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„Gender and Ethnicity in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
Insights from Intrastate Conflict in the Horn of Africa“

verfasst von | submitted by

“Annkathrin Elisabeth Rest”

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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.



Annkathrin Elisabeth Rest

Abstract

Interested in more profoundly understanding the perpetration of sexual violence during armed conflict, to explain variation in the form, frequency, targeting and intent with which it is committed, this thesis conducts a comparative analysis of three intrastate conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Drawing from feminist theory, masculinity studies and intersectionality the thesis develops a three-layer theoretical framework which it proceeds to apply in a comparative manner to the cases Sudan (2003-2005), South Sudan (2013-2017), and Ethiopia (2020-2022). Building on the well-established causes of war-time sexual violence, the thesis innovatively asserts that variation in the perpetration of sexual violence across conflicts is determined by the nuances of the conflict, as well as the extent to which ethnic grievances predate the escalation of violence. Nonetheless, it finds that commonalities outweigh differences, illustrating the profound impact of gender inequality, the militarization of masculinity and shared contextual factors such as displacement and food insecurity which exacerbate the vulnerability of people marginalised for multiple layers of their identity. In that it makes a valuable contribution to an emerging body of literature that is starting to explore nuance, and comparatively examine why sexual violence can vary so profoundly both within and across conflicts.

Abstrakt

Um ein tieferes Verständnis dafür zu erlangen, wieso und auf welche Art und Weise sexuelle Gewalt in bewaffneten Konflikten verübt wird, sowie um Variation in der Form, Frequenz, Zielausrichtung, und Absicht zu erklären, führt diese Arbeit eine vergleichende Analyse von drei innerstaatlichen Konflikten am Horn von Afrika durch. Basierend auf feministischer Theorie, Maskulinitätstheorie und Intersektionalität entwickelt die Arbeit einen dreistufigen theoretischen Rahmen. Dieser wird anschließend vergleichend auf die Konflikte im Sudan (2003-2005), im Südsudan (2013-2017) und in Äthiopien (2020-2022) angewandt. Basierend auf den etablierten Ursachen sexueller Gewalt, stellt diese These fest, dass die Unterschiede bei der Ausübung sexueller Gewalt durch die Nuancen des Konflikts, sowie durch das Ausmaß, in dem ethnische Missstände der Eskalation der Gewalt vorausgehen, bestimmt werden. Dennoch überwiegen die Gemeinsamkeiten die Unterschiede, wodurch die tiefgreifenden Auswirkungen der Geschlechterungleichheit, der Militarisierung von Männlichkeit und gemeinsamer Kontextfaktoren wie Vertreibung und Ernährungsunsicherheit verdeutlicht werden. Somit werden schlussendlich Menschen gefährdet, die aufgrund mehrerer Aspekte ihrer Identität marginalisiert und benachteiligt werden. Damit leistet die These einen wertvollen Beitrag in einer neu entstehenden Literatur, die beginnt, Nuancen zu erforschen und vergleichend zu untersuchen, warum sexuelle Gewalt sowohl innerhalb von Konflikten als auch zwischen Konflikten so stark variiert.

List of Abbreviations

ASF	Amhara Special Forces
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
EDF	Eritrean Defense Forces
EHCR	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
PoC	Protection of Civilian
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SPLA	South Sudan People's Defence Forces
SPLA-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TDF	Tigray Defence Force
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

1. Introduction

"It is perhaps more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict"

Patrick Cammaert - ret. UN Division Commander for the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

(as cited in United Nations Development Fund for Women, no date).

Rape and sexual violence have long left their marks on armed conflicts. From the 'Rape of Nanking' in WWII, to the genocides perpetrated in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo¹, Sierra Leone, El Salvador and Peru, and ongoing ethnic cleansing campaigns in Myanmar, Iraq, and Syria conflict-related sexual violence has been ever present (United Nations Development Fund for Women, no date). It has also surfaced as an issue of concern in the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict with a two-month investigation conducted by the New York Times revealing that Hamas weaponized sexual violence in its terrorist attack on October 7th (Gettleman, Schwartz, and Sella, 2023). UN Women (2024) has also drawn attention to the vulnerability of displaced Palestinians to gender-based violence in overcrowded shelters and refugee camps. Moreover, the destruction of medical infrastructure in Gaza, inhibits operational safe spaces for victims of gender-based violence.

As Mary Kaldor's (2013: 4) 'new war' thesis puts forward, the line between civilians and combatants has become increasingly blurred in contemporary conflict. Situating itself within the recent wave of literature that sheds light on the atrocities committed against civilians during armed conflict (Balcells and Standon, 2021: 58), this thesis conceptualizes conflict-related sexual violence as a highly gendered, grave and fundamental human rights violation that causes detrimental physical, psychological, cultural and socio-economic harm to victims. Moreover, this thesis underlines that conflict-related sexual violence should not be reduced to 'rape as a weapon of war,' since overemphasizing the strategic dimension of war-time sexual violence threatens to obscure the complexity and heterogeneity of the phenomenon.

The causes of conflict-related sexual violence are considerably well established, ranging from the tactical dimension to the socialization hypothesis emphasizing the militarization of

¹ In the Democratic Republic of Congo, also known as the "rape capital," over 200,000 individuals have fallen victim to sexual violence since 1996 (United Nations Development Fund for Women, no date).

masculinities, to the employment of rape to target reproductive capabilities and deliberately alter the ethnic makeup of a group. This thesis acknowledges that it is often an interplay of the above-mentioned causes that prompts conflict-related sexual violence, and that depending on the nature of the conflict as well as contextual factors one cause will be more pronounced than the others.

Recent literature has validly put forward (Wood, 2006, 2014) that sexual violence varies in form, frequency, and targeting, whereby the identity of victims and perpetrators become nuanced. Building on the well-documented variation of war-time sexual violence, as well as the existing thorough analysis of its causes, this thesis seeks to contribute to an emerging body of literature that explores the determinants of such variation. It is interested in uncovering the factors that explain variation in form, frequency and targeting of sexual violence. In that, it aims to further the establishment of a solid evidence base that informs policymaking and thereby has the potential to prevent, combat and prosecute these atrocious crimes (Skjelsbaeck, 2001: 228).

Firstly, on a foundational level, this thesis asserts that in all conflicts profound gender inequality, the militarization of masculinity and the erosion of the rule of law intersect to create pre-dispositions for conflict-related sexual violence, allowing it to proliferate as a tolerated practice. Building on this, the thesis then argues that variation in the form, frequency, and targeting of sexual violence across conflicts, is determined by the nature of the conflict. It argues that particularly the form, which is linked to strategic intentions, will vary depending on whether a conflict is political or ethnic in nature. Moreover, it asserts that targeting is determined by the extent and dynamics of ethnic grievances predating the escalation of violence, and further mediated by contextual factors relating to the humanitarian situation. Finally, it puts forward the claim that since conflict-related sexual violence is a gendered crime, it will vary in form depending on which gender is targeted, thus affecting men and women differently.

To support this line of argumentation, and test its hypotheses, the thesis first critically engages with the existing literature and relevant meta-theoretical approaches, identifying gaps to establish a point of departure for its own research. It then develops an independent

theoretical framework, which it substantiates using meta-theory, and justifies against the backdrop another case: the Yazidi Genocide (2014-2017). Before applying its theoretical framework, the thesis defines its methodology, outlining and justifying its comparative design, the selection of sources and case studies.

Three chronologically structured empirical chapters follow: Sudan (2003-2005), South Sudan (2013-2017) and Ethiopia (2020-2022). Each chapter first considers the grievances predating the conflict and contextual factors, i.e., displacement, food insecurity and looting. Then all three chapters thoroughly investigate the perpetration of CRSV, analysing frequency, form, targeting and perpetrators as well as enablers and motivating factors. Woven into its analysis the thesis compares findings both within and across the conflicts to substantiate its argument and respond to the central research puzzle.

2. Definitions

2.1 Gender-based violence

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1994) in Article 1 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.” Gender-based violence is a broad phenomenon encompassing not only physical but also verbal, psychological, sexual and socio-economic violence. Moreover, gender-based violence occurs both in the private sphere, through domestic or intimate partner violence, as well as in the public sphere, committed either by individuals unknown to the victims or actors representing institutions or states (World Health Organization, 2024). It is important to define gender-based violence since GBV in the private sphere, particularly IPV, may sharply increase during conflict. Moreover, high rates of domestic and intimate partner violence predating the conflict are linked to the normalization and institutionalization of sexual violence in military settings by armed actors.

2.2 Conflict-related sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence is a specific form of gender-based violence that is,

- 1.) sexual and/or reproductive in nature,
- 2.) committed in the context of an armed conflict and
- 3.) perpetrated by an armed actor, whether state military, militia, insurgency or terrorist group.

Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organization as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting” (Krug et al., 2002: 149). Conflict-related sexual violence, is then defined by the United Nations Secretary General (2023: 2) as “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable

gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.”

Rape

Rape, the most prominent form of sexual violence, is defined by the World Health Organization as “physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and other non-contact forms” (Krug et al., 2002: 149).

Gang Rape

Gang rape, which is highly common in conflict settings, is defined by the World Health Organization as “rape of a person by two or more perpetrators” (Krug et al., 2002: 149).

Sexual Slavery

Sexual slavery is defined by the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (no date: 7) as “the sexual exploitation of individuals through the use or threat of force, often occurring in times of armed conflict or belligerent occupation.”

Forced Pregnancy

Forced pregnancy is defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (no date) as the “unlawful confinement of a woman who has been forcibly impregnated, with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population or carrying out other grave violations of international law.”

Forced Marriage

Forced marriage, according to the Global Protection Cluster (no date), “is a marriage in which one or more of the parties is married without their consent or against their will,” noting that “in conflict-affected areas, girls may be kidnapped and forced to marry members of armed forces or armed groups.”

Child Marriage

The Global Protection Cluster (no date) further specifies that early marriage “between a child under the age of 18 with an adult or another child (...) is considered a form of forced marriage because of the impossibility for a child to give full, free and informed consent” (ibid.,).

As the name implies, conflict-related sexual violence is perpetrated in the context of an armed conflict. The Report of the Secretary General (2023: 2) specifies that this direct or indirect link can be exhibited by the profile of the perpetrator “who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, including those designated as terrorist groups and network”, the profile of the victim, “frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority (...)” or the climate of impunity which arises due to “state collapse; cross-border consequences (...); and/or violations of the provisions of ceasefire agreements.”

CRSV may amount to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Additionally, if perpetrated as part of a systematic attack against a civilian population, it may be considered a war crime or crime against humanity as per Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). Moreover, conflict-related sexual violence may be perpetrated in the context of genocide, “committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Relevant provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) include Article II, “b.) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, c.) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part d.) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.”

3. Theory

3.1 Overview of the Literature

Feminist Security Studies apply the lens of gender to traditional notions of security to explore how and why men and women experience armed conflict differently. In the 1990s, when feminist theory of international relations first gained prominence, it focused heavily on the issue of war-time sexual violence. It was only in the early 2000s that it began analysing the agency of women in perpetrating violence, for example as part of guerrilla insurgencies or terrorist organisations. Nonetheless, the study of CRSV remains the most pronounced stream of Feminist Security Studies. This body of literature has benefitted from contributions from a multitude of disciplines ranging from sociology, anthropology, and psychology, to public health, legal studies and criminology. The understanding and study of CRSV is thus multi-disciplinary and holistic in nature.

3.1.1 Meta-Theoretical Foundation

A crucial point of departure to more profoundly understand the gendered dynamics of conflict, as well as conflict-related sexual violence, is constructivist feminism. This meta-theoretical approach understands gender, more specifically masculinity and femininity, as asymmetrical social constructs that serve to perpetuate and sustain hierarchical gender relations, as well as systems of patriarchal oppression (Rest, 2023: 9). Masculinity has historically been linked to the 'public sphere' and 'high politics' and thus associated with highly valued qualities such as strength, reason, objectivity, decisiveness and agency (Rest, 2023: 9). Femininity, on the other hand, has been confined to the 'private sphere' and domain of 'low politics' and thereby linked to qualities that are considered less favourable such as emotion, indecisiveness, fragility and passivity (Rest, 2023: 9). The historical privileging of what is associated with masculinity serves as the foundation of the patriarchal state and system, and is subconsciously reproduced by most members of society on a daily basis (Peterson, 2010). Furthermore, gender is relational meaning that privileging masculinity is innately connected to de-valuing the feminine (ibid., 11). De-valuing femininity then "constitutes a governing code that legitimates and sustains structural oppression" (ibid., 18). The binary division between masculinity and femininity, as well as the intrinsic de-valorisation

of everything apart from heteronormative masculinity (ibid., 11), is a useful analytical starting point for assessing conflict-related sexual violence.

Having established that socially constructed patriarchal gender norms act as a cross-cutting red-thread, a second important analytical starting point is to explore how gender intersects with other layers of identity and vulnerability. This thesis considers intersectionality an integral conceptual tool (Dill, 2012: 2) to explore CRSV, as it sheds lights on how patriarchal power relations are further mediated by factors such as race, social class, ethnicity, culture, history, language and migrant status (Morales, 1990: 50 as cited in Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008: 5). Intersectionality allows a thorough examination of multidimensionality and prevents us from essentializing the female experience without paying sufficient attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008: 5). It puts forward the powerful and valid claim that race-, class- and gender-based systems of oppression are profoundly interconnected, intersecting to deepen and maintain structural inequality.

Intersectionality has its roots in the political mobilization of black women in the 1970s and 1980s (Smith, 2013; Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008: 5; Carastathis, 2014: 305-6). Since then, intersectionality experienced an upsurge in the early 2000s (Carastathis, 2014: 309) and has subsequently been applied in a wide variety of disciplines (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013: 787). Many are critical of this, asserting that as intersectionality has been mainstreamed, its dilution and misapplication threatens “to obscure or reproduce the very phenomenon intersectionality was conceived to illuminate and overcome” (ibid., 312). This thesis seeks to apply intersectionality with attentiveness, integrity and rigor (Carastathis, 2014: 312), to establish how certain layers of inequality and marginalization are mutually constituted and interdependent (Thornton Dill and Kohlmann, 2012: 20), and thereby exacerbate vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence.

3.1.2 Explanations in the Literature

Upon thoroughly reviewing the literature, this thesis identifies four main streams that offer explanations as to why sexual violence, and particularly rape, are prevalent during armed conflict. It considers these streams useful in conceptualizing the motivating and enabling

factors underlying conflict-related sexual violence and predicts a convergence of all four explanations in practice, further depending on the nature and circumstances of the conflict and armed actors involved.

1. Opportunistic Approach

Firstly the 'opportunistic' approach, which is rooted in the assumption that male sexual desire is uncontrollable (Mitchell, 2004: 13), asserts that "soldiers rape because war provides them with ample opportunity to do so" (Meger, 2016 as cited in Houghe and Lohne, 2017: 759). It thus assumes if provided with an opportunity, most men will rape women, particularly in climates where social norms have receded. Such rape may then be motivated by sexual gratification, personal revenge or deep-rooted misogyny predating the conflict (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10). Critics have argued that this explanation is an oversimplification rooted in essentialist ideas of masculinity and femininity, moreover, failing to explain the brutality of rape perpetrated using sharp objects, sexual torture, genital mutilation, and gang rape (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10).

In fact, studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo have interestingly shown that widespread rape of civilians still occurred in situations where fighters had access to sex workers (Wood, 2009: 150). Additionally, the opportunistic school reinforces the narrative that "rape is an inevitable by-product of war, that women are spoils of war, and that sexual violence is unavoidable collateral damage" (Mitchell, 2004: 13). Although this thesis agrees with the claim that climates of impunity, where violence becomes the norm, the frequency of sexual violence increases, it believes that there is something more than male sexual desire causing CRSV at such drastic scales. Moreover, perpetration of sexual violence is often not merely an opportunistic, individual decision, but often also an institutionally designed practice.

2. Socialization Approach

The second stream, i.e., the 'socialization hypothesis', asserts that rape proliferates during conflict because it becomes a tolerated practice (Wood, 2014; Baaz and Stern, 2013). This strand claims that soldiers may be inclined to participate in CRSV for social reasons, i.e., to create bonds with fellow soldiers in the unit, especially through gang-rape, or to conform to

the behavior of others in the unit as a result of peer-pressure (Cynthia Enloe, 2004: 115). Furthermore, tolerance of such practices is often widespread because prohibition is costly. Resources may be scarce and there might be a preference to protect otherwise capable troops instead of disciplining them (Wood, 2014: 17). This reinforces the feminist argument that militaries are sites of hegemonic masculinity that condition misogynist behavior and allow CRSV to thrive in cultures of impunity (von Joeden-Forger, 2012).

To better understand the socialization hypothesis, it is relevant to consult masculinity theory, which originated within the feminist paradigm (Fehlberg and Pepper, 2016: 674), and reveals that CRSV is “a gendered tool of war that constructs and reinforces hegemonic masculinity as a means to empower specific groups during conflict” (Vojdik, 2013: 944). Scholars understand masculinity as a relational social practice (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 829, 836 as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 941; Henshaw, 2017: 27), “created by and through men and in opposition to femininity” (Connell, p. 68 as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 940). Hegemonic masculinity, a term coined by the sociologist Raewyn Connell (1982), is the most privileged form (Connell, 2000: 10-11 as cited in Henshaw, 2017: 28) and defined by access to money and political power as well as physical strength (Fehlberg and Pepper, 2016: 675).

Militarized institutions, as sites of hegemonic masculinity, conceptualize “manhood” in extreme forms (Enloe 2000, Skjelsbaek 2001 and Tosh 2004 as cited in Fehlberg and Pepper, 2016: 678) to incentivize violence. In addition to this, they produce an essentialized image of the ideal male soldier and warrior (Goldstein as cited in Vojdik, 2013), socializing combatants into thinking that soldiering is “a ‘naturally’ manly activity” (Enloe, 2004: 109), thereby justifying extreme violence (Goldstein as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 994). Chris Coulter (2015 as cited in Fehlberg and Pepper, 2016: 676) argues that rape and sexual violence serve to demonstrate and uphold the warrior status.

Furthermore, to uphold these ideologies, institutionalization and constant re-enforcement are necessary (Vojdik, 2013: 941-2). Several studies have interestingly shown that groups who recruit by force and abduction use rape to build cohesion and solidarity among involuntary recruits (Cohen, 2011: 3 as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 943). Within small units sexual violence then becomes a tool to enforce conformity. Goldstein (2001 as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 944)

interestingly argues that because sexual violence is a taboo, perpetrating it collectively creates “allegiance in atrocity.” Through “violations of the bodies of the ‘other’” group cohesion is enhanced (Fraiman 2001 and Sivakumaran 2007 as cited in Vojdik, 2013: 944).

Finally, the perpetration of sexual violence strengthens and solidifies the patriarchal order (Fahlberg and Pepper, 2016) and may even become a “compensatory mechanism” to assert dominance (Kaufmann, 1999: 17 as cited in Fahlberg and Pepper, 2016: 675), especially in the absence of other means (Messerschmidt, 2000 as cited in *ibid.*). Related to this is the ‘continuum of violence’ perspective, which puts forward the argument that war-time sexual violence is merely an amplification and intensification of everyday, peace-time sexual violence (Cockburn, 2004 and Eduards, 2004 as cited in Houghe, 2015: 17). This argument has been substantiated by field work documenting that already high levels of intimate partner, intrafamilial and intercommunal sexual violence only further increase during conflict, highlighting the “everydayness of rape” (Copelon, 1994 as cited in Buss, 2008: 110).

3. Strategic Approach

The strategic approach originated with Susan Brownmiller (1977), who was the first to assert that rape is motivated by the will to exert dominance and power and is therefore the “ultimate act of subjugation.” Scholars have built on her work to advance and establish the concept of ‘rape as a weapon of war’ (Kirby, 2013), arguing that sexual violence, particularly rape, is purposefully ordered by commanders in pursuit of strategic aims such as terrorizing and disintegrating communities to make territorial gains, degrade prisoners, and engage in campaigns of ethnic cleansing (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10). There are clear examples of rape constituting institutional and orchestrated policy, most prominently in Bosnia-Herzegovina (*ibid.*). Rape thus often constitutes “a political form of aggression” (Eisenstein 2007: 28 as cited in Kirby, 2013: 5).

The employment of sexual violence as a weapon of war is facilitated by deeply rooted patriarchal norms, derived from socially constructed gender identities (Rest, 2023: 1). The masculinity-femininity binary is reproduced during conflict, creating a distinction between armed masculinities and victimized femininities (Peterson, 2010). As Cynthia Cockburn (2010:

152) puts it, binary patriarchal gender identities “not only serve(s) militarism (...) but seek(s) and need(s) militarization and war for (...) fulfilment.” The idealization of maternal femininity incentivizes a protectionist logic (Peterson, 2010: 21). Most famously, Jean Elshtain (1982) argued that depicting women as ‘beautiful souls’ and men as ‘just warriors’ serves as legitimization for war. Rape then attacks the very foundations and social fabric of a community, rooted in the belief that women are the backbones of society, holding together the harmony and cohesion of a group (Amnesty International, 2004a: 20). Rooted in the protectionist logic, sexual violence then serves as a tool for emasculation, demonstrating the helplessness and incapacity of men to protect their women, communities, and hence the country at large.

Rooted in the militarization of masculinity, and the privileging of hegemonic masculinity, which comes at the cost of all “sexually, racially, culturally, and economically marginalized men (Peterson, 2010: 19), homosexual violence also follows strategic objectives. The victimization of men, through the perpetration of homosexual violence (Vojdick, 2013: 942), constitutes a humiliating and feminizing act that constructs the perpetrators as masculine and the male victims as feminine- Paradoxically this is linked to the prescription of compulsory heterosexuality and fear homoeroticism (Henshaw, 2017: 37) in heteronormative military institutions that reject queerness and femineity as weak and undesirable attributes (Taylor, 2023: 5).

Finally, on a reproductive level, through the de-valorization of the feminine women’s bodies become vessels to execute genocide through forced impregnation, marriage, sterilization, abortion, and genital mutilation. Gender can thereby also be utilized to feminize, objectify, and dehumanize an “inferior other,” in this case an ethnicity that is perceived as “lesser than.” (Peterson, 2010: 21).

4. Gender-Genocide Nexus Approach

The fourth strand in the literature takes the previous argument further, focusing on the intersection of gender and ethnicity, shedding light on gender-selective killing and the concept of ‘genocidal rape’. It was only in the aftermath of the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides, particularly through the landmark Akayesu ruling, which defined “rape as an

‘instrument of genocide’” (Askin, 2003: 288; Buss, 2008: 11; Russel-Brown, 2003: 351), that genocide studies became more gender sensitive. Scholars drew attention to the “gender-selective mass killing” (Jones, 2000: 185) that target enemy men and thereby inhibit the group from reproducing. Particularly in patrilineal societies, where ethnic and religious identity are marked by the father, the killing of potential fathers alters the ethnic and religious make-up of the next generation (Ashrap, 2017: 19).

A more prominent debate is around the concept of ‘genocidal rape,’ which according to Catherine MacKinnon (1993 as cited in Russell-Brown, 2003: 364-365) is a “crime that implicates both gender and ethnicity – certain women are being raped by certain men for particular reasons.” It is widely recognised that rape and other forms of sexual violence can amount to genocidal acts if there exists a *dolus specialias* to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group (Russell-Brown, 2003: 362). However, whilst MacKinnon and Jasminka Kalajdzic take an intersectional approach, emphasizing its uniqueness and difference, Rhonda Copelon (as cited in Russell-Brown, 2003: 351) is critical pointing out that an overemphasis on genocidal rape could falsely equate rape and genocide, and thereby make invisible rape that occurs outside the context of genocide. Though this thesis considers her critique valid, it agrees with MacKinnon and Kalajdzic (as cited in Russell-Brown, 2003: 364) that one must emphasize both the generic and particular about the crime of genocidal rape. Moreover, MacKinnon validly asserts that genocidal rape does not merely target women on the basis of their identity as a woman, but also on the basis of their membership in a particular ethnic group.

This illustrates the importance of an intersectional approach, which is highly critical of conceptualizing ‘womanhood’ as a universal experience, warning that this erases power relations between women of different ethnicities, colours, cultures, sexualities, and socio-economic backgrounds (Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996, Hill Collins 199a, 1999b and Hooks 1981 and 1989 as cited in Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008: 6; Salem, 2013). Intersectionality rejects the theorization of gender as a single analytical category and understands identity as multidimensional (Morales, 1990: 50 as cited in Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008: 5), marked by the “interlocking effects of race, class, gender and sexuality” (Thornton Dill and Kohlman, 2012: 2).

Ethnic rape then becomes a policy perpetrated against an individual as a result of multiple aspects of his/her identity (Thornton Dill and Zambrana: 7 as cited in Carastathis, 2014: 307). Ethnic rape can be performed as a spectacle, to shatter communities, and to force whole groups into exile, displacing them from their land (Russel-Brown, 2003: 350). Moreover, E. von Joerden-Forgey (2012: 91) validly asserts “that one can destroy a group by destroying that group’s ability to reproduce” (ibid., 94). This can be carried out by the mass-killing of potential fathers, systematic mass rape of women of reproductive age, forced impregnation, and forced marriage of women to genocidaires. All these measures, particularly is perpetrated jointly, alter the genetic makeup of an ethnic group. Moreover, rape with sharp objects, forced abortion, forced sterilization, and genital mutilation decrease birth rates and therefore indirectly inhibit communities from passing down their culture, language and religion (Ruby Reid-Cunningham, 2008). Linked to this is the trauma inflicted on victims, which gives rise to anxiety over sex reducing the desire to reproduce (Human Rights Council, 2016: 27).

3.1.3 Weaknesses and Gaps in the Literature

Though the framework established above gives a solid overview of why sexual violence is perpetrated during conflict, it risks oversimplifying the experiences of victims. Emerging research sheds light on the realities of vulnerable groups that have previously been ignored in dominant policy discussions. One stream in the literature for example sheds light on the vulnerability of internally displaced peoples and refugees, particularly those living in camps, who are at exacerbated risk of falling victim to CRSV (Horn, 2010).

Moreover, the victimization of men and boys has long been a blind spot in the literature on CRSV with only recently emerging scholarship (Sivakumaran, 2005, 2007) discussing the perpetration of blunt genital trauma against men (Carlson, 2006). Research on how rape, forced sterilization, forced nudity, forced masturbation are used to emasculate and humiliate men is also still in its early stages (Sivakumaran, 2005: 1281, 2007: 253, 260, 270). Survey data on male victims of CRSV is also weak, considering that patriarchal gender norms often undermine victim identification and referral (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013).

Another gap in the literature has been identified by Elisabeth Wood (2006: 330) who asserts that although variation in CRSV is well-documented, the determinants of variation are not as well-established, noting the lack of “an adequate explanation for its variation across wars and armed conflict” (ibid., 330). Only recently scholars have taken a comparative approach to investigate variation in the form and severity of CRSV both across and within conflicts (Cohen, 2010, Leiby, 2009 and Wood, 2008 as cited in Cohen, 2013). Wood (2009) further points out that there is limited emphasis on ‘negative cases,’ i.e., conflicts where CRSV is absent or only occurs at low levels. Another interesting and under researched area are ‘asymmetrical cases’ where sexual violence is perpetrated only by one actor but not the other in an armed conflict. To explain variation in CRSV scholars have also conducted conduct comparative analysis at the armed group level to assess organizational dynamics (Balcells and Standon, 2021) as well as the relationship between recruitment practices and the occurrence of wartime rape (Cohen, 2013). Finally, at the macro-level scholars have conducted comparisons across conflicts (Balcells and Standon, 2021), for instance between ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts.

In light of this well-established variation and emerging interest in offering explanations as to why CRSV varies, this thesis in seeks to explore variation in more depth. It aims to build on the established explanations of conflict-related sexual violence and explore in more depth the nuances in form, frequency, targeting and intent. It thereby hopes to contribute to the emerging stream in the literature that is taking an increasingly comparative approach to observe patterns at the macro and micro-level. As Balcells and Standon (2021) point out, studying variation at both levels in a comparative fashion is innovative and promises to overcome the issue of generalizability.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Synthesizing meta-theories such as constructivist feminism, masculinity theory, and intersectionality with prominent streams in the literature, this thesis puts forward an independent three-layer theoretical framework.

1. On a foundational level, deeply entrenched gender inequality, militarized masculinities and socialization into extreme violence create environments conducive

to sexual violence. This normalization of conflict-related sexual violence is reinforced through impunity, the erosion of the rule of law and the disintegration of social norms.

2. Once sexual violence becomes a normalised and tolerated practice, it is perpetrated to achieve strategic objectives. Depending on the nature of the conflict and military objectives of the armed actor, sexual violence may serve to terrorize populations and force them into exile, or deliberately target the reproductive capabilities of women to alter the ethnic make-up of the next generation.
3. The targeting of sexual violence is influenced by a number of contextual factors, namely poverty and displacement, as well as grievances predating the conflict, leading to the disproportionate victimization of vulnerable members of society as well as those belonging to certain ethnic and political groups.

The thesis thus predicts a convergence of the four main explanations offered in the literature. It understands conflict-related sexual violence as an exercise of power and domination, linked to patriarchal oppression, as well as compounding forms of inequality and marginalization.

3.2.1 Enabling Factors

At the foundational level, several enabling factors that interact to incentivize and lay the foundations for the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence. The most fundamental of all is gender inequality, more specifically the masculinity-femininity binary, patriarchal social order and asymmetrical gendered social identities. This thesis theorizes that the more deeply entrenched gender inequality is into society, the higher the levels of conflict-related sexual violence will be. Rooted in the 'continuum of violence' approach it draws an analytical link between high levels of intimate partner and domestic violence during peacetime, often coupled with widespread harmful traditional practices, and war-time sexual violence.

Linked to gender inequality and the normalization of sexual violence is the erosion of the rule of law, which permits high levels of impunity. Moreover, in the absence of institutional structures men may seek to prove their manhood, which is otherwise tied to wealth and

status, through alternative means. Particularly as social norms diffuse, and violence is normalized, inhibitions are extremely low. Thirdly, as young men are socialized into extreme violence and militaries become sites of hegemonic hypermasculinity, war-time rape is not only tolerated but encouraged, often used to enhance soldierly solidarity and group cohesion.

The convergence of these three enabling factors create an environment in which sexual violence against women and other marginalized subjects is not only enabled and tolerated, but legitimized and encouraged.

3.2.2 Motivating Factors

At a second stage, building on the legitimization of sexual violence, a strategic element may be introduced, through which conflict-related sexual violence becomes a 'weapon of war' serving military objectives. This thesis theorizes that as a result of becoming an unquestioned practice, conflict-related sexual violence may then be perpetrated for strategic purposes. As already explored, the tactical use of rape is inherently linked to gendered social identities, which permit conflict-related sexual violence to shatter social fabrics. If the layer of ethnicity is added, the form and targeting with which conflict-related is perpetrated changes, expanding the strategic use of sexual violence from a 'weapon of war' to an instrument for ethnic cleaning and in extreme cases a 'weapon of genocide.'

3.2.3 Contextual Factors

Thirdly, there are several contextual factors influencing the targeting of conflict-related sexual violence, making certain individuals particularly vulnerable due to their socio-economic situation, political affiliation and/or membership in an ethnic or racial group. It is on the one hand circumstantial factors, such as displacement, food insecurity and loss of property, that exacerbate vulnerability to such violence. On the other hand, targeting is rarely indiscriminate and often based on actual or perceived affiliation with an ethnic, racial or political group, rooted in ethnic grievances predating the conflict.

3.2.4 Previous Case Studies

Yazidi Genocide (2014 – 2017)

In previous research the author has already studied the ways in which asymmetrical social constructs of masculinity and femininity have enabled and reproduced the employment of conflict-related sexual violence as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing in the Yazidi Genocide in the Islamic Republic of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (Rest, 2023). Upon cross-examining the strategic objectives of rape and sexual violence with findings of the Human Rights Council (2016), titled “‘They came to destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” as well as other reports, it drew similar conclusions to the above-outlined theoretical framework.

It found that patriarchal gender norms laid the foundations for sexual violence. It observed clear connections between asymmetrical gender identities, and the strategic employment of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war and genocide. The author found that, rooted in the de-valorisation of the feminine, female bodies served as vessels for genocide (Rest, 2023: 3). Since identity in Yazidi culture is patrilineal, men and women were forcibly separated (Ashrap, 2017: 19). Men, boys and elderly women were mass-executed (ibid.), females of reproductive age were raped and forcibly impregnated, bearing the children of ISIS fighters (Dabiq Magazine as cited in Ashraph, 2017: 23; Shubert and Naik, 2015). ISIS members instructed doctors to detect whether victims were virgins or already carrying children, subjecting those already pregnant to forced abortions, and those who were virgins to forced marriage (Shubert and Naik, 2015).

The author further observed links between sexual violence and the militarization of masculinity. It found that the slave market of Yazidi women and girls is highly organized, and that women and girls were given to ISIS soldiers to commemorate for bravery and victory in battle (Rest, 2023: 14; Shubert and Naik, 2015). Sexual slavery was justified by fighters claiming that holding non-Muslim women as slaves and raping them for worship (Graham-Harrison, 2017; Rest, 2023: 14). Women thereby become ‘spoils of war’ that are trafficked and traded (Newey, 2022: 6; Rest, 2023: 14).

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Challenges and Sensitivities

This thesis is acutely aware that studying conflict-related sexual violence is a complex and challenging endeavour, particularly from a methodological point of view (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10).

On the one hand, it is challenging, if not impossible, to accurately estimate prevalence (Boswell, 2001). Levels of reporting are always lower than actual numbers. This is, on the one hand, rooted in the reluctance of survivors to report rape due to fear of stigmatization, communal marginalization (Fisseha et al., 2023) and retaliation by the perpetrator, especially if the conflict is still ongoing (Callamard, 1998: 63; Sajor, 1998, 16 as cited in Boswell, 2001). On the other hand, it is related to a lack of access to referral mechanisms and appropriate health care, as well as distrust in public authorities and the legal system (Boswell, 2001). Furthermore, research drawing on hospital records and/or testimonies obtained by human rights organisations, represent only those who have resources and access to such channels (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10).

These challenges can be, in some cases, circumvented by conducting population-based studies using “carefully constructed household surveys” (ibid.,). However, varying understandings of what constitutes sexual violence, mediated by cultural factors, complicates the utility of this data. Quantitative assertions are thus best understood as “highly educated guesses” (Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10). Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2021) interestingly pointed out that overemphasizing prevalence can be counterproductive as it puts pressure on survivors to report.

Conducting qualitative research, which is valuable in that it permits in-depth analysis and facilitates a deeper understanding of core dynamics and root issues, also requires careful consideration. Asking highly sensitive questions to vulnerable populations, who have lived through traumatic experiences, requires specialized training, a high degree of competence and sharp awareness ethical dilemmas (Swiss and Jennings, 2006 as cited in Cohen, Green and Wood, 2013: 10).

3.3.2 Selection of Sources

Though this thesis takes a primarily qualitative approach, it is neither feasible nor appropriate to conduct primary, first-hand research. Instead, it will conduct desk-based research reviewing both secondary and primary literature, from authors who have conducted quantitative and qualitative field research. Such sources include community and population-based surveys, reviews of anonymised medical records and notes, interviews with key stakeholders, that is healthcare and humanitarian aid workers. Moreover, it will also consider interviews with survivors and witnesses, often conducted by prominent international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. In reviewing sources, the author will pay attention to prevalence estimates, as well as first-hand testimonies from survivors. Furthermore, the thesis will keep in mind the methodological challenges outlined above to not over-simplify or over-generalize the CRSV and thereby misrepresent or distort the lived experiences of victims.

3.3.3 Defining Independent and Dependent Variables

Considering that this thesis investigates determinants of variation in conflict-related sexual violence, i.e., what explains variation in the form, frequency, targeting and intent of CRSV, it defines its independent and dependent variables in the following way. The phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence, including the frequency, form and targeting with which it is committed, acts as the dependent variable. The independent variable(s), that is the factors that cause CRSV and influence the way in which it is perpetrated are, 1.) Contextual Factors – Displacement, Food Insecurity, Looting, 2.) Enabling Factors – Gender Inequality, Militarized Masculinities, 3.) Motivating Factors – Weaponization, Ethnic Cleansing.

3.3.4 Comparative Analysis

Drawing from Balcells and Standon (2021), who point out the need to study variation in war-time violence against civilians at multiple levels of analysis, this thesis will apply its independent theoretical framework to three cases of ethnic conflict in the Horn of Africa, taking a comparative approach to observe commonalities, differences, patterns and nuances. It will follow a 'Most Similar Systems Design' based on Raoul Naroll (1968 as cited in Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 32) 'concomitant variation' approach that assumes that

“systems as similar as possible with respect to as many features as possible constitute optimal samples” (ibid.,). It is assumed that when cases “share many economic, cultural and political characteristics (...) the number of experimental variables (...) is minimized.” (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 32). The ‘maximum strategy design’ presupposes that “if differences are found between otherwise similar countries (...) then the number of factors attributable to these differences will be sufficiently small to warrant explanation” (ibid.,). In simpler terms, the thesis assumes that differences are minimal, and therefore those that do exist must be of significance (ibid.,.)

3.3.5 Causal Analysis

To uncover why sexual violence is perpetrated in the context of armed conflict, this thesis will utilize process-tracing. Process-tracing originates from cognitive psychology, and originally referred “to techniques for examining the intermediate steps in cognitive mental processes to understand the heuristics through which humans make decisions” (Bennet and Checkel, 2012: 5). In the late 1970s, political scientist Alexander L. George broadened the focus from individual-level decision-making to structural or macro-level explanations (ibid.,). Process-tracing applied in contemporary political science thus examines the intermediate steps in a process to hypothesize how the process took place, and whether it achieved the desired outcome (ibid., 6). Moreover, process-tracing allows the researcher to identify the intervening causal processes between the independent variable(s) and the outcome of the dependent variable (ibid.,). Process-tracing is therefore a highly suitable approach for this thesis to test and apply its theoretical framework (ibid.,).

3.3.6 Selection of Cases

The three cases of ethnic conflict that this thesis has chosen are 1.) Darfur, Sudan (2003-2005) (2023), 2.) South Sudan (2013-2017), and 3.) Tigray, Ethiopia (2020- 2022). These cases are comparable due to their regional proximity, similar local dynamics, shared borders, and spill over effects. It has chosen this specific geographic focus because the Horn of Africa is one of the most volatile and conflict-ridden regions of the world. Moreover, all three cases are intrastate conflicts, i.e., civil wars, during which widespread attacks and human rights violations have been perpetrated against civilians. Additionally, they are characterized by the

involvement of multiple armed actors, with armed militias, loosely allied with government forces, playing a key role in carrying out attacks and perpetrating atrocities. Furthermore, they share similar contextual circumstances with high levels of forced displacement, food insecurity and looting of humanitarian supplies and private property. More specifically, displacement across borders illustrates overlaps between these three countries with Tigrayans migrating to Sudan for example. Finally, Sudan and South Sudan used to be one country, yet following decades of tension between the predominately Arab-Muslim north and the primarily African-Christian south (Hale, 2010: 105), as well as two civil wars (1995-1972) (1983-2005) South Sudan gained independence from the north in 2011 (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Nonetheless, the fault lines of the conflicts differ in some ways. The conflict in Sudan is characterized by a decade long struggle for civilian rule in a highly militarized environment with warring military factions struggling for dominance. Moreover, in Sudan the racial element is highly prevalent with violence being strategically perpetrated against a marginalised non-Arab minority (Amnesty International, 2004b; Human Rights Watch, 2008). In South Sudan, we have witnessed a drastic militarization of society with bitter political mobilization along ethnic lines (Noel and de Waal, 2016). The civil war in Ethiopia is marked by a polarized federal system and a struggle for power between a highly centralized government and a previously dominant region (BBC, 2021b; CNN, 2023; Cook, 2022: 370). At the same time, cross-cutting themes emerge such as the struggle for power and dominance, perpetration of violence against marginalised minorities, and mobilization along ethnic lines.

In Sudan the thesis will focus on the crimes perpetrated by both the Sudanese Armed Forces and Janjaweed militia against the non-Arab population in West Darfur, primarily the Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit, Berti, Tunjur ethnic African groups, between 2003 and 2005. When looking ahead, it will also consider the current violence perpetrated by the Rapid Support Forces against these same groups from 2023-present. In South Sudan, the thesis will focus on the deliberate targeting of civilians for their actual or perceived affiliation with either the government SPLA or rebel SPLA-IO between 2013 and 2017. In Tigray, the focus will be on the crimes perpetrated by the ENDF, EDF, and TDF between November 2020 and November 2022.

This thesis has selected Darfur, South Sudan and Tigray as cases because the study of conflict-related sexual violence in these conflicts is still only emerging and moreover less prominent than other well-established cases from the African continent such as the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Rwandan Genocide. Whilst these two cases have been abundantly explored in the literature, less light has been shed on Darfur, South Sudan and Tigray. In fact, the conflicts this thesis has selected are often side-lined in international discussions, receiving insufficient attention. The author is thus not only eager to make a contribution to the literature through its comparative approach, but also adamant to raise awareness around the issue of CRSV in the 'forgotten war' in Darfur, the 'youngest nation' of South Sudan and the 'underreported genocide' in Tigray. Finally, despite the brokering of peace deals, these conflicts remain unresolved making it ever more important to document and shed light on the grave human rights violations being committed by all parties.

4. Sudan, Darfur (2003-2005)



Omar al-Bashir - "It is not in the Sudanese culture or people of Darfur to rape. It doesn't exist. We don't have it." (cited in Hagan et. al, 2009: 1391)

"You Nuba are all Black, but we want to make red babies." (cited in Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 88).

"We rape you to make a free baby, not a slave like you." (ibid.,).

"You, the black women, we will exterminate you, you have no God." (cited in Amnesty International, 2004b: 3)

"I have orders to take everything, kill the men, and capture the women" (cited in Ferrales et al., 2016: 577).

"Men were targeted for killing. Women were raped (...) The children were abducted ... Cattle were taken. Food was taken (...) Huts were burned (...) The village was completely destroyed (...) They were yelling, 'Kill the Nuba! Kill the Nuba'" (cited in Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 80).

Figure 1: Map of Sudan²

In 2003, rebel groups in Darfur protested against the central Sudanese government for neglecting and marginalizing the region and its non-Arabic population (Fulton and Holmes, 2023; Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009). In response, the Sudanese government, under the leadership of Omar al-Bashir, and the state-backed Janjaweed militia, launched a large-scale counterinsurgency in the Western State of Darfur (Al Jazeera, 2023; Arman, 2023). This offensive left over 300,000 people dead (ibid.,). Attacks were characterized by systematic and unlawful attacks on civilians (Amnesty International, 2004b) with the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (2005: 54) finding that ground assaults included the "killing of civilians, massacres, summary executions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, abduction, looting of property and livestock, as well as deliberate destruction and torching of villages."

4.1 Grievances predating the conflict

The violence that escalated in 2003, as well as group polarization and ethnic divide, date back to the post-colonial era during which governments were dominated by Arabic-speaking elites seeking to build a national identity based on Arabism and Islamism (Sikainga, 2009 as cited in

² Figure 1: Map of Sudan. Available at: <https://i2-prod.mirror.co.uk/incoming/article5185351.ece/ALTERNATES/s1227b/Map-of-Sudan.jpg> (Accessed 24 May 2024).

Arman, 2023). The 1985 famine in Sudan intensified competition between non-Arab farmers and mostly Arab nomadic herders over land ownership and farming rights (Flint and de Waal, 2005, 2008 as cited in Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009: 1386). Darfur follows a 'hakura system' of land ownership in which semi-nomadic African tribes like the Fur and Zaghawa have partial rights, and nomadic Arab pastoralists have fewer grazing rights (Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, 2008: 881; Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 84). Moreover, in 1985, Muhammed Gadhafi delivered guns to Darfur with the aim of creating an "Arab belt" (Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, 2008: 881). This was followed by the 1986 election of Sadiq al-Mahada who wanted to create an "Arab and Islamic Union" (Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009: 1386). In 1989, when Omar al-Bashir came to power through a military coup, he privileged Arabs and marginalised the African population implementing policies of Arabization and Islamization (Ferrales et al, 2016: 568). This Arab-Islamic supremacist ideology has thus legitimized the suppression of black African groups since decades (Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, 2008).

4.2 Contextual factors

4.2.1 Displacement

The conflict in Sudan has displaced over 2.5 million people from their homes (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 1). The majority are internally displaced, and over 200,000 have fled over the border into Eastern Chad (ibid.,). According to the Atrocities Documentation Survey, which is based on interviews conducted with Darfuri refugees in Eastern Chad, there is a larger proportion of female displaced persons (Hagan, Brooks and Haugh, 2010). Even though women and children meant to be shielded from attacks in, sexual and gender-based violence continue to proliferate in refugee camps, which have become increasingly politicized spaces and are often infiltrated by armed men and weapons (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 2008). Leaving these camps, as concluded by the United Nations Commissions of Inquiry (2005), puts women at an extremely high risk of falling victim to sexual violence, particularly rape. Moreover, considering that women become the providers of their families, they often have little choice but to leave these camps to collect firewood, water, grass, and food (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 5-7, 2008; Martin, 2007). Soldiers are well aware of this, lingering outside of camps, preying on women and girls (Gadgil, Sosler and Stein, 2013 as cited in Arman, 2023:

301; Human Rights Watch, 2008: 6). Janjaweed groups, for instance, frequently patrol camps and settlements (Amnesty International, 2004b: 16). In addition to being targeted outside IDP camps, those people on the move are also vulnerable with many women and girls reporting being raped during flight at roadblocks or checkpoints (ibid., 15; Human Rights Watch, 2005: 6).

4.2.2 Food Insecurity

Victimization in the context of displacement, particularly in the pursuit of livelihood activities, is intrinsically linked to food insecurity. As mentioned, due to sex-selective killings, households become female-headed putting the burden of ensuring survival onto women (Amnesty International, 2004b). Families tend to be highly dependent on humanitarian aid, however considering that this is often deliberately blocked or looted by armed actors, distribution is scarce and insufficient (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Women fetch firewood as the primary source of cooking fuel, which is necessary to feed their families. Additionally, firewood may be sold to supplement aid assistance and allow purchasing basic supplies that were looted or had to be left behind (ibid.,).

4.2.3 Looting

Reports have emerged of militias looting cattle and private belongings, and torching whole villages (Amnesty International, 2004b). *“They have all the cattle of the whole of Darfur now, they have all of our fertile Masalit land, they will not leave”* (cited in ibid., 24). The conflict is thus also about resources, controlling land, and stripping civilians of their livelihoods.

4.3 Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Rape and other forms of sexual violence, perpetrated against women and girls, was “a prominent feature of the ‘ethnic cleansing’ campaign carried out by government forces and militias” (Human Rights Watch, 2005), both in the midst of the conflict as well as following displacement (ibid.,). Conflict-related sexual violence has been perpetrated at high volumes (Hale, 2010) both during the height of attacks against civilians, especially between 2003-2005, and in periods of relative calm (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

4.3.1 Frequency

Though it is widely established that CRSV is widespread, and a defining feature of this conflict, there is little research available that explicitly establishes the frequency of sexual violence in Sudan. In fact, out of all three case studies, the least amount of information was available to assess prevalence and frequency of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan. A report from Human Rights Watch (2008) noted that estimating prevalence is extremely challenging since sexual violence is severely underreported. Women are frequently accused of lying and exaggerating. Considering that Darfur is a highly conservative, predominantly Muslim society, rape and extramarital intercourse are highly stigmatized (Arman 2023; Martin, 2007). There is thus a lot of taboo and secrecy around sexuality (Human Rights Watch, 2008: 10).

4.3.2 Form

Sexual violence was perpetrated in various forms in Sudan. Gang rape and abduction for sexual slavery were the most common forms (Amnesty International, 2004b). In fact, research found that the majority of victims were raped multiple times and by multiple men (Arman, 2023: 301). Moreover, victims of gang rape were allegedly branded (Amnesty International 2004: 12). Secondly, abduction for sexual slavery affected especially young girls, who are held in captivity and abused either for several days, weeks or months (Amnesty International, 2015; UN Commission of Inquiry, 2005). Victims are forced to move with the Janjaweed, living in military camps in dire conditions (Amnesty International, 2004b: 12). Additionally, torture was also widespread with women being tortured to extract information on the whereabouts of their husbands and male relatives (Amnesty International, 2015: 1). Finally, there were also incidents in which pregnant women were raped resulting in the intentional loss of the fetus (ibid.,).

The two most defining features of rape were public humiliation and severe physical brutality. Reports revealed that women were publicly lined up and raped in front of their communities (Martin, 2007: 3). In other cases, family members and neighbours were forced to watch (Arman, 2023: 297). Secondly, perpetrators often used sharp objects to rape victims in addition to beating them, also with their guns. Some reports even detail soldiers slashing breasts (Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 88). This sexual and psychological humiliation was deliberate

to demonstrate dominance, not only over victims, but by extension their entire community and ethnic group.

Violence perpetrated against men differed in form. Men targeted for summary executions and extra-judicial killings (Martin, 2007: 6). Moreover, they were publicly beaten, shot, slaughtered and had their throats cut (Ferrales et al., 2016). In cases of sexual violence, genital harm and castration were common with shocking reports emerging of perpetrators excising victims' penises and inserting them into the victims' mouths (Ferrales et al., 2016: 574). These severe violations served to homosexualize and thereby emasculate men, demarcating them men as out-group members (Ferrales et al., 2016). Especially elderly men, the community's most honored members, were targeted *"the iman was raped and then taken to the police station"* (cited in ibid., 574).

4.3.3 Targeting

High levels of conflict-related sexual violence were reported in West Darfur, where there is higher concentrations of Fur and Masalit tribes (Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009: 1390). Targeting was thus racialized, happening on an ethnic basis, with Janjaweed fighters targeting Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa women (Amnesty International, 2004b; Human Rights Watch, 2008). These women were perceived as "carriers and reproducers of culture" (Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 88). Moreover, women were targeted for their reproductive abilities illustrated by declarations reported by survivors: *"You Nuba are all Black, but we want to make red babies"* and *"We rape you to make a free baby, not a slave like you"* (cited in ibid., 88). In terms of age, gender and demography targeting was indiscriminate (Martin, 2007). However, as indicated above, the form in which CRSV was perpetrated varied depending on the gender of the victim.

4.3.4 Perpetrator

The main actors perpetrating this violence were the Janjaweed, mostly in the presence of Sudanese Armed Forces (Amnesty International, 2004b). Population-based survey data from Doctors without Borders (as cited in Arman, 2023: 303) indicates that 81% of rapes committed by state-sponsored Janjaweed occurred in the presence of government personnel. A similar source found that two thirds of attacks perpetrated against civilians, which also featured rape, were joint operations by the Sudanese Armed Forces and Janjaweed (Hagan, Brooks and

Haugh, 2010). It is also relevant to note that aside from male perpetrators, so-called “Hakama” or “Janjawid women,” who played an important role in looting, verbal abuse and harassment of women (Amnesty International, 2004b: 24).

4.3.5 Enablers

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality was a decisive enabling factor for conflict-related sexual violence. Sudan ranks 170th out of 193 countries in the United Nations Development Programme’s (2022) Gender Inequality Index. Particularly Darfur is an “ultra-patriarchal society” (Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 95) that treats women as “lesser beings with fewer rights” (Martin, 2007: 1). As a result, rape is minimized and its normality internalized (Hale, 2010; Powell, 2015) deflecting responsibility away from the perpetrator and projecting it onto the victim. Moreover, widespread negative coping mechanisms, include forcibly marrying young girls to their rapists (Report of the United National Secretary General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, 2015 as cited in Arman, 2023: 301). Similarly, young women in refugee camps are often married off by their families for economic survival (Amnesty International, 2004b: 20). Another harmful traditional practice is female circumcision, undergone by 89% of Darfuri women (Arman, 2023: 302).

Regarding the situation of men, it is interesting to note that Sudan’s Criminal Code from 1991 does not include sexual violence against men in the definition of rape. Sexual violence perpetrated against men, as observed in Sudan, is a performance of masculinity rooted in hegemonic gender norms and patriarchal structures (Ferrales et al., 2016). Such violence works to emasculate victims through homosexualization, whilst elevating the dominance of the perpetrators (ibid., 571). These logics thrive in patriarchal societies like Darfur.

4.3.6 Motivation

Weapon of War

Rape and others forms of violence are powerful, low-cost weapons to terrorise, humiliate and dehumanise individuals, families and communities, shattering social structures (Arman, 2023). In Sudan CRSV has certainly been employed as a ‘weapon of war’ with several survivors recounting “they killed us,” referring to communal and identity destruction (cited in Kaiser and

Hagan, 2015: 90). Violence becomes collective, with the targeting of specific individuals in a certain way, affecting the whole group (ibid.,). It is particularly through public rape or rape in the presence of family and children that such humiliation takes place. To this psychological violence, severe physical violence is added to further terrorize people and most importantly instil fear to such an extent that families are forced to leave their homes (Amnesty International, 2015). On a related note, the mass annihilation as well as homosexualization of men deliberately strips them of their protective role further shaking the traditional foundations and norms of society (Ferrales et al., 2016).

Racism and Hatred

A key theme in the case study of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan is the racial dimension, underlined by the degrading racial epithets directed towards non-Arab minorities calling them “slaves” and “dirty black Nuba” (Human Rights Watch, 2005: 4). Survivors report hearing such slurs shouted by armed actors during attacks, insulting black African Zaghawa, Fur and Masalit people. These racial epithets were particularly prominent during joint attacks by the SAF and Janjaweed (Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009: 1390). The U.S. Department of State (2004 as cited in Hagan, Brooks and Haugh, 2010: 899) found that the number of respondents hearing racial epithets steadily increased from June 2003 onwards. Moreover, attacks by these perpetrators selectively spared Arab villages (Hagan, Rymond-Richmond and Palloni, 2009: 1391) .

The severity of these racial slurs ranged from targeted, degrading and racist death-threats like *“This is the last day for blacks,” “We will destroy the black-skinned people,” “Kill all the slaves,” “Kill all the blacks,” “You are black, you deserve to be tortured like this,”* and *“We will kill any slaves we find and cut off their heads”* (cited in Hagan, Brooks and Haugh, 2010: 898). To deliberately declared intentions that make it clear that there is an intent to forcibly displace people from their land, *“Arabs said they would kill as many Masalit as they could and that the rest would never live there again”* (ibid.,) and alter the ethnic make-up of the group, *“You are now Arab wives. There are no men here,” “You will have Arab babies,” “We will take your women and make them ours. We will change the race”* (ibid.,). Moreover, upon being targeted victims were animalized, dehumanized *“They called her Nuba [a derogatory term for black Africans] dog, son of dogs, and we came to kill you and your kids,” “You donkey, you slave; we must get rid of you,” “We kill our cows when they have black calves? we will kill you too”* and considered sub-human,

"You blacks are not human. We can do anything we want to you. You cannot live here" (cited in Hagan and Rymond-Richmond, 2008: 882).

As Sondra Hale (2010: 106) convincingly argues, rape in Sudan becomes both an "erasure" and "marker" of identity. The violation of a woman's body becomes, by extension, a violation of the community as it presumed that culture is carried in women's bodies. Upon targeting reproductive capabilities this violence creates racial or ethnic difference where it did not exist before. Where men were targeted, sexual violence is a performance of masculinity through which manhood, is destroyed thereby lessening the victim's ethnicity (Zarkov, 2001: 78 as cited in Ferrales et al., 2016: 574).

Ethnic Cleansing

It is widely acknowledged that a massive scale campaign was carried out to perpetrate ethnic cleansing against Darfur's non-Arab, African population (Arman, 2023). Rape was used as a means to control reproduction (ibid.,). Since the ethnicity of a child is determined by the bloodline of their father, women who were forcibly impregnated carried the enemy's children. Rape thereby served to alter the ethnic make-up of the group, *"We want to change the color. Every woman will deliver red- Arabs are now the husbands of these women"* and *"We will take your women and make them ours. We will change the race."* (cited in Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 99). Moreover, according to David Scheffer (2008 as cited in Arman, 2023: 299), in some communities the rape of a woman is understood and felt as the rape of the entire tribe. Additionally, violence in Sudan was highly gendered, illustrated amongst other things by gender-selective killings (Ferrales et al., 2016; Kaiser and Hagan, 2015). Moreover, by inflicting genital harm onto males, procreation was both symbolically and physically undermined (Ferrales et al., 2016). The thesis finds that, out of the four cases it is analysing, the racial and ethnic dimension is the most strongly pronounced in Sudan.

Forced Displacement

Another common feature of ethnic cleansing is forced displacement. Testimonies recorded by Amnesty International (2004), Human Rights Watch (2005) and the U.S. State Departments' Atrocities Documentation Survey (2004 as cited in Kaiser and Hagan, 2015), show a clear intent to displace civilians. Declarations range from deliberate orders as

recounted by one survivors "He grabbed me and called me 'Nuba' and told us to leave the village and go to Chad" (cited in Atrocities Documentation Survey, 2004 as cited in Kaiser and Hagan, 2015: 89) and *"You have no land here. You must leave and go like others to Chad"* (ibid.,). To violent assertions such as *"Omar al Bashir told us that we should kill all the Nubas. There is no place here for Negroes anymore"* (cited in Amnesty International, 2004b: 22) and *"The blood of the Blacks runs like water, we take their goods and we chase them from our area and our cattle will be in their land. The power of al-Bashir belongs to the Arabs and we will kill you until the end, you Blacks, we have killed your God"* (ibid., 24). The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (as cited in Human Rights Watch, 2005: 3) thus concluded that by terrorizing the population the perpetrators aimed to ensue control over the movement of IDP flows, perpetuating the displacement of civilians.

5. South Sudan (2013-2017)



"The only way to be safe for women and girls is to be dead – there is no way to be safe as we are alive. This is how bad it is" (cited in Amnesty International, 2017b: 15).

"We often say that the worst thing to be in South Sudan is a woman. It's the worst possible thing. Even the cows are treated better than the women" (cited in Lacey, 2013: 93).

"Once your husband is a soldier, especially a junior one, forget it, your life is miserable" (cited in Madutjok, 1999: 435).

"They raped me from 5pm in the evening up to 7am in the morning. I fainted. My body was covered with blood. I couldn't manage to move and go home because they left me between life and death." (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 29).

"They said ... 'If she is a clean and attractive woman, bring her and we will do what we do to women' ... Some of them said... 'We should kill her because the boy she is feeding is the very child who will fight us back in the future.'" (Amnesty International, 2017a: 31).

Figure 2: Map of South Sudan ³

South Sudan is the "youngest nation" in the world. Led by the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, South Sudan declared independence on the 9th of July 2011 after decades of struggle for self-determination, statehood and independence from the North (Al Jazeera, 2021). Only two years later, in 2013, the third civil war broke out when Vice President Riek Machar was removed from power by President Salva Kiir (Centre for Preventive Action, 2023b; Pinaud, 2020: 675). The country subsequently witnessed the militarization of political factions, splintering along ethnic lines, between the two previously united tribes that had jointly fought for independence from the North (Sperber, 2019: 723).

5.1 Grievances predating the conflict

The large-scale violence that broke out between the SPLM and the SPLM-IO in 2013 began as a political dispute, but quickly took on ethnic dimensions (Murphy et al., 2019). Despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2015, fighting re-emerged in July 2016 spreading to

³ Figure 2: Map of South Sudan. Available at: https://health-initiative-south-sudan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Map_South_Sudan.jpg (Accessed 24 May 2024).

previously unaffected areas (ibid., 181), threatening the disintegration of the young state (Sperber, 2019). The United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan even concluded that ethnic cleansing is underway and that indicators for genocide are in place (Human Rights Council, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2022). Thus, what started out as a political rivalry, took on increasingly ethnic dimensions. The heads of the two rival factions represent the two largest ethnic groups in South Sudan: the Dinka and the Nuer, which respectively recruit and build their support base from member of their own ethnic groups (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b).

However, in comparison to Sudan, where antagonization and rivalry were primarily on a racial, i.e., Arab vs. African basis, in South Sudan divisions are much more politically polarized. Political affiliation and revenge for past atrocities are leading causes for the perpetration of sexual violence. The thesis observed that targeting happened based on militarized ethnic identities, and a conflation of ethnic affiliation with political allegiance and loyalty to a specific armed group. This can be explained by the fact that ethnic grievances are less deep-rooted in South Sudan, as it was only after gaining independence from the North that previously united tribes splintered and mobilized along ethnic lines.

In Sudan and Ethiopia, ethnic divides were more entrenched throughout history. Nonetheless, certain instances from South Sudan's recent past surfaced as motives for revenge and factionalization. Most prominently the Bor massacre of 1991, perpetrated by the Riek Machar's SPLA-Nasir and the Nuer White Army during the Second Sudanese Civil War, killing at least 2,000 Dinka (Amnesty International as cited in Al Jazeera, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2014).

5.2 Contextual factors

5.2.1 Displacement

As in Sudan, in South Sudan displacement is intrinsically linked to the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence. It is estimated that in 2013 over 1 million people fled their homes (Murphy et al., 2019: 181), and that by 2019 roughly 1 million refugees had fled across borders, with 700,000 being registered in northern Uganda (Sperber, 2019: 724) and others

entering the Democratic Republic of Congo (Amnesty International, 2017b: 5). CRSV, perpetrated as part of widespread attacks on civilians, is one of the primary causes of cross-border displacement in South Sudan (Sperber, 2019). Additionally, reports reveal that women and children on the move are targeted for rape and other crimes by soldiers patrolling roads and stationed at checkpoints. In addition to cross-border displacement, it is estimated that by 2018 almost 200,000 people sought shelter in United Nations mandated protection of civilian sites across five states in South Sudan (Murphy et al., 2019: 181). The main PoCs in South Sudan are the Bentiu and Juba PoCs, in which 97% and 98% of households reported experiencing violent crimes in the past five years (Reng and Willems, 2016: 5).

Moreover, as in the case of Sudan, although IDPs are shielded from direct attacks, PoCs are not safe havens as gang violence, murder and suicide proliferate in these settings (ibid.,). Moreover, upon leaving the relative safety of these PoCs to collect firewood, fuel, water, food, and other necessary supplies, women become extremely vulnerable to sexual violence (Ellsberg et al, 2020: 20; Human Right Watch, 2015: 4,9,21; Murphy et al., 2019: 186). A survivor testimony reveals that *“rape cases are happening almost every day and UNMISS is aware of that. Sometimes they escort us to the forest, wait for us there and then come back. But sometimes they don’t reach the forest”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 33). As in Sudan, soldiers knowingly linger around PoC sites, preying on women. Accounts of women and girls falling victim to sexual violence in near proximity of these sites are widespread (Amnesty International, 2017a: 32). Survivors of these attacks have identified perpetrators as SPLA and SPLA-IO fighters, armed groups of mixed ethnicity, and men wearing civilian clothing yet carrying rifles (ibid.,).

5.2.2 Food Insecurity

The vulnerability of female IDPs is further elevated by food insecurity and famine. As in Sudan, displaced women in South Sudan often become the providers of their families, forced to meet the basic needs of their children and relatives. Similarly, although humanitarian aid is delivered to South Sudan and distributed in PoC camps, residents indicate that *“we...don’t have enough food to feed our children in the PoC because the UN gives us only a small amount of food, without firewood to cook it”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 33). Many thus collect firewood as a source of cooking fuel, sometimes selling it to earn money and supplement humanitarian aid

to buy basic household and personal supplies (ibid., 32). However as indicated previously, upon leaving PoC sites, women risk their lives.

Food has also been employed as a weapon of war in South Sudan, with fighters deliberately looting humanitarian supplies, restricting civilians' access to food and targeting those carrying food (Amnesty International, 2017b: 18). Deliberately caused delays in food distribution put women at risk because they then need to embark on dangerous journey to obtain it. As one women notes *"some women continue to go because they have children to feed so they have no choice. We call them 'the die-hard' because they take such a big risk. They walk for hours in the bush to get to the fields to look for cassava. If the soldiers or the rebels catch them, they rape them and steal the food"* (cited in ibid., 19).

Thus, as is the case in Darfur, it is ultimately the poorest, most marginalized members of society, displaced women, forced to feed their children and relatives, that are exposed to violence. The analysis so far illustrates that it is not only gender and ethnicity that interplay to enable sexual violence, but also socio-economic circumstances and livelihood issues.

5.2.3 Looting

Looting is also a defining feature of the conflict in South Sudan. Sexual violence oftentimes concurs with other forms of violence including looting, theft, and the destruction of property (Amnesty International, 2017a; 2017b; Human Rights Watch, 2015: 2,6). This is because instead of being paid a fixed salary, the pay of soldiers "is what they loot and the women they abduct" (McNeish, 2015). The abuse of women thereby becomes their wage, concluding that "sexual violence has been instrumentalized as a reward and entitle for youth and men participating in the conflict" (United Nations - UN News, 2022). As Yasmin Sooka, Chair of the UN Commission on South Sudan, points out "women's bodies are systematically used on this scale as the spoils of war" (ibid.,). Therefore, looting in this case study clearly acts as an enabler. Dynamics in South Sudan thus slightly differed from the situation in Sudan, where reports implied that looting was about control over resources, particularly land and farming.

5.3 Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a central and defining feature of the civil war in South Sudan (Human Rights Council, 2018b; Sperber, 2019) with Muthoni Wanyeki, Amnesty International's Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes, proclaiming that there is an "epidemic of sexual violence" (Amnesty International, 2017c). As concluded by the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, UNMISS and OHCHR, sexual violence is not perpetrated randomly, but in a widespread, consistent and systematic way (Amnesty International, 2017; United Nations Peacekeeping, 2018). Moreover, as pointed out by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, it "has been used as a tactic of war to displace populations, to disperse and instill fear within particular ethnic groups" (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2018).

5.3.1 Frequency

Oftentimes conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence are not isolated incidents with women experiencing these violations repeatedly, and in compounding forms, throughout their lifetime (Human Rights Council, 2018a: 36; Ellsberg et al., 2020: 21). Household and population-based surveys reveal that 35% of women "have experienced rape, attempts of rape or other forms of sexual violence by a non-partner during their lifetime" (Ellsberg et al., 2020: 1). The same survey found that in Juba city and the Juba PoC site, 1 in 10 women "have been forcibly detained or abducted throughout their lifetime" (ibid., 11).

Generally, prevalence and frequency have been more widely studied in South Sudan. Research indicates that exposure to sexual violence was elevated during conflict with a different survey reporting that 93% of recorded sexual assault cases happened during large-scale conflict and 87% in 2015, concurring with an offensive in Unity State (Reng and Willems, 2016: 1). Similarly, both quantitative and qualitative data highlights the extremely high rates of non-partner sexual violence in 2013 and further found, that armed conflict is associated with higher rates of sexual violence given that prevalence rates are three times higher than in non-conflict settings (Murphy et al., 2019: 182).

Though it is challenging to estimate prevalence, an observation common to all three cases, a survey conducted by the United Nations Population Fund in 2015 with women living in four UNMISS PoC sites in Juba, revealed that 72% of these women experienced rape since the outbreak of the conflict, primarily by soldiers and police forces (Amnesty International, 2017a: 9). Moreover, UNICEF (as cited in *ibid.*,) estimated that between December 2013 and December 2016 an astonishing 1,130 children were sexually abused in South Sudan. The South Sudan Protection Cluster (as cited in *ibid.*,) observed a 61% increase in instances of conflict-related sexual violence between 2015 and 2016, coinciding with a 32% increase in cases of abduction for the purpose of sexual slavery detected in the report of the UN Secretary General. Finally, prevalence of sexual violence in South Sudan was 21.3% higher than in other conflicts (Fisseha et al., 2023: 6).

5.3.2 Form

As in Sudan, evidence suggests that gang-rape is the most common form of sexual violence perpetrated against women, followed by rape and abductions for purposes of sexual slavery (Pinaud, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2015: 4; Sperber, 2019: 724). Women are abducted and held as sex slaves in military barracks, forced to travel with soldiers. One woman recalls *“they were all captives, like me. At night, the rebels chose who to sleep with (...) the man who had kept me as his wife”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017b: 16). In South Sudan the abduction of women, observed in all three cases, is a wider phenomenon in South Sudan, and often linked to deadly cattle-raids (Lacey et al., 2013).

Gang-rape, which can be perpetrated by up to 14 men as indicated by once survivor, (Sperber, 2019: 723) occurred on the sites naked dead bodies, possibly mass graves, in front of children and neighbours, following the slaughtering of relatives, and amidst death threats and hate speech (Human Rights Council, 2018a: 37; Human Rights Watch, 2015: 18; Pinaud, 2020: 687). Public humiliation and psychological violence are thus also defining features in this case study. Moreover, as in Sudan, severe and staggering physical brutality accompanied these rapes (United Nations - UN News, 2022). Beatings were widespread, often with ropes or sticks, or the butt of a gun (Human Rights Council, 2018a: 37; Human Rights Watch, 2015: 22, 30). Moreover, rape is often aggravated by the use of sharp objects (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b) such as *“tree branches, knives, pangas, pliers, pincers, and firearms”* (Human

Rights Council, 2018b: 6). Clear parallels between the cases become evident as sexual violence was consistently accompanied by severe physical and psychological violence intended to cause public humiliation, traumatize families, terrorize communities, and forcibly displace families.

Violence perpetrated against men was particularly severe, entailing sexual mutilation, torture, castration, often happening in detention, following arrest or during flight (Amnesty International, 2017a: 22; Human Rights Council, 2018a: 37). Men were also subjected to forced nudity, forced to watch women being raped, and in some cases even have sex with their own relatives (Human Rights Council, 2018b: 13). Again, the form in which conflict-related sexual violence was perpetrated against men in South Sudan is highly similar to patterns observed in Sudan, with CRSV taking on different dimensions in comparison to violence perpetrated against women.

5.3.3 Targeting

As established above, both men and women fall victim to CRSV, although violence takes on different forms (Reng and Willems, 2016). Fieldwork-based reports from Amnesty International (2017a, 2017b) reveal that women of all ages including elderly women and minors from 12-85 years old were targeted in South Sudan (Human Rights Council, 2018a: 36). Moreover, although it is a social taboo, pregnant women are not spared, which can have detrimental consequences for infant and maternal mortality (Amnesty International, 2017a). Thirdly, victimization of adolescent girls during the 2013 crisis was high, and rates of early marriage increased during conflict (Murphy et al, 2019: 183-184). In comparison to Sudan, where targetting happened on a racial basis, findings in South Sudan focus more closely on gender and demographic indicators.

5.3.4 Perpetrator

As in Sudan, reports suggest that conflict-related sexual violence takes place when civilians are in close proximity with armed actors (Amnesty International, 2017a: 21). This could entail “attacks on villages, searches and raids of residential areas by armed actors, roads or checkpoints or following detention” (ibid.,). CRSV has been perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, both the SPLA and the SPLA-IO ((Amnesty International 2017a, 2017b; Ibreck, 2023:

64). Moreover, non-partner violence in South Sudan is also committed by police forces, as well as individuals who are both known and unknown to the victim (Ellsberg et al., 2020: 11; Murphy et al., 2019: 186).

5.3.5 Enablers

Gender Inequality

As Lacey et al., (2013: 93) notes *“any attempt to understand the challenges facing women in South Sudan must situate the important cultural implications of the gendered roles of wife and mother in the foreground.”* Gender inequality in South Sudan is among one of the worst in the world. Performing even worse than Sudan and Ethiopia, South Sudan ranks 192nd out of 193 in the United Nations Development Programme’s (2022) Gender Inequality Index. Patriarchal structures are deeply entrenched into society as women are primarily valued for their reproductive capabilities (Lacey et al., 2013: 94), rooted in nationalizing the womb (Madutjok, 1999: 431-432). Thus, women are not only severely restricted in their physical mobility, access to land, and property ownership rights (Lacey et al., 2013: 93), but also denied autonomy in their own sexuality (Madutjok, 1999: 436-437). This dangerously permits men to exercise control over women’s bodies.

Women are perceived through their “bride price”, explaining the high prevalence of child and arranged marriages with Oxfam (2019: 5 as cited in Lokot et al., 2022: 26) estimating that 71% of girls in Nyal were married as minors. Like in Sudan, early marriage is often a negative coping mechanism driven by increased economic pressures and protection risks faced by families (Lokot et al., 2022: 26). Similarly, cattle-raiding is driven by pressure on males to marry since the bride price is paid in cattle and cattle-wealth is fundamental to South Sudan’s socio-economic structure (ibid., 31, 32). Cattle-raiding is a widespread phenomenon with 66% of women in Rumbek reporting “that their village had at some point been attacked for cattle raiding” (Ellsberg et al., 2020: 11). In some cases, it also leads to the abduction of women and girls for marriage (Ellsberg et al., 2020: 3). It is further reported that the civil war has increased bride prices, as young girls are perceived as property through which families can accumulate wealth (Sommers and Schwartz, 2011 as cited in Lacey, 2013: 95).

Women are traditionally in subordinate roles, with many having internalized harmful gender norms and IPV. For instance, 46% of women in Rumbek agreed that being raped is a woman's fault, and 36% believed a girl should marry her rapist (Ellsberg et al, 2020: 15). Moreover, over 90% of these women agreed that men have right to beat their wives (ibid.,). As such gendered violence becomes a sustained feature of a women's life, intensified during armed conflict which reinforces the domination of men over women (Madutjok, 1999). Moreover, sexual violence by non-partners is four times more prevalent in South Soudan than elsewhere in the world (Ellsberg et al., 2020: 1). Many young soldiers, driven by insecurity and jealousy of senior soldiers, force themselves onto their wives to prove their manhood (Madutjok, 1999: 435-436). Hutchinson (2000: 10 as cited in Lacey et al., 2013: 97) goes as far as claiming that *"the killing and violence aimed at women has increased to a point where it could be said to have become a 'standard practice.'"*

Erosion of Rule of Law

As the conflict in South Sudan is a full-blown civil war, threatening to disintegrate the young state, the breakdown of political systems and societal structures is a particularly acute risk. Both have detrimental impacts, minimizing the number of institutions that can guarantee the rule of law (Ellsberg et al, 2020: 3). Moreover, as social norms break down, community mechanisms crumble, and lack of sanctions from military commanders allow sexual violence to thrive in environments of impunity (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b). In such environments, rape and looting, in lieu of a salary, become normalized and accepted.

Normalization of Violence

Analysts studying the conflict in South Sudan have frequently commented on the extreme levels of violence that the youth is socialized into (Lacey et al., 2013: 92). More specifically, "the militarization of Dinka culture has produced an ethos of manliness, tactical necessity, and unity among men" annihilating previously held societal values (Madutjok, 1999: 431). This has created a mythology of brotherhood (ibid.,), indoctrinating men into a "hyper masculinized and militarized world view" (Ibreck, 2023: 64). Soldiers are often young and recruited forcibly. For instance, to re-claim rebel-held areas in Unity State the government recruited young men from Nuer sub-clans (Mc Neish, 2015). Though the youth are already

accustomed to violence due to cattle-raiding, military mobilisation and toxic masculinity in army and militia culture makes readiness to violence much more extreme.

5.3.6 Motivation

Weapon of War

As Alan Boswell (as cited in Sperber, 2019: 724) pointed out “much of the sexual violence (...) appears clearly designed to humiliate the victim and the victim’s community.” It is particularly the brutality and severity of rapes and gang rapes, accompanied by severe physical and psychological violence, that terrorizes, degrades, shames, and humiliates the victim as well as their broader ethnic and political group (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b). The trauma inflicted upon victims is deliberate and aims to “ensure the complete destruction of the social fabric” (United Nations - UN News, 2022). It is also about political dynamics and exerting dominance with Sperber (2019: 724) concluding that *“most of the dozens of fighters I have interviewed over the years view this civil war as a fight over supremacy: who dominates who.”* Moreover, researchers have concluded that gang-rapes have become a ritualized practice to increase group-cohesion and avoid desertion amongst South Sudanese armed groups (Pinaud, 2020: 671). Additionally, through violent othering, gang-rape serves to exert dominance and sovereignty over specific ethnic groups and thereby becomes a “tool for social differentiation and group formation” (ibid., 672). Pinaud (2020: 672) interestingly concludes that “though gang-rapes ethnic competitors are othered while reinforcing the perpetrators own ethnic groupness.”

Ethnic Hatred

Testimonies reveal that rape is often perpetrated alongside degrading ethnic slurs with the aim of forcibly displacing communities (Human Rights Watch, 2015: 4). For instance, one survivor recounted: *“They were telling me that I should blame God for creating me a Nuer... I feel hurt, humiliated and my level of dignity has decreased”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 24). Another recalled soldiers telling her *“we don’t want Nuer here ... this land belongs to Dinka...go to Malakal, that is where you belong. Your husbands killed our brothers long ago and they even killed children. So here we are going to kill you”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 23).

Political Affiliation

In contrast to Sudan, this thesis finds that in South Sudan motivation goes beyond purely ethnic dimensions to political affiliation, which are intrinsically intertwined. Testimonies suggest that individuals are frequently targeted on the basis of actual or perceived affiliation with either the government or opposition (Amnesty International, 2017c). Ethnicity is “used as a proxy for identifying political allegiance” (Amnesty International, 2017a : 23). Whilst the Nuer are presumed to be associated with the SPLMA-IO, Dinka are considered to be supportive of the SPLMA (Amnesty International, 2017a, 2017b). Field research conducted by Amnesty International (2017a: 28) found that *“many survivors interviewed... believed they were targeted because they were staying in SPLA-IO areas – to punish them for their assumed support for the SPLA-IO.” More specifically, one survivor shared that “they raped me because they said we were loyal to SPLMA-IO as we were staying in the SPLMA-IO controlled area”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 29).

Several others also came forward recounting the following. *“Four soldiers came and threatened to kill us. They said ‘why are you staying in the bush?’ They suspected we were linked to the rebels, but it was not so. They suspected that because I was carrying food to Yei, I may be married to a Dinka or an informer or feeding the soldiers in Yei”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017b: 16). *“What I can remember is that the time they were torturing us, they called us rebels and that’s why they were torturing us. They were just calling us enemies; the word they used was enemies”* (cited in Human Rights Council, 2018a: 37). *“They raped me because they said we were loyal to SPLMA-IO as we were staying in the SPLMA-IO controlled area”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 29).

Revenge

Another theme that has emerged in the analysis of testimonies is rape for revenge, rooted in historical grievances and previous inter-ethnic violence. Individuals are targeted to punish an entire group for past atrocities: *“They are talking about what had happened in 1991 in Bor – that Dinka women and girls were raped and killed by Riek Machar’s ethnic group, the Nuer”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 25). A different testimony reveals *“I was raped because I am Dinka, and they are from Nuer. They want to kill Dinka men and rape their wives, mothers and daughters like in 1991...”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017a: 26).

Gendered Genocidal Violence

Pinaud (2020: 667) was the first to explicitly argue that the mass rape perpetrated by the SPLA in Sudan against civilians is genocidal, claiming that genocidal rape in South Sudan is two-prolonged. On the one hand it destroys the target group physically and psychologically, and on the other it secures gains for material gains for perpetrators, consolidating their ethnic and political domination (ibid.,). Rape furthermore advances territorial gains through forced displacement, allowing perpetrators to exercise control over land and exploit natural resources including minerals and oil in Unity and Central Equatoria (ibid.,)

Moreover, Pinaud (2020: 681) asserts that widespread rape of civilians is organized and deliberate and that “there was nothing ‘out of control’ about those rapes.” He found that commanders often times ordered their troops to rape women instead of killing them. *“If men are caught, they are killed and if women are caught, they are raped”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2017b: 19). This kind of gendered violence is indicative of genocide. Whilst men are massacred women are targeted for destruction of their reproductive capacity. Shocking reports reveal that soldiers raped and killed pregnant women, took babies away from breastfeeding mothers, and killed unborn babies. Moreover, rape and the intentional spreading of HIV, may cause infertility, and the trauma experienced by victims often undermines procreation (Pinaud, 2020: 686, 687, 691).

6. Tigray, Ethiopia (2020-2022)

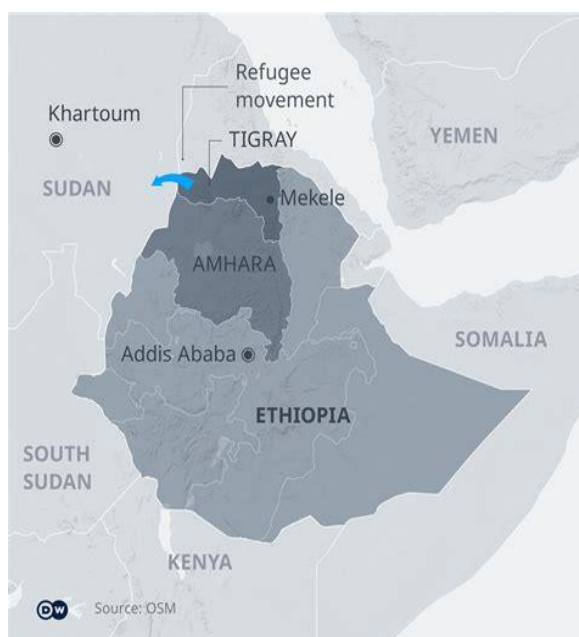


Figure 3: Map of Ethiopia⁴

“You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze; you are evil, and we are purifying your blood” (cited in Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022: 148).

“They said if you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies” (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b: 18, 20).

“Our families were raped and now it is our turn to rape you” (...) “We have a right to take revenge for what your people did to our women” (cited in Amnesty International, 2022: 14)

“They gathered like a hyena that saw something to eat.” (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b: 13)

“I have not enough words. They see us Tigrayan women as a leftover kollo (a local cereal snack)” (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b: 12).

“What do you prefer that I slaughter you like a goat or you have sex with me?” He raped me in front of my children and they were crying” (cited in Amnesty International, 2022:15).

This analysis focuses on the war in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, between 2020 and 2022. In this conflict, sexual violence was perpetrated by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), and allied Amhara and Fano militias including the Amhara Special Forces (ASF).⁵ Also the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) committed such violence upon re-gaining territory (Amnesty International, 2021a). Fighting is concentrated in the northern regions of Tigray and Western Tigray, with spill over into the Amhara region. The war in Tigray is considered one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent history with an estimated death toll of 600,000 people (Al Jazeera, 2023; Mishori et. al, 2023: 1023). Allegedly all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing (Al Jazeera, 2023; BBC 2021a, 2021b; Centre for Preventative Action, 2023a; Chotia, 2021; EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 5). Particularly Eritrean forces fighting alongside the EDF, who’s involvement was denied by both parties up until 2021, have been accused of some of the bloodiest and most gruesome crimes (Centre for Preventative Action, 2023a).

⁴ Figure 3: Map of Ethiopia. Available at: https://static.dw.com/image/55580592_7.png (Accessed 24 May 2024).

⁵ Participating in the conflict in support of the Ethiopian forces, at times jointly and at times independently, however with their consent (Amnesty International, 2021b: 11-12).

6.1 Grievances predating the conflict.

Ethiopia is a multi-ethnic country that follows a federal system, put in place in 1994, with ten regional governments divided along ethnic lines (BBC,2021b; CNN, 2023). The central government, formed in 1991, was governed by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front, led by the powerful Tigray People's Liberation Front (ibid.,). Although only making up 6% of the populations, Tigrayans were in a politically and economically privileged and dominant position for more than three decades (Cook, 2022: 370). In 2018, prime minister Abiy Ahmed centralised the political system and removed Tigrayan leaders from government exacerbating ethno-nationalist tensions (BBC,2021b; CNN, 2023). The TPLF, which had once been the politically dominant beneficiaries of the federalist system (Cook, 2022: 357), attacked an Ethiopian military base outside the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle on November 4th 2020 (Centre for Preventative Action, 2023a). This prompted a retaliation by the ENDF whose offensive has since escalated into a full-blown civil war. The ongoing conflict is thus rooted in ethnic grievances, closely linked to political power structures, predating the conflict and spanning over several decades. This thesis considers these grievances similarly historic as in the case of Sudan, and thereby more deeply entrenched than in South Sudan.

6.2 Contextual factors

6.2.1 Displacement

Tying into the systematic human rights abuses of civilians, the conflict has had dire humanitarian impacts triggering high levels of displacement, food insecurity and famine. An estimated 65,000 people have sought refuge in neighboring Sudan, with 51,207 registered by UNHCR in eastern Sudan (Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022: 152). A staggering 2 million are internally displaced (BBC, 2021b; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022: 151). Out of those IDPs, 53% originate from Western Tigray (Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022: 152). According to a joint report from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (2022: 150), rape and the threat of rape have been employed to push civilians out of their homes in Western Tigray. Displacement is thus often forced and deliberate and as in the other case studies inflicted through CRSV. As one survivor

reported to Amnesty International (2021a: 15) “I walked for four hours to Wukan to my aunt, because I was too scared to go back to Chenna.”

However, as in Sudan and South Sudan, displacement is not only an intended consequence of conflict-related sexual violence, but also an enabler. Women and girls on the move, fleeing their homes, hiding in rural areas, and undertaking long journeys along public roads, are highly vulnerable to falling victim to sexual violence. Reports from Amnesty International (2021b, 2022) and Human Rights Watch (2022), as well as the joint investigation conducted by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2021), document sexual assault of women and girls trying to flee. Also, women who have left their homes in search of food and to fetch water were targeted and raped by soldiers (EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 3).

6.2.2 Food Insecurity and Looting

A lack of basic services as well as high levels of food insecurity and famine, which according to estimates from the United Nations affect around 350,000 – 400,000 people (BBC, 2021a) therefore put women at an elevated risk of falling victims to sexual violence. Like in Sudan and South Sudan, this situation is worsened by soldiers looting property, livestock, and harvests, and forcibly taking food, money, and property from civilians (Amnesty International, 2021b: 8; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022: 103-106). In some cases, rape was linked to soldiers forcing families to cook for them (ibid.,). Additionally, it is widely reported that starvation is used as a weapon of war with armed actors deliberately obstructing humanitarian aid supplies to worsen food insecurity and hunger (Human Rights Watch, 2021: 1, 10, 13).

All in all this thesis observes significant contextual commonalities between the three cases, finding that civilians in all three conflicts were plagued by famine and food insecurity, looting of private property, and most detrimentally internal and cross-border displacement. In Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia these three contextual factors interacted to exacerbate vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence, and in many cases directly enable it.

6.3 Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

As was observed in Sudan and South Sudan, sexual violence is a pervasive feature, even a “hallmark” (Cook, 2022: 357) in the conflict in Tigray (Fisseha et al, 2023; Mishori et al., 2023; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2022). During a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on 15 April 2021, Mark Lowcok (as cited in Cook, 2022: 372), UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, concluded that “there is no doubt that sexual violence is being used in this conflict as a weapon of war, as a means to humiliate, terrorize and traumatize an entire population today and into the next generation.” There is overarching agreement that sexual violence is deliberate, organized, wide-spread and egregious in Tigray (Fisseha et al, 2023: 2; Mishori et al., 2023: 1023).

6.3.1 Frequency

Though measuring prevalence is challenging, and by no means sufficient to assess the issue of CRSV, something that this thesis has established in all three cases, it is interesting to note that 43% of women surveyed from 52/84 districts in Tigray experienced at least one type of gender-based violence (Fisseha et al., 2023: 6). The same community-based survey found that 45.9% of sexual violence occurred during the first 150 days of the war (ibid.,). Thirdly, it notes that findings indicate a 10 % higher incidence of rape compared to those reported in other conflicts around the globe. Finally, several sources indicate that the majority of Tigrayan women experience various as well as multiple forms of violence, echoing findings from Sudan and South Sudan (Amnesty International, 2021a, 2021b).

6.3.2 Form

As observed in Sudan and South Sudan, the most common form of sexual violence perpetrated in Tigray was gang-rape (Cook, 2022; Fisseha et al., 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022; Mishori et al., 2023;). Research reviewing anonymized medical records found that 76% of cases involved rapes by multiple perpetrators, i.e., gang rape by three or more perpetrators (Mishori, et. al, 2023: 1024). Similarly Human Rights Watch (2021: 20-21) noted that over 25% of reports made to the organization involved multiple perpetrators, and that 59/125 women at a one-stop center reported gang rape by military forces. Moreover, as in the other cases, women were abducted and held in captivity for sexual slavery over days, weeks and months

(ibid.,). Especially minors were abducted, held as sex slaves and often forcibly married to militia men as testimonies from 16 and 17 year old girls reveal (Amnesty International, 2021b: 14-16). This thesis thus observes crucial commonalities across all three cases in the way in which conflict-related sexual violence is perpetrated.

Whilst women are targeted for rape and sexual slavery (Mishori et al., 2023: 1023), men have reportedly been subjected to “forced nudity, genital violence, enforced rape of others, forced witnessing of sexual violence, threat of rape, castration, and sterilization” (Human Rights Watch, 2021: 23). The differentiated targetting of men, with purposes of emasculation, was also a commonality observed across all three cases.

Also in Tigray physical violence was frequently accompanied by verbal and psychological abuse as it is perpetrated alongside killings of (male) family members and in front of children, husbands, parents and community members (Human Rights Watch, 2021: 2). This is strategic as it terrorizes communities. More specifically, reports of men being forced to rape their own family members under threats of violence, shatters families and carries great stigma and humiliation (UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia as cited in Human Rights Watch, 2021: 22). Another example is the perpetration of anal rape, which, in addition to inflicting severe pain, carries even greater stigma and shame (Amnesty International, 2021b: 17).

Another common theme observed across all three cases is the appalling brutality of rape, which is not only accompanied by beatings but may also include the insertion of sharp objects into vagina and anus such as large nails and hot metal rods prompting immense pain and severe, irreversible health consequences (Amnesty International, 2021b: 12, 16; EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 35). As one survivor shares, *“they used an iron rod, which is used to clean the gun, to burn me ... They left pieces of metal in my womb; that was what hurt me”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b). Such physical torture is inflicted not to extract information, but to cause the maximum level of pain and humiliation.

6.3.3 Targeting

Accounts of CRSV focus mainly on the victimization of women and girls. As population-based surveys suggest, especially women of reproductive age, especially those between 19-25, were sexually abused (Fisseha et al., 2023: 6; Mishori et al, 2023: 1024). As in South Sudan, neither pregnant nor elderly women were spared (Amnesty International, 2021b: 12-14), and, as in the other two case studies, Human Rights Watch (2021: 21) reported that a significant number of victims were under the age of 18. Although violence was often indiscriminate, observers claim there is a clear intention by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces to ethnically cleanse the Tigrayan people (Cook, 2022: 371), illustrated by ethnic slurs accompanying violence. This thesis observed both in Sudan and Ethiopia ethnic slurs were particularly grave and common. Moreover, particularly the wives, sisters and daughters of TPLF fighters were targeted (EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 42).

6.3.4 Perpetrators

Similar to the other cases, sexual violence took place particularly then when women and girls were in close proximity of EDF, ENDF, ASF and Fano militias (Amnesty International, 2021b: 12). Survivors reported Fano militia men wearing old ENDF uniforms, mixed groups of men in which some were wearing uniforms and others civilian clothes, and men wearing civilian clothes yet carrying rifles. The involvement of perpetrators in civilians clothes, not clearly identifying as soldiers, was also common across all three cases. The joint investigation conducted by EHRC and OHCHR (2021: 44) further revealed the complicity of women who lured in other women and girls seeking refuge. Evidence has also surfaced that female EDF soldiers ridiculed and took photos of boys and men forced to parade nude in public places for humiliation purposes (EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 34, 36, 45). As in Sudan, the thesis observes the complicity and agency of women in perpetrating CRSV.

6.3.5 Enablers

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a pervasive issue in Ethiopia. Just like Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia ranks in the last quarter of the United Nations Development Programme's (2022) Gender Inequality Index, more specifically as 176th out of 193. In a population-based survey, 30.3% of women reported experiencing sexual and psychological violence by intimate partners

(Adhena and Oljira, 2020: 96). Associated factors causing this were the low decision-making capacity of women, polygamy of men, unplanned pregnancy, and alcoholism of partners (ibid., 99). Moreover, as in the other case studies, there are several harmful traditional practices still in place in Ethiopia, that are particularly prevalent in rural areas. These include female genital mutilation, early marriage, taboos preventing women controlling their own fertility and sexuality, early pregnancy, and dowry (Gebre et al., 2020: 61, 67). A population-based survey found that 59.5% were in an arranged marriage and that the majority of married girls, 60.9%, had to pay a dowry to their husband or his family (ibid., 61). Different research found that 1/10 women in Ethiopia are victims of abduction, early marriage, and marital rape (Semahegen and Mengistie, 2015 as cited in Gebre et al., 2020: 59), and that marriage by abduction, wife inheritance, and encouraging excessive fertility remain present in Ethiopia (Assefa et al., 2013 as cited in Gebre et al., 2020: 67).

The thesis finds that although the nuances of gender inequality differ from case to case, rape and sexual violence are accepted customs that are often perpetrated to assert dominance and ownership over women, in line with cultural understanding of femininity and masculinity, which are in all three countries rooted in patriarchal social order. Moreover, the prevalence of intimate partner violence and the acceptance of violence against women as the norm (Gebre et al., 2020: 59) imply continuity between gender-based violence in peace time and sexual violence during armed conflict. Harmful and internalized gender-inequality thus act as a base through which conflict-related sexual violence is perceived as a custom and tolerated practice, thriving through impunity.

6.3.7 Motivation

Weapon of War

On the one hand, consistent and systematically high levels of sexual violence in central and eastern Tigray, where the ENDF and EDF are present and have more control (Fisseha et al., 2023: 6), show that there is a link between the perpetration of sexual violence and military strategy (Mishori, et. al, 2023: 1024). Upon thoroughly analyzing testimonies from survivors and observing patterns in their accounts, it is evident that CRSV accompanied by psychological and physical violence, aims to terrorize, degrade, and humiliate individuals, and by extension their communities. A report from Amnesty International (2021b: 12) interestingly concludes

that “the widespread and continuous nature of these practices and crimes” indicate “that the strategy has been tolerated at the highest level of government.”

Ethnic Hatred

As in Sudan, and to an extent in South Sudan, dynamics extend beyond the strategic dimension, with rape being perpetrated against a specific ethnic group to erase their identity and spread disease to undermine fertility (Cook, 2022: 358). Testimonial evidence reveals that sexual violence is frequently accompanied by degrading, ethnic-based slurs, especially uttered by ENDF, EDF and ASF (Human Rights Watch, 2021: 3). The joint EHRC and OHCHR human rights investigation (2021: 41) concludes that “acts of rape were frequently intended to degrade and dehumanize an entire ethnic group.” Soldiers have expressed to victims that they seek to cleanse the Tigrayan bloodline and forcibly impregnate them to make Amhara babies: *“We will kill your men and rape your women. We were sent here to clean out Tigrayans, they will be replaced by real Ethiopians; we are cleansing this country of people like you”* (cited in EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 43) and *“They said if you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b: 18). Moreover, violence is gendered and genocidal. Men are subject to mass-killings and massacres, whereas women are targeted for sexual violence, even forced marriage, and forced impregnation.

Linked to the ethnic dimension is the issue of forced displacement. Victims describe that in addition to verbal abuse and denigration for their ethnicity, *“They said: ‘you are an Agame (an insulting word used by Eritrean to refer to Tigrayans), disgusting, backward. This is what you deserve.”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2021b: 18) they were explicitly ordered to leave their homes. One survivor recounted being told *“You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze; you are evil, and we are purifying your blood”* (cited in Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 2021: 147). Another reported the following, *“They said you and your race are foul, toilet-smelling race and should not be on our land”* (cited in *ibid.*, 148). This thesis finds the intensity of ethnic slurs, implying an intention to erase the enemy group, comparable to that observed in Sudan. Moreover, as in Sudan, coupled with shocking levels of violence, degrading ethnic slurs and death-threats forcibly displace people from their homes.

Additionally, as was evident in South Sudan, violence was in some cases rooted in desire for revenge for past atrocities. Amnesty International (2022) documented sexual violence committed by Tigrayan Defense Forces against ethnic Amhara women and girls in and around Chenna, accompanied by the same kind of ethnic slurs, degrading remarks, death threats, and severe physical violence. Testimonies reveals soldiers asserting *“Your people raped our women”; “We have a right to take revenge for what your people did to our women”; “Thank god that I am not going to kill you”* (cited in Amnesty International, 2022: 15). The theme of revenge is cross-cutting along all actors with EDF soldiers proclaiming *“you [Tigrayans] ill-treated the Eritreans for 20 years, now for 50 years you will starve, then we will kill your men and rape your women”* (cited in EHRC and OHCHR, 2021: 43).

7. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explain and more profoundly understand the phenomenon of conflict-related sexual violence. It has done so by investigating the causes of such violence, as well as by exploring the determinants of variation in form, frequency, and targeting both across and within conflicts. To confront its research puzzle, the thesis first reviewed the established explanations in the literature as to why sexual violence is perpetrated during conflict, informing its analysis with meta-theoretical insights. It then developed its own theoretical framework, which it applied by conducting comparative analysis of three cases of intrastate conflict: Sudan (2003-2005), South Sudan (2013-2017) and Tigray (2020-2022, observing commonalities, patterns and differences in form, frequency and targeting, as well as enabling and motivating factors.

This thesis concludes that variation in the perpetration of war-time sexual violence is most starkly determined by the nuances of the conflict. More specifically, it observed that the greatest variation across conflicts lied in the targeting of sexual violence, determined by the extent to which ethnic grievances predate the conflict, as well as how strongly defined the intent of ethnic cleansing is. Moreover, the thesis observes that within conflicts, depending on which gender was targeted, the form in and intent with which sexual violence was perpetrated differed meaning that the crime was committed in distinct ways against men versus women. Despite these two key variations, however, the thesis found more commonalities than differences across cases. In fact, the thesis was able to draw convincing conclusions regarding how gender inequality, militarization of masculinity, and shared contextual factors create conditions for and enable conflict-related sexual violence.

The thesis was also able to substantiate its theoretical framework. It found that there are three interacting levels that permit the perpetration of conflict-related sexual violence. Firstly, it corroborated the three enabling factors that create conditions in which sexual violence becomes normalized and even institutionalized. That is deeply rooted gender inequality, intensified by harmful traditional practices, the socialization of young men into extreme violence and hegemonic masculinity and the erosion of the rule of law. All three legitimize and reinforce CRSV to such an extent that it becomes almost a custom and

unquestioned practice, in some cases even a pre-requisite for masculinity and group cohesion through male bonding. The thesis finds that these factors create cultures and societies in which violence against women is normalized and internalized, both by female victims and male perpetrators. Though the nuances of these norms and relations varied from case to case, overarchingly it found that rape and sexual violence were accepted customs often perpetrated to assert dominance and ownership over women, in line with cultural understanding of femineity and masculinity. Moreover, the thesis observed continuity between war-time sexual violence and highly rates of intercommunal and intimate-partner violence during peace time.

Secondly, rooted in socially constructed gender norms, sexual violence is weaponized to humiliate and terrorize communities, shattering and forcibly displacing them. The thesis found that across all three-case studies gang-rape was highly prevalent, as was the abduction of young girls for sexual slavery. Moreover, considering that sexual violence was overwhelmingly accompanied with severe psychological and physical violence, characterized by public humiliation and appalling levels of brutality, there exists clear links between form in which CRSV is committed and its weaponization for strategic purposes. Another layer is the ethnic dimension. The thesis found that targeting is often based on ethnic group membership with rape serving as an instrument of reproductive control. Gendered genocidal violence, i.e., gender-selective killing, further intensified this. Nonetheless, the extent to which targeting was on an ethnic basis varied depending on the extent to which and way in which ethnic grievances predated the conflict.

Thirdly, three contextual factors, displacement, food insecurity and looting intersected to exacerbate the vulnerability of certain individuals to sexual violence. The thesis found that in all three conflicts food insecurity, looting of private property, and most detrimentally internal and cross-border displacement interact to exacerbate vulnerability and, in some cases, directly enable CRSV. It is thus not only gender and ethnicity that interplay, to varying extents, to cause and enable sexual violence, but also socio-economic circumstances, as well as migrant status and livelihood issues. The thesis concludes that it is ultimately the poorest, most marginalized members of society, displaced women belonging to ethnic minorities, forced to feed their children and relatives, that are exposed to violence.

Conflict-related sexual violence is thus a complex phenomenon, operating at multiple levels and to varying extents. Understanding why it is perpetrated warrants a thorough investigation of societal structures, gender relations and conflict dynamics, particularly related to ethnic mobilization, hatred, and cleansing. However, as illustrated by the contextual factors, it is not only gender and ethnicity that make women fall victim to these crimes, but also socio-economic vulnerability and displacement, illustrating ultimately how multiple layers of marginalization intersect to target the most disadvantaged members of society.

Building on its findings the thesis identifies multiple pathways for further research. Firstly, it considers it interesting and relevant to analyze in more depth the intersections between displacement and sexual violence. More can be done to understand and shed light on the situation of women and girls in IDP and refugee camps. Secondly, it would be relevant to study the armed actor level, more specifically how military cultures and hierarchies, small unit dynamics and recruitment practices influence the perpetration of sexual violence. Though this research is methodologically challenging, it would offer crucial insights into the construction of militarized masculinities, as well the ways in which, they impact the form, frequency and targeting of sexual violence. One could draw comparisons between highly organized state-centered militaries and loosely associated militias to examine whether this determines of variation.

Despite the brokering of peace agreements, long-lasting peace has not returned to any of the countries this thesis has studied (Landale, 2023; Michael and Mcneill, 2023; Tut Pur, 2022). In Sudan, a peace deal was signed 14 years ago between Omar al-Bashir's government and Darfur rebels (CNN, 2010). Nonetheless, since 2023, the Rapid Support Forces, which have succeeded the Janjaweed, are yet again committing genocide against the non-Arab population in Darfur (Foreign Policy, 2024). In 2020 in South Sudan a peace deal was signed between the two rival leaders to end violence (BBC, 2020), however to this day the humanitarian situation remains dire with the threat of genocide continues to loom (DW, 2024). In Ethiopia the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed in 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2022), yet reconciliation and recovery are far from achieved.

The outcomes and current status of all three cases raises fundamental questions around the implications of peace-settlements, as well as the trade-off between justice and functionality. Whilst functional approaches prioritize stability and pragmatic compromise, justice-based approaches seek truth and reconciliation, retribution, and reparations. Leaning towards one comes at the cost of the other, raising deeper questions around what peace and post-conflict reconciliation mean. Is peace the absence of direct, physical violence, or is it the freedom from indirect, structural violence? Building on Johan Galtung's (1969: 183) delimitation between negative and positive peace, this thesis ultimately finds that in volatile environments deeply entrenched structural violence, which is profoundly linked to direct, physical violence, creating a continuum of violence, make the achievement of holistic peace ever more challenging.

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