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Silence Breakers in War and Peace: Research on Gender and Violence with an Ethics of Engagement

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In 2001 I published an article in *EJIR* which analyzed 140 studies on sexual violence in war published in the 1900s. It took one year to gather the 140 articles. Today a quick Google search will yield thousands of hits. The political attention given to gender-based aspects of armed conflict, and sexual violence in particular, has created a demand for particular forms of knowledge and in this dynamic lies a tension for the academic community. This article presents an analysis of the social science literature on conflict-related sexual violence based on the notion of an *ethics of engagement*.

Introduction

If there is one thing the *#metoo* social media campaign in 2017 has shown, it is that sexual harassment and abuse is a multifaceted phenomenon. The hashtag, based on a campaign initiated by activist Tarana Burke more than 10 years ago, and picked up by American actor Alyssa Milano, enabled a mode and a language to articulate experiences that far too many women had kept to themselves. *Time* magazine made the *silence breakers* of the *#metoo* initiative the *Time* Person of the Year 2017, a testament to the impact the campaign has had. The hashtag opened up a language, recognition, and an outlet for talking about experiences that had far too often remained inarticulate to those affected as well as their surroundings. The massive response has led to worldwide discussions about men, male cultures, and organizations. Filmmaker Harvey Weinstein, and others in the American film and media industry, as well as prominent politicians, have lost their jobs, been indicted, or stepped down from prominent position, and the same has happened elsewhere in the world, notably in Scandinavia. However, the problem is bigger than a few bad apples, and in the Norwegian and Swedish context, this has been widely addressed. Male cultures in top leadership in the media, cultural and private business sector, as well as in

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academia, have been exposed and met with outrage and disbelief. The President of the Norwegian parliament, the *Storting*, called the situation a "societal problem" in his response to reporting in Norway.[1] Archetypical discussions about how women can protect themselves against sexual harassment and abuse were gone. The focus has almost exclusively been on the predator and the personal and sociopolitical traits he embodies.

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a different kind of violence and abuse, but there are similarities with the *#metoo* campaign, and some notable differences. First, the setting in which CRSV occurs is its own "societal problem," and this makes CRSV a distinct kind of violence. Second and similar to the *#metoo* campaign, gendered violence in these settings was overlooked until *silence breakers* started to speak up. These silence breakers have been many. Women who were held captive as sex slaves by Japanese forces one generation ago (Chai 1993; Chung 1994; Hicks 1994; Sancho 1997; Soh 1996) have told about their ordeals as so-called "comfort women." Bosnian victims gave testimony to journalists and human rights reporters on such a scale and so early in the conflicts that the phenomenon could not be overlooked or ignored by policy makers, academics, and first responders in conflict settings (Allen 1996; Seifert 1994; Stiglmayer 1994). The same was true in Rwanda (De Brouwer 2005; Organization of African Unity 2000). In addition, more recently, we have heard Yezidi[2] and Rohingya[3] victims who have given testimony to the international press and at the UN about the same experiences, and more cases could have been added to the list of silence breakers. Finally, but opposed to the *#metoo* response (which has been an overwhelmingly strong focus on sexual predators, male characteristics, as well as sociopolitical cultures), the response to the sexual violence in armed conflict (SVAC) *silence breakers* has been predominantly and historically focused on protection and mitigation of the impact on victims. The predator, or perpetrator, and the sociopolitical context which encourages, or silently accepts, and permits, this behavior have far too often been sidelined in academic and policy analyses, a development which is about to change, and will be discussed later in this text.

Since the 1990s, there has been an insistence that SVAC has to be better understood, explained, and addressed, and while this article is not a comparison between CRSV and the *#metoo* campaign, I aim to show how the response to the silence breakers of CRSV has been located within policy and research. I aim to do this by analyzing how the scholarly literature has emerged from an *ethics of engagement* creating a particular kind of epistemic community. Further, the article will show how this community is tied to different approaches to social justice, which has different implications for the status of knowledge and policy.

Background

Before introducing current scholarly debates, it is worth reminding ourselves that at the time of the Bosnian conflict in the early 1990s CRSV was

almost a non-theme in academic analyses and policy circles. The common understanding was that this was simply a by-product of armed conflict, not as a central feature of warfare. This "by-product" did not merit scrutiny, or systematic analyses. Hence, we had little understanding of the phenomenon, its complexities and varied impacts psychologically, socially, culturally, or politically. The wars in the 1990s, notably the ethnic conflict in Bosnia and the genocide in Rwanda, changed this perception. CRSV marked how we came to understand the so-called "new wars" (Chinkin and Kaldor 2017, 15) where the frontlines were blurred and civilians the target. From having been a hidden and overlooked phenomenon, CRSV became increasingly front and center stage in war reporting, fact-finding, and policy making in the 2000s. Further, the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 and the pursuant resolutions that make up the so-called Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda ensured international political leadership and engagement in the prevention and mitigation of CRSV. The WPS agenda is quite simply, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (Tryggestad 2016), and includes UNSCR 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); and 2242 (2015).

In 2001 I published an article in the *European Journal of International Relations* (*EJIR*) which analyzed 140 academic articles on CRSV published in the 1900s where the aim was to investigate what had been written and how the relationship between sexual violence and war was conceptualized (Skjelsbæk 2001). In an annotated bibliography with an overview of these texts (Skjelsbæk 1999), the vast majority of the articles were of a conceptual nature. What characterized these texts was that they were hypothetical in outlook, assuming consequences of CRSV. They assumed that victims would be ostracized, families and communities being torn apart, perpetrators looming large, and little or no political attention to these crimes. There was little empirical data to draw on. The core argument conveyed by the authors of these texts was the conceptualization of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and that academics and policy makers alike needed to recognize this. As we know, this was exactly the way in which scholars and policy makers talked about sexual violence in war in the years that followed. Alongside this conceptual change, a fact-finding regime emerged in order to satisfy the need to get overviews and data. The report by UN special rapporteur Cherif Bassiouni on the situation in Bosnia in 1994 and the report by the Organization for African Unity on the situation in Rwanda from 2000 are examples of these early efforts. Today, documenting sexual violence crimes are integral to war documentation by NGOs, journalists, and international organizations alike. Further, there was an increasing engagement in the social science research community to understand the mechanisms that created fertile grounds for sexual violence to be seen as an efficient and purposeful weapon of war. Scholars were asking about the psychological, sociological, and also political dimensions at play. There was also a concern with how insights within these

different spheres of knowledge could translate into different kinds of policies and interventions aimed to help survivors and victims, and prevent perpetrators.

In the late 1990s, it took me one year to gather the 140 articles that were the basis for my first article on this theme in 2001. The texts in my publication from 2001 (Skjelsbæk 2001) were gathered before the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000. Since then much has changed. Today a quick Google search will yield thousands of hits and a myriad of different studies, reports, thematic foci, methodologies, and epistemological approaches. From being a theme on the margins of international relations, peace and conflict, as well as gender studies, it has since become a central theme in all these scholarly fields and more. The academic engagement on the complexities of CRSV research increased dramatically in the early 2000s. At the International Studies Association (ISA) conventions, for instance, more and more panels on CRSV emerged. There was also a noticeable engagement by more and more male scholars, and the field was transformed from a field almost exclusively dominated by women and feminist scholarship, to a more mixed scholarship where feminist standpoint epistemology, i.e. taking the lives of women as the starting point of analysis (Harding 1991), was only one of several avenues for knowledge production. The increased interest was so dramatic that the academic community was concerned that there was a fetishization of sexual violence in international security studies (Meger 2016) and even recommended against young scholars engaging in this research field at all, as the widely read blogpost by Marsha Henry demonstrated.[4] Another example is the Missing Peace Initiative, which is a collective effort to bring together policy makers and scholars in the field of CRSV, initiated by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley (HRC), Women In International Security (WIIS), and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) which started in 2012. They saw a need to establish a Young Scholar Forum[5] to make sure that scholars communicated across disciplinary, methodological, and epistemological divides. One theme amongst these young scholars, as well as within the larger CRSV community, was a methodological and epistemological concern with knowledge production and its implications for policy makers. The myriad of studies and approaches that exist alongside each other today can be difficult to navigate for scholars, policy makers, and practitioners alike who wish to look for understandings, insights, and explanations. Clearly, there is more data than ever before, but what constitutes data, how should we study these different data, and what is the impact of this variety for the academic field and for the interaction between policy, practice, and academia? These questions create tensions between different kinds of scholarship, as will be outlined below.

Further, the social science research community alongside a very dedicated human rights community was part of the efforts to bring CRSV to policy circles in the United Nations and elsewhere. There was a combined insistence

to reframe CRSV from being seen as a by-product of war to a central aspect of warfare, and the weapon of war conceptualization caught on as political rhetoric and a research focus. Despite these important efforts, the research community was not able to answer seemingly simple questions that the policy communities and the UNSCR resolutions were asking. Had, for instance, CRSV increased in the so-called new wars or not? Who were the primary perpetrators, all men or particular men and in particular military groups? Where and when did CRSV happen in a conflict cycle? What happened to victims and perpetrators after conflicts ended? In addition, and perhaps most importantly, if CRSV is central to warfare, for which reasons does it happen? How can it be prevented? The 2000s opened up for funding, interest, and a demand for knowledge and empirical data that could help in answering these pressing questions. In addition, the focus of the larger WPS agenda became a narrow gaze at sexual violence in war, often at the expense of other elements of the resolution (Olsson and Gizelis 2015; Shepherd 2014; Tryggestad 2009).

To be better equipped to respond, react, and prevent CRSV, a demand for evidence-based policies increased and social science engagement grew in ways that had been unthinkable in the 1990s. There were more and more social scientists, and notably a large and growing body of legal scholars, who engaged, received funding, and started studying the complexities of CRSV from different scholarly vantage points. Therefore, a knowledge field emerged with a vast diversity in modes of research, insight, and implications for policy. I will try to unpack this diversity through a discussion of different forms of ethical engagement.

Ethics of Engagement

In the following, I will argue that the scholarly field of CRSV research is defined by a term used to denote ongoing debates in my own scholarly field of psychology, namely *ethics of engagement*. Further, as I will show, the field is characterized by a divide, or multiplicity, in this engagement, which has implications for conceptualizations of knowledge and policy.

Within psychological scholarship, the term *ethics of engagement* is used to denote an ethical reflection which is in contrast to "traditional research ethics [. . .] where participants are treated as objectified data sources, ethics is often reduced to the entry and exit conditions of research participation and is not seen to play any intrinsic role in the research itself" (Smythe 2015, 128). Like the psychological researcher and practitioner who is ethically obliged to promote knowledge and practice that contributes to well-being and avoids harm, the research field of CRSV is largely guided by the same aims, namely to give voice to silenced experiences, to produce knowledge with emancipatory aims and to strive for social justice. As we have learned through studies of Holocaust survivors, an event to be retold and reported is not an accurate

imprint of what is remembered. Rather it is a subjective and selective account of what has happened adapted to the context in which it is told, and women may have particularly difficult stories to tell due to gendered norms (Lothe 2013, 20). Finding the right words, retelling accurately, and reporting truthfully can be particularly difficult when it comes to human rights and sexual abuses. By naming and conceptualizing, the people involved come into being as victims, survivors, and perpetrators. This can be painful, stigmatizing, and often overshadowed with cultural norms and sociopolitical implications in both war and after. These dimensions frame the phenomenon of study and research findings, and are constantly subject to debate. In addition, these debates, I will argue, show various ethics of engagement. This engagement again links to notions of *epistemology* and *social justice*.

Ethics of Engagement and Epistemology

Ethics is central to everyone who is doing research on sexual violence in war. Everyone who has applied to get ethical approval from a scientific board to conduct research on CRSV has had to demonstrate how the research complies with ethical guidelines and does no harm to research subjects, their families, and communities. However, an ethics of engagement is more than mere compliance with established guidelines it "requires critical reflection on all aspects of research and [. . .] practices including the epistemological practices of making knowledge claims" (Smythe 2015, 130). My own experience when applying for my first research project on sexual violence research in late 1990s Bosnia is a case in point. After three rounds of rejections from concerned funders, I decided to go to the field and ask locally if they thought research on the impact of wartime sexual violence in post-war Bosnia was at all feasible. The response I got was overwhelmingly positive and supportive. The project I had developed was strong and convincing, according to the funders but the concern was that I would harm research subjects by talking to them about CRSV. The concern from my prospective funders was primarily with me talking to those who had first-hand experience. My counter argument, after having travelled to Bosnia and Croatia and talked to women's groups and NGOs, was that by not allowing research *with* victims/survivors the funders and the ethics board were effectively censoring victims' experiences and voices. This argument resonated with the funders and ethics board, and I received funding. The concern of my funders was how my approach would comply with established ethical guidelines, but when I could present more contextual arguments, along with the argument that silencing the victim voices would also be an ethical consideration, they changed their mind. The critical foundations for this epistemological approach were as an important part of the ethical reflection I had to go through. I relied on the definition of critical epistemology defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994, 111) where they state that "critical theory's transactional/subjectivist assumption is that knowledge is value mediated and hence value dependent."

Much of the early research on CRSV shared this critical epistemological approach. The aim was to give voice to victims (almost exclusively female), their experiences and sense making, because this was an important value statement, in addition to filling a knowledge gap. This engagement spurred qualitative, case based, and ethnographic research in affected communities (such as Agger 1989; Allen 1996; Arcel 1998; Benderly 1997; Bennett, Bexley, and Warnock 1995; Chung 1994; Cockburn 1998; Hansen 2001; Kesic 2000; Meznaric 1994; Nordstrom 1996). The research had a clear critical and emancipatory ethical commitment, and it had transformative aims in policy as well as research: to improve the situation for women in armed conflict. This research was important in the pre-UNSCR 1325 phase, and it formed the way in which CRSV became situated as a knowledge field; notably as a predominantly qualitative field of study where the ethical value based reflections were seen as intrinsic to the nature of study rather than only as a set of extrinsic requirements. The post-UNSCR 1325 era has, however, brought other kinds of research to the fore, based on a different kind of epistemological ethics and engagement.

The new mode of research that entered the stage in the late 2000s grew, in large part, out of the Center for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)[6] at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), which was a Center of Excellence on primarily quantitative studies of civil wars. After a decade of counting battle deaths, estimating different kinds of violence, and attempts even to predict future civil wars based on intricate statistical analyses, a group of scholars were asking whether they could study sexual violence crimes in similar ways. This research, dominated by quantitative political scientists, changed the academic climate in the CRSV research field globally. CRSV research went from predominantly critical and qualitative scholarship taking patriarchal relations as a point of departure for analysis, to a positivist scholarship that had a different ethics of engagement as well as epistemology. These studies zoomed in on the particularities of the war zone and engaged less in exploring the patriarchal structures underpinning it. It was particularly the development of the SVAC dataset,[7] which epitomized this change. The starting point and motivation for the SVAC project was a critical assessment of the early, critical, and qualitative research. They proposed a different approach while thoroughly accounting for the potential shortcomings in their own data gathering, such as possible under-and over-reporting, and discussions of what actually counts, as the following statement shows:

> The current state of knowledge of sexual violence in war-torn societies is very weak. Policy makers cannot effectively intervene to stop sexual violence in war without information on *where* this behavior is likely to take place, *when* it occurs, who are likely to *perpetrate* the crimes, and who is likely to be *targeted*. [. . .] Although there are a variety of biases in the source of data used to gather these details, these may be mitigated through triangulating data, meaning using multiple sources. Despite the challenges in data

> collection on wartime sexual violence, the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) project indicates that a global data collection is attainable. (Nordås and Cohen 2011, 3)

The initial dataset covered active conflicts from 1989 to 2009, giving a total of 129 active conflicts and 625 armed actors in these conflicts. The sources for coding were US State Department Country Reports, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Further, there were six dimensions of coding: prevalence, perpetrators, victims, forms, location, and timing (Cohen and Nordås 2014). The SVAC Dataset includes reports of CRSV committed by the following types of armed conflict actors: government/state military, pro-government militias, and rebel/insurgent forces. They collected data for all years of active conflict and for five years post-conflict. This research was timely and important and it contributed greatly to new conversations with new academic fields as well as policy audiences. This research enabled a new language for talking about sexual violence in war and it brought, in many ways, CRSV into mainstream politics and political research, exemplified by Peterman et al.'s (2011) article in *Foreign Affairs*. Based on a positivistic and dualist approach, particularly in the field of political science, this research resisted the critical/feminist epistemological approach and it was argued, "the research did not presuppose a male perpetrator and a female victim,"[8] but that the data would speak for itself. The research did not articulate emancipatory aims on behalf of research subjects, but argued for an ethical engagement for evidence-based policies as articulated below:

> Many of these analyses [early studies of CRSV] select on the dependent variable and are not comparative in nature; there is little exploration of 'negative cases' where sexual violence has not occurred [. . .]. A systematic comparison of conflicts with reports of massive sexual violence to those with little or no sexual violence could illuminate causal mechanisms and root causes [. . .]. However, a lack of reliable cross-national data has hampered the quantitative study of wartime sexual violence [. . .]. Such data can also be a critical tool to improve policy initiatives geared towards decreasing sexual violence prevalence and mitigating its effects [. . .]. (Cohen and Nordås 2014, 418)

The evidence gathered in these studies (Cohen and Nordås 2015; Hoover Green 2012) spoke to a rhetoric of exceptionalism, a focus on the war-zone and the particularities of events, actors, and settings in armed conflicts. It spoke less to a rhetoric of continuity where sexual violence in times of war is a continuation of sexual violence in times of peace. Boesten (2017, 10) summarizes what this turn in the academic literature has entailed, and argues that "a theoretical construct that helped understanding of the complexity of the relation between sexual violence, gender, nationalism and political violence when

most observers thought rape was an inevitable by-product of war (and hence, of the natural and uncontrollable violence and promiscuity of men), and which put rape in war on global policy agendas in the mid-1990s, is reduced to a simplified, measurable and limiting script that can be eradicated with the correct policy tools and based on the correct evidence." The aim is precision in understanding the war-zone; its particular strategies and tactics, and what is lost, argues Boesten (2017) as well as Davies and True (2015), is a focus on the continuities in gender-based violence, including sexual violence, in war and peace. Both approaches address the epistemological concern with the silence breakers, the foundations for which they chose to speak or stay silent, the critical/feminist and the positivist. Whereas the critical/feminist approach sees the silence breaking as a research focus in itself, the positivist approach problematizes this as data issues that impact reliability and validity. The two different approaches above illustrate that different scholars do not agree on the *explanandum* of study, i.e. what is to be explained (by scholars) and, ultimately, reacted to (by policy makers and practitioners). This is not simply a contestation over different definitions used for different studies with different data, but fundamental differences in understandings of the phenomenon being studied. Clearly, these diverse approaches share a strong ethics of engagement, but the implications of this engagement can have different outcomes in policy, practice, and further research, as will be discussed further in the next section on social justice.

Ethics of Engagement and Social Justice

At the core of both approaches outlined above is a strong commitment to social transformation to combat CRSV, albeit with somewhat different conclusions, audiences, and rhetoric. An inherent aspect of an ethics of engagement in social and political research is, as Walsh (2015, 90) points out, to contribute to "transforming social institutions, even in ways that fundamentally challenge the status quo." For CRSV research, this aim has entailed an engagement to end impunity but also toward changing socially gendered inequalities by critically investigating the roles of victims and perpetrators. The challenge is, as stated above, how to see the CRSV in the war zone; as exceptionalism or continuity of gendered relations. The fact that the victim/perpetrator dichotomy is not clear-cut male/female makes this effort even more complex. Further, this complexity could also challenge notions of good/evil along victim/perpetrator lines as well, where the perpetrator could be both victim and predator and the victim is also a survivor. Sjoberg's (2016) publication is a case in point. Her monograph *Women as wartime rapists: beyond sensation and stereotyping* is an elegant example of how gender analyses of CRSV often presuppose a particular male–female dichotomy. When unpacking these complexities and promoting research for transformation for increased social justice, it is not evident where best to direct policy efforts.

Should research focus on the emancipation of victims or on preventions of perpetrators, and in which ways?

Returning again to the pre-UNSCR 1325 literature the majority of the authors argued that "any convincing analysis of this phenomenon [CRSV] must have as its basis a clear gendered understanding of the war-zone" and any analysis that failed to do so would remain incomplete (Skjelsbæk 2001, 213–14). This view was particularly strong in the "canonized" pre-UNSCR 1325 publications. The "canon," as I saw in it in Skjelsbæk 2001 consisted of Brownmiller (1991 [1975]), Allen (1996), Copelon (1995), Drakulic (1993), Gutman (1993), MacKinnon (1993), Niarchos (1995), Nordstrom (1996), and Stiglmayer (1994). In addition to facilitating silence breaking of reporting of these crimes, the fight against impunity for perpetrators became central, and a strong legal literature grew as a result (e.g. de Brouwer et al. 2013; O'Rourke 2013; Zawati 2014). Getting perpetrators to justice relied in large part of documentation and giving voice to victims, predominantly women. Houge and Lohne (2017) argue that the end impunity approach has become *the* social justice approach to CRSV at the expense of more comprehensive efforts to address gendered inequalities as a root cause. Based on an analysis of how this aim has been framed in reporting by Human Rights Watch and the UN, they conclude that "their diagnosis and prognosis of the issues at stake overlap to the extent that they reinforce and consolidate the end impunity-approach as *the* solution to the problem of conflict-related sexual violence" (Houge and Lohne 2017, 777). In these attempts lies an oversimplification of complexities in order to strive for the goal of increased social justice, through criminal justice:

> The analysis illustrates how the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing of conflict-related sexual violence constructs and reinforces criminal law as its proper response. The diagnostic framing emphasizes the tactical use of sexual violence as an illegitimate form of warfare, as well as the opportunities provided by war for individual perpetrators. Both of these diagnoses are presented as emanating from a lack of legal order and law enforcement. The prognosis is further accentuated by the motivational framing that re-presents victims and suffering as in need of—foremost—legal redress and criminal justice. (Houge and Lohne 2017, 778)

The problem is that nuances and complexities are lost, argue the authors. "By framing conflict-related sexual violence as first and fore-most a criminal—and individualized—act, the multi-layered, complex, social, and collective phenomenon of harm that it also is, is increasingly peeled away from understandings of the problem" Houge and Lohne (2017, 781) conclude. In order to establish data to fit the law, oversimplifications were useful, and quantitative research on CRSV proved helpful for that purpose. The quantitative aim was to get "more precision in determining the patterns and trends of

sexual violence in specific conflicts is the only way to seek accountability; after all, if we just say rape in war is endemic, or inevitable, then it is apparently the natural behavior of men, or to-be-expected collateral damage of war," according to Boesten (2017, 3). It was necessary to establish agency for the perpetrators and assess guilt and responsibilities accordingly. The unintended side effects of these social justice efforts were that "the problem with the narrative authority of the end impunity mantra is not that ending impunity is irrelevant. Rather, it is not the solution its proponents claim it to be" (Houge and Lohne 2017, 783), and criminal prosecution as a means to achieve social justice does not address the underlying inequalities. While this critique is valid, criminal prosecution as well as the quantitative turn also brought a complex gendered reality to the fore. The massive documentation in court cases, as well as in quantitative databases, challenged perpetrator/victim, and male/female dichotomies, a challenge that the early literature based on a critical epistemological feminist approach did not address in full. The early literature's claim for social justice was through emancipations of female victim's voices, and sidelined male victimization. However, the cases before the international criminal prosecution mechanisms, and especially International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), have shown substantial numbers of male victims. These included men forced into perpetrator roles in detention settings, such as in the Duško Tadić case, and as regular victims of these crimes (Houge, 2008). When the NGO response has been toward women, children, and their families, then there are few places where these male victims can find psychosocial support. This way of responding has structurally incapacitated male victimization policy responses.

A more complex understanding of victimization also brought a more complex understanding of perpetration. Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood (2013) warn against a set of misconceptions regarding the perpetrators: that they are always men; that sexual violence is more common among rebel groups than state militaries; that given an opportunity, men will rape; and that it is combatants who always perpetrate sexual violence. The ways in which they address these misconceptions is by discussing definitional and measurement challenges, which need to be "more systematically addressed if we are to continue our progress toward a full understanding of wartime sexual violence" (Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013, 11). Their scholarly aim, however, appears to be to come to a "full understanding" of sexual violence crimes. This would entail closing identified research gaps such as exploring, "how and why groups do not use sexual violence [. . .], which types of formal and informal armed group institutions promote sexual violence as a practice; the conditions under which commanders (at lower as well as high levels) adopt rape as a strategy; and why many commanders believe the cost of prohibiting sexual violence is high" (Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013, 13). A full understanding is a laudable goal, but as the authors state in their conclusion, "direct on the ground engagement and service provision rightly take precedence" (Cohen,

Hoover Green, and Wood 2013, 13), suggesting that this as a goal is, perhaps, unattainable, and leaving it open how these efforts link to social justice aims. Another way of generating knowledge about sexual violence perpetrators, therefore, can be as Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2009, 2013) have done: by extensive fieldwork and qualitative interviews on the ground, in their case in the DRC. Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2009) were able to detect discourses of different forms of rape, based on a discourse analysis of interviews with 193 people in 43 group interviews. They identified "lust rapes" (which were seen as more "normal," i.e. not linked to the conflict pattern) and "evil rapes" (which happened in conjunction with other forms of war violence in the armed conflict). Their aim was not to reach a full understanding, or a grand theory, of the phenomenon of sexual violence perpetration, but rather to illuminate how "perpetrators, themselves, understand their violent crimes" (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009, 496). They argue further that, "the soldier's testimonies must be seen as a product of the particular context of the DRC—a warscape which has its local particularities, but which must also be seen as a reflection of the warscapes in diverse contexts which are crafted out of the increasingly globalized context of militarization and attendant notions of 'normal' heterosexual masculinity" (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009, 515). Leiby (2009) provides yet another approach by combining methods and comparing cases: sexual violence in Guatemala and Peru. The basis for her work is a quantitative coding of the published reports from the truth and reconciliation commissions in both countries, supplemented by fieldwork. Her focus is on the state as perpetrator, and more specifically on how the "state either explicitly encouraged, condoned, or at the very least had knowledge of the crimes being committed" (Leiby 2009, 456). In concluding her work she asks whether there are differences "in rebel groups—such as their size, their proximity to civilian populations, their resource base or their politico-military strategy—that make some more likely to commit these kinds of human rights abuses? Do these factors in turn make the state more likely to use sexual violence?" (Leiby 2009, 466). As both of the latter studies show, their findings are local, but their aims are global in that they situate their findings within different conceptual aims for understanding sexual violence perpetration. Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2009) do this by linking their findings to globalized understandings of militarization and heterosexual masculinity, and Leiby (2009) by focusing on the mechanisms that enable sexual violence perpetration and its instrumental gain in armed conflict. In other words, these studies present different pathways to conceptualizing social justice for different kinds of victims and perpetrators, through resisting gendered dichotomies, and suggesting multiple layers of perpetration. Engaging in research on sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict for the purpose of social justice and transformation sets up various challenges for the researchers; their choice of questions to ask, the data and voices that are given weight, and not the least how the research is communicated and translated to wider audiences.

Nevertheless, how to give voice to perpetrators poses new ethical difficulties for the researcher, especially when the perpetrator expresses views, attitudes, and admits having committed international crimes. How should the researcher represent these views from an ethically engaged perspective where social justice is a defined goal? Consider the following guidelines that Norwegian scholars need to relate to:

> Researchers must show respect for the values and views of research subjects, even if they differ from those generally accepted by society at large. Researchers should not ascribe irrational or unworthy motives to anyone without providing convincing arguments for doing so. (Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities, 2016, 22)

The wish to better understand and address perpetrators is formulated in the UNSC resolutions asking for specific studies on military cultures, military leadership, and more. There is different emphasis on this in different UNSC resolutions such as in UNSCR 1820 which focuses on military disciplinary measures (Action point 3), criminal prosecution (Action point 4), and prevention measures (Action point 15). UNSCR 1888 focuses on the appointment of an SRSG to ensure coherent and strategic leadership (Action point 4) and clearer identification of perpetrators (Action point 7). UNSCR 1960 focuses on listing parties to armed conflict that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for acts of rape or other forms of sexual violence (Action point 3). The emerging field of studies on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeepers is also a response to this call for knowledge on perpetration of CRSV and provides a hopeful field for further understanding and policy change. This shift is a response to a general lack of empirical knowledge on perpetrators, increased attention by the UNSC on how to prosecute and prevent perpetrators, and lack of conceptualization of the sexual violence perpetrator as opposed to other crimes committed by soldiers in wartime.

A Troubled Epistemic Community

The different approaches outlined above constitute a particular epistemic community with a shared goal, to prevent perpetrators and protect victims; but with different prescriptions of how to get there. If we look at the definition of an epistemic community provided by Haas (1992, 3) these differences becomes clear. He states that "an epistemic community may consist of professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, they have (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for

elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity—that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise—that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence." In summary, the epistemological differences make the sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict research community a somewhat distinct epistemic community; it shares a value-based rationale for knowledge production and aims for social change, but departs in notions of validity and methodology. Does it then constitute an epistemic community? I will argue that yes, it does, but not exactly in the way suggested by Haas (1992).

First, the epistemological differences are clear, but not mutually exclusive. There is a distinction between trying to understand the intersectionality between gender and violence through transactional methodologies, i.e. qualitative approaches based on interactions and sense making with research subjects versus a dualist approach focusing on observed events by various actors in time and space. The differences complement and mutually enrich each other. Further, it seems that different approaches and different scholarly disciplines carry with them different repertoires of preparedness to face the ethical engagement and challenges CRSV research can entail. Different fields of scholarship may have different forms of preparedness, language, or maybe even an academic culture to articulate impacts of CRSV research on themselves. The positivistic ideal of detachment, neutrality, and objectivity is part of this picture and sets individual researchers up for difficulties when confronted with devastating human rights violations such as CRSV. When strong emotions arise, through reading about, coding, or talking to people who have been impacted by CRSV (as victims or perpetrators), it may create a feeling of being unprofessional, nonscientific, and too subjective. As the scholarly field has evolved in the 2000s, it is important to reflect more on the ethical implications of this research engagement, not only in technical methodological terms, but also on the research community at large, as Campbell (2013), Karstedt (2002), and Simic (2017) have argued before. It is important to know whether researchers who engage in CRSV underplay the impact the research have on them in order to appear strong and confident in a competitive research environment. Do they fear asking certain questions because they are painful to ask, difficult to study, and maybe even harder to describe and make scientific? Can these discomforts be part of the reason why the quantitative turn had been so appealing? Does the quantitative turn enable researchers and policy makers alike to address CRSV without having to grapple with messiness of CRSV? These dilemmas have scholarly impact, they make us look for certain elements of CRSV and possibly overlook others. It is not just a question of epistemology, and methodology, but perhaps our ethical requirements also

hinder a fuller and more complex understanding of CRSV? Does the ethics of engagement, the fact that most scholars, whether qualitative or quantitative, wish to impact policies and practice, to produce knowledge that can help prevent, protect and mitigate CRSV, produce certain forms of blindness? Could this explain why male victimization and survival as well as perpetration of CRSV is studied less than female victimization?

Second, there is still an uncertainty as to what the phenomenon of study is. What is the research community trying to explain and improve? What is actually sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict, and equally important, what is not? What should first responders report and assist and what should researchers look for when trying to get data to advance knowledge and inform policies? In her attempt to provide knowledge for policy makers Wood (2014) notes the following:

> [B]y "conflict-related sexual violence" I mean sexual violence by armed organizations during armed conflict. By "armed organizations" or "armed actors" [...], I mean State actors (military, police, paramilitary organizations under the direct command of other State actors) and non-State actors (rebel and militia organizations). [...] By "sexual violence" I refer to sexual violence as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which includes "[r]ape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity". (Wood 2014, 458–59)

Wood places definitional emphasis on sexual actors and actions in the armed context. In her outline of points that policy makers need to consider her aim is that "[p]olicy informed by recent research on conflict-related sexual violence should be better able to prevent or mitigate its occurrence" (Wood 2014, 478) and she proceeds to present a list of ten recommendations for how to create better prevention and mitigation strategies. It is the armed groups, i.e. the perpetrators who commit, and equally important those who do not commit, that are in focus. Wood (2014) asserts that CRSV is not inevitable, and points to the fact that there are armed groups who do not commit CRSV and urges academics and policy makers alike to learn from those who do not commit these crimes as much as from those who do.

Others who also aim to provide advice to responders define CRSV somewhat differently. Health and Human Rights Info (HHRI 2014) is a case in point. In a manual they have produced for first responders to CRSV they provide a whole section on definitions where the aim is to "clarify the connection between gender-based violence (GBV)[9] and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) in war, why this has been described as a 'weapon of war', and how it affects both individuals and society" (HHRI 2014, 12). This definition demonstrates a different take on attempting to conceptualize the phenomenon, and help first responders how to react. They are told to see a phenomenon that is

based on gender inequalities and asymmetric power relations and culture, such as in this definitional outline:

> Rape is described as a 'weapon of war' because it is used to destroy communities from the inside. Women in many societies are responsible for caring for both the young and the old, and in times of war they may earn the family income. The humiliation of women also humiliates their men, who have been unable to protect them. Rape destroys trust and disrupts social networks. After rape, many women are marginalised, stigmatised, and isolated. Rape in war and forced pregnancies are also used for ethnic cleansing, to demonstrate power and destroy the enemy. GBV in war has very serious consequences. [. . .] It is therefore vitally important to provide help and assistance to survivors, to restore their dignity and self-respect, and create conditions in which they feel protected and belong in a community. (HHRI 2014, 12)

In this definitional overview, the focus has shifted from sexual actors, actions, and the armed context, to power inequalities between men and women, within and outside of the armed conflict context. The phenomenon to be dealt with is a violent and sexual attack on women's social and cultural subordinate roles. The first responders, in this case in the HHRI and their attempts to mitigate PTSD with survivors and victims, are presented with a phenomenon that is framed as a gendered continuity of violence and inequalities, and they are urged to tailor their response accordingly.

How to best frame the phenomenon is notoriously complex. Enloe (2000, 108) writes that "rape evokes the nightmarishness of war, but it becomes just an indistinguishable part of a poisonous wartime stew called 'lootpillageandrape'." Any attempt to untangle the "lootpillageandrape" nexus to make the impact of rape clearer and more visible is a political endeavor, warns Enloe, who continues by saying that such efforts are both difficult and complex. And indeed they are, and one could argue that two different discourses about CRSV have developed since Enloe wrote about this in 2000. While the "rootpillageandrape" might render rape invisible, it still suggests that CRSV is part of a repertoire of violence. Moreover, against this there exists another discourse that highlights "rape as a weapon of war," a conceptualization with which many scholars have taken issue. Not because it is necessarily a wrong definition, but it has become an exclusive optic through which CRSV is understood. Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2013) devote a whole chapter in their book on the framing of CRSV in the DRC and elegantly explain, historically, the political power embedded in this particular narrative. The conceptualization was powerful enough to put CRSV on the agenda of the UNSC; it became an issue for international peace and security concerns and redefined perpetrators, victims, and actors. However, the discourse also runs the risk of framing the phenomenon in ways that inhibit other forms of understanding

and studying perpetrators, victims, and actions. "This dominant framework reproduces a limited framework through which we can hear, feel and attend to the voices and suffering of both those who rape and those who are raped" (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, 2). Kirby (2013) echoes this concern and asserts that the weapon-of-war narrative by no means should be seen as *a* gendered analysis, but as a different feminist approach where the concepts of gender, power, and politics are debated as well. The challenge, then, is to show how this form of violence and assault is seen as part of a continuum in peace, war, and postwar (Boesten 2014; Houge and Skjelsbæk 2018) "without undermining the possibility of interventions to address such violence" (Boesten 2017, 2). How can we maintain a gendered focus without being stuck in gender binaries that might cloud conceptions and empirical observations? These differences and contentions run through the social science and policy related debates and engage scholars and practitioners in different ways. However, do these differing ways of framing the phenomenon necessarily need to be in conflict with each other? Could they, possibly, complement and expand each other?

Finally, the close connection to policy and practice leaves an ethical concern for the interpretation of research findings: their use and misuse. While there is a demand for knowledge for policy makers, there is often dissatisfaction amongst scholars of how research is seen, understood, or used. This is by no means unique to the CRSV field; it cuts across all of academia.[10] Still, there is interdependence between policy and research that can, at times, be troublesome. One example of how social science scholarship and policy scholarship has collided was the publication of the Human Security Report (HSR) in 2012 entitled *Sexual Violence, Education, and War: Beyond the Mainstream Narrative*. The report stirred a controversy over the claim that the focus on CRSV was exaggerated through claims such as "[i]n the majority of conflict countries, reported levels of sexual violence are far lower than the mainstream narrative suggests," without adequately discussing why it is that the numbers on male and female victimization is low. Further, the authors of the report argued, "the evidence suggests that the level of sexual violence worldwide is likely declining, not increasing as claimed by senior UN officials" (HSR 2012, *Introduction*). These claims were met with fierce resistance from qualitative and quantitative scholars alike (Krystalli 2014). The qualitative response[11] was that the report misrepresented the difficulties entailed in reporting and on that basis drew misguided conclusions. The qualitative response was that reporting CRSV is difficult for social reasons, and personal reasons, and for language reasons. It may not always be the case that the victim/survivor whether male or female has the necessary vocabulary to correctly identify what has happened to them. This can be particularly difficult for young victims who are sexually inexperienced, in any culture, whether it is peace or war. The quantitative critique[12] went even further and claimed that it was simply a false claim to say that CRSV was on the decline, because there were

no reliable data to support such a claim. The report, aimed at providing better policy advice, ended up being so criticized that certain funders withdrew their funding.

The CRSV field has been characterized by a strong sense of urgency. As new reports have come out about CRSV happening to large groups in women in the DRC, Syria, Yemen, and in Myanmar a few major questions repeatedly emerge: how can the victims be helped, how can CRSV be stopped from spreading and how can perpetrators (direct and those with command responsibilities) be held accountable? While the sense of urgency has been articulated in the different UNSC resolutions on CRSV, the initiative that has perhaps epitomized the impatience the most was the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), launched in 2014 with a large conference in London spearheaded by actor Angelina Jolie, and former UK Foreign Secretary William Hague. There will be a follow-up conference in 2019. The 2014 conference gathered primarily policy makers and officials to ensure political engagement from top levels. This is of course of great importance, and was also a response to the fact that those responsible for CRSV follow-up in international organizations, such as the UN, NATO, OSCE, and others, were often young, and predominantly female, staff with little or no funding. It was therefore important to change the perception that this was a soft security issue, and get recognition, as the UN had urged member states to do, that this was indeed a hard security issue. In other words, it was seen as an area of concern for military, defense, and foreign policy leaders. In this respect, the UK summit in 2014 was a success. Exactly *how* to work with these issues, *what* to do in order to prevent, respond and protect, was perhaps less clear for the high-level officials invited to the summit. In order to be able to address CRSV issues, there was a need for social science research, but many researchers were not invited to the summit, and if they were, they were not invited to present major findings. In a blogpost[13] written immediately after the conference Amelia Hoover Green wrote that "refusing to accept that a problem is too complex to tackle is one thing; refusing to accept the reality of complexity is quite another" in response to the claim made that the policy makers repeatedly stated that they refused to accept the notion the issue was too complex to tackle. The argument was that policy responses would be misguided if the focus and perception were uniquely focused on sexual violence as a weapon of war, and thereby overlooking other ways in which sexual violence operates in armed conflicts. In the *Huffington Post*[14] an open letter was posted by concerned researchers that addressed a set of myths which prevailed at the conference and which could lead to misguided policies. In the field of international criminal prosecution, however, social science research on CRSV has had a clearer role to play. While legal proceedings on sexual violence in national courts often focus on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, in international criminal prosecution settings such as the ICTY, the ICTR, the ICC, and others, it is the contextual, and coercive, setting which encompasses the crimes which needs to be proven in court.

In order to do so, social science knowledge is needed. For how do you establish that a coercive environment has been the site of the CRSV crimes? How do you determine who are vulnerable groups and populations, the aggressors, the political and military leadership which are, presumably, responsible for the crimes? There is a need for witnesses and experts on war and armed conflict. These experts must have different kinds of knowledge and expertise about the war zone. Further, this knowledge must be transferred to first responders. They must learn to know how to recognize traumatic responses to CRSV in victims and survivors and they must know what to take down, report, and document if the crimes should end up in an international criminal court. Uniforms, insignia, and symbols must be documented by doctors, police, aid workers, and others who are the first to assist CRSV survivors. This is not always easy to remember and so interaction between social science scholars, legal scholars, and the policy communities is core, but not always seen as priority.

Conclusion

Research on sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict has grown to become a large scholarly field with a particular ethics of engagement at its core. As an epistemic community, all research in this field strives for greater wellbeing and societal transformations that aim to prevent sexual violence crimes and mitigate the impact on victims. The scholarly community is also characterized by an epistemological divide, a divide that frames the research questions, methodologies, and implications of findings in different ways. These differences are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the diversity of approaches enables communication with different policy communities in different ways, and suggests varied paths to increased social justice. What the myriad of studies and approaches also show, however, is that the complexities involved in sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict are hard to encapsulate in one set of studies. Rather, the field needs multiple voices, approaches, and prescriptions to prevent and mitigate these crimes.

If there is anything the recent global *#metoo* campaign has shown, it is that there is a need to share and give voice and language to the myriad of experiences, interpretation, and framing of events. Only then can the focus be directed where it needs to be: toward those who make it happen—the principal perpetrators and the bystanders who silently accept and condone crimes which should have been unacceptable.

Notes

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1. In *Dagrevyen* December 1, 2017 (the major news show on the major public news channel in Norway).
2. "At UN, Yazidi woman tells of sexual torture by ISIS", last modified November 10, 2017, accessed December 18, 2017, https://www.newsday.com/news/world/un-isis-sexual-torture-survivior-nadia-murad-1.14912103
3. "Sexual violence in war zones at 'worst ever' as drive to protect women falters", last modified November 26, 2017, accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/nov/26/rohingya-rape-sexual-violence-un-women and "AP: Rohingya methodically raped by Myanmar's armed forces", last modified December 11, 2017, accessed December 18, 2017, https://apnews.com/5e4a1351468f4755a6f861e39ec782c9/AP-Investigation:-Rape-of-Rohingya-sweeping,-methodical?ncid=newsltushpmgnews__TheMorningEmail__121117
4. "Ten Reasons Not To Write Your Master's Dissertation on Sexual Violence in War," last modified June 4, 2013, accessed September 26, 2018, https://thedisorderofthings.com/2013/06/04/ten-reasons-not-to-write-your-masters-dissertation-on-sexual-violence-in-war/
5. "The Missing Peace Symposium 2013 | Young Scholar Network," last modified 2013, accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.usip.org/events/the-missing-peace-symposium-2013/young-scholars
6. "About the Centre for the Study of Civil War (2002–2012)," last modified in 2012, accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.prio.org/Programmes/Extensions/Centre-for-the-Study-of-Civil-War/About/
7. "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict Dataset," last modified in 2016, accessed September 26, 2018, http://www.sexualviolencedata.org/dataset/
8. Argument made at the Missing Peace Symposium 2013, panel entitled "Methodological Challenges and Opportunities" which can be found at "The Missing Peace Symposium 2013 Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings," last modified in 2013, accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.usip.org/events/missing-peace-symposium-2013
9. United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women defines GBV 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." "General Assembly", last modified December 20, 1993, accessed September 26, 2018, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm

10. See "Research impact on policy-making is often understood in instrumentalist terms, but more often plays symbolic role," last modified June 17, 2014, accessed September 26, 2018, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/07/17/research-impact-policy-symbolic-instrumental/
11. See "The Dangerous Arguments in the 2012 Human Security Report: Moving the Debate Away from the Academics and the Wonks," last modified March 7, 2013, accessed September 26, 2018, http://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/03/07/the-dangerous-arguments-in-the-2012-human-security-report-moving-the-debate-away-from-the-academics-and-the-wonks/
12. See "Is Wartime Rape Declining On a Global Scale? We Don't Know—And It Doesn't Matter," last modified November 1, 2012, accessed September 26, 2018, http://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2012/11/01/is-wartime-rape-declining-on-a-global-scale-we-dont-know-and-it-doesnt-matter/
13. See "Ignoring the evidence at the End Sexual Violence in Conflict summit," last modified June 17, 2014, accessed September 26, 2018, http://www.womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/ignoring-the-evidence-at-the-global-summit-to-end-sexual-violence-in-confli#.U6B-Gp19PqY.facebook
14. See "An Open Letter to UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie," last modified June 17, 2014, accessed September 26, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/kim-thuy-seelinger-jd/sexual-violence-initiative_b_5490235.html

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