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**What Does The ‘Post’ in ‘Post-Conflict’ Do?**

**Telling Stories About Gender-Based Violence After War.**

Gender-based violence, including but not limited to sexual violence, is one of the most significant and widespread threats to security that people experience on both individual and collective levels. As feminist scholars remind us, it is important to pay attention to such violence not only in narrowly defined conflict spaces but across the continuum: in public and private spheres, and across pre-war, war, and post-war timelines. In this context of fluidity - of continuity as well as change - categorising, temporalizing, and narrating violence is a fraught and political endeavour. In seeking to make sense of gender-based violence in/and the post-conflict, then, in this chapter I ask questions about the political work that the idea of ‘post-ness’ might generate. I do this through an exploration of two distinct elements of my work to date: an interview-based study exploring refugees’ understanding of the relationship between ‘outsider’ sexual violence in conflict spaces and intimate partner violence; and the commemoration of the so-called comfort women of the Asia-Pacific War in the contemporary USA. Through these disparate examples, I unpack the varied political work that can be done by different ways of storying the relationship between past violence and the present moment.

**Keywords:** Gender-based violence; sexual violence; continuum of violence; post-conflict; narrating violence; memorialisation; temporality.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV), including but not limited to sexual violence, is one of the most widespread forms of insecurity across both war and peace. Despite the recent isolating policy focus on rape perpetrated by armed men in conflict spaces against civilians as a ‘weapon of war’ (see Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013, Wood 2018), feminist scholars have highlighted the important interconnections that link multiple forms of GBV; both spatially across public and private spheres, and temporally across pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict time periods (Cockburn 2004; Kelly 1988). Indeed, feminists have sought to trouble the idea that there *is* such a thing as a neat, fixed, objective divide between public and private or war and peace, arguing that the experience of war is often more temporally and spatially expansive than traditional approaches assume (Cockburn 2004; Gray 2019; Sjoberg 2013). The categorisation of violent acts into different boxes – ‘war’ or ‘not war’; ‘public’ or ‘private’; ‘sexual violence’ or ‘torture’ – is a fluid, dynamic and, critically, gendered process, that is politically shaped and politically productive (see Gray 2019; Gray and Stern 2019; Gray et al 2020).

This chapter falls within the ‘post-conflict’ section of this handbook. In light of the fluidity across pre-conflict/conflict/post-conflict highlighted above, the ‘post’ in this bibliographic location gives me pause. It remains, of course, highly valuable to pay specific attention to gendered (in)securities in what are understood as ‘post-conflict’ times and spaces. Doing so is crucial, both for learning about and responding to the specific needs and experiences of people living in these spaces, and for developing our understanding of pre-conflict/conflict/post-conflict fluidity itself. War does create “something new (and exceptional),” but what it creates does not “come from nowhere” (Porter 2017, 57). That is, while war produces important and often devastating changes, the ways they are played out are rooted in what has come before.

In this chapter I do not take ‘post-conflict’ as a neutral descriptor and seek to chart lived experiences of gendered (in)security in the spaces it describes. Instead, keeping in mind that, insofar as they can be divided at all, there is always both continuity and change between war and post-war spaces, I ask questions about the political work that the idea of ‘postness’ might do. That is, I am interested in how continuity and/or change is storied, and in the political possibilities that these stories generate. I discuss this through two distinct examples from my own work: victim-survivors’ understandings of the relationship between their lived experiences of ‘outsider’ sexual violence and intimate partner violence (IPV), accessed through qualitative interviews conducted with people living as refugees in Kampala, Uganda; and the commemoration of the so-called ‘comfort women’ of the Asia-Pacific war through memorials built in the contemporary USA. These examples are distinct in several ways: they take place across different geographical spaces; and while the participants in Kampala were reflecting on their own, recent experiences of conflict/post-conflict violence, the temporal and lived experience gap in the comfort women study is far more pronounced. Bringing these two disparate examples together, then, creates an interesting space for reflection on the complex political work that the idea of ‘post’-conflict can do.

Below, I begin by mapping the two dynamic bodies of scholarship that most clearly underpin my interventions. First, I discuss feminist scholarship on Gender-based Violence (GBV) across the continuum of violence between war and peace, public and private. Second, scholarship which seeks to make sense of the politics of memorialisation, including the memorialisation of GBV, with a particular focus on how temporality has appeared in this scholarship. Next, I sketch out the two elements of my own contribution that provide the basis of my discussions. Finally, I pull together insights from each of these projects around how ‘postness’ appears, tracing the political work done by ideas about the relationship between war and that which comes afterwards. I finish by offering some ideas around future directions for research.

SCHOLARSHIP ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE ACROSS THE CONTINUUM AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORALISATION

Recent decades have seen a very real and significant shift in that conflict-related GBV, once disregarded as an unfortunate but largely inevitable side-effect of war, has instead come to be seen as a pressing *security issue*: a weapon of war (Crawford 2017; Kirby 2012); a central concern of the UN’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (Kirby and Shepherd 2016); a threat not just to the women and men who are its victims but, in addition, to international peace and security more broadly (Anderson 2010). While recognising the hugely significant role that a securitised framing has played in driving conflict-related GBV up the international agenda, scholars have begun to problematise the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ discourse from multiple angles. Critics have highlighted, for example, the colonial assumptions upon which the discourse relies (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013; Zalewski and Runyan 2015). Others have also identified the state-centric, militarist definitions of security that underpin the weapon of war discourse, pointing out that it relies on the idea of a masculinised protector who must protect a vulnerable, feminised populace from outside (often racialised) aggressors (e.g. Cuomo 2013; Young 2003; Puar and Rai 2002; Wright 2015) and arguing, in contrast, that conceptualisations of security must take (gendered) everyday experiences of violence seriously if they are to be meaningful (Wibben 2020). Scholars have also critiqued the way that the ‘weapon of war’ discourse abstracts one form of conflict-related GBV from the broader continuum (Cockburn 2004; Kelly 1988), creating a “hierarchy of harms both *within* gender-based violence, and *between* gender-based violence and other human rights abuses” (Kirby 2015: 463, emphasis in original). That is, scholarship has highlighted the interconnections between forms of GBV that take place across the pre-war/war/post-war/peace continuum and across the public/private divide, as well as their rootedness in broad structures of inequality (Boesten 2014; Swaine 2015; Farmer 2009). Closely related, feminists have also questioned taken-for-granted ideas about the boundaries of ‘war’ itself, suggesting that “wars start earlier and go on longer than traditional interpretations identify” (Sjoberg 2013: 271–272). For Cockburn (2004: 43),

gender links violence at different points on a scale reaching from the personal to the international, from the home and urban backstreet to the manoeuvres of the tank column and the sortie of the stealth bomber: battering and marital rape, confinement, ‘dowry’ burnings, honour killings, and genital mutilation in peacetime; military rape, sequestration, prostitution, and sexualized torture in war. No wonder women often say, ‘War? Don’t speak to me of war. My daily life is battlefield enough.’

Given the focus of this chapter, it is worthwhile to pause here briefly to specifically highlight scholarship which identifies a continuation, even a *rise* in GBV in post-conflict spaces - particularly among refugees and internally displaced persons - because of ongoing militarism, stigmatisation, fractured social support mechanisms and impunity for war cries, structural economic gendered inequalities, and/or gendered norms (e.g. Davies and True 2017; Lugova *et al.* 2020; Manjoo and McRaith 2011; Pankhurst 2008; Ramisetty and Muriu 2013).

 My current research draws on scholarship on the politics of memorialisation, something that has been “of increasing interest to scholars since the ‘memory boom’ hit the study of Politics and International Relations in the 2000s” (Mälksoo 2023: 3). Much of this scholarship has “focused on ways in which memory and remembrance practices are correlated with power” (ibid: 4); that is, scholars have examined how dominant modes of public memorialisation have contributed to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the (gendered and racialised) status quo (Basham 2016; Edkins 2003; Sylvester 2019). For James Young, mainstream memorials tend to encourage *forgetting,* because they reduce members of the public to “passive spectators” with no responsibility to remember the past: “once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember” (Young 1992: 273). In contrast, Young (1992: 277) advocates what he terms “counter-monuments”: memorialisation efforts that aim “not to console but to provoke,” demanding attention and ongoing engagement from members of the public.

As Phoebe Martin and I explore elsewhere (Martin and Gray forthcoming), one key theme that emerges from the literature on memorialisation – one that speaks in interesting ways to the idea of the ‘*post*-conflict’ – is that of temporality. Time, scholars generally agree, is not best conceptualised in a linear way: rather, time “is socially produced and reproduced in everyday life; we construct the time we live in” (Viebach 2019: 279). Past events, particularly traumatic events, can “ooze and seep through and across the neat temporal boundaries of past, present and future” (Clark 2023: 943; see also Edkins 2003; Munn 1992). Despite this, dominant (often state-led) modes of memorialisation – as well as related practices of transitional justice – tend to story time as linear and progressive, creating an identifiable “before” and “after” to histories of violence (Viebach 2019: 280; see also Clark 2023; Edkins 2003; Nagy 2008). While counter-memorials may, as I discuss below, adopt a different relationship to temporality (see Martin and Gray forthcoming; Viebach 2019), the dominant, linear approach that animates most memory projects can create a false sense of reassurance that histories of violence are safely in the past, and will not be repeated (see Edkins 2003; Viebach 2019; Zucker and Simon 2020). As such, telling stories about past events is not so much about that past as it is about constructing an *idea* about ‘the past,’ in a way that has meaning for the politics of the present.

Until recently, GBV has been strikingly under-represented in public memorialisation, despite its prevalence. As Nguyen explains, referring specifically to the lack of memorials for conflict-related GBV, “There is no honour to being a rapist and there is neither glory nor fun to being raped, and so memorials to rape victims are rare” (2016: 227; see also Hicks 1994: 11; Herman 1992: 73). This picture, however, is changing in the contemporary moment, as across the world, disparate groups make claims to public representation for histories of violence that question conservative stories of national unity and strength, such as histories of racist, gendered and/or homophobic oppression (e.g. Doss 2010; Winter 2001; Zebracki 2015). Some of these memorials – both permanent built structures and more or less temporary artistic interventions – commemorate GBV in peacetime (see Bold et al 2002; Cultural Memory Group 2006; Held 2022; Martin and Gray forthcoming; Sardina and Fox 2022; Serafini 2020; for an updated map of public sexual violence memorials see Gray, no date). While paying careful attention to memorials across the war/peace continuum offers pertinent space from which to examine the politics of memorialisation broadly, in this brief chapter, I focus my discussions on efforts to commemorate conflict-related GBV, specifically the history of the so-called ‘comfort women’ of the Asia-Pacific War, in order to unpack the ‘post’ in ‘post-war’.

Scholars have discussed public memory of conflict-related GBV in multiple sites, including Bangladesh (D’Costa 2011: 32; Mookherjee 2015: 129), Rwanda (Selimovic 2020), and Hungary (Pető 2021). Others have explored the role that commemoration – from built memorial sites to less formal cultural and arts-based interventions – has in broader transitional justice processes, as a way to make GBV visible and, through this, to pressurise societies to work towards its remediation (see chapters in Boesten and Scanlon 2021; see also Li 2022: 22; Violi 2019). While examples exist in multiple places, by far the numerical majority of the conflict-related GBV memorials worldwide are dedicated to the comfort women of the Asia-Pacific War: women and girls, mostly, but by no means exclusively, from the Korean peninsula, who were held in military brothels by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces across Asia between the early 1930s and 1945 (see Soh 2008; Tanaka 2002). There are now multiple memorials honouring the Comfort Women in South Korea as well as examples in the USA, Japan, Taiwan, China, Australia, Canada, and Germany, and a growing body of scholarship that examines these monuments (see e.g. Ahn 2019: 157-174; Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie 2019: 161-200; Hasunuma and McCarthy 2019; Lee 2021; Li 2022; Rooney 2018; Son 2018; Ushiyama 2021; Yoon 2018).

THE POLITICS OF NARRATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN (POST-)CONFLICT SPACESIn what remains of this chapter, I reflect on some of my work that contributes to discussions on how GBV is storied in the post-conflict. My first example is a study I did with Chris Dolan, which explores how victim-survivors make sense of the interrelations between different forms of GBV across conflict and post-conflict (Gray and Dolan 2022)[[1]](#endnote-1). Dolan and I used in-depth, qualitative individual and group interviews with refugee women and men who were living in Kampala, Uganda, having fled conflict in Rwanda, Burundi, or DRC. Qualitative interviews have been extensively used to study lived experiences of GBV (see Lewis *et al*. 2002: 50-51), and this approach was particularly useful in helping us to understand participants’ constructions of their own experiences and realities. Dolan and I explored the connections that participants drew between sexual violence perpetrated by armed men in conflict setting (which we call ‘outsider sexual violence’) and subsequent IPV. Participants in our study were living as refugees in Kampala: they were unable to return home, they often felt threatened by their proximity to their countries of origin, and many were experiencing economic and social hardships as a result of living as refugees, as well as ongoing trauma. Conflict, thus, had a significant impact on their day-to-day lives. In the study, participants overwhelmingly said that ‘outsider’ sexual violence, whether perpetrated against men or against women, could, in various ways, go on to be a direct cause of subsequent IPV. In these causal claims, we argue, outsider sexual violence is understood to disrupt victims’ ability to live up to the heteropatriarchal social norms, expectations, and power relations structuring families, and thereby also to disturb the gendered power relations between spouses. Within this logic, IPV occurs in complex, multiple, and sometimes contradictory ways in response to these disruptions.

The second example concerns my ongoing work on the memorialisation of conflict-related GBV, specifically the commemoration of the history of the so-called ‘comfort women’ of the Asia-Pacific War.[[2]](#endnote-2) This study draws on a combination of qualitative methods: visual research methods, in-depth qualitative interviews, and the analysis of textual data, such as activist websites and newspaper coverage. While visual methods remain fairly uncommon in the study of (international) politics and security, they have been gaining traction in recent years, and advocates contend that they enable scholars to garner insights into the functioning of international politics that would not otherwise be available, adding layers of richness and depth to our understanding of political phenomena (Bleiker 2009; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2000). Using visual methods enables me to analyse how the monuments convey particular views of the world (Abousnnouga and Machin 2010: 139). In this, I have found Sylvester’s method of “feminist gazing” particularly useful to understand how the monuments “work” (Sylvester 2006: 204). This approach allows me to unpack how the objects themselves participate in security debates – making claims about the importance in public space of forms of harm that have long been relegated to the private sphere. In addition, my use of in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted primarily with activists and artists involved in the establishment of sexual violence memorials, have provided valuable insights into, among other things, how a monuments’ creators understand what their work is trying to do and how they see it as intervening into wider discussions about GBV, as well as what kinds of negotiations and compromises they had to make to get their work installed in public space. My analysis of texts produced by memorial activists, such as websites, helps to deepen and compliment the interview data; that of newspaper coverage gives me an idea of the wider public discourse about the memorials and their political projects. The study is generating interesting insights into the contested politics of representing and discussing GBV in public spaces in the post-#MeToo era. These include, among other things, the importance of claiming physical space as an activist strategy for raising awareness; how complex stories of sexual violence must necessarily be simplified through the reproduction of visual tropes in order to be told in memorial form (Gray and Martin forthcoming); and how the scripting of temporality structures commemorative storylines (Martin and Gray forthcoming).

While these projects are of course distinct, thinking about them together can generate interesting insights around the idea of the ‘post-conflict’ in relation to GBV. In the Kampala research (Gray and Dolan 2022), the ongoing impact of conflict - its stretchiness into the ‘post-conflict’ - was obvious and urgent in the lives of our participants. Several participants reported that their lived experiences of violence and insecurity did not end when they fled from active warzones to refuge in Uganda but rather continued, albeit in a somewhat altered form. They were no longer subject to sexual assault at the hands of enemy soldiers who attacked them for strategic or for opportunistic reasons; but they were vulnerable to similar assaults at the hands of civilians who took advantage of their vulnerability as refugees. Violence within their own marriages, similarly, had taken place in the warzone they had fled, and often continued into their life in refuge. Other insecurities – economic insecurity, the threat they felt when security personnel from their countries of origin were spotted in Kampala – also persisted.

However, while participants recognised a certain continuity in the form of ongoing insecurities, the stories that they told about GBV were largely structured by the idea of a ‘before’ and an ‘after.’ Specifically, they were animated by the idea of linear, unidirectional causality: that ‘outsider’ sexual violence during conflict was the *cause* of subsequent IPV. That is, “war enters the family”; IPV is “the outcome of the sexual violence which happened to us” (Participant, cited in Gray and Dolan 2020: 575). Dolan and I identify three key pathways through which participants described outsider sexual violence as causative of IPV: emotional response, material hardship, and sexual and reproductive life. For example, participants suggested that when a married woman is the victim of outsider sexual violence, the rape challenges her husband’s normative dominance over and protection of her, and the feelings of shame and anger that this generates within him could cause him to behave violently towards her (*ibid*.: 575-576). Similarly, participants suggested that the loss of status in relation to their wives that was experienced by male survivors of outsider sexual violence also caused IPV, either because women would take advantage of their husband’s ‘emasculation’ to further undermine their normative dominance, mostly through verbal or emotional abuse, or because a man would use mostly physical violence in an attempt to reclaim his elevated status (*ibid*.: 576-577). In addition, some male survivors found it difficult to provide financially for their families as a result of their sexual victimisation, because of their physical injuries and/or their displacement as refugees. This not only compounded their feelings of emasculation but also, they explained, led their wives to subject them to verbal and emotional abuse for failing to fulfil their role as providers (*ibid*.: 577-578). All these narratives rely to a certain extent upon a linear progression of time. A state of being that had existed in the past between husband and wife had, at an identifiable point in time, been broken. At the moment of telling, this set of relations remained in the present tense of being broken, and this brokenness was the cause of IPV: “Sexual violence in conflict can cause domestic violence, it is inevitable. And a raped man is morally unstable. It takes time for him to renormalize” (participant, cited in Gray and Dolan 2022: 577).

However, the logics through which participants make sense of their experiences suggest not so much a moment of ‘breaking’ but, in fact, a *chronicity* of gendered oppression (for a discussion of chronicity, see Martin and Gray forthcoming). Both the normative gendered roles and relations that participants described, and the idea of their disruption by outsider sexual violence, was underpinned by constant heteropatriarchal gendered logics of identity and family that pre-existed conflict itself. While outsider sexual violence targeted at men and women reverberated throughout participants’ marriages in notably different ways, all were rooted in the same heteropatriarchal structures and ideas (Gray and Dolan 2022: 579). As such, we suggest, “while IPV might be framed as a response to the extraordinary violence of war, in many ways it is not, itself, extraordinary; on the contrary, it is deeply rooted within, and understood in relation to, the “normal” violences and inequalities that structure everyday life” (ibid.: 579). Returning to this now through a questioning of the political implications of the idea of ‘*post*-conflict,’ I suggest that the chronicity of gendered oppressions and violences is masked by this motif of a ‘break.’ As I have explored elsewhere, the ways in which survivors story their experiences of violence has important implications for the processes by which their selves and lives are performatively remade (Gray, Stern and Dolan 2020; see also Gray and Dolan 2022: 578). Sidestepping the chronicity of GBV may play an important role in enabling this remaking of coherent selfhoods, as it allows for the possibility of return to an unproblematic, ‘respectably’ gendered ‘before.’ In this context, then, the ‘post’ in ‘post-conflict’ may be doing some work towards framing war as a rupture and ongoing problems as temporary and extraordinary, eventually to be overcome with a return to the norm.

My work on memorials also speaks to the politics of temporal framing. Here, the notion of ‘post-conflict’ is somewhat different than in the example discussed above, in that the past that it storied in the visual and textual narratives of the memorials themselves and in the discourse around them is significantly further removed. Participants in the Uganda study were discussing violence that they themselves had experienced recently; the comfort women memorials on which my study focuses – the Column of Strength in San Francisco, California; The Comfort Women Memorial Peace Garden in Fairfax County, Virginia; and the Statue of Peace in Annandale, Virginia – were all unveiled between 69 and 74 years after the official end date of the Asia-Pacific War, created by activists who were not themselves comfort system survivors. While participants’ narratives in the Uganda study, then, are raw, personal stories of violence and survival, the comfort women memorials, instead, tell a story of something that sits more neatly in the past that we, in the present, should look back upon with sympathy and support for the victim-survivors and anger towards the perpetrators.

However, while, as I note above, much of the literature on memorials – at least, that concerned with dominant, state-led efforts at commemoration – suggests that they rely on a linear, progressive understanding of time that underpins a false sense of reassurance that violent histories will not be repeated (see Edkins 2003; Nagy 2008; Viebach 2019: 280; Zucker and Simon 2020), the key actors involved with these memorials were highly cognisant of the connections between the history of the comfort system and the ongoing issues of conflict-related GBV and/or sex trafficking in the contemporary USA. That is, while the primary focus of these memorials is, indeed, commemorating a past history of violence, those involved worked hard to highlight some of the continuities between this history and contemporary oppressions and violences.

Speaking about the Annandale Statue of Peace, for example, one participant suggested that the statue

is still very relevant to now. Because human trafficking still occurs. Women, sexual violence against women in wars, in Africa it is still occurring. Not only in Africa, Middle East, everywhere in the world, currently, current wars. It is still happening. Ukraine war right now, it’s still happening. So, rape, it is still very relevant to the current events.

Similarly, Judith Mirkinson, one of the key activists involved in the Column of Strength, suggested in a published book that the memorial “makes the connection between sexual enslavement then and the issue of sex trafficking now” (Mirkinson 2020: 161); as “a way of linking the past to the present and the future” (Mirkinson 2020: 153). In Fairfax County, Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova said at the first anniversary celebration for the Comfort Women Memorial Peace Garden that:

Human trafficking is a serious issue on all corners of the globe, including right here in the United States and in Fairfax County… The purpose of this memorial is to commemorate the Comfort Women of World War II and draw attention to the broader issue of human trafficking occurring all over the world.

(cited in Beale 2015).

The connection to contemporary GBV was also communicated by the plaques at all three sites. In Fairfax County, the plaque reads

In honor of the women and girls whose basic right and dignities were taken from them as victims of human trafficking during WWII…. May the memories of these women and girls serve as a reminder of the importance of protecting the rights of women and an affirmation of basic human rights.

In Annandale

In memory of the painful history of Japanese military “comfort women” who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese military government during World War II. We will continue to stand in solidarity, to call for victims and eliminate such war crimes against humanity.

And in San Francisco

This memorial is dedicated to the memory of [the comfort] women, and to eradicating sexual violence and sex trafficking throughout the world.

Visually, also, the memorials refer not only to the history of the comfort system – both the Statue of Peace and the Column of Strength centre on depictions of young girls, meant to represent the victims at the time of their victimisation – they also incorporate imagery of the comfort women as older activists. On the marble base of the Statue of Peace, behind the central figure of the girl, a mosaic shadow shows the shape of an elderly woman, drawing a link between the young girl and her older, activist self (see Lee 2021; Han and Griffiths 2017). The Column of Strength includes a life-size statue in the likeness of South Korean activist Kim Hak-sun, who in 1991 became the first survivor to speak out in public and demand recognition and an apology from the Japanese government. Kim is depicted in her later years and this, again, draws a direct visual connection between the young victims and their older, activist counterparts. Similarly, both the Fairfax Garden and the Statue of Peace feature the motif of a butterfly, widely used by the comfort women redress movement to symbolise “the metamorphosis from victim (cocoon) to activist (butterfly)” (Lee 2021: 228; see also Gray and Martin forthcoming).

 Here, then, the narrations of past sexual violence are underpinned by a different temporal politics than those in the Kampala example. While the chronicity of GBV seems less immediately obvious, to me, in the case of the comfort women memorials than it does in the lives of our participants in Kampala, the idea of a ‘break’ between conflict and post-conflict, which characterised participants’ narratives in Kampala, is actively resisted by memorial creators in the USA. The comfort women memorial activists do not seek to narrate their personal histories of violence and, as such, the stakes of the narration, in terms of the performative remaking of coherent selfhoods and liveable lives, are not the same. Instead, a focus on the chronicity of violence lends itself to a different set of political objectives; including calling for wider gendered social change, and perhaps also an attempt to sidestep the assertion by the Japanese government that the memorials themselves are “unfair and one-sided attacks” that single out Japan, when GBV is a global issue (Ushiyama 2021: 1256). That is, because of their different personal and political projects, the participants in these two very different studies engaged with the concept of ‘postness’ in markedly different ways. Taken together, then, these two contrasting studies demonstrate the different politics that can be engendered by different approaches to framing the temporality of violence and (in)security in post-conflict spaces. When narrating the temporality of GBV, then, whether ‘postness’ is taken to primarily mean a break with what came before or a continuation of it can dictate what kind of political implications a story of violence can bring to bear, at multiple levels from the personal upwards. Importantly, this can generate different orientations towards the future; specifically, towards a hoped-for future where security can be realised. Is the desired future one in which a return to the ‘before’ becomes possible? Or is it one in which chronic structures of inequality and oppression must change?

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA: MEMORIAL POLITICS AND THE TEMPORALITY OF GBV

This area of study holds significant avenues for further research. As Clark (2023: 946) points out, while there is now a significant and dynamic body of scholarship that seeks to make sense of conflict-related GBV, it does not yet substantively engage with the topic of temporality (c.f., Martin and Gray forthcoming; Medawatte 2020). A research agenda focused on the temporality of GBV may offer a fruitful path, as it may shed light on some yet unexamined assumptions that structure the field as it currently stands.

In addition, the ongoing moment of “memorial mania” (Doss 2010) in relation to GBV, characterised by a proliferation of memorials commemorating GBV in both war and peace in multiple spaces across the world, offers a fascinating area for further study. This is an interesting time to be engaging with memorials, as their interventions into conversations about what forms of harm – which insecurities, whose insecurities – matter to the polity as a whole are continuing to play out. It is important to note, of course, that memorials do not, and cannot, do this work in isolation. To have any power, they must be embedded into social and political movements. As such, this research agenda is one that looks to the changing approaches of social and political movements striving to tackle everyday gendered insecurities across the continuum. How do these proliferating memorials help people to tell stories about violence, in whatever tense, that contribute to rebuilding their lives after trauma?

It is, in addition, crucial to keep focus on the unnoticed silences that structure the proliferation of memorials. Which experiences or forms of GBV are not (yet) represented in memorials? What is still considered too controversial, too inflammatory, too inappropriate to be storied in public space? For example, while the USA now houses multiple memorials commemorating the comfort women – women who were victimised in a geographical and temporal space significantly removed from that in which these memorials are located – it remains difficult to imagine a national memorial to, say, victims of military sexual trauma within the US armed forces. The persistence of these silences, then, should remind us that, as much as we might celebrate a ‘breaking of the silence’ around GBV, there is much work still to be done.

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2. This work is supported by the Economics and Social Research Council [grant number ES/V003321/1]. This funding runs from August 2021 to August 2024; at the time of writing, in March 2024, the research is ongoing. I am PI on this project, and Dr Phoebe Martin was employed as a Postdoctoral Research Associate on the project for one year from October 2022. While I focus this chapter only on the memorialisation of the comfort women within the USA, the broader project analyses GBV memorialisation across the war/peace continuum. The project will have multiple outputs, some written alone and others in collaboration with Phoebe Martin. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)