer to as *silencing* – rather than a state of being. Unlike silence as an object or as a state of being, this metaphor is inherently relational: it implies that one's literal or metaphorical silence is acting upon some other object in the sense of rendering it unable to speak or to be heard. Further underscoring the entwinement of silence's multiple metaphors in their practical use, we have already encountered this form in the previous quotes: the idea that male rape is “[s]uppressed by victims and perpetrators alike”<sup>552</sup> or that victims and perpetrators “enter into a form of ‘conspiracy of silence.’”<sup>553</sup> Here, the victim and perpetrator *being silent* about the crime which transpired additionally functions as an *act of silencing* the crime itself so that it cannot be detected.

This double meaning is also evident in the report on the workshop about CRSV against men and boys held in July of 2013 following the passage of Resolution 2106 – the first to recognize men and boys as potential victims – discussed in Chapter 4. The report frames its findings with the contention that while “[t]he Women, Peace and Security agenda has had considerable success in drawing attention to the issue of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations,” it “has been silent on the related question

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid

<sup>553</sup> Mental Health and Human Rights Info 2017

of conflict related sexual violence against men and boys.”<sup>554</sup> Later in the report, however, this silence on the part of WPS is revealed as having a particular effect upon the issue’s visibility (or audibility, to stay consistent with the metaphor of silence): “the resultant discursive and policy focus on sexual and gender based violence as a women’s rights issue has become, from a policy and humanitarian perspective, *a serious obstacle* to prevention of and response to conflict related sexual and gender-based violence against men and boys...”<sup>555</sup>

Importantly, it is not the rights frame that is understood here as impeding recognition of CRSV against men and boys, but the association of CRSV with women. This idea – that a focus on women and girls as CRSV victims silences the experiences of men and boys – comes up frequently in male survivor advocacy. Take, for example, this excerpt from a 2013 report co-authored by Refugee Law Project: “International attention to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in recent decades has focused on women and their vulnerabilities to these abuses, *eclipsing* attention to conflict-related sexual violence against men.”<sup>556</sup> A 2011 Médecins Sans Frontières blog post puts it more damningly when referencing the “influence of the gender approach,” which the author claims “has led international relief agencies and the United Nations to give priority to an approach focused on violence against women, thereby legitimising a hierarchy of sexual victims, with men located at the bottom of this hierarchy.”<sup>557</sup> Here again, the focus on violence against women is understood as silencing male survivors by contributing to a

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<sup>554</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2013, 5

<sup>555</sup> Ibid, 9 (italics my own)

<sup>556</sup> Refugee Law Project 2013, 4 (italics my own)

<sup>557</sup> Le Pape 2011

“hierarchy of sexual victims” wherein men’s experiences are worth less than a woman’s. This idea was discussed in Chapter 4 by way of a 2019 article in *The Telegraph* where author Goodley argues that men’s experiences of CRSV cannot be addressed through the WPS agenda. According to Goodley, “[t]his silence [on CRSV against men and boys] is a result of under-reporting, the prioritisation of women and girls, and international policy frameworks, stemming from the United Nations, that structurally discriminate against male survivors of sexual violence.”<sup>558</sup> Elsewhere, feminist activism is specifically blamed for this focus on women and girls; as one commentator writes, “the lack of widespread institutional recognition of male rape, combined with feminist movements, defining sexual violence as exclusively a women’s issue, has resulted in the failure to include this section of the population in policy and research agendas of governments, donor agencies and academic institutions. This framework has created a lack of attention to male victims in sexual abuse scenarios.”<sup>559</sup> Similarly, a paper co-authored by Refugee Law Project and the International Human Rights Law Clinic at UC Berkeley claims that “[t]he influence of some feminist scholars has also worked to marginalize male victims within discussions of conflict-related sexual violence,” and goes on to offer several explanations for “why feminists often exclude male victims,” one such explanation being that “feminist literature is committed to “centralizing women” when discussing law, international relations, and security studies, and to looking at conflict-related sexual violence as a manifestation of discrimination against women.”<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Goodley 2019

<sup>559</sup> Furstenberg 2014

<sup>560</sup> Refugee Law Project and International Human Rights Law Clinic at UC Berkeley 2019

Crucially, understanding a focus on women and girls as silencing CRSV against men and boys is distinct from understanding gender norms as a silencing factor. Gender norms, indeed, come up frequently in male survivor advocacy as explanations for the overall gap in addressing men and boys. For example, a 2017 report by Amnesty International explains that “[s]exual violence against men and boys in South Sudan’s conflict remains largely invisible, despite indications that it occurs with some frequency. This is due to common assumptions – and misperceptions – that sexual violence only involves male perpetrators and female victims.”<sup>561</sup> In this example, unlike in the last, it is not the *centering* of women and girls in CRSV work which silences CRSV against men and boys, but the assumption that *only* women can be victims of CRSV. While it may seem minimal, Section IV will demonstrate the importance of this nuance for inter-advocacy relationships.

### **5.3 Rethinking the Truism that Men and Boy Survivors are *Particularly* Stigmatized**

In Chapter 3, I described how various participants pushed back against the idea that men are far less likely than women to report sexual violence, noting several anecdotes from throughout the Great Lakes region as well as Sudan where men came forward in droves. The point there was to cast doubt on the hypothesis that men and boys were absent from the global agenda due to a lack of data, and this hypothesis often overlaps with the notion that men and boys do not report sexual violence. I will now return to this idea with the aim of marking an entry point for a discussion of the first problematic outcome stemming from the ‘silence’ frame for understanding CRSV against

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<sup>561</sup> Amnesty International 2017, 41

men and boys: the assumption that CRSV against men and boys is particularly stigmatized.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the idea that men and boys experience stigma as survivors of CRSV is not the problem; evidence indeed suggests that many male survivors do not come forward about their experiences because they fear that they will not be understood, or worse, criminalized. More precisely, the problem with this statement is the notion that men and boys are *particularly* stigmatized, which contains an implicit comparison to experiences women and girl survivors. It is well-known that survivors of CRSV, like sexual violence in general, often experience social stigma from their families or surrounding communities. However, the belief that men and boys experience this stigma even more profoundly than women and girls leads some practitioners to not even attempt to identify any potential male survivors in the field. One practitioner working in humanitarian contexts explained how they were able to gather data on male survivors despite the doubts of their colleagues:

I had a whole bunch of them tell me – and it was always men, right? – medical staff [would say], “Oh, don't even ask about it [sexual violence against men]. Nobody will tell you, it's too stigmatized.” [...] We got a lot of disclosure because we were thoughtful about how we did it. Like, I didn't ask the questions. We had [local] women who were trained ask the questions. You know, we created opportunities for people to tell us if they wanted to tell us. But if you don't ask somebody and you don't create safe opportunities, they will never tell you.<sup>562</sup>

In addition to providing further anecdotal evidence against the assumption that men never come forward, this example is illustrative in how the silence frame can lead to complacency amongst those responsible for documenting cases; in a vicious cycle, the belief that men never report justifies doing nothing to seek out male survivors,

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<sup>562</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2024 (virtual call)

contributing to both this same misconception as well as the data gap. Not only does it contribute to a general gap in data on CRSV against men and boys, but it precludes deeper inquiry into the context-specific barriers that can exist for survivors of all genders: when/where they emerge, as well as how they can be overcome. The previous example from Sierra Leone suggests that in a clinical setting, it matters greatly who is asking the questions; existing guidelines for working with male survivors indeed confirm that some men might prefer to disclose to a woman, whereas others would prefer a man.<sup>563</sup> In a group therapeutic setting, Chris Dolan – speaking based on his experiences in Uganda and Mozambique – drew attention to the importance of survivors seeing other men come forward: “You know, we are always told that because it’s such a taboo for them, that that’s why they can’t speak. That that’s why there’s no evidence. But you know well actually the minute you put, you slightly change the parameters of the conversation and you put somebody forward who is willing to speak up... Turns out lots of other people are willing to speak up as well.”<sup>564</sup> Another participant, also speaking of the Ugandan context, suggested that creating a less hostile social climate for male survivors could be relatively straightforward: “For the Kabaka [the king of Buganda, a subnational kingdom within the country], for example, it can be as simple as... Every year they do a birthday run for him and they pick a theme. Sometimes it’s cancer, sometimes it’s children with [a] disability. It’s basically about people that are vulnerable... [I]f he’s gotten on board with this, it’s as simple as making it [sexual violence against men and boys] a theme.”<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> See, i.e., International Institute for Criminal Investigations 2016, 11; UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2012, 12

<sup>564</sup> Interview with author, Participant 4, November 8, 2023 (United Kingdom)

<sup>565</sup> Interview with author, Participant 1, August 24, 2023 (virtual call)

Obviously, this act alone – even if it was successful – would not flip a switch to end the difficulties that male survivors in Uganda navigate and the social norms that contribute to them. But the logic here of targeting well-regarded community leaders is similar to ideas which have been proposed in the context of advancing women’s equality by targeting influential actors such as religious authorities.<sup>566</sup> Gaining the acceptance of influential figures represents one possible entry point to initiating long-term transformations.

By the same token, it is also possible that in some contexts, not only might men be more likely to come forward than is typically assumed, but the social barriers for women and girls could in fact be comparatively higher than for men. Others have already pointed out that the emphasis on male survivors as particularly stigmatized creates a false dichotomy implying that women and girl survivors generally don’t experience stigma or that they experience less stigma than men.<sup>567</sup> Few would actually suggest this outright, but it is nonetheless implicit in the assumption. But not only is this generalization unhelpful in that it reifies a hierarchy of victimhood and approaches the onerous attempt of quantifying experiences of individual suffering,<sup>568</sup> it is also a generalization that does not apply to every situation. One participant offered the following insight based on their work in the Syrian refugee context:

And I talked with people about [why] they were fleeing. They were fleeing because of the risk of rape. Because they were so afraid if their daughters were raped, what it would mean for their family honor, for their daughters, but also for their whole family. And I would talk with people one-on-one and in small groups [about] what happens if your daughter were to be raped, what happens to a girl or to a woman who is raped? And again and again, people would tell me the different ways that were available for suicide. And if they weren't taken, you know, the

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<sup>566</sup> See, i.e., Kassas et al. 2022; le Roux et al. 2016; Petersen 2016

<sup>567</sup> Touquet et al. 2020, 29

<sup>568</sup> Ibid, 29

means that they might take. And they didn't call it honor killing. These were mothers, and they called it mercy killing. And they said, "The life of a woman who's been raped is so bleak, it's a mercy to kill her." And these same women, I asked them, "And what about the men who are raped?" Nobody denied that it was happening. They said for a man who's been raped, it's very hard on him as well. That's a very hard thing to bear. And I said, "Does he need to die?" "No." "Can you still get married?" "Yes." "Is he cast out of the community?" "No."<sup>569</sup>

The same participant explained that while many men who had been detained in Libya reported sexual violence, women survivors rarely came forward:

As Gaddafi fell in Libya, every man coming out of detention was admitting that they'd been raped in custody. So we worked with the ministry that was helping to reorient people coming out of prison on case management and on supporting male survivors of sexual violence. Very important work. And then we went back to our regular work of supporting women. Worked for years in that same Libyan context. Never saw a single woman for years. Not a single woman reported rape.<sup>570</sup>

Similarly, in the Afghan context, one Human Rights Watch report quoted an interview with an aid worker who explained:

It was impossible to document the rape or kidnapping of women in these cases. The families always denied cases where the women were kidnapped or raped, because of the dishonor and shame. The families would deny that their women were kidnapped, or refuse to discuss these cases; it is because Afghan families are very conservative. There would be lots of stories, lots of talk about how "other families" had had the women abducted. A set of people would tell us, "Look, that family over there, across the street, their women were kidnapped," but when we went over to ask the family themselves, they would deny it, and say nothing had happened. This is how it always happened. *Maybe they would admit it if a boy was abducted, for rape, but not the women* [italics added].<sup>571</sup>

Just as interesting is a report by Amnesty International which suggests that in some circumstances the sexual victimization of men might actually be working to decrease the

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<sup>569</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>570</sup> Ibid. The participant continued to explain that they "went to a big meeting with some UN people in New York and actually heard one of them, high-level, within one of the UN agencies say that the issues of sexual violence in Libya are just so much worse for men, and no one is talking about it."

<sup>571</sup> Human Rights Watch 2005a, 63

stigma experienced by female survivors.<sup>572</sup> While this fascinating finding is not actually elaborated on in the report (speaking to the low salience of the CRSV against men and boys in 2004 when the report was published), this example further underscores that barriers to reporting and experiences of stigma cannot be deduced from the gender of a survivor alone. While barriers and stigma are always gendered, because gender norms are not homogenous around the world, it's crucial to understand them as context-specific and to generate more empirical knowledge about what accounts for the clear variation demonstrated here.

In sum, viewing male survivors as particularly stigmatized is oversimplistic and sometimes plainly inaccurate. Survivors of all gender and sexual identities experience stigma in highly personal and also context-specific ways that may affect reporting. Rather than assuming that male survivors face greater stigma than women and are therefore less likely to report, a more productive approach would situate stigma as a context-specific phenomenon that requires inquiry on a case-by-case basis. However, it's important to add a qualifying statement to my critique of this oft-repeated narrative.

Documenting the experiences of male survivors is paramount so that these survivors can access whatever services they need and so that this documentation can be used to build a stronger evidence base. But as existing guidelines suggest<sup>573</sup> and as anecdotes from my own research confirm, male survivors – like all survivors – must be afforded the agency to define their experiences on their own terms. One participant explained that the concept of sexual violence doesn't align with some male survivors'

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<sup>572</sup> Amnesty International 2004b

<sup>573</sup> See, i.e., Gender-Based Violence AoR 2021, 13; International Institute for Criminal Investigations 2016, 13

own perceptions of what happened to them; according to the participant, “[t]hey [male survivors] just don't put it within a sexual violence frame, or at least many people don't. [...] it's unethical to ask directly, but even if someone did ask a male survivor directly, you know, ‘Did you experience sexual violence?’ most of them are going to say no, because they don't conceptualize it that way.”<sup>574</sup> Speaking specifically about Myanmar’s attack on the Rohingya, another participant confirmed that male survivors sometimes avoid the term sexual violence “even though that's what *we* would classify it as” [italics added].<sup>575</sup> Given this, it’s clear how harmful it would be for someone like a clinician or a lawyer to try to convince a male survivor that what they experienced was rape. When I brought up the possibility of re-traumatization to the participant, they explained that “I think that's also part of the survivor-centered approach is allowing the person to pick whatever path works for them, but also pick whatever vocabulary works for them.” However, they continued that “the challenge of that is it comes into direct conflict with policies that are trying to set out clear parameters” for defining sexual violence.<sup>576</sup> Ultimately, resolving this tension is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it underscores the difficulties of translating ‘survivor-centered approaches,’ a concept developed in the context of clinical care, into the level of international policy where nuance is often forfeited for generalized knowledge.

#### **5.4 Feminist Concerns over the ‘men, too’ Norm: Part and Parcel of a “phallic drift”?**

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<sup>574</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo)

<sup>575</sup> Interview with author, Participant 13, December 12, 2023 (United States)

<sup>576</sup> Ibid

Before discussing the second sense in which the language of silence is problematic, some background information is necessary. In this section I will argue that the narrative that feminists are complicit in the silencing of CRSV against men and boys exacerbates tensions that exist between feminist advocacy and male survivor advocacy that are not directly related to the silence frame itself. I will attempt to explain what those tensions are and where they stem from. In short, concerns over resource scarcity or beliefs that the vast preponderance of CRSV victims being women and girls, are not, I argue, at the core of why feminists have been hesitant to embrace the issue of CRSV against men and boys. Rather, I argue that they are secondary rationalizations which stem from a perception that such efforts represent a form of patriarchal, anti-feminist backlash against hard-won but still limited gains for women that threatens to undo the efforts of feminist advocacy.

As discussed in Chapter 3, feminist engagement with CRSV against men and boys beginning in the 1990's and up until around 2008 was varied and sometimes extended beyond mere ignorance, but reflecting the broader culture of silence around the issue, remained largely minimal. Once the issue started gaining more traction, some feminists worked to expand their conceptualizations of sexual and gender-based violence to better account for the experiences of men. Other feminists, however, grew concerned over the potential implications of this newfound visibility, and their engagement with the issue was markedly less friendly. In 2014, Chris Dolan penned an essay for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) journal *International Review of the Red Cross*, entitled "Letting go of the gender binary: Charting new pathways for humanitarian interventions on gender-based violence." In the essay, Dolan questions the

prevalent belief that women and girls constitute the majority of GBV survivors in humanitarian settings:

The manner in which this assumed majority status of female victims becomes both the beginning of an extensive exploration of that victimhood and the end of any analysis of the impacts on and needs of the assumed minority of victims is extraordinary: no serious social scientist, no donor and no committed humanitarian should allow so much action to be premised on such shaky empirical foundations. At best, a first-past-the-post electoral system, in which those who get the largest number of votes get all the power, has been applied to the allocation of humanitarian aid such that those who are believed to be the largest percentage of victims get all the assistance. At worst, the allocation has been rigged, with ballot papers for male victims removed from the count.<sup>577</sup>

In the essay he also advocates for more expansive definitions of GBV which shift away from gender equality as the anchoring framework for GBV, instead focusing on gender inclusivity, as will be discussed more below.

Several years later, the journal would publish a reply from renowned feminist and GBV expert Jeanne Ward, one of the lead authors on the revised Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines published in 2015 that Dolan had consulted on. In her essay, entitled “It’s not about the gender binary, it’s about the gender hierarchy,” Ward contextualizes her response within the challenges that feminists continue to experience in securing resources for women and girls.<sup>578</sup> Indeed, a lack of funding for women-focused work was continuously raised by participants as a main driver behind the feminist skepticism towards the increased visibility of men and boys survivors. Given these continued shortcomings, introducing the issue of CRSV against men and boys was perceived by some feminists as having the potential to redirect the already-scant

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<sup>577</sup> Dolan 2014c, 495

<sup>578</sup> Ward 2016; Ward notes, for example, that funding for humanitarian programs supporting gender equality fell by 10% from 2013 to 2014 (2016, 284).

resources away from women and girls. As one participant from the humanitarian sector put it, “We don't have a lot of money in this GBV field at all in humanitarian settings. And as much as you try to say, like, ‘We can work together’ and all these things, at the end of the day, resources are pooled from others to different priorities.”<sup>579</sup> Another participant, a feminist who focuses on international law, recounted to me some apprehension they were faced with while presenting their research on CRSV against men and boys right around the time where the issue was starting to gain more recognition post-Resolution 1820. They explained that they were “unprepared for the reaction from some people in the room,” specifically “activists who were inside Syria at the time working in the war zones,” who asked, “‘Why are you focusing on men and boys? Women and girls are being targeted in Syria.’ [...] ‘We are working so hard to raise awareness to get funding for our dangerous work.’ [...] ‘And if you focus on this, then you are drawing attention away from sexual violence directed against women and girls.’”<sup>580</sup> Another participant – a feminist with a background in humanitarianism – contextualized the pushback similarly:

... to understand the defensiveness that came with that and why also we interpreted this as this particular anti-feminist backlash, you also need to contextualize that in what's happening to GBV actors in the field outside of the men and boys conversation, right? Like, GBV services are ostracized. Everywhere you go you have to fight for a bit of land to build your women's center on. Then they give you a bit of land, which is, you know, like in a shitty place without toilets, and you're fighting for the toilets to be built and then they give you a latrine without doors and [you're] like, "We can't have a women's toilet without a door." And then, you know, you're spending all this time just fighting for the most basic thing...<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>580</sup> Interview with author, Participant 16, December 19, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>581</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call). I will pick up on the significance of the concept of anti-feminist backlash shortly.

These are just a few examples of the connections that participants made between feminist pushback and the issue of resource scarcity. But another explanation participants frequently raised, and which Ward also mentions in her reply to Dolan,<sup>582</sup> is the perception that women survivors far outnumber men. One participant from the security sector explained, “When a problem disproportionately affects one segment of the community... in this case being women when it comes to sexual violence... and then placing a lot of effort on raising the other side when it's so small... the usual question is, ‘How do we make sure that this advocacy does not overshadow the other population which is the most affected?’”<sup>583</sup> Later in the interview they continued to caution, “We can just not turn to an approach where we are doing 50/50. You know, this is not about equality... this is about equity.”<sup>584</sup>

As this participant’s statement makes evident, the belief that men and boys represent a very small portion of CRSV survivors can coincide with concerns over limited funding in the explanations of those who are concerned with the ‘men, too’ norm from a feminist perspective. Indeed, participants frequently connected these ideas. One participant, who was previously involved in a prevalence study, recounted that “What I would often hear, and I’m sure you have too, is that you don’t actually need to know the numbers to know that we need to act and like set up these services. So that’s one frame. I think the other risk, though... is just a fear of loss of resources that are then being taken

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<sup>582</sup> Ward 2016, 296

<sup>583</sup> Interview with author, Participant 27, April 26, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>584</sup> Ibid

away because often people still have like a zero sum [attitude], and rightly so. Like we don't have a lot of money in this GBV field at all in humanitarian settings.”<sup>585</sup>

In her essay, Ward mentions several key moments in the visibility of CRSV against men and boys discussed in Chapter 4, including the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. As Ward does, several participants that I interviewed recounted discomfort amongst some in the GBV sector regarding what they saw as the disproportionate visibility dedicated to CRSV against men and boys at the Summit. One participant explained, “I'm sitting there and I'm realizing, ‘There are more male survivors being highlighted on the stage than women at this conference.’”<sup>586</sup> They went on to elaborate that some felt that this visibility was disproportionate to the reality of the problem, continuing, “I don't necessarily agree with this, but this was very much the feeling – was [that] there is not as many male survivors as there are female survivors. If they're there it's a smaller, a small percent.”<sup>587</sup>

However, representing the negative reaction from some feminists as a resource issue – in the sense that there aren't enough resources to go around, and/or that CRSV against men and boys is so uncommon that significant resources shouldn't be diverted towards the problem – is an oversimplistic explanation that fails to capture a much more nuanced dynamic which informs these resource-related concerns.

On the one hand, skeptical feminists identify ways that working with male survivors, as with engaging men as allies in prevention, could have unintended and

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<sup>585</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>586</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>587</sup> Ibid

deeply negative consequences for women and girls. To speak briefly on the relationship between these two efforts, it became clear to me in my interviews that discursively, they are often blurred together. One participant told me that “it was very much a confused discourse” such that “I would struggle to tell you, like, ‘Oh, these were the conversations that were happening about men and boys, about survivors, and these were the conversations that were happening about engaging men and boys in [GBV prevention] programing’” because the conversations were happening simultaneously, albeit without “a clear sense of what people were actually seeking to do.”<sup>588</sup> In practice, however, efforts to engage men as survivors and as allies and/or perpetrators do not always occur in tandem. On which donors funded prevention work, Gary Barker of Equimundo explained that “those groups, not all those groups always funded work around men as survivors. But they were at least within a conversation about women as survivors [and] would listen to, ‘Hey, we need to talk about this complex interplay between men and boys at time being survivors, that sometimes being a factor associated with men's use of violence against female partners, others.’”<sup>589</sup> For many in the prevention space, then, concern with violence experienced by men – gendered or otherwise – was a utilitarian approach to understanding violence against women and girls rather than a goal in itself.

Given this, feminists are attentive to the ways that male engagement and work with male survivors could each work at cross-purposes with the feminist agenda undergirding the broader GBV prevention movement. According to one participant, “there's probably three categories of men and boys in conflict. There's perpetrators,

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<sup>588</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>589</sup> Interview with author, Participant 10, December 7, 2023 (virtual call).

there's victims, and then there's allies. And we can hold those three spaces simultaneously. But it's very hard to... do that in a way that also might hold feminist principles or survivor accountability front and center, to take that like very nuanced approach is just challenging when you're implementing programs.”<sup>590</sup> For example, as mentioned earlier, religion is commonly identified as a main entry point for behavioral interventions, including GBV; however, given the patriarchal tendencies within organized religion, feminists worry that using religion to dissuade men from violence could end up further cementing power imbalances between men and women. A participant I interviewed with experience designing GBV prevention work under contract by NGOs explained to me that “it was so hard to get people who themselves were not religious to understand that in the populations and countries we were working in, people were deeply religious and were very motivated by religious messages and religious figures in their lives.”<sup>591</sup>

In terms of problems which could arise from work with male survivors, as discussed in Chapter 3, integrating male survivors into programs designed to serve women and girls is challenging because men cannot, by virtue, be let into safe spaces for female survivors, and the concept of male-only safe spaces isn't practical because there's no way to ensure that a male survivor wouldn't encounter his perpetrator there, who would likely also be a man.<sup>592</sup> However, as programs to assist male survivors have picked up and garnered visibility, new concerns emerged amongst feminists. One participant

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<sup>590</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>591</sup> Interview with author, Participant 19, February 16, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>592</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

explained that “[i]f you look at some of the programs that are actually specifically focused on male survivors of sexual violence, they are rooted in ideas of restoring masculinity. And what does that mean? What exactly are they aiming at? Like restoring a sense of power over women?”<sup>593</sup> Given that CRSV against men and boys has been theorized as a means feminizing/emasculating or “homosexualizing”<sup>594</sup> the victim, it makes sense that programs supporting male survivors would address these narratives and work to rehabilitate their gendered/sexual identities. However, as the participant just quoted suggests, such efforts can quickly lapse into a reaffirmation of patriarchal and heteronormative power structures. The same participant explained that while male survivors *do* need help with feelings of emasculation, “because the way that society understands these incidents affects how you understand them and your own psychology and coping with it,” “the answer to that can't be, ‘No, you're still a man. You're still in charge. You're still better than a woman. You're still better than a gay man.’ Like, what is that? It's not, you know, it's very problematic.”<sup>595</sup>

In anticipation of these concerns, organizations serving male survivors, like many of those working with men to prevent GBV, often emphasize their feminist-informed praxis and dedication to maintaining accountability to women and girls. As explored in Chapter 4, Women’s Refugee Commission is an example of an NGO which takes this tactic. Similarly, the All Survivors Project situates their mission as intended to “complement and reinforce existing work on CRSV against women and girls, recognising

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<sup>593</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>594</sup> Ferrales et al. 2016

<sup>595</sup> Interview with author, Participant 35, July 23, 2024 (virtual call)

the disproportionate impact of CRSV on them and the way in which gendered inequalities, institutions and identities drive this form of violence.”<sup>596</sup> One participant who advocates for boy survivors of sexual violence similarly explained that in developing guidelines for practitioners, they aim to “integrate components in there that also challenge the status quo, that challenge ideas of masculinity, and that reinforce gender equity messages,” rather than “reinforcing male privilege.”<sup>597</sup>

So, on the one hand, engaging men in GBV programming, whether as survivors, allies or perpetrators, risks inadvertently entrenching the patriarchal structures such work is ostensibly out to work against. But on the other hand, some feminists, including some of my participants, perceive the ‘men, too’ norm itself as part of a broader *backlash* against feminist achievements. Before delving into what this means for the relationship between feminist advocacy and the issue of CRSV against men and boys, it’s useful to explain the concept of backlash from a theoretical perspective. Borrowing from Mansbridge and Shames, Jordan defines backlash as ““resistance from ‘those in power to attempts to change the status quo.’”<sup>598</sup> As marginalized groups gain access to resources and legitimacy, those who benefit from this marginalization seek to reverse these gains and maintain a monopoly on power. Regarding feminism, as has already been discussed in this dissertation, feminists have made major headway in the past few decades in raising awareness around women’s rights and the epidemic of violence against women. As Zaremberg et al. explain, while antifeminist backlash in response to these advances is not

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<sup>596</sup> All Survivors Project n.d.

<sup>597</sup> Interview with author, Participant 25, April 10, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>598</sup> Mansbridge and Shames 2008, cited in Jordan 2016, 21

new to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more recently “anti-gender equality organizations and movements have grown in strength, coordination, and impact at multiple levels and in multiple spaces, permeating state and multilateral institutions, political parties, and governmental coalitions.”<sup>599</sup> At the national level, increasingly organized anti-feminist movements have coalesced throughout Europe<sup>600</sup> and Latin America, where targeted violence against feminist activists has been on the rise.<sup>601</sup> Backlash is also unfolding at the international level, with the pushback against so-called ‘gender ideology’ by actors such as the Vatican in global venues, as seen in Chapter 4, as one such example.<sup>602</sup>

Jordan distinguishes between anti-feminist backlash, which is “based on the claim that society disadvantages men rather than women,” and what she refers to as “postfeminism,” the idea that gender equality has already been reached.<sup>603</sup> The former, also known as ‘men’s rights activism’ or MRA and emblemized by right-wing male influencer Andrew Tate, differs from the latter in that is overtly misogynistic. The insidiousness of MRA is that misogyny is often packaged alongside real problems faced by men, such as deteriorating mental health and what some refer to as an “epidemic of loneliness” amongst men,<sup>604</sup> thus drawing in men who might otherwise not be invested in misogynistic ideology. Postfeminism, on the other hand, accepts many of feminist

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<sup>599</sup> Zaremborg et al. 2021, 527

<sup>600</sup> See, i.e., Kováts 2017; Paternotte and Kuhar 2018

<sup>601</sup> See, i.e., Biroli and Caminotti 2020; Sanín 2020

<sup>602</sup> See also Cupac and Ebetürk 2020

<sup>603</sup> Jordan 2016

<sup>604</sup> Guerrero 2024

theory's fundamental contentions and frameworks and "normally include[s] an appreciation for feminist accomplishments, coupled with a belief that the work of feminism is in the past, and thus that feminist collective action is no longer necessary."<sup>605</sup> Importantly, however, whether there is a substantive difference between anti-feminist backlash and postfeminism is up for debate, as some argue that postfeminism's veneer of agreeability and "optimism"<sup>606</sup> conceals anti-feminist objectives. It does so by "[a]bandoning the structural analysis of patriarchal power" and thus masking "larger forces that continue to oppress many women's lives."<sup>607</sup> For some, then, postfeminism is simply another, friendlier face of anti-feminism that subtly works against feminist goals by suggesting that they have already been achieved.<sup>608</sup>

Given this context, what does it mean for feminists to understand the increased visibility of CRSV against men and boys as an example of anti-feminist backlash? While she doesn't use the word 'backlash,' Ward's reply to Dolan in the *International Review of the Red Cross* is one of the earlier public-facing articulations of this critique and serves as a useful starting point for exploring it. While she includes the caveat that "[e]ngaging men in conversations about violence against women, or showcasing the problem of sexual violence against men in conflict at a global conference, are not problematic actions in themselves," Ward argues that these efforts can represent a "phallic drift," defined as "a tendency to revert towards a male point of view and attention to males, with the

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<sup>605</sup> Messner 2016, 10

<sup>606</sup> Jordan 2016, 21

<sup>607</sup> Genz 2006, 336

<sup>608</sup> See, i.e., Ging 2019

concomitant diminishment of feminist voices, approaches and attention to women's needs and experiences."<sup>609</sup>

Prior to beginning this research, I assumed along with others that awareness-raising efforts around CRSV against men and boys and 'male engagement' work were at odds given that the latter has the potential to reify men as violent perpetrators in ways that preclude their potential vulnerability.<sup>610</sup> To a degree I still believe this to be true; as I argue elsewhere, the racialized discourse around male violence in 'conflict countries' at the 2014 Summit undermines the visibility that male victims were afforded at the event.<sup>611</sup> Suhail Abualsameed, for instance, recounted to me an instance where an organization invited him to speak on a panel on prevention preliminarily titled, "The Problem with Arab Masculinity" – which he quickly pushed back against.<sup>612</sup>

However, it came across to me quite clearly in my interviews that some feminists understand male engagement work as simply another side of the same coin of what Ward calls a "phallic drift."<sup>613</sup> One participant recounted to me an incident where a film by Equimundo was shown at the 2015 Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Forum, which would continue to be an important site of contestation for the place of men within GBV work. The film, "Abby and Kyalu," tells the story of a married couple abducted by rebel forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo; while Abby, the husband, endured

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<sup>609</sup> Ward 2016, 287

<sup>610</sup> See, i.e., Féron 2016, 72-73; Lewis 2014, 209

<sup>611</sup> Norosky 2024

<sup>612</sup> Interview with author, Participant 2, September 9, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>613</sup> Ward 2016, 287

forced labor, Kyalu was raped.<sup>614</sup> The rape resulted in a pregnancy, and Abby rejected both Kyalu and the child. After Abby is enrolled in an Equimundo program, however, we learn that he eventually comes to realize his wife is not at fault and forgives her. According to the participant, however, what really incensed some feminists present at the screening was that the film concluded as follows: “‘So now [Abby] has gone on to become a nurse or whatever. He's gotten more education and he's doing fine,’ etc., etc. and it doesn't mention what happened to [Kyalu] and it just... it created a huge uproar.”<sup>615</sup> Another participant also present informed me that after some emotionally charged “corridor conversations” about the film, the organizers eventually set up an impromptu facilitated discussion during the lunch period about “what does an ally look like” and how male engagement work can avoid undercutting women’s activism.<sup>616</sup>

The uproar over “Abby and Kyalu” indicates that the struggle is over far more than resources alone: it is a struggle over gender’s meaning and politicization. It bears emphasis that this film is being screened at the SVRI Forum, a space to critically analyze gender, but also one created by and for women specifically. Yet in the film, the woman involved is portrayed as tangential rather than central to the story. Abby gets a job and becomes a leader in his community; whither Kyalu? For some feminists, the backgrounding of Kyalu’s story to celebrate Abby was symptomatic of a larger problem where women were once again moving to the margins, and men, back to the center. The push to acknowledge and include male survivors came to be interpreted similarly.

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<sup>614</sup> Equimundo 2015

<sup>615</sup> Interview with author, Participant 23, March 19, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>616</sup> Interview with author, Participant 24, March 22, 2024 (virtual call)

Writing about the 2014 Summit, Ward cites the focus of one of the only NGO panels taking place outside the “The Fringe – the exhibition room for NGOs to showcase their work – on men and boys as survivors of CRSV as evidence of “[t]he ebb away from centring women and girls in gender and GBV.”<sup>617</sup> Ward also criticizes the US Institute for Peace’s 2013 “Men, peace and security” symposium discussed in Chapter 4 on these same grounds. One of my participants had this to say about the symposium: “I thought it was just really egregious because they very much focused at on all the ways that, you know, men are experiencing violence, but completely out of the context and ignoring any other kind of violence or violence against women.”<sup>618</sup>

That efforts to address sexual violence against men are perceived as decontextualized from the problem of violence against women and what is at the root of this problem (patriarchy) is, indeed, a sticking point; this comes into focus when examining the debate around the conceptual boundaries of GBV. As discussed in Chapter 4, the inclusion of men and boys as survivors in the revised IASC Guidelines, the focal point of the exchange between Dolan and Ward, was an important moment in the spread of the ‘men, too’ norm. I will now unpack the tensions I alluded to evident in the text in terms of how men fit into definitions of GBV in order to fully explicate the feminist critique that the ‘men, too’ norm constitutes antifeminist backlash.

In reference to the revised IASC Guidelines, Dolan states his recommendation clearly: “a number of key shifts in the conceptualization of GBV in humanitarian settings are required, for unless understandings of GBV shift from an emphasis on gender

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<sup>617</sup> Ward 2016, 286

<sup>618</sup> Interview with author, Participant 23, March 19, 2024 (virtual call)

equality towards an ethos of gender inclusivity, the situation of victims will not improve, and social justice and change agendas will continue to falter.”<sup>619</sup> In defense of retaining a narrower definition of GBV, however, Ward asserts that while certain types of violence against men are very much *gendered* – such as sexual violence and gender-selective killing – it makes little sense to understand them as *gender-based*, as “this is not about men being targeted because of broad-based discrimination against them for being men; it is about men in particular social groups being targeted in order for their opponents to win wars.”<sup>620</sup> One of my participants explained it similarly: “It's always... he's a man, and he's indigenous. He's a man, and he's gay. He's a man, and he's very poor. And he's a man, coming from an ethnic minority or a minority religion.”<sup>621</sup>

Indeed, multiple participants raised the concern that more ‘expansive’ or ‘inclusive’ definitions of GBV can run the risk of being so broad they are rendered meaningless. One participant, for example, explained to me that *all* violence can be understood as gendered in one way or another.<sup>622</sup> As Ward argues, the difference between *gendered* and *gender-based* violence is an important one; for the latter, gender is the basis upon which individuals are targeted. Further, in a patriarchal society, it is women who fall to the bottom of the gender hierarchy and therefore can be targeted on the basis of their gender. The variable of patriarchy is key here; as discussed in Chapter 3, patriarchy was central to early feminist conceptualizations of wartime sexual violence

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<sup>619</sup> Dolan 2014c, 486

<sup>620</sup> Ward 2016, 293

<sup>621</sup> Interview with author, Participant 33, June 13, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>622</sup> Interview with author, Participant 31, April 25, 2024 (virtual call)

based on events such as mass rape in the Balkan conflict. Some feminists worry that broader definitions of GBV may be able to account for the experiences of more individuals – as one participant put it, “become all things for all people”<sup>623</sup> – but do so by diluting gender’s use as an analytical tool for studying patriarchy.

This is not just about semantics; the definition of GBV shapes resource allocation. In this regard, it could be argued that feminist pushback against a broader GBV definition is reducible to resource competition: if the spectrum of issues which can be considered under the GBV umbrella expands, the portion of the GBV money pot dedicated to women and girls shrinks. However, more than just resources, the very political utility of gender is at stake.

Some feminists critical of the ever-expanding GBV definition see the push to acknowledge men as GBV victims as a reassertion of male privilege in the form of encroachment into a space historically by and for women; and a hard-won space, at that. It’s not only pushes to include CRSV against men and boys within the GBV frame which have elicited this response from some feminists; for some, expanding GBV to account for the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals can be understood similarly. When I asked one of my participants on their thoughts on ‘inclusive’ approaches to defining GBV, they had this to say:

I mean, it's so complex because part of me like... Fully, fully agrees with it. And also I think... Historically, those pushes could also... Be almost a form of backlash against the advances that women and girls have made. But yeah, from more of a practitioner level, we actually had done some work with different communities of SOGIESC [diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics] organizations in a variety of humanitarian contexts. And I would say their experiences are fundamentally different than a heterosexual woman or man in a lot of these settings and there's often multiple levels of displacement or crisis where you're forced out of your home or then, you know, conflict is

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<sup>623</sup> Interview with author, Participant 31, April 25, 2024 (virtual call)

occurring. You're much more excluded from like a formal economic sector. All these different things. And even with that though there's also so many dynamics of, who's taking space a little bit more, or seen as a visible leader... Where there's still invisibility I would say of bi or lesbian women and it's still driven by men or are those that identify as men. So it's interesting too, even in those spaces. It's also quite nuanced.<sup>624</sup>

Other participants also brought up the concern that LGBTQ+ advocacy in the humanitarian space often falls into patterns of male privilege. According to another participant, "...we started using inclusion of LGBT issues, really to talk about gay men. And so at least this is how it came to the GBV world. Nobody came to GBV actors saying, 'what about queer women, or trans women?' Now that has come, obviously. But, you know, ten years ago, that was not the conversation. The conversation was, 'what about gay men?'"<sup>625</sup> In this participant's perspective, early attention to LGBTQ+ issues in the humanitarian world was "an attempt to smuggle in men into the definition of gender-based violence."<sup>626</sup>

I have reiterated that not all feminists operating in the CRSV issue landscape share all or even any of these critiques surrounding the increased attention to male victims. Similarly, it's important to provide the caveat not all feminists who resist placing the experiences of men and boys in the GBV box feel the same about LGBTQ+ individuals, or even just LGBTQ+ individuals who happen to also be women, where "they'll be willing to acknowledge... transgender women, but not necessarily gay men. Or you know, so it's like they're open to LGBTQ+ or SOGIESC [sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics] language, but only to a certain

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<sup>624</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>625</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>626</sup> Ibid

degree.”<sup>627</sup> While they opted to not implicate the specific government, this participant continued to explain that “there is one government in particular [that] is quite progressive that I saw that happen. Sort of put pressure on one of, an organization that they were sharing funds with, that they were a donor for. And that particular organization did change the language in its policy.”<sup>628</sup>

The understanding of expansive GBV definitions as a form of patriarchal backlash is most evident in the work of the Coalition for Feminist Change, or COFEM. COFEM was established in 2016 following a meeting in New York City between “a small group of academics, advocates and practitioners from around the world” who shared concerns about the state of the GBV landscape.<sup>629</sup> On their website where they explain the inception of the group, COFEM states:

In humanitarian and development work, a focus on VAWG without a socio-political analysis of gender inequality or a fully articulated theory of violence has led to interventions that do not address the lived experiences of women and girls, and do not recognize the constraints which prevent them from being able to realize their rights. [...] As donors seek a “silver bullet” to ending VAWG, there has been a proliferation of male focused programming, exemplified by these agendas and interventions. This often results in the leadership and voices of women and girls being muted or, yet again, silenced altogether.<sup>630</sup>

Their statement continues by listing specific problematic trends which all work to “depoliticize” violence against women and girls:

Participants at the convening agreed that the shrinking space and undermining of work with women and girls are manifesting in multiple ways but are all linked by the depoliticizing of VAWG. This manifests in multiple and interconnected challenges, including:

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<sup>627</sup> Interview with author, Participant 26, April 19, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>628</sup> Ibid

<sup>629</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change n.d.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid

The rise of gender neutrality within humanitarian discourse and practice;  
The emergence of competition around victimhood;  
A shift from women and girl led movements and activism to a technocratic approach to ending violence;  
Different interpretations of what “gender-based violence” (GBV) entails;  
A lack of clarity about how VAWG intersects with other forms of interpersonal and collective violence; and  
A lack of analysis of how to include men and boys in work to eradicate VAWG in a way that is accountable to women and girls.<sup>631</sup>

Here, two threads discussed so far in this chapter come together: gender-neutral approaches to and definitions of GBV, and male engagement work. Along with the idea of ‘competitive victimhood,’ a concept which has been employed to critique discourses around male survivors,<sup>632</sup> the position of COFEM illustrates how concerns about the increased visibility of CRSV against men and boys are part of a much broader sentiment amongst some feminists that women and girls are being “yet again, silenced altogether.”<sup>633</sup> The irony of the word ‘silence’ being used here is not lost on me, and will be addressed in the next section when I return to a focus on that concept.

COFEM is an active participant at the SVRI Forum and has presented research there over the years which continues to articulate these critiques. In one paper, titled “Eclipsed: When a broad protection agenda obscures the needs of women and girls,” COFEM specifically calls out the UN Refugee Agency’s ‘age, gender and diversity’ approach, which as discussed in Chapter 4, provided a key opening for the issue of CRSV against men and boys.<sup>634</sup> They continue to explain about these approaches that:

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<sup>631</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change n.d.

<sup>632</sup> Touquet et al. 2020, 29

<sup>633</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change n.d.

<sup>634</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change 2017a, 3

Although seemingly innocuous, both the discourse and practice of “gender sensitivity” represents a dissociation of “gender” from its articulation of patriarchal power relations. It also distances gender analysis and mainstreaming from their purpose of addressing the practical and strategic needs of women and girls, especially their equality and empowerment. In this approach, gender programming is undertaken not because a thorough analysis of gender power imbalances has been completed, but because of a simple analysis that what one group has, the other must have too.<sup>635</sup>

Continuing to build on this critique of the disassociation of gender from patriarchy, in another report, COFEM notes with concern that “some groups have begun using the term ‘gender-based violence’ (GBV) to talk about violence against men and boys, reframing GBV away from an analysis of gender hierarchy as it informs VAWG and toward an analysis of hegemonic (patriarchal) masculinity as it influences violence against males.”<sup>636</sup> The report continues by taking aim at the notion that men can be negatively impacted by patriarchy:

...framing men’s experiences as patriarchal oppression ‘reinvents patriarchy’. These analyses belie what oppression actually means and fail to acknowledge how males benefit from patriarchy. These efforts can equate men’s experiences of violence, for example, to women’s experiences of violence. This obscures the profound differences between VAWG and violence against men and boys – the nature and frequency of the violence, the primary aggressor, and the wider system of patriarchy. The feminist community does not refute the importance of addressing violence against men. However, it is problematic that when some groups undertake research and action on violence against men and boys, and/or shift into “male rights” work, the discourse on violence against men and boys is pitted in competition with and even compared to VAWG. This framing is both unhelpful and unethical.<sup>637</sup>

Here, COFEM underscores the bleeding-over of postfeminist analyses into anti-feminist backlash. In drawing attention to “male rights” work/MRA – a concept which

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<sup>635</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change 2017a, 4

<sup>636</sup> Coalition of Feminists for Social Change 2017b, 5

<sup>637</sup> Ibid, 6

immediately reads as onerous to anyone who calls themselves a feminist – alongside more expansive understandings of patriarchy as having the capacity to negatively impact men, COFEM signals that they understand these two distinct tendencies to be deeply related if not ultimately the same.

Given this adjacency, organizations which focus on men’s mental health issues as a problem of patriarchy but understand themselves to be in alliance with feminist causes, such as Equimundo, have to walk along a fine line and consistently distance themselves from anti-feminist backlash and MRA. Equimundo’s founder, Gary Barker, explained how they now navigate a new landscape where the far-right have “figured out masculinities:”

...our message of, “We have to hold accountable and question harmful ideas about manhood,” they've been able to turn that into, “Look, these guys think you're bad. These people are blaming you as opposed to blaming a structural system and holding individual men accountable, but also saying prevention means we question these ideas about manhood...” They have in pretty obvious ways [been] filling in that space and getting lots of folks to follow them, from Jordan Peterson to Andrew Tate and MAGA supporters and all the rest, right?<sup>638</sup>

I will return to the MRA problem in the next section as I circle back to the concept of silence.

It’s important to underscore that few feminists are opposed to *any* recognition of CRSV against men and boys. As I hope to have demonstrated, the problem instead is that some feminists perceive the issue’s heightened visibility in gender work, including its conceptualization as a form of ‘gender-based violence,’ as a bad-faith effort to crowd out feminists from the space they created and rework the political utility of gender towards anti-feminist ends. There is particular discomfort amongst feminists regarding the idea

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<sup>638</sup> Interview with author, Participant 10, December 7, 2023 (virtual call)

that existing GBV services designed to serve women and girls need to change what they're doing to account for male survivors – and with good reason. In addition to the politically problematic aspect of backgrounding patriarchy, some also argue that attempting to reach male survivors through GBV services simply wouldn't work, even if changes were made internally. One participant, an expert on sexual violence in humanitarian contexts, explained this as follows: "...where do most male survivors go? They go to the health center first... especially male survivors, adults, they don't want to go to a center for women and girls. They go there as a last resort, they really don't want to go to the GBV spaces. So to push this issue onto the GBV issues just didn't really make a lot of sense, um, apart from all the bigger, political and ethical considerations."<sup>639</sup>

To conclude this section, several points require reiteration. First, very real concerns about resources underlie the feminist pushback against the 'men, too' norm. However, as I just showed, reducing the problem to resources alone fails to account for an even more important dynamic wherein the centering of men and boy survivors is understood as a form of patriarchal backlash against feminist gains. Second and relatedly, skepticism about the visibility of CRSV against men and boys is not a standalone issue. Instead, CRSV against men and boys is understood by some feminists as part of a broader trend of backlash which includes other areas of work such as male engagement in violence prevention and even sexual and gender minorities. In what follows I will demonstrate how the use of the concept of silence in advocacy on CRSV against men and boys exacerbates the tensions just described.

### **5.5 “There is a difference between actively silencing, and trying to protect a space for women and girls:” Consequences of the Silence Frame for Inter-Advocacy Relationships**

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<sup>639</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo)

In Chapter 3, I argued that the lack of momentum for drawing attention to CRSV against men and boys in the 1990's and early 2000's feminist advocacy landscape specifically can be explained as a confluence of two related factors: the issue's uncomfortable fit into CRSV's contextualization within the broader issue of patriarchal gender-based violence (an understanding that feminists and many others used to make sense of CRSV), and the continuously unmet needs of women and girls despite the increased visibility of their victimization during conflict. Unfortunately, this gap between rhetoric and tangible outcomes persists today; what's more, some feminists worry that the trending attention towards CRSV against men and boys is a component of a larger patriarchal backlash against feminist progress unfolding in the humanitarian space as it is in broader society.

Against this backdrop, I argue here that the language of silence frequently deployed by advocates for male survivors, but which has also become one of the most prominent frames through which the issue is understood by the international community writ large, places additional strain on the relationship between male survivor advocacy and certain branches of feminist advocacy. Here I will pick up on some of the debates in Chapter 2 surrounding the concept of silence, focusing in particular on how silence is often taken to indicate oppression.

At a broader level, participants explained that positioning male survivors *against* female survivors is hugely detrimental in forging working relationships with feminists working on violence against women and girls – as one participant with a women's rights background put it, “people weren't always finding ways to talk about men and boys that

didn't make it feel competitive.”<sup>640</sup> One participant who has worked on CRSV against men and boys similarly explained that “...it hasn't really helped that a lot of the... not a lot, but some of the people [who] have been advocating for the need to look at sexual violence against men and boys do tend to have this, ‘What about the men?’ kind of... ‘It's enough talk about women, let's talk about men.’ That is really not helpful in terms of building bridges and finding allies.”

There are multiple, distinct aspects of the ‘silence’ frame for CRSV against men and boys that I wish to unpack here involving this sense of competitiveness, but they can be connected and summarized as follows: narratives representing CRSV against men and boys as a ‘silenced’ issue position a focus on women and girls – and thus, the feminists who advocated for this focus – as ‘silencing’ male survivors. The two issues are pitted against each other such that the visibility of women and girls is understood as *made possible by* the exclusion of men and boys. Here, the perils of engaging silence in a vague and one-dimensional way as discussed in Chapter 2 are stark: to understand CRSV against men and boys as a ‘silenced’ issue vis-à-vis that against women and girls, one must ascribe more power to feminist advocacy at the international level than it has been afforded both historically and contemporaneously. Academically, this uncritical deployment of the metaphor of silence would lead to a misunderstanding of the mechanisms behind the silence on CRSV against men and boys; practically, it has the effect of deepening the tensions between male survivor advocacy and feminist advocacy described in the previous section.

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<sup>640</sup> Interview with author, Participant 14, December 13, 2023 (virtual call)

Narratives about the past and present situation of feminist advocacy were prevalent in conversations with participants about the reasons behind the broader feminist pushback against the ‘men, too’ norm, but also about the reasons why the ‘silence’ frame falls harshly on the ears of feminists in particular. One individual I spoke with began their career in GBV prevention with a focus on women and girls, but after encountering male survivors in the field, broadened this focus to address the experiences of male survivors (as well as survivors who are sexual and gender minorities) from a feminist perspective. When I asked the participant their thoughts on the idea that CRSV against men and boys has been ‘silenced,’ they had this to say:

I don't think it's an accurate description. I really don't, I think it kind of strikes to the heart of some of these tensions. I know that some people do think, you know, some people who advocate for male survivors do think it has been a silenced issue. And I would just, as someone who advocates for survivors... I would strongly disagree. *There is a difference between actively silencing and trying to protect a space for women and girls.* Women and girls and female survivors need dedicated funding and spaces and attention, and it has taken so long to carve that out.<sup>641</sup>

As I will show, the distinction articulated by this participant between what they refer to as “actively silencing” versus “protect[ing] a space for women and girls” is helpful in interpreting how both the legacy and ongoing situation of transnational feminist advocacy shapes some feminists’ negative responses to the idea that male survivors have been silenced.

How, exactly, does the *past* of feminist advocacy inform this negative response?

The same participant continued just quoted elaborated on this point:

I would be very careful about this idea around silencing, because I don't think that that is an accurate frame. I think there is some ideological underpinnings there that need to be excavated and looked at, and it needs to be situated within a bigger historical context of the history of GBV, the history of humanitarian response, and

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<sup>641</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo; italics added)

what it took for women and women's groups and feminists to actually get sexual violence on the agenda in the first place. I mean, there would be no services for anyone, for anyone male or female, if it hadn't been for feminists and for GBV actors.<sup>642</sup>

Several components of this remark require elaboration, the first being the idea of “what it took” to get sexual violence on the agenda. As discussed in Chapter 3, while high-level recognition of sexual violence – specifically, CRSV – was garnered through important milestones like the Rome Statute and Resolution 1325, this did not immediately translate into widespread diffusion of the idea that sexual violence or any other type of GBV, in or out of conflict, was a matter of importance. Speaking from the perspective of integrating GBV into humanitarianism, the same participant explained that GBV was “just absolutely dismissed” on the ground by non-GBV practitioners, such that ““We’ll deal with the rapes later”” was “unfortunately a common refrain.”<sup>643</sup> While Chapter 3 showed how the early challenges in converting recognition into resources understandably monopolized feminists’ attention during the early-mid 2000’s at the expense of expanding to engage the issue of CRSV against men and boys, my contention here is that this historical struggle continues shape the feminists’ understanding of their place at the international level, which as one participant put it, is “fundamentally still very much an underdog.”<sup>644</sup> The narrative that a focus on women and girls ‘silenced’ male survivors runs entirely counter to this understanding by replacing a story about an “underdog” succeeding in

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<sup>642</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo; italics added)

<sup>643</sup> Ibid

<sup>644</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

their advocacy despite all odds through tireless work, with a new story where this “underdog” is actually an oppressor.

Second, the idea that “there would be no services for anyone, for anyone male or female, if it hadn’t been for feminists and for GBV actors” suggests that the ‘silencing’ narrative is perceived by some feminists as a case of ‘biting the hand that feeds,’ with feminists as the hand. This is because as one participant put it, “[t]here was nothing”<sup>645</sup> in terms of services for rape survivors getting implemented at the international level prior to feminist intervention; feminists put the issue on the map and in doing so, paved the way for recognition of CRSV against men and boys later down the line. Longtime feminist advocate and peacebuilder Naraghi Anderlini contextualized this with the additional point discussed in Chapter 3 that not only did feminists lay the broader foundation, but some actively attempted to account for CRSV against men and boy survivors prior to when recognition of the issue became so popular:

But once we got Resolution 1820 out and this issue came to the fore – it [CRSV] had been part of 1325, but it took on its own life – we had on the one hand men saying, "Hey, hang on a second, this happens to men as well." And then you had people who said, “Oh, these women, they just want more money for their own NGOs. They're only talking about women.” And we said, “No, guys. We tried to get language in. We couldn't. And by the way, you all could have been doing this for the last 3000 years and talking about these issues and you never did. So now that we've opened the door for you also to come in, don't then try and trample over what women's activism has done advocacy on because that’s egregious and offensive.”<sup>646</sup>

As indicated here by Naraghi Anderlini, it seems strange to place blame for the initial lack of acknowledgment around male survivors squarely on feminists and their emphasis

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<sup>645</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>646</sup> Interview with author, Participant 7, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

on women and girls given that the broader sociocultural silence on sexual violence against men long predates their activism. Indeed, in arguing that CRSV is not an inevitable byproduct of war but instead a ‘weapon’ with strategic value which can in turn be prevented, feminists “opened the door” for men to also be recognized as potentially vulnerable to this crime. As shown in Chapter 3, framing early feminist engagements with CRSV as having excluded men elides the context in which feminist advocacy emerged: violence against women in war was seen as a private offense,<sup>647</sup> and on a broader level, women’s experiences in and contributions to conflict were entirely absent from the international agenda

Similarly, other participants expressed frustration at how the narrative that feminists ‘silenced’ CRSV against men and boys erases the contributions of feminists to providing clinical care for survivors of all genders, including men. One participant with previous involvement in developing early best-practice guidelines for working with survivors in humanitarian contexts explained that while “it [the organization they partnered with] was still very much in that binary mode,” the guidelines they created were still “very much acknowledging when you're working in the health sector, it's about who presents themselves to you and needs help. And you need to be prepared to do that, no judgment. Just be aware, if it's a male survivor, you need to be prepared to address x, y, z... And don't make assumptions about who they want the provider to be. They might prefer a woman. They might prefer a man. Like let them pick.”<sup>648</sup> Indeed, following a meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) about sexual and gender-based

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<sup>647</sup> See, i.e., Charlesworth et al. 1991, 625

<sup>648</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2025 (virtual call)

violence in displacement, in 2002 the WHO and UNHCR jointly released their Clinical Management of Survivors of Rape guidance which contained a section on special considerations for male survivors.<sup>649</sup> Similarly, while the first edition of the IASC Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Assistance published in 2005 does not include specific details on how to work with male survivors, its definition of rape clearly accounts for men: “Rape of women and of men is often used as a weapon of war, as a form of attack on the enemy, typifying the conquest and degradation of its women or captured male fighters. It may also be used to punish women for transgressing social or moral codes, for instance, those prohibiting adultery or drunkenness in public. Women and men may also be raped when in police custody or in prison.”<sup>650</sup>

The reframing of the history of feminist advocacy and negation of feminist contributions to better understanding and responding to CRSV against men and boys is, in Naraghi Anderlini’s words, “offensive” to many feminists. However, bringing this idea into the contemporary context – the idea that the visibility of CRSV against women and girls relies on an exclusion of that against men and boys – has even more damaging consequences. By this logic, ‘unsilencing’ the experiences of men and boys requires, rather than an *expansion* of existing frameworks based on that of women and girls, a *decentering* of women and girls altogether. As I will show, several intertwined circumstances of the current moment discussed in the previous section are relevant here to understanding why this idea is particularly troubling for feminists: funds for everything from emergency aid to empowering women and girls are dwindling, the scourge of

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<sup>649</sup> World Health Organization and UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2002, 28

<sup>650</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2005, 8

violence against women – sexual and otherwise, conflict and non-conflict – remains as daunting as it was when feminists first began their interventions in global governance, and organized anti-feminist backlash is gaining momentum across the globe.

Participants reiterated to me that many feminists were open to taking the issue of CRSV against men and boys on-board and integrating it into their work but were put off by both how the message had been delivered and the practical implications therein. One participant with a background in women’s rights had this to say: “I think if you come to the issue and you say to people who work on women's rights, on sexual violence, if you say like, ‘Victims of sexual violence also include people who are not women and girls, and we need to care about them, too,’ everyone will go, ‘Yeah, of course. Sure. Definitely.’ And, ‘Help me figure out how we can be better at that.’ If you come and you say, like, ‘Women and girls are getting all this stuff, and how come men and boys don't get that?’ people are like, ‘Excuse me?’”<sup>651</sup> Similarly, one participant with expertise on the experiences of women and girls in humanitarian settings, but who has also worked on CRSV against men and boys, expressed the following:

I was constantly seeing stuff saying, “We've already addressed sexual violence against women and girls. We need to stop focusing on that. We need to stop putting resources there. We need to divert all the resources.” And no. I'm not saying don't have resources for men, boys, people who don't fit into the model of the women and girls services that exist. Either because they're made not to fit or because they choose not to be put into that category. Don't make it into, “We're taking your money,” and make it into, “This is an issue that affects pretty much everyone, no matter how you want to kind of slice the pie and we need to address the survivors who need the help.” [...] But that's not the way that it's been written about.<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> Interview with author, Participant 14, December 13, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>652</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2025 (virtual call)

The belief that silencing men and boys survivors enabled feminists to draw attention to CRSV in a way that centers women and girls rests on both of these assumptions about the state of funding for women and girls (“women and girls are getting all this stuff”) and the extent of the problem (sexual violence against women and girls has “already been addressed”) which are deeply troubling for feminists. In terms of funding, one participant explained that critics have interpreted the rhetorical weight which has finally been afforded to violence against women and girls to suggest that the issue now enjoys a never-ending wellspring of resources and support: “Like, yeah, there is a lot of discourse about gender-based violence. They're documenting it, there is data. [...] And of course there is definitely more funding for GBV than there was ten years ago, like, no question around it. But when you're looking at the needs on the ground and this level of support that GBV gets on the ground, it's like we're talking about two completely different worlds.”<sup>653</sup> They continued to describe a situation where many now assume that “loads of money [is] going to GBV programing and that there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in every humanitarian response working on gender-based violence, where in reality it's a scrappy team trying to get together enough money for a toilet.”<sup>654</sup>

As for the idea that sexual violence against women and girls has “already been addressed,” this bares an even more striking resemblance to anti-feminist backlash and MRA discourse. As mentioned earlier, postfeminist analyses share an uncomfortable proximity to overtly misogynistic analyses in implying a situation where feminism has

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<sup>653</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>654</sup> Ibid

come so far that women's subordinated status has been inverted so that men are now oppressed on the basis of gender. Something that stood out to me in interviewing advocates of male survivors is how conscious many of them were of how their advocacy can be misconstrued to "sound like men's right[s] advocates"<sup>655</sup> and their keen interest in distancing themselves from that kind of rhetoric, which one participant likened to an "all lives matter' approach."<sup>656</sup> This concern is expedient, given that, as a participant with expertise in preventing violence against women explained to me, "it's a thin line between centering men as victims and mass shootings of women."<sup>657</sup> While this statement might come off as hyperbolic to some, the reality is that this is how advocacy around male survivors is perceived by many feminists. This wariness stems from the close proximity between rhetoric advocating for male survivors and MRA talking points which, as described in the previous section, continue to gain traction. Take, for example, the following blogpost on sexual violence against men originally published by the Libertarian Institute and republished by an organization called Stop Abusive and Violent Environments or SAVE. Amongst their accomplishments SAVE's website boasts involvement in having "[f]orced hundreds of universities to change their female-only scholarships to make them male-inclusive."<sup>658</sup> In the blog, the author writes:

Men benefit at the expense of women. They do so by sexually oppressing women...or so the story goes. The preceding statement reflects some historical truth. In the '50s, men as a class did receive preferential treatment in the workplace, academia, and from the general culture. Women who experienced sexual and domestic violence were blamed for their own victimization. But

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<sup>655</sup> Interview with author, Participant 20, February 20, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>656</sup> Interview with author, Participant 27, April 26, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>657</sup> Interview with author, Participant 23, March 19, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>658</sup> SAVE n.d.

society has changed at a dizzying pace. We live in a healthier society that contains a fatal flaw: identity politics. If people are defined by biological subcategories that are in conflict, then society is at war—a forever war. Fairness or equality to one class means pulling down another. If men perpetrate sexual violence, then raising up women means policing and punishing males. When facts contradict the narrative, they may be given a cursory nod, then the narrators return to the script.<sup>659</sup>

This example is discussing general sexual violence and does not take the conflict context into account. What it does show, however, is how easily celebratory perspectives on women's advances can slip into anti-feminist dog whistles. In this excerpt, a society obsessed with "identity politics" has subsumed our previous patriarchal society such that men are now routinely "punish[ed]" for their maleness, one form of this punishment being that their experiences of sexual violence "may be given a cursory nod" but nothing more so as not to disrupt the "script" in which women are perpetual victims of male violence. Compare this to the following excerpt from one of the earlier academic publications on CRSV against men and boys:

As is commonly expressed in the literature, one of the main reasons for lack of focus on sexual violence against men is due to the almost exclusive focus on women powered by narrow feminist constructions of masculinity and sexual violence, also reflected in academic and policy discourses. The injustices of female oppression for so many centuries is evident to many if not all, and it is a topic that can rouse a passionate discourse; the outright injustice felt by many adds a justifiable impetus for initiatives in protecting and empowering women. There is a clear 'enemy' (man) and clear 'victim' (woman), which may ease campaigning and advocacy. [...] According to available literature, the concept of sexual violence (particularly male rape) may be problematic to many, as human rights discourse in conflict-related sexual violence tends to perpetuate a female–victim and male–perpetrator paradigm. However, this feminist stance needs to be challenged because in emphasising women as victims, harmful constructs of feminine and masculine identities are reified.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> McElroy 2020

<sup>660</sup> Solangon and Patel 2012, 424

While it is clearly not the intentions of the authors to do so – they indeed go on to assert that “[t]his is important not as a show of resistance to feminism but as a prompt that conceptualisations of gender need to be re-evaluated in order to present a more balanced understanding of sexual violence overall”<sup>661</sup> – the parallels between this passage and the previous one are stark. Most importantly, what stands out in each is the implication that feminist strategy for drawing attention to violence against women and girls hinges on the exclusion of men and boy survivors.

If the argument is made that a focus on women and girls inherently silences male survivors of CRSV, it follows logically that in order to address male survivors, women need to be decentered in approaches to CRSV. This is why Goodley explicitly suggests in her 2019 op-ed that the CRSV issue needs to be extracted from the WPS.<sup>662</sup> But what would it look like to decenter women and girls in addressing the issue? In a 2023 blogpost about CRSV against men and boys, one commentator takes aim at the art installation ‘Thinking of you’ by Alketa Xhafa Mripa, “a tribute to wartime sexual violence in Kosova” which “called on people to donate a skirt or a dress to recognize the survivors and hung thousands of dresses on washing lines.”<sup>663</sup> According to the commentator, “the concept on which this installation was built only reaffirmed the impossibility of overcoming the discourse that sees sexual violence as something that happened only to women...”<sup>664</sup> The critique, here, is that the female-coded imagery of

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<sup>661</sup> Solangon and Patel 2012, 425

<sup>662</sup> Goodley 2019

<sup>663</sup> Kurteshi 2023

<sup>664</sup> Ibid

skirts and dresses assumes that all victims of sexual violence are female. Making this art installation inclusive of male survivors, therefore, would require one of two changes: skirts and dresses are swapped for a more gender-neutral signifier, or something symbolizing male survivors is added to the skirts and dresses to dilute the art's women-specific focus.

When reading this critique against the artist's own statement, however, it becomes clear how the deployment of the 'silencing' frame suffers from the constraints of one's own "horizon of expectation".<sup>665</sup> The artist explains,

In 2013, I came across a TV interview, about the survivors of sexual violence in Kosovo.

I watched a woman, hiding behind a curtain, in the hope of remaining anonymous, sharing her traumatic experience.

She told her story of sexual brutality. I listened to her speak about how the trauma did not just end with this horrific and brutal act as she was not only sexually violated but she was then stigmatized by the society in which she grew up in and loved. She had to live with the fear of embarrassing her family. She was viewed as a woman without honour.<sup>666</sup>

She goes on to describe the impetus behind the specific design of the installation, noting that she "wanted to bring this issue into the man's world, to a public place. I decided to take this hidden private issue that no one wanted to talk about and place it in the main football arena in Prishtina. I decided to create a piece where thousands of skirts and dresses would be hung on washing lines across the stadium. No longer would the voices be hidden behind a curtain."<sup>667</sup> Now, my argument here is not to suggest that the previous interpretation that this female-coded installation reifies the synonymy of 'sexual

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<sup>665</sup> Block de Behar 1995, 7, cited in Guillaume 2018

<sup>666</sup> Xhafa Mripa n.d.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid

violence survivor’ with ‘woman’ is incorrect. What this analysis obscures, however, is the context which necessitated this art from the perspective of the artist: the gendered stigmatization experienced by women survivors (“a woman without honor”) and the relegation of sexual violence against women to the status of a “private issue”. In other words, by interpreting the installation solely through what its silence *does* – in this instance, discursively precluding men as sexual violence victims – what its silence *means* in the sense of why it was important for the artist to emphasize womanhood is lost.<sup>668</sup> From a feminist perspective, negating this context is an affront to both the history behind “what it took”<sup>669</sup> for feminists to get sexual violence on the agenda, but also the continuing reality that despite high-level, public-facing rhetoric, GBV against women in conflict, including sexual violence, is routinely treated as an afterthought by non-GBV specialists both behind closed doors and on the ground.

## 5.6 Conclusion

I will conclude this chapter by summarizing its main arguments and offering some thoughts about the normative implications of these arguments as well as what they can tell us about silence as a theoretical concept. My overall claim is that the language of silence, while powerful in commanding attention, has unintended and negative consequences for the advocacy which frequently deploys it in two senses. First, reifying male survivors as ‘silent’ vis-à-vis female survivors obscures the context-specific factors which can both enable male survivors’ disclosure and, conversely, present barriers for female survivors. There is undeniably a massive gap in empirical understandings of

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<sup>668</sup> Guillaume 2018

<sup>669</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo; italics added)

CRSV against men and boys in terms of scope, cause, and consequence; the framing of male survivors as ‘silent’/‘silenced,’ while not without some truth, drives the issue further into the shadows by perpetuating self-fulfilling prophecies and complacency about the dearth of information we have.

Second, the understanding of feminists as having ‘silenced’ male survivors of CRSV through their work to draw attention to women and girls’ experiences of CRSV exacerbates tensions between male survivor advocacy and feminist advocacy on VAWG. To illustrate one final time why this is the case, I will draw from another quote from a participant who we’ve heard a lot from already. Again, for context, this particular participant has worked on sexual violence against both women and men in conflict from a feminist perspective. They had this to say about the idea that CRSV against men and boys has been silenced:

And I think a lot of times around this narrative, “It's being silenced, we're being pushed out,” that's just not true. That is just absolutely not true. There has been a pushback. There has been a pushback. But I don't see this as a pushback necessarily against male survivors, per se, and more as a push for dedicated spaces and funding, for female survivors. I mean, you can parallel it in many different ways, like, you know, if there are LGBT-only spaces. It's strange to get upset if straight people aren't involved, right, that you need to have dedicated spaces and funding and programs for certain marginalized groups. And women and girls are one of those groups, and we can do both. [...] We can have dedicated spaces for women and girls, and we can address male survivors and LGBTQ survivors. We can do it all. There is a way. It is not a zero-sum game. There is a way to do it.”<sup>670</sup>

Others I interviewed shared the “We can do it all” sentiment. One participant pointed out that “[i]f you take one UK Trident missile, you could fund all of the work that's being done globally on gender-based violence easily... it's a political decision to not have more

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<sup>670</sup> Interview with author, Participant 9, November 28, 2023 (voice memo)

focus on more resources. But that bigger question is seldom raised.”<sup>671</sup> Another stated plainly that the zero-sum game/scarcity framing is a “white supremacist mindset.”<sup>672</sup>

First of all, I want to make clear that some *do* – fairly so – see it as a zero-sum game; in fact, one participant directly called out this narrative, explaining that “as much as you try to say, like, ‘We can work together’ and all these things, at the end of the day, resources are pooled from others to different priorities.”<sup>673</sup> More concerning, however, one participant explained to me that some feminists have become so disillusioned with the discourse around male survivors that they have even heard other practitioners say “horrific things about male survivors and refusing to acknowledge them” altogether.<sup>674</sup> So on the one hand, there are always going to be some feminists from the GBV sector with no interest in “building bridges,” in one participant’s words,<sup>675</sup> just as there are some male survivor advocates who will engage with the issue as part of what another participant called a “bad faith”<sup>676</sup> effort to actively work against feminist progress.

But on the other hand, there are a good deal of feminists who’ve spent their careers focusing on violence against women and girls who want to make their tents bigger to account for CRSV against men and boys. What I have argued in this chapter is that in addition to fueling unhelpful preconceptions around male survivors themselves,

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<sup>671</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 14, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>672</sup> Interview with author, Participant 3, October 19, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>673</sup> Interview with author, Participant 21, March 5, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>674</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>675</sup> Interview with author, Participant 6, November 17, 2023 (virtual call)

<sup>676</sup> Interview with author, Participant 29, May 9, 2025 (virtual call)

the language of silence alienates a large swath of individuals from the issue of CRSV against men and boys who otherwise could be partners in this work. What, precisely, the relationship between these streams of work – addressing CRSV against women and girls and against men and boys, not to mention how sexual and gender minorities fit into that – should look like is beyond the scope of my dissertation, and as someone without experience as a practitioner, any conclusion I could arrive at is going to be limited in that regard. I do, however, feel confident in my belief that there needs to be *some* sort of relationship. As one of my participants (notably, who is a bit skeptical of the ‘men, too’ norm) put it: “[I]t would be ridiculous if decades and decades and decades of knowledge and expertise about supporting survivors were just completely ignored and started from scratch because GBV actors don't want to do it. Like, that would be criminal.”<sup>677</sup> Another participant explained that “[t]he number one thing [a male survivor] wants is the same thing we ask for all survivors: confidentiality, respect, nondiscrimination and safety. So we [the GBV field] are extremely well-suited to help male survivors.”<sup>678</sup> What I have also concluded, based on both the prevalence of the ‘silence’ frame in all types of male survivor advocacy and the strong reaction I heard from some participants when asking their thoughts about this frame, is that it worsens an already tense and nuanced situation.

At a theoretical level, what can feminist reactions to the silence frame tell us about silence as a concept? Chapter 2 discussed how silence functions as a metaphor for many different social phenomena, which can be broadly organized into three categories

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<sup>677</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

<sup>678</sup> Interview with author, Participant 22, March 14, 2024 (virtual call)

(silence-as-object, silence-as-substance, and silence-as-state<sup>679</sup>). Further, there is variation even within these categories; for example, silence used as a metaphor for a state can be relational, such that one's own silence can have the capacity to silence someone/something else. However, this level of nuance is rarely made explicit when the metaphor of silence is deployed in practice. In social science scholarship, neglecting to specify the sense in which this metaphor is being used leads to analytical confusion, for example conflating what silence 'means' (an explanation for a silent state of being) with what it 'does' (an explanation for what an object of silence does).<sup>680</sup> But in the heterogeneous advocacy landscape, which is clearly afforded far less space for nuance than scholarship, what I have shown in this instance is that the ambiguity of silence can lead to contention. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the feminist origins of CRSV advocacy are deeply important to understanding why CRSV against men and boys was initially absent from the global agenda. However, what I also showed is that feminists were not silent on the subject with the intention of concealing it; this conflates what feminists' silence 'does' (in concert with heteronormative/homophobic constructs surrounding sexual violence) with what it 'means' in the sense of why silence was chosen. In so doing, the context of feminists' silence – most notably, the material constraints placed on their advocacy and the history leading up to their gains – is erased. This erasure then enables a particular narrative about feminist advocacy which, as I showed in this chapter, clashes heavily with feminists' own understanding of the past and present of their interventions; more specifically, a constituency who sees themselves as “fundamentally

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<sup>679</sup> Jaworski 1993

<sup>680</sup> Guillaume 2018

still very much an underdog”<sup>681</sup> is represented as an oppressive force. In this way, the difficulties inherent to mobilizing the concept of silence in empirical research are reflected in how silence is used in the day-to-day.

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<sup>681</sup> Interview with author, Participant 28, May 2, 2024 (virtual call)

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This concluding chapter will begin with a summary of this dissertation's empirical findings. I will then identify the implications of these findings for three bodies of international relations literature: norms, securitization theory, and transnational advocacy networks. Next, I will restate these findings through the conceptual framework of silence. Finally, the chapter will end with an elaboration on what these findings suggest about silence as a concept as well as methodological approaches to studying silence. In so doing, I will take the opportunity to reflect on the motivations behind this project as well as how my own thoughts about both CRSV against men and boys and the concept of silence have changed over the course of research and analysis.

In Chapter 3, I argued that the initial gap in addressing CRSV against men and boys during the 1990's and into the early-mid 2000's can best be understood by contextualizing it in two senses: first, within the embeddedness of then-nascent attention to CRSV within a broader effort to surface the long-neglected experiences of women and girls in conflict, and second, within prevailing heteronormative and homophobic constructions of sexual violence which render male survivors, at best, incomprehensible. Of course, both of these factors have already been addressed in the literature on CRSV against men and boys. What I hope to add to these analyses is a clearer, more empirically grounded mapping of how these two factors interacted with another to perpetuate this gap. Notably, I showed the complexity of agency in this story, wherein much of the gap was sustained neither by pure ignorance nor direct, purposeful concealment. Instead, there were no available frames for CRSV against men and boys which meshed well

enough with existing frames such that it could be coherently articulated as a problem. This led to a range of outcomes, such as the categorization of more well-known instances of sexual violence against men such as that at Abu Ghraib primarily as ‘torture’ rather than ‘sexual violence’. Meanwhile, directing attention squarely onto the role of feminist advocacy, this discursive mismatch was compounded by the material reality these advocates were operating in: an overwhelming problem and a lack of resources with which to combat it. While an emergent norm against CRSV gained unprecedented rhetorical weight even amongst state actors, as is often the case with human rights-related norms, this did little to command sufficient dedication and funding to meaningfully combat the issue.

Chapter 4 then proceeded to ask why and how this longstanding gap eventually gave way to a surprisingly visible discourse around male CRSV survivors which I conceptualized as a form of norm contestation best described as the ‘men, too’ discourse. I argued that the primary reason this change was able to occur is the securitization of CRSV, which can best be marked in time by the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 in 2008 as a catalyst. While the understanding of sexual violence as a ‘weapon of war’ long predates Resolution 1820 – and indeed, was pioneered by feminist advocates – this event kicked off a spiral of institutional proliferation specific to CRSV, whereas before, this issue was bundled amongst other so-called ‘women’s issues’ which defined the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Advocates of male survivors took advantage of the new discursive space created by this institutional splitting-off of CRSV from WPS which enabled various stakeholders to repurpose the ‘weapon of war’ frame in new ways that so happened to more easily accommodate the inclusion of male survivors,

allowing for broad support of the issue. While feminist thinking was evolving with the emergence of the ‘Third Wave’ wherein patriarchy’s effects were increasingly considered beyond only women, and so an understanding of CRSV against men and boys could be coherently understood as a problem of patriarchy, for more traditionally powerful *state* actors, patriarchy slid into the background. For global leaders in the West such as the US and UK, the idea that the ‘weapon’ of CRSV is wielded not only against women and girls but also men and boys was helpful in elevating CRSV’s status as a ‘real’ security issue rather than a more quotidian example of women’s ongoing gender-based oppression. Agencies and organizations without gender-specific mandates took up the issue for similar reasons, though without as much interest in security or the conflict context per se. On the other hand, for more marginal states from across the globe united by a shared interest in preserving conservative ideologies rooted in religion, the understanding of wartime as an exceptional space and sexual violence as a potent weapon of battle meant to disrupt communities eased fears that accounting for male survivors would open the floodgates for more expansive and progressive beliefs about gender and/or sexuality.

What are the broader consequences of these findings for international relations theory? First, to the study of norms, this research demonstrates that even norms about ‘taboo’ issues which seem impossible to acknowledge can come to take on surprisingly broad appeal. While previous scholarship emphasizes the importance of shared ideational grounding in enabling norms to gain widespread traction,<sup>682</sup> the evidence provided in Chapter 4 suggests that norms – or more specifically in this instance, forms of norm contestation – can be successful in garnering support even without this basis. As

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<sup>682</sup> See, i.e., Acharya 2001 and 2004

described various times throughout this dissertation, the very idea of male-directed sexual violence suffers from a great stigma across many different sociocultural contexts. While female survivors of sexual violence clearly suffer from stigma as well, acknowledging that women are raped in conflict was not contentious prior to the interventions of feminists. Rather, what had to be overcome was the belief that this fact is inconsequential to war itself and belongs in the ‘private’ realm.<sup>683</sup> Contrary to that against men, sexual violence against women was so hyper-visible and so normalized to the degree that it was effectively invisible.<sup>684</sup> Male survivor advocates had no preexisting sociocultural beliefs around male sexual vulnerability to latch on to, and indeed, had the disadvantage of prevalent beliefs which rendered such an idea impossible. Instead, the utility of CRSV against men and boys in displacing CRSV from the realm of ‘women’s work’ and squarely into ‘hard’ security was enough to overcome the lack of cultural fit amongst security-minded actors, and the issue’s ability to be articulated within multiple, even contradictory frameworks of gender enabled the issue’s visibility to ‘trickle down’ to other actors. Unsurprisingly, however, the unstable foundations upon which this now-widespread recognition was built poses serious problems for actually implementing a more gender-inclusive norm against wartime sexual violence. In other words, the inclusion of men and boys in efforts to combat CRSV remains largely superficial despite this energized rhetoric.

Second, to securitization theory, my findings cast a new light on the potential ideational consequences of securitization. Typically, the securitization of some ‘thing’ is

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<sup>683</sup> See, i.e., Gullace 1997

<sup>684</sup> Hirschauer 2019

understood to radically narrow the scope of the way that ‘thing’ can be understood. However, I showed that the securitization of CRSV actually created an opening for alternative and even contradictory meanings around what CRSV ‘is’ to emerge, on two levels. In the causal sense, elevating the issue of CRSV to the status of an existential threat simply meant that more actors were talking about it more often. The creation of CRSV-specific forums, such as the annual Security Council debates on CRSV and the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, presented an opportunity to look for gaps in previous understandings of the problem.

In the constitutive sense, the securitization of CRSV severed the issue from much of its prior ideological baggage such that CRSV itself became a more hollowed-out signifier. Huysmans invokes Saussure’s theorization of the signified (the ‘thing itself’ or meaning) vs. the signifier (the verbal/textual/imaginal representation of that meaning) to argue that security itself should be understood as a ‘thick signifier’.<sup>685</sup> This is to say that the deployment of the security signifier “orders social life in a particular way.”<sup>686</sup> Indeed, various empirical studies push back against the Copenhagen School’s neglect of the role of context<sup>687</sup> to demonstrate how securitization reinforces flattened, binarized understandings of complex social issues in drawing from preexisting societal norms surrounding issues such as race<sup>688</sup> and gender.<sup>689</sup> For example, Gray and Franck argue that the securitization of migration into the EU, in drawing from preexisting “gendered

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<sup>685</sup> Huysmans 1998, 228

<sup>686</sup> Ibid, 233

<sup>687</sup> Balzacq et al. 2016, 502-504

<sup>688</sup> Bertrand 2016

<sup>689</sup> Hansen 2000

and racialized grids of intelligibility” endemic to colonialism, perpetuated reductive narratives about who can and cannot be vulnerable, such that “positioning (all) women refugees as *uniquely* vulnerable has here enabled the obscuring of the vulnerability of (all) refugee men.”<sup>690</sup>

In examining the securitization of CRSV, Meger argues that this securitization was necessary accomplished through fetishization.<sup>691</sup> Her analysis extends a broader body of feminist literature critiquing how the securitization of CRSV perpetuates reductive understandings which isolate sexual violence occurring in war from the broader “continuum of violence”<sup>692</sup> women experience in the everyday of so-called peacetime.<sup>693</sup> Similarly, this fetishization makes a very particular type of CRSV visible – its intentional, systematized use as a tool of community degradation and disruption – at the expense of other types of CRSV, such domestic violence linked to the instability of conflict, or the sexual harms experienced by refugees in transit or within refugee or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. In this sense, research on the securitization of CRSV coheres with broader understandings within securitization theory which assume that the securitization of some referent object radically narrows how that issue can be understood.

However, my research complicates this picture. While the securitization of CRSV at the global level undoubtedly rests on an oversimplified version of the ‘weapon of war’ frame which repurposes (or in Meger’s words, co-opts<sup>694</sup>) feminist analyses towards

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<sup>690</sup> Gray and Franck 2019, 287

<sup>691</sup> Meger 2016a

<sup>692</sup> Krause 2015

<sup>693</sup> See, i.e., Krause 2015; Kreft 2020; Mackenzie 2010

<sup>694</sup> Meger 2016b, 153

more security-centric aims, it was this very abstraction from the broader context of gender-based inequality which enabled male victims of CRSV to rise to the fore. In other words, the securitized repurposing of the ‘weapon of war’ frame by UN actors and state actors such as the US and UK at once closed off possibilities for the kinds of sexual and gender-based violence which could be considered important but simultaneously opened *new* possibilities for who could be understood as potentially vulnerable. As such, it seems appropriate to reconceptualize the fetishization intrinsic to securitization as both potentially enabling and disabling.

Furthermore, close attention to the conflicting discourses underpinning this newfound visibility suggests that securitization achieved through fetishization involves not just simplicity, but what Oosterveld refers to as “constructive ambiguity”.<sup>695</sup> Oosterveld shows how “constructive ambiguity” in the Rome Statute’s definition of gender provides an opening for progressive judges to push the boundaries of the gender norms which structure broad societal beliefs about sexual violence.<sup>696</sup> Similarly, the ‘weapon of war’ frame might be fruitfully understood as containing a great deal of “constructive ambiguity” regarding gender in that it doesn’t require a clear consensus on what CRSV means beyond its utility as a tool of combat, which created room for actors with conflicting ideological and strategic goals to recognize male survivors. While now the subject of significant criticism due to the way it has been implemented, it’s important to remember that the ‘weapon of war’ frame was pioneered by feminists with a keen interest in foregrounding, not backgrounding patriarchy. This frame is therefore clearly

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<sup>695</sup> Oosterveld 2014

<sup>696</sup> Ibid

not incompatible with an analysis of patriarchy, but on the other hand, its “constructive ambiguity” as to the role of gender makes it possible to deploy it in ways which obscure this context or even accommodate highly conservative beliefs about gender. The diagnostic component<sup>697</sup> of the securitization of CRSV understands gender norms as weaponizable but says nothing of how these norms relate to social realities. For feminists, these norms are socially constructed, and they function to structurally oppress women. For more conservative and often religiously motivated actors, they reflect inescapable biological truths about men and women. And finally, for security-minded actors, the broader context of CRSV’s utility as a weapon is perceived as inconsequential to combatting it. In each of these narratives, the particular issue of CRSV against men and boys takes on a different meaning. But these divergent beliefs did not prevent widespread recognition of the problem from occurring.

Extending Rychnovská’s argument for conceptualizing securitization as a form of threat framing,<sup>698</sup> my findings suggest that these frames are more likely to be successful in generating broad appeal especially at the highly heterogenous global level when they contain “constructive ambiguity” as to any potentially controversial topics. Indeed, while Rychnovská’s own analysis of the securitization of terrorism at the Security Council places emphasis on how the framing of terrorism resonated within agreed-upon collective meanings established at the Security Council in previous years, it also provides evidence for the claim I am making here; Rychnovská explains that “[b]oth the United States as a securitizing actor and the audience framed the problem of international terrorism in a

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<sup>697</sup> Rychnovská (2014, 18) argues that securitization entails a diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational threat framings.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid

very broad and abstract manner, which allowed for bridging the threat of terrorism with other issues and might have hidden potential disagreements that would be related to understanding the issue in more detail.”<sup>699</sup> Future research should expand beyond single-case studies to test the impact of “constructive ambiguity” in framing on the likelihood of successful securitization. Furthermore, future research should also consider what kinds of “constructive ambiguity” are likely to matter in garnering acceptance of a securitizing move and why.

Third, to the literature on transnational advocacy networks (TANs), my findings reinforce previous arguments that TANs can be productively understood as replete with their own internal power dynamics rather than as a unified, homogenous entity. While previous studies of TANs emphasize the role of gatekeepers – typically very large, established, and well-known NGOs – my findings instead spotlight the dynamics between the smaller ‘nodes’ of the network that gatekeepers, as Carpenter shows, have to coordinate between.<sup>700</sup> Carpenter’s research identifies the importance of how gatekeepers perceive issue ties to other issues and organizations,<sup>701</sup> suggesting that these micro-dynamics ultimately shape whether gatekeepers will embrace or reject a nascent issue. Importantly, my findings do not suggest that the issue of CRSV against men and boys was actively gatekept (indeed, this misconception turned out to constitute the challenges with emerged *after* the issue garnered attention), although prior to undertaking this research this was a dynamic that I anticipated seeing. However, in drawing attention to

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<sup>699</sup> Rychnovská 2014, 23

<sup>700</sup> Carpenter 2014

<sup>701</sup> Ibid

the nuanced ways in which tensions and synergies between individuals and organizations within a TAN can emerge, I provide a more detailed account of how these ties – negative and positive – that gatekeepers take into account in vetting an issue can emerge.

Specifically, this dissertation suggests that the framing of neglected issues as silenced by other issues and the individuals who advocate on their behalf can create these negative, competitive ties even between issues that share many similarities and could benefit from being more connected. In addition to helping us better understand the dynamics behind vetting, these findings show how the language of silence can function to hamper productive partnerships in the advocacy world. This is normatively problematic in the sense that these fraught relationships ultimately hinder holistic understandings of global problems such as CRSV such that they can be more adequately responded to at the levels of prevention and response.

Finally, I will now provide some concluding remarks on silence. Chapter 3 empirically demonstrated the conceptual argument in Chapter 2 that silence can be fruitfully understood, in one sense, as a collaborative structure. This type of silence – used in this instance as a metaphor for an object of silence sustained by various states of silence – requires careful mapping to be fully understood. Because silence appears as a lack, it is particularly easy to analyze this type of discourse in an oversimplistic way which confuse what silence *does* (in the sense of its independent productive effects) with what silence *means* (in the sense of what caused it). In particular, because the focus on women and girls in which earlier attention to CRSV was embedded, in tandem with heteronormative and homophobic social constructs surrounding sexual violence, perpetuated the preexisting myth that men cannot be or are very rarely victims of sexual

violence, it may appear at first glance that exposure of CRSV against women and girls was contingent on an exclusion of male survivors. Furthermore, it may also be assumed that feminist advocates actively worked to drive the issue into the shadows to maintain dominion over the issue area.

However, I showed that feminists' overall (but not total) lack of engagement with CRSV against men and boys in the 1990's and early 2000's can better be understood as a form of agential silence, but not silencing. For many, beyond just feminists, the thought to conceptualize sexual crimes against men through the lens of CRSV simply did not occur because the prevalent framing of CRSV at that time didn't intuitively accommodate male survivors. On the other hand, feminists were so caught up in what they felt was the task of the moment – as one participant put it, “surfacing” the neglected experiences of women and girls in conflict<sup>702</sup> – that complicating the already herculean effort of getting stakeholders to see the issue of CRSV as worthy of attention and then to translate this energy into tangible resource commitments was just not seen as expedient. I found no evidence for any coordinated effort amongst feminists to block CRSV against men and boys from being discussed that would explain why the issue was not a part of the agenda in the pre-2008/securitization period. Additionally, I emphasized that this agential feminist silence was part of a much larger picture as it intersected with deep-seated and cross-cultural reluctance to acknowledge male-directed sexual violence because doing so troubles heteronormative understandings of what sexual violence entails. Complicating the picture even further, I provided evidence that some feminists did actively try to secure

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<sup>702</sup> Interview with author, Participant 16, December 19, 2023 (virtual call)

recognition of the issue, but in at least one instance, were actively blocked from doing so due to the efforts of conservative state actors.

All in all, then, Chapter 3 showed how broad silences spanning across time and space can be productively understood as collaborative structures in that they have productive effects (structure) but can be sustained by complex processes involving multiple modalities of silence (collaborative) which are not immediately evident in how silence ‘appears’. To understand what explains collaborative structures of silence, it is necessary to look beyond the ‘appearance’ of silence and to map out the many tendencies and interactions which converged to create it.

The correlate of this finding is that collaborative structures of silence may be more tenuously sustained, and thus more easily broken, than other forms of silence which are more unified and direct. Chapter 4 showed this to be the case with the issue of CRSV against men and boys; while the density of this silence has been referred to consistently in the literature, and some even continue to write about the issue as if it is wholly unmentionable to this day, I showed how the issue rose to the fore rather quickly once the securitization of CRSV provided an opening. The convenient fit of CRSV against men and boys within security-centric deployments of the ‘weapon of war’ frame, which powerful states and authoritative institutions were increasingly interested in, explains this rapid ascendance following the efforts of some male survivor advocates. Furthermore, this top-level recognition trickled down to other actors who didn’t share as much of an interest in this security-centric deployment but who were able to rationalize CRSV against men and boys within their own agendas, such that the issue became increasingly more widespread over time. This rationalization was possible because the securitization

of CRSV perpetuated a hollowed-out, bare-bones articulation of the ‘weapon of war’ frame which enabled actors with all kinds of ideological orientations to justify recognition of the issue within their own preferred logics, some of which are in direct contention.

However, while the complexity of the silence on CRSV against men and boys made it easier to poke holes in, this also meant that entirely ‘unsilencing’ the issue would also be a complicated endeavor. I conceptualized the ‘men, too’ norm as a mode of ‘unsilencing,’ but as I have already mentioned, I do not mean to create the impression that this project is complete. CRSV against men and boys is far more visible than it was 20 years ago; understanding the issue as fully silenced makes little sense today. However, as I showed in Chapter 5, this recent inclusion is largely superficial because it is also tenuous in the sense that these factors which sustained the initial silence, while overcome such that male survivors could become a talking point, have not been eliminated.

I demonstrated that this tenuous inclusion is shaped, in part, by the language of silence itself. I identified two primary side effects of this language, both of which are normatively unhelpful. First, it perpetuates an oversimplistic understanding of how survivors’ experiences of stigma manifests along gendered contours, representing men as unable to disclose on the basis of their gender and women as, conversely, unencumbered. Second, it exacerbates tensions in the CRSV advocacy landscape between advocacy on behalf of male survivors, and on behalf of women and girl survivors. In Chapter 5 I described the conditions of ongoing resource scarcity and anti-feminist backlash which prompt skepticism towards the ‘men, too’ discourse particularly amongst those who identify as feminists and were involved in this line of work long enough to remember

when sexual violence during conflict or other emergencies was considered completely irrelevant. These circumstances, I argued, explain why the narrative that feminist advocacy centering women and girls blocked recognition of male survivors, while as I showed in Chapter 3 is a fair (but importantly, incomplete) assessment, is nonetheless damaging to internetwork relationships in the advocacy landscape. What's more, while I did not find any evidence of active silencing in the pre-2008/securitization period, the way in which CRSV against men and boys has more recently been discussed as it is increasingly visible has led to some active pushback amongst feminists. While it would be oversimplistic to suggest that this was the only reason some feminists reacted negatively to male survivor advocacy – anxieties around what an inclusion of male survivors would mean for funding are real and well-founded – I showed that it certainly doesn't help bring feminists on-board. Specifically, it alienates those feminists who do not see it as a zero-sum game, and who want to learn about how they can better work to serve and account for male survivors.

Silence, as a concept, is obviously complex and poses methodological challenges that while not entirely unique to silence are certainly exacerbated by this type of discourse appearing as an “absent presence”.<sup>703</sup> However, while this complexity is something that can be articulated and dwelled on in scholarship, it's much harder to do this in advocacy. The nature of advocacy requires straightforward, digestible narratives with clearly constructed problems and calls to action. As such, while I still fully believe that silence is an incredibly useful concept for interpreting the issue of CRSV against men and boys in scholarship, because of the particularities of this issue and its relation to

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<sup>703</sup> Mazzei 2007

other issues (CRSV against women and girls and patriarchal violence more broadly), my findings suggest that it's well past time to reconsider the utility of this language in public-facing advocacy.

At the same time, having previously been seduced by the more straightforward narrative that CRSV against men and boys was unilaterally silenced, I can also understand from personal experience what motivates many people to buy in to this narrative. For the vast majority of individuals, I think that this belief is rooted not in a desire to counter feminist advances – I personally have identified with the normative goals of feminism long before I ever learned about CRSV against men and boys – but rather, in a deep sense of shame for having previously been ignorant about this problem and a sense of injustice learning about what male survivors experience. As discussed in Chapter 2, the invocation of silence is an ethical call-to-arms; it compels the ‘listener’ of silence to actively work against, less remain complicit – hence phrases such as, ‘silence is violence’. However, just as complex silences appear initially in a one-dimensional way, silence in rhetoric is a blunt object. Sometimes, this bluntness is useful and necessary; other times, as I have shown, it is not. In addition to providing a potential pathway for forging a more harmonious relationship in the CRSV advocacy landscape between those who have dedicated their careers to helping women survivors and those who have done the same for male survivors, my other hope in providing this analysis is that readers will think more carefully about how they deploy the concept of silence both in scholarship and the everyday.

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