Feminism in the Humanitarian Machine. Introduction to the Special Section on 'The Politics of Intervention Against (Conflict-Related) Sexual and Gender-based Violence'

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ABSTRACT

The prevention and mitigation of sexual and gender-based violence in (post-) conflict societies has become an important humanitarian activity. This introductory article examines the analytical discourses on these interventions, the institutionalization of SGBV expertise in international politics, and the emancipatory potential of anti-SGBV practices. It argues that the confluence of feminist professional activism and militarized humanitarian interventionism produced specific international activities against SGBV. As part of the institutionalization of gender themes in international politics, feminist emancipatory claims have been taken up by humanitarian organizations. The normal operating state of the humanitarian machine, however, undercuts its potential contribution to social transformation towards larger gender equality in (post-) conflict societies.

Introduction

This special section analyses international activities that seek to prevent the occurrence and mitigate the consequences of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in armed conflicts and post-conflict societies.[1] The history of these branches of humanitarian intervention is relatively short. A surge in sustained political interest regarding sexual violence in armed conflict occurred only in the last decade of the previous millennium. It then took another ten years or so for projects and programmes focused on sexual violence to become integral to larger peacebuilding activities. Now, anti-sexual violence activities are a routine element in broader approaches of peacebuilding and statebuilding, as for example organized by the UN and its sub-organizations and peace missions. Other international organizations (IO) and internationally operating humanitarian non-governmental organizations (INGO) also now implement such projects and programmes fairly regularly.[2] Presently this branch of humanitarian activity seems to have arrived at a crossroads. On the one hand, SGBV-focused projects and programmes, and the involvement of specialized personnel, have become established practice in intervention settings. On the other hand, the political interest in war-related sexual violence may have already peaked and be on the verge of decline (Hilhorst and Douma 2018). Meanwhile, academic criticism of previously hegemonic rationales and approaches is increasing. Accordingly, it seems appropriate at this moment to take

stock. The authors of this section aim to critically describe and analyse the history, concepts, structures and effects of these interventions. We interrogate how ideas and knowledge about SGBV in conflict areas are produced and discussed; which instruments and approaches are employed to prevent sexual violence and mitigate its consequences for victims, their families and larger society; and how and whether interventions seek to transform norms and structures of gendered inequality.

This section situates SGBV interventions in (post-) conflict areas within the wider 'humanitarian machine'. This machine are the structures, discourses, and practices of militarized humanitarian interventions, which are designed, financed, organized and implemented by international organizations and international NGO, donor ministries, lobby groups, policy-oriented academic institutions, think tanks and consultancy networks. James Ferguson (1990) describes the field of developmental organizations as an 'anti-politics machine' that sought to improve the lot of the poor. As Fergusson argues, this machine both boosted the bureaucratic apparatus of states, and—through its technocratic frameworks—depoliticized deeply political issues. Poverty, meanwhile, persisted despite international development organizations stated aim to overcome it.

Since Fergusson published his study almost thirty years ago, the development sector has become largely indistinguishable from its humanitarian counterpart. Additionally, the state-centred development approach he described gave way to a more decentralized, liberal organization of international intervention. Two major continuities, however, exist: like its predecessor, the humanitarian machine seems, for one, prone to primarily foster weakly centralized bureaucracies, and secondly to employ technocratic approaches to political problems.

Feminist political networks deserve much of the credit for putting conflict-related sexual violence on the international political table. Their success in donor-state ministries, IO and INGO however also meant that SGBV became an object of the humanitarian anti-politics machine. Many of the tensions and dilemmas tied to liberal humanitarianism are therefore built into SGBV interventions. Such tensions have resulted in unease among feminist academics, civil servants and activists. Many now wish for a different, more progressive design and implementation of SGBV interventions, with less influence from market logics, neoliberal and security discourses, and organizational exigencies.

Academic debates have particularly criticized reductionist representations of SGBV in international politics which separated rape as a weapon of war from other forms of SGBV in times of both peace and war; from other forms of wartime violence and violent domination; and from structurally, gendered aspects of inequality and poverty in (post-) conflict societies and world society at large. SGBV in armed conflict, critics argue, has been portrayed as exceptional and particular, detached from its social and political context, and is accordingly also treated with exceptional measures. Karen Engle (2005) and Doris Buss (2009) disparage the narrow perspectives of international tribunals on SGBV, which decontextualized violence from its social setting, depicted women as uniformly powerless, and essentialized ethnic groups into either perpetrators or victims. Moreover, victims who do not fit into the dominant narrative, such as men or women from a 'perpetrator' ethnic group, were rendered invisible. Paul Kirby (2015, 458) argues that the interpretation of rape as a weapon of war in international politics 'offers an unduly simplistic account of where and why such violence happens' (see also Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013). Such simplification leads to misconceptions about (a

perceived lack of) the capabilities of women, and undermines their self-emancipatory contributions (Freedman 2015).

Several authors underline their criticism of SGBV exceptionalism by portraying these political debates as extraordinary. For example, Séverine Autesserre (2012) calls interventionists' frames of wartime rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo a 'dangerous tale'. Dorothea Hilhorst and Nynke Douma (2018) speak of a 'hype', and Sara Meger (2016) denounces a 'fetishization' of SGBV by international actors. Indeed, several unintended effects of the sensationalist humanitarian gaze have been observed: the crowding out of attention to other humanitarian problems (Cohen and Green 2012; D'Errico et al. 2013), incentives for humanitarian organizations to overstate the prevalence of SGBV, to compete for victims, and disincentives for coordination between these organizations. Some observers have even noted false rape claims by non-affected populations eager to access aid resources, and pressure to prosecute SGBV which endangered suspects' rights to due process (Douma and Hilhorst 2012; Lake 2014). Such criticism is underlined by the application of securitization theory (Meger 2016; Mertens and Pardy 2016) to the analysis of SGBV interventions. Securitization theory centrally claims that international actors use security frames to legitimize extraordinary and extralegal measures in response to perceived security threats (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998).

Such portrayals beg the question whether the critics themselves do not overly scandalize the normal operating state of the humanitarian machine. Simplification, sensationalism, decontextualization, and ultimately depoliticization are long-known, built-in techniques of humanitarianism that stretch back to its colonial roots (Ferguson 1990; Malkki 1996; Barnett 2011). Similarly, the commodification of aid receivers, organizational competition and non-coordination, and thematic fashions are generally observable effects of the quasi-market in which humanitarian organizations operate (Cooley and Ron 2002; Kühl 2009; Krause 2014). And while SGBV has served as a pretext for various military attacks and occupations of doubtful legality (Kosovo in 1999; Afghanistan in 2002; Libya in 2011), the large majority of SGBV interventions are neither extraordinary nor extralegal. Based on Security Council resolutions and multilaterally negotiated organizational mandates, commonly licensed by or even at the invitation of host states, SGBV interventions are undertaken on a sound legal basis. Moreover, their practices, while partly based on international policing powers, do not exceed the boundaries of what since the 1990s has gradually become the new normal of international militarized humanitarian intervention.

As Michael Barnett (2011, 12–14) argues, humanitarian interventions are an 'application of power to liberate the victims of the world', resulting in a paradox between domination and emancipation: 'Any act of intervention, no matter how well intended, is also an act of control. Humanitarian governance may have its heart in the right place, but it is still a form of governance, and governance always includes power'. As this section demonstrates, normative, economic, and bureaucratic mechanisms that have been well-rehearsed throughout the period of liberal interventionism also prevail in SGBV interventions. SGBV projects and programmes have been integrated and adjusted to the norms and modes of the humanitarian machine; as a consequence, they reproduce the tensions and dilemmas of contemporary liberal humanitarianism. The first factor underlying these dynamics are normative approaches. Contemporary SGBV interventions are, in line with the predominant human rights-approaches, to a large extent 'victim-centred', promising aid and ultimately 'empowerment' for survivors of SGBV. While the attention and larger financial share for

victimized women constitutes a potential emancipatory achievement of feminist humanitarianism, this section shows how SGBV interventions risk reproducing structures of gendered inequality, and thereby follow in the footsteps of its missionary and colonial precursors. In their contribution to the section, Charlotte Mertens and Henri Myrttinen demonstrate that the colonial baggage carried by SGBV interventions may not be easily dropped. Based on fieldwork, archival research and professional experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond, their contribution reveals the long shadow of colonial sexual politics, which anxiously guarded both the chastity and reproductive health of women, while fostering 'civilized' masculinities of colonized men as heads of idealized nuclear families. Today many projects and programmes advocate similar concepts and ideas of heteronormative sexuality and ways of life that mix Western and locally dominant approaches. Then and now, alternative ways of living—and non-female or non-heterosexual victims of SGBV—are usually excluded.

The contributions of Mertens and Myrttinen as well as that of Anne Menzel highlight how even explicitly emancipatory approaches may reproduce gendered inequalities. Mertens and Myrttinen point to the language games of victim-centred approaches that pre-determine that SGBV victims have to turn into 'thrivers' able to carry emancipatory messages into their communities. As they warn, 'thriving' survivors may even face violent backlashes from conservative community members for resisting their subordinate social position. Menzel's ethnography shows how campaigns against teenage pregnancy in Sierra Leone lay the burden of individual betterment and social development on the shoulders of marginalized young women, but without providing for structural changes which could ensure greater gender equality. Instead of attacking patriarchal societal structures and behaviour, these campaigns make career promises in return for girls' chastity and modesty. Such programmes risk both disappointing the hopes of young women and reproducing inequalities. Taken together, these contributions highlight the astonishing parallels between historical colonial and contemporary liberal normative perspectives, which demand female 'beneficiaries' and local men to adjust their subjectivities to a heteronormative ideal, rather than fostering structural change towards greater social and gender equality.

A second set of factors identified in this section providing for tensions and dilemmas between domination and emancipation, stem from the bureaucratic and economic logics underlying operations of the humanitarian machine. Both Menzel's article and that by Alex Veit and Lisa Tschörner analyse how donors and interventions organizations frame SGBV and design and implement projects and programmes. Menzel shows how in Sierra Leone donor-fatigue with failing institutional capacity-building approaches fostered a new concern with teenage pregnancy as a form or consequence of SGBV. Catalyzed by the Ebola crisis, donors, international organizations, local NGOs and the government of Sierra Leone set their eyes on the sexual relationships of young girls, apparently with the intent of guarding vulnerable women from sexual predators. Veit and Tschörner interrogate, based on a triangulation of academic literature, policy papers and field research, how feminist academic debates on the causes of SGBV impact the design and implementation of SGBV projects and programmes. They show how feminist research criticized simplifying explanations of rape as a weapon of war and moved towards explanations emphasizing gendered social contexts of violence. Their article, again with a focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo, finds that IOs and INGOs eagerly use both new and old academic research results to legitimize projects and programmes, but often ignore theoretical

contradictions evident in academic findings. Moreover, rather than reforming their programmatic approaches towards SGBV based on new insights, large implementing organizations in particular prefer well-rehearsed victim-centred approaches to new preventive approaches that seek to change structural gender inequality in (post-) conflict society.

The humanitarian machine is open to emancipative ideas: it advocates empowerment of vulnerable girls and survivors of sexual violence; it employs human rights-based approaches; it is even listening to critical feminist voices demanding to change approaches that fail to deliver emancipation. At the same time, the bureaucratic and economic logics of the humanitarian machine lead away from these emancipatory aims. In sum, the section points out the potential of SGBV interventions as a means to improve the lot of survivors, but also highlights the limits of emancipation within the structures of the humanitarian machine.

In the following part of this introductory article, I discuss the tensions between emancipation and domination with regard to SGBV and interventions against SGBV in (post-) conflict areas in a conceptual perspective. I demonstrate that SGBV interventions constitute a confluence of political forces of the liberal moment, namely, militarized humanitarianism on the one hand and universalist feminism on the other. On a discursive level, feminists and humanitarians have found common ground in debates about 'New Wars' (Kaldor 1999) and 'Rape as a Weapon of War' (Card 1996). A central aspect of that has been the turn to human rights, which characterized much of Western feminism and humanitarianism in the 1990s. As a result, SGBV became a topic, with feminist professionals as its advocate, that entered the 'humanitarian machine' of donor ministries, international organizations, NGOs, lobby groups, policy-oriented academic institutions, think tanks and consultancy networks.

Inspired by Michel Foucault's (1991, 1995, 2010) work on the interplay between institutions and subjectivities, I discuss in the third part the paradox of domination and emancipation on the level of implementation. I argue that SGBV interventions have been incorporated into institution-focused peace-and-statebuilding, and therefore contribute to security and judicial sector reform, but also build other public social structures such as hospitals. This 'therapeutic' approach (Park 2009) towards victims contributes to structures of internationalized authority. More difficult to observe are its emancipatory achievements.

Taken together, this introduction as well as the section as a whole posit that the enmeshment of feminism and humanitarianism advanced the position of the female victim of war-related SGBV within the global sacrificial order. Victim-centred projects and programmes are intentionally or inadvertently engaged in the production of new subjectivities. While they pledge to provide opportunities for emancipation, their actual contribution is delimited by international humanitarianism's structures of domination.

Sexual violence and the discovery of new wars

Present international political attention on SGBV in conflict areas, and the allocation of resources to mitigate consequences and reduce its occurrence, are tightly connected to new interpretations of war and conflict since the Cold War. The new wars concept (most prominently: Kaldor 1999) largely succeeded in convincing Western publics of a binary difference between their own and other people's forms of warfare, 'a "them" and "us" division based on the opposing characteristics of excess and rationality' (Duffield 2002, 1052). Analyses of new wars claimed that fighters in contemporary civil

wars were driven by two motivations: individual 'greed' (Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and ethnic identity (critically: Brubaker 2002). Somewhat contradictorily, the former seemed to be a form of rational strategizing, while the latter alluded to pre-modern tribal emotions. Both motivations, meanwhile, have been taken to explain brutality towards non-combatant civilians (Snow 1996).

Feminist academic writings since the 1990s provide a nuanced debate on the history, causes and consequences of sexual violence in war. This literature has been the most influential feminist academic contribution to the conceptualization of contemporary warfare in the global South, south-eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The most successful theoretical concept in these debates—rape as a strategic or tactical weapon of war—fits well into the new wars narrative of both hyper-rational and affect-guided fighters.

In it, sexual violence in conflict is explained as a deliberate military choice, a strategic move to undermine the moral coherence of the enemy ethnic group, intended to result in flight, submission or dissolution (Allen 1996; Seifert 1996; Chinkin and Kaldor 2013). Critics argue that feminist literature has thereby contributed to a hegemonic 'main plot' about 'rape as a weapon of war', even if 'the storylines of (feminist) scholarship' have been more differentiated than policy and media reporting (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, 44). Partly, simplification may have been a political strategy. Engle (2005, 779), discussing feminist debates on sexual violence and contributions to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, states that 'Feminists often worked together (…), largely putting aside their disagreements so as to play a formative role in the creation and operation of a major international institution'.

Similarly to the new wars concept, the weapon of war-approach portrays raping combatants as following a rational-choice strategy, while simultaneously being driven by emotions and affects. Card (1996, 7), for example, discusses among strategic aims of rape in conflict both ethnic expulsion, which may be a rationally conceived aim, as well as ethnic revenge, which more clearly belongs to the realm of affect. Kirby (2013, 807) sorts the theoretical tensions in the weapon of war-literature into a tripartite conceptualization:

> The victims of rape thus appear as instrumentalized objects (used and discarded in the pursuit of other ends); the abject bodies of unreason (defiled as sources of deep disgust for rapists); or mythologized subjects (others with an imagined group identity antagonistically opposed to that of the perpetrators).

The simultaneity and seeming tension between rationality and affect are nothing new in the analysis of warfare. Already Clausewitz (2000, 264–282) argued that the 'strange trinity' of warfare as a political instrument, as driven by 'passion', and as an object of probability and chance, constitute the fundamental elements of a theory of war. Problematic, in both an analytical and normative perspective, is however the 'othering' of warfare in the global South. As is made obvious by their designation, new wars have been conceived as essentially different from previous ones. Old wars were conflicts fought between regular (European/Western) armed forces, and mythologized as disciplined and noble. Such interpretations implicitly allocate greedy, tribal and brutal warfare to non-western countries (including south-eastern Europe) (Kalyvas 2001; Schlichte 2006).

Many feminist analysts of sexual violence have been aware of the pitfall of othering sexual violence through ahistorical approaches. Many authors note that sexual violence has been an integral part of the history of warfare, and point out sexual atrocities

committed by Western regular armies (e.g. Seifert 1996). Indirectly, however, this literature supplemented the new wars literature's orientalist leanings. One aspect that eased the appropriation of critical feminist academic production into the humanitarian machine, has been the disproportionate attention to a single contemporary armed conflict in the feminist sexual violence literature: the conflict in Bosnia–Herzegovina from 1991 to 1996 (Skjelsbæk 2001, 213; Engle 2005, 785; Buss 2009, 147), which has been also new wars analysts' main prism. Excessive focus easily leads to non-credible claims of exceptionalism. Referring to this war, for example, Roy Gutman (1994, x) notes that 'Rape occurs in nearly every war, but in this one it has played a unique role. The degradation and molestation of women was central to the conquest'.

Analyses of sex and violence are intimately linked with ideas about race, an interrelation that has haunted feminist discussions at least since the controversy between Susan Brownmiller (1975) and Angela Davis (1983, Cohen 2015). The ascription of a menacing, violent sexuality to non-western men has a long historical tradition (Mertens 2016). Accordingly, it has been difficult for post-colonial analysts of war-related SGBV to deal with orientalist baggage while remaining 'a good global feminist' (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, 88–106). The new unease about SGBV interventions in the global South, as described above, is linked to critical perspectives on this race-sexuality nexus. SGBV interventions are suspected of reproducing a colonial *mission civilisatrice*, in which white actors seek to save 'brown women from brown men' (Spivak 2010, 279; see Mertens and Myrttinen 2019).

Even so, the analytical divide between SGBV committed by different perpetrators, depending on their origin and organizational context, has continued in critical analyses, e.g. research on SGBV committed by UN peacekeepers and other intervention personnel (Higate and Henry 2004). Analysts have tended to adopt international organizations' official designation of 'sexual exploitation and abuse' (SEA) for the criminal acts of these soldiers and employees. Even forced prostitution and sexual exchange with minors have seldom been defined as sexual violence. Such differentiation rests entirely upon the position of the perpetrator—New War warriors commit sexual violence, while regular internationally-mandated forces abuse sexually—even if these forms of SGBV were similar and took place in the same conflict zones (e.g. Higate 2007; Grady 2010; Donovan 2015).[3] Accordingly, the motivations behind SGBV on the part of UN soldiers and personnel have been sought in militarized masculinities (Whitworth 2004). Perpetrators from non-regular armed groups in new wars have in contrast been analyzed as cynical calculators with primordial emotions. Similarly, reports of sexual torture committed by US forces during the occupation of Iraq after 2003 galvanized attention on the position of female soldiers and gender relations in that army (Jeffreys 2007; Sjoberg 2007), but they did not provoke any audible academic claim that the USA had used SGBV as a weapon of war.

Nonetheless these investigations provided strong hints that SGBV in war and conflict is a phenomenon that cuts across history and geography and deserves explanations that account for differences and similarities between time, place and social context. Historical and sociological perspectives, including accounts of sexual violence committed by regular European forces and the US army during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (which the literature on new wars and rape as a weapon of war largely has omitted), have meanwhile demonstrated that SGBV has occurred differently in various conflict situations, and has been relatively rare in others (Burds 2009; Miller 2009; Wood 2009). Today, refined analytical approaches to the causes of SGBV in areas of armed conflict have moved

towards researching continuums between non-conflict and conflict-related SGBV (Boesten 2017) and military socializations in armies and armed groups (Wood and Toppelberg 2017; see Veit and Tschörner 2019).

Feminism and the humanitarian shift

The liberal moment after the Cold War was a period of turns and mergers. Humanitarian discourse became ubiquitous in the field of peacekeeping, but also in development organizations (Barnett 2011, 88–117). As a result, the international professional and political fields of development, security and humanitarian action became increasingly indistinguishable. The anti-politics machine, which James Ferguson (1990) described as concerned with development in the 1980s, turned into a militarized humanitarian machine. As an important part of these processes, feminism successfully claimed and advanced its discursive authority 'in terms of norms and problematizations related to government of gender equality' (Harrington 2006, 354–355).

The institutionalization of women's expertise in gender issues on the international level of course dates to before the liberal moment. International organizations' attention to women's causes stretches back to the League of Nations. And while women's expertise regarding gender initially was acquired from consultative advocacy NGOs, from the 1970s onwards women's and gender studies in universities directly have produced expertise and experts for IOs and INGOs. In international organizations at that time the idea of women as human resources for development crystallized as the major gender theme. Women, gender and development became institutionalized as a professional field (Berkovitch 1999, 139–167). In the 1990s, with the United Nations and other international organizations dispatching ever more peace missions, the professional sub-field on gender and development turned its attention to humanitarian intervention, and therein particularly towards SGBV (Harrington 2011). The analytical proximity of new interpretations of warfare and SGBV thus coincided with the further advancement of feminist-minded professionals in international arenas. Ruth Seifert noted in 1996 that 'women now hold positions in politics, academia, science, and the media enabling them to make these [SGBV] incidents a political issue' (Seifert 1996, 35).

A common denominator inside the otherwise often disparate and internally competitive humanitarian machine was the human rights framework. While humanitarianism became ubiquitous and merged with peacebuilding and development in the 1990s, human rights became a dominant way of framing problems and solutions (Barnett 2011, 88–117). A move towards human rights (and away from structural inequalities) had also taken place in feminist thinking (Engle 1992). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998, which forcefully reaffirmed the status of SGBV as an international crime, is a key outcome of the convergence of feminism, humanitarianism, and international security politics (Engle 2005; Halley 2008). Another process in which these previously disparate areas came closer took place in the UN Security Council, which during the 1990s increasingly showed concern about SGBV. In 2000 the council passed Resolution 1325, which institutionalized feminists' stakes in peacebuilding and highlighted the prevention of SGBV and the mitigation of individual and societal costs as a responsibility of humanitarian actors (Willett 2010; Harrington 2011). A chain of resolutions, passed from 2008 to 2014, further elaborated institutional aspects and proposed means and instruments to confront SGBV (Shepherd 2011; Veit and Tschörner 2019).

Feminism was now closely attached to militarized humanitarian intervention (Heath-cote 2011; Pratt 2013; Mertens and Pardy 2016). An outstanding personification of the merging of feminism, human rights activism, and militarized humanitarianism is former US-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. During the Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing in September 1995, in her position as the United States' First Lady, she gave a celebrated speech in which she declared 'women's rights are human rights' and therefore 'It is a violation of human rights when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war'. Her husband's government, at the same time, engaged in an air force campaign in Bosnia–Herzegovina against Bosnian-Serb secessionists, who Madeleine Albright, then US ambassador to the United Nations, had called people 'descended to the level of beasts' for their methods of 'murder, torture, indiscriminate bombing, fire, dismemberment, rape and castration' (Lewis 1994). During Clinton's tenure as Secretary of State (2009–13) she made SGBV a priority of her department, and pressed for the passing of major Security Council resolutions (Heathcote 2011). By visiting rape victims in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (Gettleman 2009), she also contributed to the growth of intervention projects and programmes against SGBV in that country. In 2011 she controversially alleged the use of rape as a weapon of war by Libyan government forces, while their installations and soldiers were bombarded by US war planes (BBC 2011).

Feminist scholarship is divided about the benefits and liabilities of feminist participation in militarized humanitarian intervention and the interlinked 'fight against impunity' for SGBV through international penal action. Some emphasize the achievement (and remaining challenges) of establishing feminist concerns and norms at the international level (Tryggestad 2009). Carol Cohn and Cynthia Enloe (2003, 1201) welcome female leadership in international institutions, praise the passing of UNSC resolution 1325, but also emphasize the perils of legitimizing military intervention as a way to save non-Western women: 'You have to have a feminist understanding of orientalism'. Other scholars more strongly criticize the alliance of 'elite feminists' (Harrington 2011, 2) with militarized humanitarian intervention as 'neo-orientalist' (Doezema 2001, 2010), 'embedded' (Hunt 2006), or 'governance feminism' (Halley et al. 2018). These affirmations and criticisms mirror the paradox inherent in the humanitarian machine, which invests power resources to liberate victims from their plight. In SGBV interventions, in particular, we observe this paradox as a conflict about race and gender, historical baggage and post-colonial inequality, and the roles of feminism and feminist-minded professionals in the militarized humanitarian machine.

Hospitals and courts: Statebuilding subjectivities

James Ferguson (1990, 252–254) argues that the developmental 'anti-politics machine' does not simply fail, even if the results of projects and programmes do not match initial aims. As he contends, they often unintentionally succeed in fostering state control: by opening up peripheral regions to 'the taxman', security forces, and various other bureaucratic 'services' serving perhaps popular needs, but more certainly governmental control. As the abundant literature on state weakness (critically: Heathershaw and Schatz 2017) and statebuilding failures (e.g. Bliesemann de Guevara 2012) implies, he may have overstated the sustainability of bureaucratic state expansion in the global South. At least in post-conflict states, official statebuilding aims seem to be regularly missed.

SGBV interventions do not officially serve to re-build states, but rather to provide services to mitigate harm done by sexual and gender-based violence, and to prevent its

further occurrence. Nonetheless, similar to the liberal peace framework (Richmond 2005), SGBV interventions seek the emancipation of individuals through the establishment of statehood. Given both Fergusson's observation of state authority as an unintended outcome, and the more recent literature's scepticism about chances of intended statebuilding, it is pertinent to discuss the effects of SGBV interventions in regards of bureaucratic domination as well as individual emancipation.

As Michel Foucault (1991, 1995, 2010) and many other authors have demonstrated, hospitals and courts are among liberal states' most central institutions of subjectivation in the sense of a voluntary subordination to domination that appears as (or constitutes, in a liberal perspective) individual emancipation. Also SGBV interventions happen to build their promise of emancipation to a large extent on these institutions. In the following brief remarks, I focus in particular on the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, my observations likely also apply to other contemporary post-conflict SGBV interventions, since judicial prosecution and health services have become their standard instruments (Kirby 2015; Houge and Lohne 2017; Tanyag 2018).

Hospitals and courts have been privileged spaces within post-conflict militarized humanitarian intervention since the 1990s, long before the surge of SGBV initiatives in the late 2000s. Courts, specifically, epitomize the complex liberal promise of emancipation through institutionalized power (Veit 2010). Hospitals are less often understood as explicit spaces of statebuilding. However, humanitarian IOs and NGOs in many cases do not provide treatment themselves, but instead support existing public health structures and thereby also contribute to statebuilding agendas (Gordon 2012).

As Veit and Tschörner (2019) argue in this section, the choice of SGBV intervention instruments follows a path-dependency that is steered by the previously acquired expertise of the aid organizations. Organizations usually prefer continuing their previous activities, rather than developing new expertise and abilities (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). It is thus not entirely surprising that also in SGBV projects and programmes, these same organizations continue their work on the same set of institutions.

Path-dependency may, however, also mean important changes: when funding for activities in eastern DR Congo, such as judicial reform and medical capacity-building became scarce due to donor fatigue (see also Menzel 2019) on a similar development in Sierra Leone, SGBV-targeted funding in some cases allowed for the continuation of previous approaches. However, the new SGBV-targeting agenda required a narrowing of funding recipients: support was provided e.g. only to specialized police units rather than the force as a whole, or only for specialized units and specific patients rather than an entire hospital and all its clients (interviews with international organization staff, hospital administrators, police and judicial personnel in eastern DR Congo, 2016–17). In this way, SGBV interventions have become direct ingredients of statebuilding engagements and wider humanitarian governance, while however privileging specific institutions and 'beneficiaries'.

These beneficiaries, the addressees of SGBV intervention's emancipatory pledge, are the victims of sexual violence. Indeed, feminism's central achievement in SGBV politics has been the upward movement of female survivors in the 'international sacrificial order' (Barnett 2005). Measured in financial terms, aid destined for victims of SGBV in some intervention settings has become a considerable part of overall humanitarian expenses.

These funds are in many post-conflict settings invested in a 'holistic' package, understood as comprehensive with regard to survivors' needs: health and psychological care, socio-economic backing, and legal aid. These services are gentle offers to victims of SGBV. In particular, free-of-charge health care for survivors who are often poor is an important empowering service. As interventionist organizations and several authors argue, holistic 'therapeutic' approaches benefit victims beyond immediate needs and potentially foster processes of psychological 'healing' (Henry 2009; Boesten 2014, 69–96).

Given humanitarianism's nature as the application of power to liberate victims, service provision is simultaneously characterized by hierarchical relationships (Fassin 2012). Victims' needs have been defined by aid organizations and donors (D'Errico et al. 2013), and humanitarian organizations decide which individuals may benefit from their projects and programmes. The emancipatory effect of SGBV interventions, in particular for often desperately poor survivors, is therefore also an imperative asserted through considerable disciplinary powers. The rhetorical trajectory that transforms 'victims' undergoing therapy into 'beneficiaries' and further into 'thrivers' (see Mertens and Myrttinen 2019) aptly demonstrates how intervention projects imagine victims' emancipatory '*assujettissement*' (Foucault 1991).

From a victim's perspective, emancipation may easily appear to be an obligation. Some 'holistic' programmes require survivors to access at least two of their services in order to qualify for a third. Undergoing physical and psychological health assessments and therapies, thus, is a prerequisite for socio-economic assistance (interviews with intervention organizations in eastern DR Congo, 2017). Victims also receive emphatic advice on pressing charges, which implies that organizations may favour justice seekers when it comes to the distribution of often limited socio-economic benefits.

Such emancipatory obligations moreover entail performances as deserving victims. An essential component of holistic programmes, both in hospital and in court, is the victim's testimony. Through the re-narrating of experiences of violence and its consequences, so it is supposed, victims may arrive at healing, closure and eventual emancipation. On the other hand, intervention organizations also depend on victims' testimonies in order to legitimize their own activities. Again, emancipation and domination appear as the two sides of SGBV interventions, since victims' narratives are not only a requirement, but also must fit into categories established by legislation and project outlines (see also Malkki 1996; Fassin 2008, 533; Graham 2014).

How well the humanitarians' demand for victims' performances is understood locally can be seen from adaptations to legal and bureaucratic categories of deserving 'victimcy' (Utas 2005) such as false rape claims (Hilhorst and Douma 2018). Fraud likely excludes 'real' victims of SGBV from limited aid funding, and undermines support for SGBV interventions. Given the poverty and powerlessness of many rural communities in (post-) conflict societies, there are also understandable instances of a striving for autonomous self-empowerment.

On a more general level, however, we still know very little about how victims and wider communities react to therapeutic paradigms. Some authors straightforwardly argue that therapeutic intervention approaches foster (non-emancipatory) gendered governmentalities and pathologize victims and societies (Pupavac 2004; Moon 2009; Park 2009). Victims, however, may also react pragmatically to humanitarian demands of domination and emancipation and attempt to appropriate select offerings without entering into unwanted

obligations. Lake, Muthaka, and Walker (2016), for example, show how victims of SGBV combine normative and instrumental motivations when they pursue justice in courts as a way of closure.

As Menzel (2019) shows in regard to sensitization programmes for sexual behaviour, young women in Sierra Leone appreciate messages of a brighter future based on modesty, chastity and industriousness while also being aware and pragmatic concerning the actual possibilities and constraints in their lives. The contradiction of a simultaneously emancipatory and disciplining potential of SGBV interventions runs right through individuals, as it also does through institutions that promise healing through disciplined testimony, and liberation through punishment. SGBV interventions thus provide new facets to the more general paradox of liberal humanitarianism.

Conclusion

In this introductory article, I have argued that SGBV interventions reproduce tensions and dilemmas within the humanitarian machine, and thereby cause feminist unease about the loss of an emancipatory agenda. Liberal humanitarianism's colonial baggage, including its political, bureaucratic and economic mechanisms, has incorporated feminist activism in its drive to provide therapy, law and order as a strategy for emancipation in (post-) conflict societies. The incorporation of feminism into the humanitarian machine began with the campaigns against war-related rape, which closely fit a larger narrative of new wars. Both analytical strands identified male combatants in non-Western armed conflict as prone to a cynical use of (sexual) violence for both hyper-rational reasons and pre-modern tribal identifications. The entry of feminist-inspired professionals into the realm of international politics allowed for a successful push towards stronger engagements against SGBV, resulting in a surge of multilateral resolutions and funding in the second half of the 2000s. SGBV projects and programmes then pledged to emancipate both victims and post-conflict societies as a whole from the scourge of SGBV through the application of humanitarian power and a promise of liberal statehood. While we still know very little about the actual impact of SGBV programmes on subjectivities in (post-) conflict societies, in hospitals and courts, we may already observe the permanently transitional contours of internationalized authority in (post-) conflict societies, which – due to feminist political work – newly grants SGBV victims a privileged position in the international sacrificial order.

Critical analyses of SGBV interventions have pointed to many of their shortcomings – such as the reproduction of colonial narratives, the commodification of victims, and the limiting of prevention to law and order approaches. This introduction, as well as this section as a whole, emphasizes that these deficiencies grew out of the merger between a specific, governance-inclined strand of feminism, and humanitarianism. Like the developmental 'anti-politics' machine described by James Fergusson, the present humanitarian machine often fails to provide routes to emancipation for its supposed beneficiaries. Slightly more reliably, it contributes to the reproduction of domination through the transformation of political conflicts into technical problems. SGBV interventions, as part of the humanitarian machine, have developed bureaucratic systems of therapy and prosecution that fit into causal narratives and organizational portfolios, but have little potential to trigger a radical change in the gendered power relations that ultimately underlie all forms and contexts of SGBV. Yet as Mertens and Myrttinen (2019) also emphasize, such

criticism should not be read as a call to curtail funding for projects and programmes, which would further limit the chances of victims and (post-) conflict societies to deal with and overcome SGBV. Some IOs in the humanitarian field consider 'gender relations' in (post-)conflict society as 'too political', a realm in which they may not intervene because of limits set by their mandates. Such statements, while not shared by all intervention organizations, implicitly acknowledge the limits of the humanitarian machine. Its technical operations provide opportunities for the improvement of beneficiaries' lives. The denial of the political character of these technical operations and the postcolonial situation in which they are embedded, however, curtails their emancipatory potential.

Notes

1. Some organizations and analysts differentiate between 'sexual violence in conflict', 'conflict-related sexual violence' (CRSV) and 'sexual and gender-based violence' (SGBV). While these distinctions in some regards allow for greater analytical clarity, the nature of diverse forms of violence, their contextual settings, and humanitarian intervention practice often do not allow for useful analytical categorizations. Therefore, in this paper, the broadest term, SGBV, is used. Another generic term is 'intervention organization', which is employed for all inter-governmental organizations (IO) as well as international non-governmental organizations (INGO) engaged against SGBV in (post-) conflict countries. 'International' here refers to actors, organizations or programmes that work across national borders; 'local' means that actors, organizations or programmes do not usually work across national borders. Because SGBV in conflict-areas has been understood primarily as a humanitarian problem, peacebuilding and development approaches are also subsumed under this term.
2. While we include the use of sexual violence as a humanitarian *casus belli* in several multilateral military interventions as a contextual element, and while many SGBV projects and programmes are closely related to military peace missions, our analyses are focused on specific projects and programmes staffed by civilian actor groups.
3. While obviously there are also many differences between instances of SGBV, the adoption of this official wording not only affirmed international organizations' (primarily the United Nations') stance on the issue, it also prescribed a comparative perspective.

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