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**The ‘War’ / ‘Not-War’ Divide:**

**Domestic violence in the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative**

**Abstract**

While recognising the importance of policy designed to tackle conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, scholars have increasingly critiqued such policies for failing to sufficiently apprehend the multiple forms of this violence - from rape deployed as a weapon of war to domestic violence - as interrelated oppressions located along a continuum. In this article I explore a connected but distinct line of critique, arguing that SGBV policies are also limited by a narrow understanding of how gender-based violences relate to war itself. Drawing on an analysis of the British Government’s Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, I identify a key distinction which emerges between those types of SGBV which are considered to be part of war, and those which are not. This division, I suggest, closes down space for recognising how war is also enacted within private spaces.

**Introduction**

I begin this paper from the question: how does domestic violence (dis)appear in policy on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict? While it may seem an acceptable ‘common sense’ that policy on SGBV in conflict focuses on those types perpetrated by armed actors against women (and men) of ‘enemy’ groupings, several recent studies have suggested that domestic violence - taken here to mean violence perpetrated against one’s spouse, common-law spouse, or dating partner - is likely to be the most prevalent form of SGBV in warzones (Peterman *et al*., 2011; Stark and Ager, 2011: 130; Swaine, 2015: 759-60; Tanner and O’Connor, 2017: vii; Wood, 2014).[[1]](#footnote-1) Domestic violence - a hugely prevalent form of violence in peacetime which affects around 30% of women worldwide (WHO, 2016) - is thought to increase even further in conflict settings (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002: 14-15). Given this significant prevalence, it is pertinent to pay attention to whether, and to *how*, such violence appears in policies intended to tackle conflict SGBV.

Reflecting this prevalence, as I discuss below, scholars have critiqued the failure of policy on conflict SGBV - such as the British Government’s Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), upon which I focus in this article, and the broader UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, in which the PSVI is embedded - to properly engage with domestic violence. Generally speaking, the overriding critique has been that in focusing on violence which falls easily into the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ framework - that is, rapes perpetrated by armed men against (primarily) women of ‘enemy’ collectives - policy approaches have created a ‘hierarchy of harms’ between different forms of SGBV (Kirby, 2015a: 463). This hierarchy of harms obscures the continuum of violence which connects multiple forms of SGBV across both war and peace, making it difficult to see the ‘everyday’ violences which are prevalent in all settings and increasingly so during war (Davies and True, 2017: 9; Kirby, 2015b: 510, 2015a: 463; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 380; McLeod, 2011: 596; Myrttinen and Swaine, 2015: 498; Swaine, 2015: 761). That is, critics have focused on the failure of policy to connect ‘everyday’ and ‘extraordinary’ forms of SGBV.

The arguments I develop in this paper build upon this line of critique but are in significant ways distinct from it, in that I am concerned less with the abstraction of particular forms of SGBV from *one another* than I am with the abstraction of ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV from *war itself.* I suggest that, in fact, the PSVI *does* make (limited) moves towards recognising connections between different forms of SGBV, but that the key distinction limiting its vision is that between those enactments of SGBV which are considered part of war, and those which are not. That is, SGBV perpetrated by armed men against ‘enemy’ women is clearly framed within the initiative as *part of war*. In contrast, domestic violence emerges from the documents as *related to,* but ultimately *separate from,* ‘war’– the *‘not-war.’* Domestic violence thus emerges as something which is connected to the violences of war, but which is not, ontologically, SGBV ‘in conflict.’ This distinction is largely constructed through the public/private divide. In this article I draw on feminist scholarship which approaches war through the lens of everyday experience to argue that dividing SGBV in conflict spaces into the categories of ‘war’ and ’not-war’ closes down space for recognising how war is (also) enacted within ‘private’ spaces and through ‘private’ experiences within warzones – how the ‘private’ is, itself, a space in which war (also) takes place. As such, the PSVI is impoverished not only in its understandings of SGBV but, further, in its understandings of *what war is and how it is experienced.* My identification of a ‘war’/‘not-war’ divide in the PSVI thus contributes to and extends critical scholarship on SGBV policy by drawing attention to the limitations of the narrow conceptualisation of ‘war’ through which many such interventions are informed.

Before I proceed, it is worth highlighting that I do not assume that all forms of SGBV are the same. There are important variances in how different violences are perpetrated and experienced by different subjects in different conflict settings and across war and peace, as scholars including Meger (2016), Cohen (2016), and Cohen and Wood (2016) have demonstrated. Moreover, in comparison to marital rapes, rapes perpetrated by armed men against unknown civilians are more likely to involve extreme and/or fatal violence, multiple perpetrators, forced witnesses, and the use of objects other than the penis to penetrate the victim’s body (Benshoof, 2014: 151-52; Meger, 2010: 126-127), and they are also likely to have different legal statuses and to be interpreted and responded to differently by victim-survivors, perpetrators, and the wider community. In some cases (although, as Eriksson Baaz and Stern [2013] contend, perhaps not as often as some have assumed), rapes perpetrated by armed men against enemy women may be deployed for self-consciously strategic reasons, which is unlikely to be the case with domestic violence. In addition, of course, we cannot assume that all experiences of domestic violence in all warzones are the same. These differences are important, and it is not my intention to erase them here.

However, while these differences exist, the way in which they are understood within dominant narratives is not inevitable. The multiple and interlinked harmful acts which come under the label of ‘violence’ do not fall unproblematically into neat, clearly delineated categories; rather, they coexist, they (re)produce one another, and the boundaries between them are shifting, blurred, and overlapping. Given this blurriness, *how* violences come to be divided into distinct typologies is not straight-forward or inevitable but, like all definitions, it entails potentially violent processes of silencing and homogenising. In addition, of course, such definitions are innately political: they have political causes and political implications. From a policy perspective, a definition of war which assumes it is ontologically distinct from ‘everyday’ or private sphere experiences will only grasp a limited slice of the social spaces in which war is enacted. On the other hand, a policy approach which takes domestic violence seriously as part of war, I suggest, could develop a more holistic vision of war itself and, therefore, could offer a more compelling path through which to alleviate war’s effects and prevent its recurrence.

The paper proceeds as follows. I begin by introducing the PSVI and situating it within the broader United Nations’ WPS agenda. Next, I briefly review the significant body of critical scholarship concerned with the WPS and PSVI. I then proceed to exploring the theoretical work which underpins my discussions: first reflecting on the continuum of violence which has informed much of the existing critical engagement with WPS and the PSVI; and then discussing connected scholarship on war as experience, which informs my own intervention. Subsequently, I present my analysis of PSVI discourse, mapping how domestic violence (dis)appears in the documents which emerge from the PSVI as closely connected to but ultimately ontologically separate from SGBV ‘in conflict.’ Finally, I reflect on the implications of my discussions, both for policy interventions and more broadly.

**Background, focus, and methods**

The PSVI is a British Government policy programme, launched in 2012, which seeks to end impunity for perpetrators of SGBV in conflict, to improve support for survivors, and to raise awareness and rally action among states (FCO *et al*., no date). As Kirby explores in some detail, achievements made by the British Government under the umbrella of the PSVI include a G8 declaration on conflict sexual violence, the unanimous passing of UN Security Council WPS Resolution 2106, the endorsement by 155 governments of a UN General Assembly statement, the compilation and launch of the *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict*, and the creation of a register of over 60 sexual violence experts (2015a: 457-58; see also Davies and True, 2017; Mertens and Pardy, 2017). The PSVI’s highest profile moment to date was the June 2014 *Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict*, which took place in London and was attended by representatives of 123 nation-states as well as over 900 activists, humanitarians, lawyers, and survivors, and thousands of members of the public. The summit, co-chaired by then UK Foreign Secretary William Hague together with actress and Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie, was heavily promoted and garnered significant levels of media coverage and public interest (Kirby, 2015a; see also Kirby 2015b; Myrttinen and Swaine, 2015; Wright, 2015). Attendees and supporters were encouraged to engage on social media using the hashtag #TimeToAct.

While I focus on the PSVI, it is worth very briefly locating the Initiative under the broader umbrella of the UN’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which was inaugurated by the unanimous passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000. UNSCR 1325 itself builds on a long history of women’s activism (Cohn *et al*., 2004: 131; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016a: 250-51; Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011: 491-92; Shepherd, 2008: 387-88) and of the legal regulation of conflict-related SGBV (Kirby, 2015a: 462). The WPS agenda is concerned broadly with the impact of conflict on women and girls: focusing, among other things, on the participation of women in decision-making in (post)conflict spaces; women’s involvement in peacekeeping and peace negotiations; and the protection of women’s and girls’ human rights in (post)conflict, in particular in relation to protection from SGBV (Kirby and Shepherd, 2016a: 249). WPS achievements since 2000 have included the passage of another seven Security Council Resolutions, as well as the development by multiple national governments of WPS National Action Plans and the incorporation of some of the key principles of WPS into the work of bodies such as NATO and the EU (Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016a: 250).

While rooting my discussions broadly across the WPS agenda, I focus my analysis on the PSVI. The PSVI provides a particularly appropriate example because, on the surface at least, itembraces the notion, long advocated by feminist scholars and activists, that SGBV exits on a continuum of violence across both war and peace. Additionally, it is a fruitful case through which to trace how different forms of SGBV are read in relation to war because it is recent, high profile, and provides a rich archive of documents upon which to draw. While much has been written about the PSVI in the media and by activists, I read the Initiative’s dominant framings of SGBV through two elements of its broad documentary archive: official statements, reports and declarations on the PSVI published by the British Government and by international bodies such as the G8, and relevant statements attributed to high-profile PSVI representatives including William Hague and Angelina Jolie.

**Critical scholarship on PSVI and WPS**

There now exists a significant body of scholarship which critically examines the WPS agenda, and more recently also the PSVI, from a feminist perspective. Much of this work recognises WPS as a hugely significant, even ‘groundbreaking’ (Cohn, 2008: 185), contribution to protecting and promoting women’s rights in conflict settings (see also Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011: 490; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002: 3; Willett, 2010: 142). The Resolutions have been identified as a vital framework for including gender in high-level discussions on international peace and security (Guerrina and Wright, 2016: 293) and as an important resource for grassroots practitioners and activists (Cohn, 2008: 189-91; Cornwall, 2003: 1338; Owen, 2011). The PSVI, similarly, has been praised for the commitment it represents to maintaining the recognition of SGBV in conflict as an important issue on the global stage (Rees and Chinkin 2015; Davis and True 2017).

Despite this positive recognition, scholars have raised important critiques of both PSVI and WPS. Most of these are beyond the scope of this article to discuss in any detail. For the present purposes, it is suffice to say that WPS has been criticised both for its failure to quickly and comprehensively progress towards its self-defined targets (Henry, 2012; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 374-76; Shepherd and True, 2014: 263; Willett, 2010: 156); and for the significant tensions which structure the agenda itself, such as its colonial underpinnings (Henry, 2012; Mertens and Pardy, 2017), its cis- and hetero-normativity (Hagen, 2016), its limited attempts to recognise men and boys as victims (Gorris, 2015; Kirby, 2015a: 470), and its state-centrism (Cohn *et al*., 2004; Hirschauer, 2014: 9; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 383; Shepherd, 2008).

Of more immediate relevance to my arguments herein are a set of intertwined critiques which, taken together, frame WPS and PSVI as problematically abstracting a particular form of wartime harm - namely, SGBV perpetrated by armed men against enemy women as a ‘weapon of war’ - from its broader context of violence and inequality. Critics have pointed to a gradual narrowing of the agenda from the wide-reaching, radical vision of UNSCR 1325 towards a more constrained focus on the protection of women from sexual violence (Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 380); a shift which is particularly clear in the PSVI itself, described as ‘a relatively conservative rendition of WPS’ (Kirby, 2015a: 461). Critics argue that this narrowed agenda abstracts warzone SGBV from the gender-based inequalities baked into peacetime societies, such as unequal land rights (Mertens and Pardy, 2017: 13-14).

Moreover, scholars have raised important critiques about *which* violences are highlighted in this narrowed WPS agenda, which focuses on rape as a ‘weapon of war.’ As Eriksson Baaz and Stern explore, the weapon of war discourse relies upon four key assumptions: that such rape is strategic; that it is perpetrated by a rational, culpable actor; that it can be stopped; and that women’s sexual ‘purity’ represents the ‘purity’ of their collectives (2013: 44-62). That is, in this discourse, rapes perpetrated by armed men against ‘enemy’ women are a form of violence deliberately and strategically employed against individual members of an ‘enemy’ group in order to attack that group as a whole (see, for example, Benshoof 2014; Mackenzie 2010; Meger 2010; Sjoberg and Peet, 2011). For the purposes of my arguments herein, it is important to note that the recognition of rape as conflict violence through the ‘weapon of war’ discourse has been achieved through its incorporation into pre-existing ideas about what war is. That is, prior to the securitisation of rapes perpetrated by armed men against ‘enemy’ women as a weapon of war, *all* SGBV in warzones was understood within dominant discourse as ‘private’ and ‘individual’ and, therefore, was marginalised as non-political in dominant understandings of the harms of war (Hirschauer, 2014: 5, 41; see also Hansen, 2000, 2001). The understanding of conflict rape as a weapon, in contrast, is premised on its reframing as a public threat to the ethnic/national collective; through its being ‘rhetorically [attached] to security objectives of war’ as conventionally understood (Hirschauer, 2014: 187). That is, while much work on rape as a weapon of war does seek to recognise complexity, and while slippages occur in the narrative, the archetypal ‘weapon of war’ rape remains one which can be read as a *public* sphere act of violence, perpetrated by a member of one collective against a member of another, for strategic purposes recognised by traditional theorisations of war (Buss, 2007; Shepherd, 2005).

Scholars have compellingly argued that the overwhelming focus of the PSVI and WPS on ‘weapon of war’ rape masks the ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV which women experience in both war and peace, as well as the ways in which multiple forms of SGBV are interlinked and are rooted in structures of gender inequality (Davies and True, 2017: 9; Kirby, 2015a: 463, 2015b: 510; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 380; McLeod, 2011: 596; Myrttinen and Swaine, 2015: 498; Swaine, 2015: 761). That is, this narrow focus

precludes recognition of the ‘continuum of violence’ that characterises the experience of many individuals whose lives are marked not only by the ‘extraordinary’ violence of ‘rape as a weapon of war’ but also by the everyday, ‘private’ forms of violence that occur everywhere and may be more prevalent in inequitable and unstable societal environments.

(Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 380)

The limited scope of violence engaged by initiatives such as the PSVI means that they are likely to fail to deal with domestic violence in conflict zones, and, moreover, the ‘hierarchy of harms’ created may actually result in a *decrease* in accountability for domestic violence (see Kirby, 2015a: 761; Swaine, 2015). That is, policy frameworks designed to tackle SGBV in conflict spaces tend to ignoredomestic violence and, therefore, are unable to engage with the full range of conflict SGBV.

My arguments herein build on this important line of critique. I suggest that in fact, neither domestic violence nor the ‘continuum of violence’ is *ignored* in PSVI discourse. Rather, in a limited way, domestic violence is incorporated into and recognised within the PSVI documents, but the way in which it is incorporated is as something which is related to but separate from war itself; as outside the ontological category of ‘SGBV in conflict.’ These arguments are developed, and their implications assessed, below.

**Theoretical framework: The continuum of violence and war as experience**

The notion of a continuum connecting multiple forms of violence, across ‘war’ and ‘peace,’ and across the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres, is widely accepted by feminist theorists. The concept of a ‘continuum of violence,’ developed to describe the interconnections between multiple forms of gendered violence from sexual harassment to rape and murder (Kelly, 1988), has been used to identify connections between the forms of SGBV which women experience in warzones and the gendered violences and inequalities which characterise peacetime society (Boesten 2014; Cockburn 2004; Davis and True 2015; Reardon, 1985; Swaine 2015). Indeed, as Kelly suggests, in many cases feminist analysis of conflict SGBV ‘refuses to name it as fundamentally different from gender violence in other contexts’ (2000: 55), because ‘the perceived distinction between everyday/everynight rape and wartime rape ignores both the sexual nature of rape in war and the harms and symbolic meanings of all rapes’ (2010: 177; see also Brownmiller, 1975: 64; Siefert, 1996: 37-38). Moreover, scholars have also drawn upon the concept of the continuum to blur the conceptual boundaries between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ more broadly; undermining the idea of war as a ‘clear and finite event’ and identifying it, instead, ‘as a process or continuum without a clear start or end point’; an insight which allow us to see how ‘wars start earlier and go on longer than traditional interpretations identify’ (Sjoberg, 2013: 75, 271-272).

In addition to these moves to draw the connections between different forms of SGBV and to blur the chronological boundaries between war and peace, feminist and other critical theorists have also drawn on continuum thinking to blur the imagined spatial boundaries between ‘the personal’ and ‘the international’ in warzones. This work is often informed by feminist critiques of the public/private divide, which scholars have long argued is neither natural nor inevitable but is, rather, a fluid, shifting, and highly gendered and gendering political construction (see Hyndman, 2001; Landes, 1998). As such, scholars have suggested that in war as in peace, ‘it is important that the public and private spheres are not viewed as separate worlds but areas of interwoven influence’ (Jones, 2012: 198). Building on this understanding, feminists have conceptualised the intimate and the geopolitical as ‘intra-actively’ related levels of experience that are brought into being ‘with and through one another’ (Basham, 2013: 11), and have argued that intimacy is ‘already a foundational part of the geopolitical’ (Pain, 2015: 72; see also Pain and Staeheli, 2014). This insight reveals that war is ‘simultaneously a geopolitical and an everyday phenomenon’; it is ‘simultaneously co-constituted by geopolitical and everyday practices’ (Basham, 2013: 14, 7; see also Enloe, 1989: 196; Sjoberg, 2013: 159).

Following these understandings, and in contrast to traditional theories which focus at the level of states, international organisations, and elite individuals in attempting to understand war, critical theorists have paid attention to the ways in which war is *lived* by ‘ordinary’ people (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011; McSorey, 2013; Parashar, 2013; Sylvester, 2012, 2013). For Sylvester, ‘people, bodies, [and] emotions’ are not merely war’s periphery but, rather, they are ‘the crux of war’ (2013: 111-12): it is people and their experiences which comprise ‘the relations of war’ (2012: 484), and as such, ‘war cannot be fully apprehended unless it is studied upwards from people’s physical, emotional, and social experiences’ (2013: 2). Similarly, Parashar has sought to understand how war is lived through the ‘banal moments’ which make up the lives of people who ‘live inside wars and confront the gory images and the sight of blood and bodies on a daily basis’ (Parashar, 2013: 618-19; see also Sjoberg 2013: 270). The intention here is not to deny the horror of war in its more extraordinary and newsworthy manifestations; but, rather, to understand how it is also lived and experienced by embodied human subjects. In so doing, scholarship on war as experience does not simply aim to flesh out accounts of what we already (think we) know about wars; rather, it centres experiences which traditional frameworks cannot explain and, thus, is deeply challenging to them (Parashar, 2013).

Further, these insights also link into scholarship on civil wars which has been critical more broadly of the conception of conflict as taking place *between* coherent groups, instead highlighting that ‘war’ also occurs in violence *within* the groups understood to be actors in a conflict. For Bakke *et al*., dominant theoretical engagements with conflict tend to assume that warring groups and their boundaries are fixed and stable, which means that they ‘cannot make sense’ of the violence and the struggles for power within such collectives; of the ‘reality of complex struggles involving numerous actors’ and the complex and shifting relationships between ‘the macropolitical cleavage [and] local conflicts where narrow feuds, personal ambitions, and private motives predominate’ (2012: 266). As such, a comprehensive understanding of war - of what it is; of how, and in which social spaces, it is enacted - requires a recognition of the complexity and multi-directionality of the social relations of violence beyond the ‘master cleavage’ (Kalyvas 2003; see also Caspersen 2008; Cunnningham *et al*., 2012).

Building on this line of thinking, I suggest that the domestic violence which takes place in warzones should not be treated as external to ‘what war really is’; rather, like other aspects of how people in warzones negotiate their everyday lives, and like other aspects of violence *within* warring groups, domestic violence can be seen as part of the social relations of war itself. To be clear, it is not my argument here that the broad category of domestic violence (across both ‘war’ and ‘peace’) *is* war, or that both (peacetime) domestic violence and war operate through the same dynamics (others have made this claim – see, for example, Pain’s discussions of ‘everyday terrorism’ [2014], and ‘intimate war’ [2015]; and for a discussion of the potential pitfalls of this approach, see Sjoberg 2015). Instead, I focus on the domestic violence which takes place in contexts traditionally recognised as warzones, arguing that we cannot understand the violences of ‘war’ without (also) paying attention to intimate violences in such spaces. This argument resonates with feminist scholarship exploring some of the pathways through which domestic violence increases in warzones. Three main avenues of causality have been identified: that war breaks down the norms and structures which discourage domestic violence in peacetime and enable its victim-survivors to escape (Okello and Hovil, 2007; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002: 14); that the violences of war seep into the space of the home (Ćopić, 2004; Horn *et al*., 2014; Korac, 1998; Saile *et al*., 2013); and that the patriarchal culture of warfare itself reshapes broader gender relations, encouraging domestic violence (Albanese, 2001; see also McLeod, 2016: 82, 119). As this scholarship makes clear, domestic violence in warzones is not isolated from war, existing somehow in a separate social sphere distinct from the space of warring. Instead, domestic violence is part of the ‘intimacy-geopolitics’ (Pain and Staeheli, 2014: 345) through which wars are enacted and lived.

While existing critiques of WPS and of the PSVI have, as noted above, focused on the lack of recognition of the interrelationships between multiple forms of violence across war and peace, this notion - the blurring of spatial boundaries within warzones between the intimate and the geopolitical, interlinked with the recognition that the violence of war also takes place *within* collectives - has not informed critical engagements with policy programmes to the same extent. This approach, which informs my analysis of PSVI discourse below, adds to the existing literature by offering a critique of the broader conceptual frameworks which fundamentally underpin policy approaches to conflict-related SGBV.

**Analysis: The Continuum of Violence and the ‘War’ / ‘Not-War’ divide in the PSVI**

In the section which follows, I present my analysis of the documents which emerge from the PSVI. I begin by demonstrating that, notwithstanding the critiques outlined above, elements of the PSVI discourse *do* draw clear links between the different enactments of SGBV which constitute the continuum of violence. That is, numerous examples emerge which reflect the understanding that rapes that function as a ‘weapon of war’ cannot be usefully abstracted from the broader context of gendered inequality and violence in which, feminist scholarship suggests, they are situated. Second, I demonstrate that despite this apparent ‘continuum thinking,’ the primary focus of the PSVI discourse nonetheless returns to the hegemonic ‘weapon of war’ framing. In the third section, I focus specifically on the (dis)appearance of domestic violence in the narratives which emerge from the PSVI, demonstrating that despite the connections drawn in the documents between multiple iterations of SGBV, domestic violence remains excluded from what ‘counts’ under the Initiative. This exclusion, I suggest, is not because connections between various forms of SGBV are not seen but, rather, because ‘private’ forms are not recognised as *part of war* and, as such they are excluded from the remit of the PSVI. I argue, therefore, that the potential of the PSVI is limited less by its narrow understanding of SGBV, as others have suggested, than by its narrow understanding of *war* and of the social spaces in which it takes place.

*The continuum of violence in the PSVI*

Several examples emerge from the documents analysed for this study which point to a recognition of the interconnections between multiple iterations of SGBV. For instance, Hague argues that ‘we must conceptualise sexual violence in its broadest sense, in terms of women’s rights, education and participation’ (FCO and Hague, 2012a). He also describes conflict SGBV as ‘ranging from opportunistic acts of brutality to deliberate torture and systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing’; he states that wartime sexual violence ‘cannot be separated from wider issues of women’s rights’; and he calls for the ‘economic and political empowerment of women’ (Hague 2012b). Similarly, the statement signed by the G8 in 2013 under the auspices of the PSVI states that ‘promoting and protecting women’s and children’s full human rights and fundamental freedoms is critical in the fight to end all forms of sexual violence committed in conflict’ (G8UK, 2013: 2; for a further similar example, see FCO, 2014a: 54). Taken together, these statements reflect a recognition that rapes which function as a ‘weapon of war’ cannot be finally or decisively separated either from ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV or from broader structural questions of gendered inequality.

Moving more specifically to domestic violence, while explicit mentions of this form of SGBV are rare in the documents, they are not absent. The official report on the 2014 Global Summit, for example, mentions an event on domestic violence in Yemen as part of the ‘Global Relay’ of events held at UK Embassies and High Commissions around the world during the 84 hours of the Summit (FCO, 2014a: 29). In addition, speaking at the Summit itself, Hague suggested that ‘if we can change global attitudes on [rape perpetrated by armed men against ‘enemy’ women], we will also change attitudes towards women in particular in many domestic situations’ (Hague, cited in James, 2014). At a 2016 PSVI expert roundtable focused on SGBV and stigmatisation, domestic violence was listed as a possible consequence of the stigma experienced by victim-survivors of rapes perpetrated by armed men (FCO, 2016: 3). Again, these examples demonstrate that PSVI discourse does not frame ‘weapon of war’ rape as entirely isolated from more ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV; rather, connections between these forms of violence are recognised in the Initiative’s approach.

What these examples reveal is that, embedded into the discourse of the PSVI, there is a certain degree of recognition that rapes which function as a ‘weapon of war’ cannot be fully understood or alleviated if they are abstracted from their broader context of gender-based inequality or from the ‘everyday’ forms of SGBV which characterise the continuum of violence. In what follows, however, I demonstrate that the possible implications of this recognition are stymied within the work of the Initiative because of the ongoing division of the continuum into its apparent ‘war’ and ‘not-war’ enactments.

*Rape as a ‘weapon of war’ in the PSVI*

Despite this apparent ‘continuum thinking,’ the primary focus of the PSVI remains on sexual violence as a weapon of war (Kirby, 2015a: 461). The four nodal points which Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2013: 44-62) identify as central to the weapon of war thesis - strategicness; a perpetrator who acts with conscious intent; the idea that rape can be stopped; and the gendered positioning of women’s sexuality as the valuable property of the nation - are all central to PSVI discourse. Conflict SGBV is repeatedly described in the PSVI documents in the language of strategy and of weaponry: it is ‘a tactic of war’ (Jolie, cited in FCO, 2012b); a ‘method of war’ (FCO, 2014a: 37); and ‘a strategy to advance military objectives’ (FCO, 2014b: 15). Hague laments that ‘[r]ape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as weapons against women in conflicts the world over’ (FCO and Hague, 2012b), and British Government policy states that ‘Sexual violence is frequently used for political ends, as a means of ethnic cleansing and to terrorise local populations’ (FCO *et al*., 2015). In addition, the actions advocated by the PSVI emphasise the interlinked ideas of the culpability of perpetrators and the avoidability of wartime rape. The voiceover of a short animated video produced to promote the Initiative, for example, states ‘Rape and sexual violence are the worst crimes you can imagine - but they are not in inevitable part of war’ (FCO 2014c). Similarly, speaking at the Global Summit to end Sexual Violence in Conflict, Jolie said ‘It is a myth that rape is an inevitable part of conflict. There is nothing inevitable about it (…) we can end the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war once and for all. We really can do it’ (FCO, 2014d); and Hague, ‘we believe the time has come to end the use of rape in war once and for all, and we believe it can be done’ (FCO and Hague, 2014). The avoidability of conflict sexual violence is closely connected in the PSVI documents to the culpability of perpetrators: SGBV ‘can be stopped if perpetrators are held to account and attitudes and practices change’ (FCO, 2014a: 38). Reflecting this understanding of rape as preventable if perpetrators are held to account, the Initiative has called for reforms to national laws and for the use of international prosecutions when necessary (FCO, 2014a: 39-40); and the *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict* provides guidance on best practice around the documentation and investigation of sexual violence as a crime under international law (FCO, 2014b; for further discussion see Kirby, 2015a: 464-68). Finally, conflict SGBV is repeatedly described as something which is ‘intended to hurt not only a single individual, but their family, their community, their ethnic group’ (Jolie, cited in FCO, 2012b); which aims ‘to degrade and humiliate the victims themselves and undermine the ethnic, religious or political group to which they belong’ (Hague, 2013); and which is ‘designed to destroy individuals, families, and communities’ (FCO and Hague, 2013: 1).

It is, of course, not particularly surprising that the rape as a weapon of war narrative emerges as the strong focus of the PSVI documents despite the simultaneous recognition of SGBV as a continuum, as this discourse has taken on a hegemonic status in academic and policy work concerned with warzone SGBV in recent years. Indeed, as Eriksson Baaz and Stern argue, this representation has become so ubiquitous and universalising that ‘seeing, hearing and thinking otherwise about wartime rape and its subjects (e.g. perpetrators, victims) is difficult’ (2013: 2; see also Kirby, 2012: 798). Moreover, the weapon of war framing of SGBV is likely also particularly attractive in this context because of the relative ease with which it can be translated into policy - in Eriksson Baaz and Stern’s words, rape conceptualised as a weapon of war lends itself well to the ‘necessary reductionism for arriving at viable policy goals’ and leads to policies that ‘can be placed in a results-based framework’ (2013: 4). This policy-friendliness is clearly reflected in the notion of the avoidability of ‘weapon of war’ rape outlined above - as the imagined possibility that conflict-related SGBV might be stopped ‘once and for all’ (Jolie, in FCO, 2014d), as well as the presentation of concrete ways to do so, is likely highly attractive from the perspective of politicians and others interested in presenting the Initiative as an important and impactful intervention on the global stage. That is, from the perspective of policy-makers among whose stated aims is to ‘raise awareness, rally global action, promote international coherence and increase the political will and capacity of states to do more’ (FCO *et al*., no date), a framing which points to clear and (ostensibly) achievable policy goals is no doubt attractive. Similarly, the simple message that an end to impunity for military perpetrators will end war rape lends itself well to public-facing, star-studded events with accompanying hashtags, such as the 2014 *Global Summit.* However, while the apparent potential for impact is likely one factor encouraging the focus of the PSVI on ‘weapon of war’ rape, I suggest that this emphasis is also shaped by a simplistic framing of war itself - a point to which I now turn.

*The (dis)appearance of domestic violence in the PSVI*

Domestic violence emerges from the documents as something which is likely present in conflict settings but which ultimately does not ‘count’ under the remit of the initiative. In the most explicit statement of this kind, Hague states that while he does not wish to produce too rigid a definition of what the PSVI is about, ‘it’s about mass systematic rape, not about individual cases of domestic violence, that’s where the dividing line is’ (cited in James, 2014). It is important to note here that Hague is not suggesting that domestic violence does not occur, in conflict settings or otherwise. Neither is he arguing against the notion of a connection between domestic violence and other forms of warzone SGBV - indeed, by mentioning ‘mass systematic rape’ and ‘domestic violence’ in the same sentence, one could argue that he is indicating a connection between them. His statement, however, creates a binary distinction between ‘mass’ forms of rape on the one hand, and ‘individual’ cases of domestic violence on the other. This division is important for two reasons. First, through the use of the terms ‘mass’ and ‘individual,’ Hague’s statement (re)produces the separation between ‘rape as a weapon of war’ as a ‘public sphere’ attack on the collective, and ‘domestic violence’ as a ‘private sphere’ form of violence. In terms of sheer numbers, of course, domestic violence *is* a mass form of violence which affects as many as 30% of women worldwide (WHO, 2016) and likely increases further in conflict and post-conflict settings (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002: 14-15). The division of the acts which constitute the continuum of SGBV into ‘mass’ and ‘individual’ forms, then, it not a neutral observation of fact, but a political process of division which relies upon the spatial imaginary of the public/private divide, and which also obscures the ways in which women themselves might be thought to constitute a ‘collective’ (Hansen, 2000). Second, Hague explicitly expels domestic violence from the concern of the PSVI. If the Initiative aims to prevent ‘sexual violence in conflict,’ and domestic violence does not fall under its remit, the implication here is that *domestic violence in warzones is not ‘sexual violence in conflict.’* That is, the imagined spatial division of public and private is used here to legitimate the marginalisation of domestic violence in conflict zones into the category of the ‘not-war.’

In another example, Hague states ‘Sexual violence is a problem found in every society in the world, and all countries have to do more to tackle it at home (…) But it is in the context of war and conflict that sexual violence is found to the most appalling degree, and on a scale most of us cannot imagine’ (FCO, 2012a). Similarly, he says elsewhere that ‘Sexual violence is abhorrent in any setting, and all countries have a responsibility to tackle it at home. But its prevalence in war makes it a foreign policy issue, not just a national concern’ (Hague, 2013).

Again, while recognising the connections between types of violence across the continuum, Hague invokes a dichotomy in these statements between those forms of SGBV which take place ‘at home’, on the one hand, and those which take place ‘in war and conflict’ on the other. In these statements, ‘conflict’ forms of SGBV are the ‘most appalling’, they take place on the greatest ‘scale’ and, as a part of conflict - as ‘war’ - they are a relevant foreign policy concern. On the other hand, while forms of SGBV which take place ‘at home’ are ‘abhorrent,’ they remain ‘just a national concern’ - of relevance to domestic politics, but not to foreign policy or to the remit of the PSVI. By implication, then, SGBV which takes place ‘at home’ (whether ‘home’ means ‘within the household’ or ‘within the nation/collective’) are not part of conflict.

As noted above, the ‘weapon of war’ discourse frames (particular forms of) SGBV in conflict spaces as part of war by rhetorically connecting them to conventional ideas about what war is (Hirschauer, 2014: 187). That is, this framing is effective because it successfully attaches (particular enactments of) the SGBV which takes place in conflict zones to the easily recognised ‘public’ sphere issues which are understood as the content of a dispute between apparently cohesive groups, such as ethnicity, nationality, or territory. In contrast domestic violence, as a form of violence which takes place largely *within* warring groups and cannot easily be attached to the recognised strategic objectives of warring, is not easily recognised as ‘war’ and, therefore, is understood as falling outside of the remit of the PSVI. As such, despite the general recognition in the PSVI documents that various forms of SGBV are interrelated, the constituent parts of the continuum of violence remain divided between those enactments recognised as part of war, and those which remain excluded from this category. This division relies on an understanding of war as an external wave of violence which somehow stops at the front door of the home; an understanding which obscures important insights that position war as experience, that identify war as something that (also) takes place within warring groups, and that highlight the intra-active relationship between the personal and the international. As such, it relies upon a thin and simplistic understanding of what war is.

**Concluding Remarks: The stakes of the ‘war’/’not-war’ divide**

In the above, I draw upon an analysis of documents emerging from the PSVI to argue that while domestic violence does appear in this policy discourse, it does so in specific ways which position it as related to, but ultimately not part of, the violences of war. In this final section, I return to my theoretical discussions of feminist analyses of war as experience to draw out some of the stakes of my discussion - why does it matter if domestic violence is framed as ontologically separate from ‘war’ itself?

In many ways, my discussions herein lend further support to the critiques which others have advanced of the WPS agenda and the PSVI: not only those which argue that it serves to highlight particular forms of SGBV and to marginalise others (Davies and True, 2017: 9; Kirby, 2015b: 510; 2015a: 463; Kirby and Shepherd, 2016b: 380; McLeod, 2011: 596; Myrttinen and Swaine, 2015: 498; Swaine, 2015: 761); but also those which critique the failure to engage with the broad harms of war itself beyond SGBV (Cohn, 2008: 14; Gibbings, 2011; Shepherd, 2011: 515; Wright, 2015: 504-505). My intervention extends these critiques, however, because of the insight that domestic violence is not simply *hidden* in such discourses, but is framed in a particular way which serves to (re)produce traditional assumptions about the interlinked distinctions between war and peace and public and private and, in so doing, closes down space for recognising ‘everyday experiences’ in warzones *as war*. The definition and categorisation of violence is an unavoidably fraught, slippery, and political endeavour; and the apparent ease with which some elements of the PSVI discourse draw ‘common sense’ lines around what should count as war violence - it is ‘mass systemic rape,’ it is not ‘individual cases of domestic violence’ (Hague, cited in James, 2014) - obscures the politics which are inevitably embedded in the task of delineating such boundaries. As such, these assumptions shut down space for recognising ‘private’ violences as valid and important windows through which we can better understand the nature of war itself.

The arguments presented in this paper contribute to critical discussions of policy on conflict-related SGBV by examining how such policies are limited not only by their narrow conceptualisations of SGBV, but, moreover, by their narrow conceptualisation of war itself. In failing to recognise the multiple ways in which war is experienced by ordinary people at the level of the everyday (Parashar, 2013; Sjoberg, 2013: 248-278; Sylvester 2012, 2013), and the ways in which apparently unified warring groups are often characterised by intra-group violence and by struggles for power (*Bakke et al*., 2012; Caspersen, 2008; Cunningham *et al.*, 2012; Kalyvas, 2003), such policies ultimately fail to recognise war in all its complexity and, as such, their potential ability to deal with its effects is significantly stymied. No doubt, developing policy which confronts war in all its complication and its intimacy involves great complexity. Indeed, following the theoretical insights upon which I draw in this paper makes it difficult to come to an easy, clear, and stable definition of what war is or, therefore, of what SGBV ‘in conflict’ is; and this instability, arguably, is problematic for policy making as it defies the reductionism upon which policy, perhaps inevitably, relies (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013: 4). It is certainly far less likely to allow for hopeful, headline-grabbing interventions orientated towards ending SGBV in conflict ‘once and for all’ (Jolie, in FCO, 2014d); and, as a result, may be less likely to garner the impressive celebrity endorsement and international, high-level and public, interest and support which have been enjoyed by the PSVI. However, the limited and simplistic framing of what is and what is not ‘war’ which informs the PSVI is, I suggest, equally problematic, because it obscures the complexities through which war and its many violences are enacted. As such, it is likely to lead to interventions which have only limited potential to improve the lives of those living in warzones.

In addition to these policy-facing implications, the conceptualisation of war in policy discourse has important and broad political implications related to the (re)production and the legitimation of war itself. These implications, I suggest, have to do with the stories that we tell about war. The telling of particular war stories - about who fights and who is harmed, about what violence is and how is it categorised, about how and why violence is distributed across global space - is of course deeply political. As multiple scholars have explored, for example, the selective telling of war stories shapes the formation of nation in post-conflict contexts (D’Costa, 2011; Das, 2007: 18-37; Parashar, 2014: 144-68). For Parashar, the silencing of stories of women’s violence in wars contributes to the (re)production of patriarchal myths of war centred around masculine protection of the vulnerable feminine (2014: 144-68). In a distinct but interrelated vein, Eriksson Baaz and Stern have charted the ways in which the dominant stories told about warzone SGBV are reproductive of a colonial imaginary, in which barbaric violences are assumed to be endemic in ‘third world’ spaces in ways which are ‘both “unknowable/unintelligible” and “known”, through its particularly dominant position in the “colonial library” (Said 1978)’ (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013: 90; see also Mertens and Pardy, 2017). Reflecting these insights, I suggest that the ‘war’/’not-war’ divide serves, likewise, to reproduce the traditional and simplistic story of war as a (masculinised) struggle between coherent collectives each seeking to protect their ‘womenandchildren’ (Enloe, 1993: 166) from external harm; and in addition that the exclusion of domestic violence, widely recognised as prevalent in the Global North, from the category of ‘war violence’ serves to reproduce the imaged divide between the Global South as a space of (senseless) war and the North as a space of (rational) peace (for a similar discussion in relation to ‘everyday terrorism’ see Gentry 2015). As Parashar suggests, telling *different* war stories, such as those which highlight women’s participation in war as fighters, can disrupt the dominant narrative and support demands by women to claim a stake in peace, as well as in war (Parashar, 2014: 184). Similarly, telling stories of domestic violence *as war stories*, I suggest, contributes to attempts to unravel the myth of masculinist protection through which war has traditionally been made sense of and legitimated, as well as the colonial imaginaries which naturalise a particular global distribution of violence. That is, where stories of rape as a ‘weapon of war’ (re)produce an understanding of ‘third world’ spaces as innately ‘barbaric,’ stories of domestic violence may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how war is rooted in and enacted through the myriad violences distributed in structurally unequal ways across the globe. Similarly, where stories of rapes perpetrated by ‘enemies’ can prop up war justifications - where they ‘can be a reason to start a war; can be a reason to fight harder in a war; can be a reason to rape someone’ (Halley, 2008: 4) - stories of domestic violence can serve to complicate and to counter this story by drawing attention to the violence, subordination, and control which are endemic in the provision of masculinist protection itself.

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1. It is important to note that compiling accurate statistics on SGBV is notoriously difficult, and surveys which attempt to measure it are likely to be skewed by both under-reporting and over-reporting (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2011). Despite these problems, the available statistics nevertheless point to the significance of both SGBV in general and domestic violence in particular in conflict zones. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)