Gender Equality, Sexual Violence, and the Revolutionary Potential of Political Empowerment: A Feminist Approach to Understanding Women's Post-Conflict Mobilization

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THAT WAR IS A PROFOUNDLY GENDERED ENTERPRISE is a well-established and widely acknowledged premise of feminist international relations (IR) theory. In peace and in war, gender is a pervasive lens through which feminist IR scholars have theorized about, critiqued, troubled, and complicated politics and women's position within political processes. Certain gendered aspects of war are hyper-visible and easily recognizable. War as we traditionally conceive of it — consisting of at least two armed combatants fighting against each other — tends to be fought overwhelmingly by men against other men. Governments which engage in war tend, historically, to be led by men; conscription affects primarily men; battlefield casualties are overwhelmingly male.[1]

Women have long been excluded from active conflict.[2] Renowned heroines from Hua Mulan to Joan of Arc have disguised themselves as men to fight, exposing the artificiality of gendered expectations of what constitutes a 'good' soldier and transgressing the socially mediated boundaries of proper womanhood: namely, remaining within the domestic sphere. Conversely, men have dressed as women to avoid conscription, a practice dating back to Ovid's account of Achilles in *The Metamorphoses*, in which Achilles' mother, Thetis, disguised her son in women's clothing to avoid participating in the Trojan War. Only recently have American women been allowed to serve in combat roles, though not without immense pushback by a primarily male constituency which believes good soldiers are, inherently and biologically, male.[3]

Despite being largely excluded from combat, women have long been acknowledged as being the worst sufferers in war.[4] Though it is impossible to enumerate all the ways in which war is gendered, it is imperative to recognize that conflict constitutes, and is constituted by, multi-faceted threats to women's security. Women are disproportionately vulnerable to displacement, poverty, and malnutrition.[5] They are also more vulnerable than their male counterparts to sexual violence, which tends to be elevated during active conflict periods.[6] Sexual violence tends overwhelmingly to be perpetrated by male soldiers against female civilians during wartime, though sexual violence is by no means exclusive to war, nor is it exclusively a phenomenon targeting women. Children,

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[1] David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 188. Fisher's last recorded sitting is 1767, the year of her death, but it is unclear whether all of the paintings were completed that year.

[2] Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge University Press: 2001), 5.

[3] Stephen Maninger, "Women in combat: Reconsidering the case against the deployment of women in combat-support and combat units," in *Women in the Military and in Armed Conflict*, 9-27 (VS: 2008).

[4] Mattias Agerberg and Anne-Katherin Kreft, "Gendered Conflict, Gendered Outcomes: The Politicization of Sexual Violence and Quota Adoption," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64 (2-3): 1-28.

[5] Mayra Buvinic, Monica Das Gupta, Ursula Casabonne, and Philip Verwimp, "Violent Conflict and Gender Inequality: An Overview," 2013.

[6] Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009"; Agerberg and Kreft, "Gendered Conflict, Gendered Outcomes."

prisoners, ethnic minorities, and detainees of all genders experience elevated levels of sexual assault during wartime.[7]

There is no singular explanation for why sexual violence is elevated during wartime. Though sexual violence differs greatly across conflicts, continents, and time periods, there are certain similarities between instances of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Male soldiers — emboldened by easy access to weapons and tools of coercion and often encouraged by superiors to rape, loot, and pillage[8] — are the most common perpetrators of CRSV.[9] Sexual violence has often been understood as a result of hyper-masculinization that accompanies the drumbeat of war.[10] Particularly in instances of genocide, targeting adolescent and adult women can be one step in a strategy to forcibly impregnate populations. This form of sexual violence, referred to in feminist IR literature as genocidal rape, is almost always accompanied by restricting access to reproductive healthcare, contraception, and abortion. Genocidal rape is targeted against certain ethnic and religious populations, as was seen in the mass rape of Bosnian Muslim women during the Bosnian War. Sexual violence can also be a strategy to humiliate women; public acts of sexual violence bolster this goal. Regardless of the form it takes in any given conflict, sexual violence is a pervasive means by which women carry the wounds of war, often long after conflict itself has ceased.

Research Question

This article will answer the research question: what explains variation in post-conflict gender equality? I explain why certain countries which emerge from the ruins of brutal conflict become some of the most gender-egalitarian countries in the world.

My explanation of this seemingly paradoxical transformation foregrounds conflict-related sexual violence and those women who have survived CRSV in Rwanda and Nepal. Rather than asking why sexual violence occurs, I investigate attempts to reckon with sexual violence-related atrocities as a means of explaining variation in post-conflict gender equality. My framing of sexual violence as a narrative central to understanding gender equality builds on decades of knowledge accumulated by feminist scholars, who point to interpersonal violence and sexual assault as venues for asserting systemic and gendered notions of dominance and power. Reconciling with the damage done by mass sexual violence is an important first step toward creating sustainable gender equality.

It is difficult to overstate the extent to which CRSV featured prominently in Rwanda: estimates of rape victims range from 250,000 to 500,000.[11] Some research has suggested that every girl over the age of twelve had been raped, while other observers claimed that every female survivor had been raped.[12] UN Special Rapporteur on Rwanda Rene Degni-Segui wrote in a 1996 report: "Rape was the rule, and its absence the exception."[13] In Nepal, estimates of those affected by rape range in

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[7]Cohen and Nordås, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict," 425.

[8]Sara Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

[9]Cohen and Nordås, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict," 420-423.

[10]Hyper-masculinization, also called "militarized masculinity," came to prominence with the publication of Joshua Goldstein's *War and Gender*, in which he describes the process of in-group bonding, boot camp training, and deployment as venues for the formation of militarized masculinity. Just as soldiers need to be taught to kill, so do soldiers need to be socialized to perform militarized masculinity. Gendered language and mythic cues indicate male superiority on the battlefield: victory is a confirmation of masculinity, whereas defeat is emasculating. Femininity becomes pejorative in war zones. Coupled with dehumanization of native populations and denigration of women, wartime rape is a phenomenon that can be understood using Golstein's socialization logic.

[11]Binaifer Nowrojee, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath.* (Human Rights Watch: 1996): 24.

[12]Ibid.

[13]United Nations, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Rwanda submitted by Mr. Rene Degni-Segui, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/1996/68, January 29, 1996.

the thousands, and both parties to the conflict perpetrated CRSV against each other.[14] With the explicit aim of "intentionally breaking down enemy 'honor'," soldiers raped and exploited women "during high intensity periods of conflict."[15] Prolonged civil war engendered fear of gender-based violence and vulnerability among rural women, many of whom were re-victimized throughout the war or were left alone due to the death of male family members.[16]

After the conflicts in Rwanda and Nepal, women entered the public sphere in unprecedented numbers, mobilizing for peace, political change, and gender equality. This political mobilization is remarkable and, I argue, directly related to widespread CRSV. The establishment of gender quotas is often cited as the marker of evidence for this mobilization; however, in my case studies, I complicate this narrative by showing how the different approaches to reckoning these countries embarked on in the immediate post-conflict period resulted in separate trajectories for gender equality.

Explaining how violent conflict affects post-conflict gender equality is equally important as it is complex and ethically confounding. I expand on a growing subset of literature arguing that "gains in women's agency oftentimes do not accrue *despite* the violence to which armed conflict exposes women, but *because of it.*"[17] This is not to say that sexual violence is a necessary part of conflict, nor is it the reason that women choose to participate in politics or civil society. Sexual violence often alienates survivors, saddling them with societal shame, stigma, psychological trauma, and unwanted pregnancies. Rather, it is the political mobilization that women exhibit after surviving CRSV and/or witnessing its effects that is significant in my analysis. Women's involvement in reconciliation and reconstruction processes is significant since they represent a newly vocal constituency, formulating policy based on their experiences and creating grassroots organizations with the desire to prevent such atrocities from happening again.

Agerberg and Kreft (2019) argue that women mobilize politically in response to CRSV, making demands for greater political representation with the goal of improving women's position in society.[18] Following Agerberg and Kreft, I argue that conflicts in which CRSV is prevalent warrant a gendered response because gender inequality is made hyper-visible.[19] Gender-based violence causes survivors to mobilize and bring attention to gender inequality, putting pressure on states to create new norms, build a more gender egalitarian society, and enact policies that will close the widening gender gaps left by war.

Attempts to reconcile the harms inflicted during conflict represent a conscious effort on behalf of the state to create a more gender egalitarian society. Post-conflict reconstruction offers states the opportunity to establish new norms, build better institutions, engage new constituencies, and pursue policies that foster gender equality.[20] Efforts to reckon with widespread CRSV have taken many forms, varying based on the type of conflict and the willingness of the regime overseeing post-conflict reconstruction to acknowledge that sexual violence was widespread during active conflict. Certain states actively refuse to atone with violent histories of CRSV and thus inhibit the post-conflict development of a more gender egalitarian society.[21]

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[14]Lily Thapa and Deon V. Canyon, "The Advancement of Women in Post-Conflict Nepal," Daniel K. Inouye Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, Occasional Paper: 2.

[15]Ibid., 2.

[16]Luna K.C., Gemma Van Der Haar, and Dorothea Hilhorst, "Changing Gender Role: Women's Livelihoods, Conflict and Post-Conflict Security in Nepal," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4 (2): 178.

[17]Agerberg and Kreft, "Gendered Conflict, Gendered Outcomes," 2.

[18]Ibid., 2-5.

[19]Ibid., 2.

[20]Elaine Zuckerman and Marcia Greenberg, "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An Analytical Framework for Policymakers," *Gender and Development* 12(3), 2004: 79-80.

[21]One example of such behavior can be seen in Cambodia, in which Khmer Rouge-era rape victims often live alongside unpunished perpetrators. Attempts to seek reparation and justice through the criminal justice system have been unsuccessful, due in large part to the refusal of modern society to envision women as victims and the refusal of the government to acknowledge widespread rape as a tactic of intimidation. Cambodian courts have

The formation of truth commissions, redress and compensation for survivors, prosecution of perpetrators, community-based reconciliation processes, state acknowledgement of widespread sexual violence, deliverance of aid to survivors of CRSV, and state-sanctioned efforts to facilitate the participation of women into government, the economy, civil society, are just a few of the myriad strategies to reconcile with the long-term effects of CRSV. Reconciliation in its multitude of forms paves the way for gender egalitarianism in post-conflict societies. State-based attempts to reconcile are not the only means by which countries have become more gender egalitarian. Often, bottom-up approaches to gender equality — including grassroots organizing and civil society movements — have been successful in pushing governments to change or hold governments accountable for their promises to make gender equality a reality.

Attempts to engage women in reconstruction processes range from weak to robust. A recent study on literature about post-conflict reconstruction found positive shifts towards understanding the nuanced consequences of conflict on women and the importance of engaging women in post-conflict reconstruction and societal transformation projects.[22] Many post-conflict countries have independently taken steps to engage women in politics by establishing gender quotas.[23] Rwanda is now well-known as having the largest female parliamentary representation in the world. However, the use of quotas as a measure of gender equality does not adequately account for why such quotas are implemented.[24] Additionally, quotas measure top-down state action in the realm of gender equality, often discounting the crucial role that survivors of sexual violence play in pushing for grassroots, bottom-up change, such as the fundamental transformation of how society conceives of and talks about sexual violence.

Explaining Post-Conflict Outcomes

How, then, do attempts to reckon with conflict-related sexual violence affect post-conflict gender inequality? I argue that mobilization has compelling explanatory power regarding post-conflict outcomes. Mobilization resulting from the wounds of CRSV explains variation in post-conflict gender equality, as exemplified by countries in which survivors of sexual violence are actively re-assimilated into society.

I hypothesize that the existence of CRSV catalyzes positive developments toward gender equality, however contradictory this claim may seem. Survivors mobilize to rectify the violence they have experienced and on behalf of the violence they witnessed during conflict. Certain states are much more amenable to this mobilization than others. States in which gender equality increases because of this observed pattern must have an organized civil society, grassroots organizing capacity, and a government that allows organizations and individuals to freely speak, criticize, protest, and bring charges against sometimes powerfully situated individuals.

This research poses an original and largely unaddressed path of inquiry situated within larger

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repeatedly struck down rape cases, and a systematic study of rape victims has revealed that the vast majority of victims do not come forward due to fear of stigma. The study was undertaken by the Cambodian government with support from the United Nations, after a UN-funded survey found that one in five Cambodian men admitted to having raped a woman. The same fear of stigma was seen in Khmer Rouge-related cases, and many see the legacy of the Khmer Rouge as the reason that rape is highly stigmatized. Phorn Bopha, "Study Finds Violence Is an Ever-Present Threat for Many Cambodian Women," *VOA Khmer,* 1 December 2015. Katrina Anderson, "Turning reconciliation on its head: responding to sexual violence under the Khmer Rouge," *Seattle Journal of Social Justice* 3(2), 2004: 800.

[22]Richard Strickland and Nata Duvvury, "Gender Equity and Peacebuilding, From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way," International Center for Research on Women, 2003.

[23]Ruling parties in South Africa (ANC), Mozambique (Frelimo), and Namibia (Swapo) have all done so. Zuckerman and Greenberg, "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction," 71.

[24]Tripp, *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa*, xxii.

scholarly discussions of CRSV, post-conflict reconstruction, development, and gender equality. Moving beyond an examination purely of the causes and effects of CRSV, I synthesize bodies of research on the aforementioned topics in order to examine the effects of post-conflict reconciliation processes on gender equality. Doing so is essential for creating and implementing effective post-conflict reconstruction processes that rehabilitate and empower female survivors of CRSV.

Sexual Violence During War

Historically, CRSV has been written off as an inevitable byproduct of war, meaning that its prevalence and its consequences have often been excluded from the historical record. Both an absence of serious engagement with the topic and lack of remedy and recognition for survivors have reinforced a culture of impunity for perpetrators. Maria Eriksson explains the dangers of omission within the field of international law:

> The 1949 Geneva Conventions depicts rape as harming a woman's honor, rather than as an act against the physical integrity or autonomy of the person. Transcripts from the Nuremberg war trials held in 1945-1946 demonstrate an extensive practice of rape committed by the armed forces of several nations in various areas of occupation during the Second World War. Witness testimony on indiscriminate mass rape and sexual mutilation of women of all ages before relatives and neighbours is interspersed in the transcripts. However, the focus of the trials remained on other violations deemed to be of a graver nature and no individual was prosecuted for rape as an international crime. The area of international criminal law, which in effect developed from the establishment of the Nuremberg tribunal, from its inception thus disregarded sexual violence, treating it as an unfortunate side-effect of war and not of international concern.[25]

Following the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda during the 1990s, awareness of CRSV has risen exponentially. Consequently, these wars galvanized support for international action to address and prevent CRSV.[26] International organizations and feminist activists alike have mobilized to address the unique challenges women face when recovering from conflict-related sexual violence, including stigmatization and lack of access to reproductive healthcare. A key objective within these and related efforts has been incorporating women into post-conflict development and peace processes to create and sustain post-conflict gender equality.[27] The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration, and the European Convention have all formalized states' commitment to integrating women into development and empowering women's participation in politics, the economy, and civil society.[28]

The year 2000 was pivotal for women's issues and gender equality at the United Nations (UN): the Security Council issued Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the latter of which explicitly acknowledged states' responsibility to "promote gender equality and empower women."[29] UNSCR 1325, the first resolution dedicated to women after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, established the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, which acknowledges the unique challenges faced by women during

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[25] Eriksson, *Defining Rape*, 12.

[26] Agerberg and Kreft, "Gendered Conflict, Gendered Outcomes," 2.

[27] Marie Berry, "When "Bright Futures" Fade: Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment in Rwanda," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41(1): 3.

[28] Steans, "Conflict, Peace, and Violence" in *Gender and International Relations.*

[29] "Millennium Development Goals," https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sdgoverview/mdg_goals.html

conflict and the important role women play in the prevention and resolution of conflict.[30] The four pillars of UNSCR 1325 include: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.[31] Broadly, UNSCR 1325 calls for the participation of women in all levels of decision-making, protection of women from CRSV, prevention of violent conflict, and attention to gendered dynamics in relief and recovery efforts.[32] UNSCR 1325 has since prompted resolutions 1820, 1888, 1960, and 2106, which have addressed successive issues related to CRSV within the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. These resolutions indicate a growing global consensus that women's issues are, inherently, security issues, and suggest a willingness to engage with women's issues – especially CRSV – on an international level. On the local level, feminist organizations have pushed governments to enact gender reforms, offered victims immediate support and healthcare, and adopted the Women, Peace, and Security agenda into praxis using grassroots activist techniques.[33]

The radical notion, first articulated in UNSCR 1325, that women play an essential role in post-conflict reconstruction processes now informs international and local action. Often, women's involvement in reconstruction stems from their experience in wartime. Those who have been affected by sexual violence play vital roles in post-conflict societies, as seen in Nepal and Rwanda.

A growing body of political science grapples with the political implications of CRSV. Though quantitative data on sexual violence is notoriously difficult to come by, there is a plethora of contemporary literature on responses to CRSV and under what conditions states adopt and implement policy to document, prosecute, and merely acknowledge CRSV.[34] Multiple studies have proven that state-led efforts are more likely to acknowledge tactical rape perpetrated by armed actors during conflict rather than discuss the broader social contexts in which sexual violence occurs.[35] The immediate post-conflict period presents states the opportunity to implement reforms that are sensitive to issues of gender-based violence; however, these approaches vary widely between conflicts and the amenability of the government in power to implement such reforms.[36]

Research on the intersection of gender and security has been historically rooted in discussion of sexual assault and systematic rape as a tool of war, particularly prevalent in ethnic conflicts and genocides.[37] Armed actors perpetrating violence for the purpose of eliminating certain groups of people are prone to use sexual violence as a means to do so, whether that be through the capture of women and girls, sexual trafficking and slavery, forced marriages,[38] the creation of 'rape camps'

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[30] Elisabeth Porter, "Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 15(3), 2003.

[31] S/RES/1325, 2000, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)

[32] "What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security," *United States Institute of Peace*, https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325

[33] Some of these organizations are: such as *Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *Corporation Mujer Sigue Mis Pasos* in Colombia, *Medica Zenika-Infoteka* in Bosnia, *Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan* in Afghanistan, and *Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz* in El Salvador.

[34] See: Sara Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* (Oxford University Press: 2016); Aisling Swaine, *Conflict-Related Violence Against Women: Transforming Transition* (Cambridge University Press: 2018).

[35] Doris E. Buss "Rethinking 'Rape as a Weapon of War," *Feminist Legal Studies* 17(2): 145-163; Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, "Reframing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence: Bringing gender analysis back in," *Security Dialogue* 46(6): 495-512; Chiseche Mibenge, "Investigating outcomes of a limited gender analysis of enslavement in post-conflict justice processes," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5(3): 34-46; Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Naomi Cahn, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process* (Oxford University Press: 2011).

[36] Aisling Swaine, Michelle Spearing, Maureen Murphy, and Manuel Contreras-Urbina, "Exploring the Intersection of Violence Against Women and Girls With Post-Conflict Statebuilding and Peacebuilding Processes: A New Analytical Framework," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 14(1): 6.

[37] Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage*, 2-5.

[38] Isikozlu and Millard, *Towards a typology of wartime rape.*

(as was seen in the Bosnian War),[39] or through ritualized, public sexual assault meant to denigrate and humiliate women.[40]

Only recently has this literature expanded to analyze combatant behavior through the lens of gendered power, employing feminist epistemologies to the study of international politics.[41] Scholars trained in gender analysis have continually pointed to historical silence and social stigma surrounding sexual violence as enabling ineffective responses to sexual violence.[42] Impunity for perpetrators creates a culture in which victims of sexual assault are symbolically silenced.[43] The adoption of policy dealing with sexual violence is often done on the national scale,[44] though the UN's adoption of the Women, Peace, and Security framework has led to the proliferation of legal mechanisms and policy designed specifically to combat gender inequality and repair harms done by CRSV.[45]

Quantitative Methodology and Research Design

What explains variation in post-conflict gender equality? I hypothesize that sexual violence creates increases in women's political empowerment; I test this hypothesis by controlling for a variety of other phenomena which have bearing on women's empowerment in the post-conflict period.

The unit of analysis for my dataset is country-year for all years during the period 1989-2018. All countries and territories are coded using Correlates of War (COW) codes for ease of use.[46] I created a dataset comprised of panel data in order to observe changes on the country level over time.[47] See Table 1, below, which includes a description of all variables used in my analysis.

Table 1: Variables Descriptions and Observations

Variable	Description	Source	Observations
ccode	Correlates of War code	Correlates of War	5,285
gdppc	GDP per capita, in USD	International Monetary Fund	4,951

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[39]Lene Hansen, "Gender, nation, rape: Bosnia and the construction of security," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2000, 3(1): 55-75.

[40]Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009," *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3): 418–28.

[41]Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (University of California Press: 2014); Anne Orford, "The Politics of Collective Security." *Michigan Journal of International Law* 17(2): 373-409; Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations; Sexuality and the Law: Feminist Engagements*, ed. Vanessa Munro and Carl Stychin (Routledge: 2007).

[42]Duncanson, "Forces for Good?" 2009; Elizabeth F. Defeis, "U.N. Peacekeepers and Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: An End to Impunity," *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 7(2): 185-214.

[43]Bukuluki et al., "Perceptions of the drivers of sexual and gender based violence," 84-102.

[44]Alili Mari Tripp, "Legislating gender-based violence in post-conflict Africa," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5: 7-20.

[45]Meger, *Rape Loot Pillage*; Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*; Swaine, *Conflict-Related Violence Against Women.*

[46]COW codes include all states in the international system, past and present, though there are some notable omissions of autonomous territories or areas with historically contested sovereignty. For four territories, I created my own COW codes: Hong Kong=1000, Palestine/Gaza=1100, Palestine/West Bank=1200, Somaliland=1300.

[47]To build the dataset I used for quantitative analysis, I sourced data from a variety of preexisting datasets. Because the phenomenon I am trying to elucidate is inherently complex, I included a variety of indicators in my data collection process.

Variable	Description	Source	Observations
hdi	Human Development Index	United Nations Development Program	4,608
region	Location of conflict	UCDP/PRIO	5,286
svac	Prevalence of sexual violence	SVAC dataset	1,214
active	Denotes active state-based armed conflict	UCDP/PRIO	5,286
intensity	Conflict intensity level	UCDP/PRIO	5,286
empow_gender	Women's Political Empowerment Index Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM)	5,197	
cs_gender	Measures the extent to which women are prevented from participating in civil society	V-DEM	4,212
pow_gender	Measures the extent to which political power is distributed according to gender	V-DEM	4,212
ps_gender	Measures the extent to which gender affects the distribution of public services	V-DEM	4,047
qadopt	Denotes the existence of a gender quota in a country's constitution or secondary law	Quota Adoption and Reform Over Time (QAROT) dataset	4,487
qimp	Denotes the implementation of a gender quota in a country	QAROT	4,487
qtype	Quota type	QAROT	936
qpercent	Legislative threshold stipulated by a gender quota, if applicable	QAROT	935
contra	Contraceptive prevalence, any methods (%)	World Bank	945
laborforce	Percent of labor force that is female	World Bank	4,885
nondislaw	Law mandates nondiscrimination based on gender	World Bank	750
mllaw	Law mandates paid or unpaid maternity leave	World Bank	750
cmlaw	Law prohibits or invalidates child or early marriage	World Bank	334
dvlaw	Legislation exists on domestic violence	World Bank	1,658
mrlaw	Legislation explicitly criminalizes marital rape	World Bank	332
shlaw	Legislation specifically addresses sexual harassment	World Bank	475
literate	Literacy rate, adult female (% of women ages 15 and above)	World Bank	729
prop	Married men and married women have equal ownership rights to property	World Bank	744
const	Nondiscrimination clause mentions gender in the constitution	World Bank	584
svprev	Proportion of women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months	World Bank	82

Variable	Description	Source	Observations
testim	Women's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's	World Bank	750
work	Women are able to work in the same industries as men	World Bank	1,658
inttot	Total summed magnitude of all interstate episodes of political violence	Center for Systemic Peace Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV)	4,866
civtot	Total summed magnitude of all societal episodes of political violence	MEPV	4,866
actotal	Total summed magnitude of all episodes of political violence (civil and interstate)	MEPV	4,866
inttribunal_cat	An international tribunal, such as those established by UN mandates, or criminal investigation undertaken by the International Criminal Court, all of which involve violence and/or crimes against humanity, involving a state is active in a given year.	International Criminal Tribunals Database	5,286
inttribunal	An international tribunal, such as those established by UN mandates, or criminal investigation undertaken by the International Criminal Court, all of which involve violence and/or crimes against humanity, involving a state is active in a given year.	International Criminal Tribunals Database	5,286
warcrimes	National courts in a given country are actively hearing cases and/or indicting individuals for genocide, war crimes, and/or crimes against humanity which involve individuals and/or entities in that state	International Crimes Database	5,286
tribunal	Any tribunal involving the aforementioned war crimes - national or international - is active in a given year involving a given state International	Criminal Tribunals Database	5,286
crsvtribunal	A tribunal explicitly involving conflict-related sexual/gender-based violence is taking place in a given year involving a given country	World Legal Information Institutes (WLII) open access databases on international decisions and case law	5,286
cedaw	A case heard by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Working Group is heard, involving a given country in a given year	World Legal Information Institutes (WLII) open access databases on international decisions and case law	5,077

Observations tabulated in STATA.

Following Webster et al (2019), I chose the *women's political empowerment index* from the

Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) dataset to be my dependent variable.[48] It is an aggregated index that is unique among similar variables because of its temporal coverage and its attention to women's political involvement outside of elected office.[49] I employ a generalized estimating equation (GEE) to model the relationship between my independent variables and women's political empowerment (*empow_gender*).[50] I model these changes in seven separate equations, which show "seasonal" change in women's political empowerment in one-, two-, three-, four-, five-, ten-, and fifteen- year intervals.[51] I generated robust standard errors to account for autocorrelation within the data. The equation I used to create these models is as follows, in which S denotes "seasonal" difference, L denotes a "lag," and numbers represent the year intervals being measured:[52]

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xtgee S1.empow_gender L1.sv L1.lngdppc L1.active L1.laborforce L1.hdi
L1.qadopt, robust
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I ran this equation in STATA for each interval, converting the results into a coefficient table. Table 2 contains the results of my statistical analysis and indicates which variables reach levels of statistical significance under each model.

Quantitative Results

The seven GEE models I produced show varying effects of my independent variables on women's political empowerment. The number of observations decreases as seasonal difference and lag intervals increase, meaning that coefficients in Model 7 (at a fifteen-year interval) are estimated at a higher level of uncertainty than in Model 1 (at a one-year interval). None of the coefficients in Models 1 and 2 are statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence interval, though they show an interesting pattern. Logged GDP per capita, labor force, HDI, and quota adoption have negative coefficients in the one- and two-year interval models. Sexual violence and active conflict are the sole variables with positive coefficients in the same models. Positive coefficients denote an increase in change in women's empowerment, whereas negative coefficients represent a decrease in change.

Certain variables maintain patterns throughout all seven of the models. For example, at each interval, active conflict has a positive coefficient, and it is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level in the three- and four- year models. Three variables – labor force, HDI, and quota adoption – maintain negative coefficients in all models. Beginning in Model 3, labor force is statistically significant across all remaining models, and in Models 6 and 7 it is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Similarly, HDI is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level in Model 6 and $p < 0.001$ level in Model 7. Quota adoption is significant at the p<0.01 level in Models 3 and 5, even more so in Model 4 and 6, but drops to $p < 0.05$ level significance in Model 7.

Sexual violence reaches marginal significance ($p < 1.0$) in Models 2 and 3. Both logged GDP per capita and sexual violence never reach statistical significance, and neither remains a solely positive

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[48]The index is defined as the "process of increasing capacity for women, leading to greater choice, agency, and participation in societal decision-making," and measures three equally-weighted indicators: civil liberties, participation in civil society organizations, and representation of women in formal political positions. Michael Coppedge, et al. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project Codebook https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/d1/24/d124efd5-7ff5-4175-a1ed-f294984084d0/v-dem_codebook_v6.pdf

[49]Aksel Sundström, Pamela Paxton, Yi-Ting Wang, and Staffan I. Lindberg, "Women's Political Empowerment: A New Global Index, 1900–2012," *World Development* 94: 335.

[50]Since my data is panel data, I use a GEE to model changes in my continuous dependent variable (which is required in GEEs).

[51]Rather than a "lag" (in STATA: L.) at one-year $= x_{t-1}$, "seasonal" difference (in STATA: S.) is understood as one-year interval $= x_t - x_{t-1}$ STATA requires a syntax specification between the two in order to differentiate between types of time-series data. See page 4 of https://www.stata.com/manuals13/tstsset.pdf

[52]"Seasonal" difference is measured as $x_t - x_{t-1}$, whereas "lag" is measured as x_{t-1}

Table 2: Coefficient Table

| | **Model 1** | **Model 2** | **Model 3** | **Model 4** | **Model 5** | **Model 6** | **Model 7** |
	1 year	*2 years*	*3 years*	*4 years*	*5 years*	*10 years*	*15 years*
Sexual violence, lag	0.00261	0.00507	0.00716	0.00728	0.00601	0.00430	-0.00606
	(0.00133)	(0.00262)	(0.00394)	(0.00501)	(0.00578)	(0.00657)	(0.00657)
GDP per capita, log, lag	-0.000696	-0.0017	-0.00308	-0.00428	-0.0044	0.000609	0.0134
	(0.000584)	(0.00101)	(0.0016)	(0.00243)	(0.00326)	(0.00657)	(0.00837)
Active conflict, lag	0.00130	0.00351	0.00831*	0.0119*	0.0124	0.0216	0.0115
	(0.00144)	(0.00295)	(.0042)	(0.0056)	(0.00681)	(0.0119)	(0.0121)
Labor force, lag	-0.0000588	-0.000151	-0.000277*	-0.000403*	-0.000559*	-0.00164**	-0.00271**
	(0.0000454)	(0.0000914)	(0.00014)	(0.000197)	(0.000246)	(0.00056)	(0.000867)
HDI, lag	-0.00983	-0.0169	-0.0247	-0.0372	-0.0588	-0.222**	-0.385***
	(0.00541)	(0.00992)	(0.016)	(0.0246)	(0.0342)	(0.0718)	(0.0946)
Quota adoption, lag	-0.0000385	-0.00255	-0.0076**	-0.0125	-0.0168**	-0.0419***	-0.0292*
	(0.000898)	(0.00162)	(0.00265)	(0.0038)	(0.00517)	(0.0108)	(0.0115)
Constant	0.0172***	0.0372***	0.0606***	0.0886***	0.116***	0.247***	0.321***
	(0.00305)	(0.00586)	(0.00879)	(0.0127)	(0.0159)	(0.0365)	(0.0466)
Observations	3776	3776	3775	3617	3457	2653	1857

Standard errors in parentheses.   ***p < 0.05**   ****p < 0.01**   *****p < 0.001**

or negative coefficient across all models. However, sexual violence only has a negative coefficient in Model 7 (at a fifteen-year interval). GDP, on the other hand, maintains a negative coefficient in Models 1 through 5 and has a positive coefficient in the remaining models.

Analysis and Future Research

The problems I encountered during my research are, I believe, indicative of larger problems in this realm of research. I was limited in my ability to perform the analysis which I originally envisioned, which would have included more variables to denote key qualities that other scholars and I consider important for measuring gender equality, such as literacy rates, access to education, access to contraception, wage equality, and rates of domestic violence.

The pattern of the sexual violence coefficients that these models produced mostly confirmed my hypothesis. Six out of seven of these coefficients are positive (Models 1-6), displaying an increase in women's empowerment in part due to the presence of sexual violence even ten years removed from conflict. The negative coefficient in Model 7 raises questions about the temporal nature of the effects of sexual violence — are the gains theorized by Agerberg and Kreft temporary?[53] If so, how temporary are they, and what makes these gains temporary?

The temporal nature of the effects revealed an interesting pattern; on average, statistically significant coefficients appeared in Model 3, and the effects of variables on the dependent variable faded over time. Following Agerberg and Kreft, I believe that the nature of this pattern has to do

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[53]I am referring here to the quote I referenced earlier: "gains in women's agency oftentimes do not accrue despite the violence to which armed conflict exposes women, but *because of it.*" Agerberg and Kreft, "Gendered Conflict, Gendered Outcomes," 2.

with the type of change produced. These authors argue that CRSV elicits "simultaneously gendered forms of international pressure and domestic women's mobilization," which in conjunction generate positive change in women's empowerment.[54] This change would logically require about three years to accrue; international actors require time to build coalitions and develop campaigns to address issues such as gender equality, and the same can be said for domestic organizations concerned with building an egalitarian post-conflict society. Immediate change (in one- or two- year increments) in the dependent variable may be implausible even though it is closer temporally to the catalyst. As for the tendency of these effects to fade over time, perhaps distance from the catalyst for change stalls societal willingness to continually engage with issues directly caused by violent conflict.

The data show that quota adoption has a negative coefficient, and thus a negative effect on gender equality, in all models. This was perhaps the most surprising finding in my entire analysis because of its high and sustained statistical significance. This finding confirms feminist wariness of state-centric approaches to gender equality, and it confirmed my own hesitance to use quotas to measure gender equality. The results of my research call for a reevaluation of quotas as a metric through which gender equality can — or should — be understood.

Qualitative Methodology and Research Design

What explains variation in post-conflict gender equality in the cases of the Rwandan genocide and the Nepalese civil war? I perform a theory-driven small-N analysis using Mill's most different systems design (MDSD) to answer this question.[55] Table 3 outlines my qualitative methodology, showing the variables along which I contrasted Nepal and Rwanda. I selected CRSV to be the constant variable between the two because of its explanatory power in my analysis.

Table 3: Most Different Systems Design (MDSD): Variable Comparison Table

	Nepal	**Rwanda**
Conflict years	1996-2006	1994
Regime type	Royal dictatorship (1989-1990: 2002-2007)	Military dictatorship (all years)
	Parliamentary democracy (1991-2001; 2008-2018)	
Active pre-war civil society	No	Yes
Root of conflict	Political (Maoist)	Ethnic (genocide)
Year of gender quota adoption	1990	2003
Year in which reconciliation commission was established	2015 (9 years since end of conflict)	1999 (5 years since end of conflict)
CRSV	Yes	Yes
Gender equality five years post-conflict	0.84/1.0	0.696/1.0

Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) v10 Dataset
https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset/

I also write a multiple case study on the Rwandan genocide (1990-1994) and Nepalese civil war (1996-2006) in which the outcome of interest is gender equality, measured by the women's political empowerment index (See Tables 1 and 2). Following Cohen and Nordås (2014), I will be looking

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[54]Ibid., 2.
[55]John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (Harper: 1843 and 1869).

at the five years in the immediate post-conflict period to investigate how reconciliation with CRSV takes hold in Rwanda and Nepal. Thus, the specific outcome I am interested in is the measure of gender equality five years after the end of armed conflict.

Rwanda Overview

The Rwandan genocide is a fitting case study for many reasons. Primarily, I am concerned with illustrating the logic that reckoning processes — of which there were many in Rwanda — affect post-conflict gender equality. Secondly, the depth and breadth of scholarly engagement with the Rwandan genocide facilitates a well-informed case study. Since I will not be doing field research, relying on published scholarship is crucial for my case study. Third, and perhaps most critically, the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath are well-documented. The same cannot be said of all instances of CRSV.

For the purposes of my research, I focus on the local efforts mounted in the immediate post-conflict period, rather than focus on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Since I theorize that attempts at reconciliation indicate a national willingness to create a more egalitarian post-conflict society, I find a focus on local efforts — rather than internationally imposed efforts — to be apt.

Unlike other countries recovering from genocide, Rwanda mounted a multi-faceted effort to reckon with the effects of genocide in the immediate post-conflict period. The implementation of a 1996 law allowed for the prosecution of genocidal crimes, including rape. Shortly thereafter, in 1999, the Rwandan government created a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, whose stated purpose was as follows: "To promote unity, reconciliation, and social cohesion among Rwandans and build a country in which everyone has equal rights and contributes to good governance."[56]

The confluence of all three of these mechanisms created what has been lauded as a gender-egalitarian society: in 2017, Rwanda ranked in the top five nations in which women are the most equal to men in terms of economic participation, political empowerment, education, and health.[57] Due in large part to quota laws implemented to encourage female participation in politics, Rwanda is considered by many indices to be one of the most politically gender-equal countries in the world. Few countries have higher female representation in government than Rwanda, which consistently ranks among the top five countries for gender equality. This fact alone stuns many from the Western world, whose assumptions about Rwanda are negatively shaped by the 1994 genocide and abetted by a lack of nuanced understanding of African politics. Compounding the distorted Western viewpoint towards Rwanda is media portrayals of the genocide, which have been rightly criticized as both being reductionist and replicating the white, Western gaze which constructs the continent of Africa as a monolith plagued by eternal war.

A focus on gender quotas and perceived gender equality has obscured the role that women's organizations played in the post-genocide period. The proliferation of women's organizations was due in large part to the material consequences women faced in the wake of the genocide, the monetary and technical support provided by the international community and transnational feminist networks, and the historic success of indigenous grassroots organizing in among rural women and farming cooperatives.[58] One example of such a group is *Association des Veuves du Genocide* (Association of the Widows of Genocide), a solidarity organization formed by widows in dire psychological

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[56] "The Justice and Reconciliation Process in Rwanda," UN Outreach Program on the Rwanda Genocide, Published 2012, https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/pdf/bgjustice.pdf.

[57] World Economic Forum, "The Global Gender Gap Report."

[58] Jennie Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs* 107 (428): 371-373.

and economic need who vowed to take an active role in caring for themselves, their children, and the country. Though I will discuss civil society organizing later, it is worth noting that these micro-narratives are often omitted from the larger progress narrative told about Rwanda's post-genocide transformation. Though the gender quota implemented by the government is credited for facilitating the entry of women into government, women in government do not alone facilitate gender equality; gender equality must be understood as a process inclusive of but not limited to formal government processes. Thus, when writing my case study of the Rwandan genocide and the post-conflict transformation process, the challenge will be complicating the state-centric narrative usually told about gender equality — and the role of women in organizing for this equality — in the modern era.

Nepal Overview

The Nepalese civil war between the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the Communist Party of Nepal Maoists (CPN-Maoist) began in 1996, when insurgent Maoists vowed to overthrow the monarchy and install a people's republic in its place. Throughout the war, Maoists retained control of rural areas, in which a vast majority (87%) of Nepalese population lives.[59] Despite a history of peace among its diverse ethnic and religious population as well as recent gains in political rights and social liberties, Nepal quickly succumbed to political tension from the Maoists, whose stated goal for deposing the monarchy was the poor distribution of resources resulting in "social and economic injustice against the poor, particularly in rural and remote areas."[60] An analysis of the political economy of development resources reveals poor resource distribution in the pre-war period — particularly, corruption of the ruling elite and lack of distribution of wealth to the rural population that constitutes the vast majority of Nepal.[61] The war resulted in an estimated 17,000 fatalities and 200,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) over a ten-year period.[62]

The trajectory of post-conflict reconciliation between the GoN and CPN-Maoist differ greatly from steps undertaken in Rwanda. After negotiations that largely excluded women, both sides signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement on November 21, 2006. The agreement created a Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR), which provided oversight to other justice-oriented national and local commissions. The MoPR later established Local Peace Committees (LPCs), which worked at the district, municipal, and village level and mandated at least one-third female membership. After the successful rollout of LPCs, the GoN adopted UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, shortly thereafter approving a national action plan to integrate women in peace processes and acknowledge the value of their contributions in post-conflict reconstruction processes. The GoN established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) in 2015, well after the cessation of armed conflict and signing of peace accords. Both transitional justice mechanisms were originally granted two-year mandates and have been criticized for lacking enforcement mechanisms, credibility, and capacity to address complaints.[63]

Before the signing of the peace accords, Nepal officially had a gender quota. However, the gender quota adopted in 1990 allowed very few women in government who were not from upper castes or

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[59] Kishor Sharma, "The political economy of civil war in Nepal," *World Development* 34(7): 1237.

[60] Ibid., 1238.

[61] Ibid., 1247-1248.

[62] M.V. Arino, "Nepal, A Gender View of the Armed Conflict and Peace Process," Quaderns de Construccio de Pau (4): 1-18.

[63] Human Rights Watch, "Nepal: Transitional Justice Proving Elusive," 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/13/nepal-transitional-justice-proving-elusive#

had close political connections.[64] The peace accords revised the electoral system to incorporate 'first past the post' and proportional representation models to give traditionally excluded groups — namely, poor women and those belonging to 'lower' castes — a greater voice in government.[65]

Outside of official political venues, civil society has been an important venue of contemporary engagement for women in Nepal. Following the civil war, the People's Movement in April 2006 spurred democratic mobilization and coalition-building, particularly among women who were displaced by the war, ignored by peacebuilding efforts, or inadequately reintegrated into society. Coalitional organizing between women's groups has led to the passage of specific legislation, such as the Nepal Citizenship Act (2006), Gender Equality Act (2006), and Domestic Violence Act (2009. It is important to note, however, that the history of grassroots organizing in Nepal contrasts sharply with feminist histories in Rwanda. All civil society organizations were officially banned in Nepal between 1960-1990, which created barriers for pre-war organizing. In the post-war era, however, civil society organizations have operated with relative freedom from government intervention or surveillance. Additionally, the unprecedented participation of women in the Maoist side of the conflict has had ripple effects throughout society, as I will detail below.

Analyzing Cases

What explains variation in post-conflict gender equality in these cases? I carefully selected each variable in my case study to represent key facets of the conflicts and countries in which they occurred. I will proceed with a discussion of each of these variables in the context of the conflicts in which they occurred, their interconnectedness, and their implications for the conflict and post-conflict periods.

Nepalese Civil War

In Nepal, the societal context in which conflict and reconciliation took place is shaped by caste, ethnicity, and region of origin.[66] These markers are also important forces that shape gendered expectations, roles, and politics.[67] CPN-Maoist started war with the objective to end structural inequality based on the aforementioned categories.[68] The Maoist nature of the conflict drew many women to participate actively in combat; an estimated 30-40% of Maoist combatants were women,[69] many of whom came from the most marginalized caste and ethnic groups (Dalit, Tharu, Janjati, Madeshi).[70] To an extent that was unprecedented in Nepal, "women ex-combatants were liberated from traditional gender roles and empowered to take on new roles traditionally reserved for men."[71] This liberation was unprecedented for combatants because women were prohibited from serving

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[64]Falch Åshild, "Women's political participation and influence in post-conflict Burundi and Nepal," Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 21.

[65]Ibid., 22.

[66]Luna K.C., Gemma Van Der Haar, and Dorothea Hilhorst, "Changing Gender Role: Women's Livelihoods, Conflict and Post-Conflict Security in Nepal," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4(2): 177.

[67]Meena Acharya, "Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women." *Achieving Millennium Development Goals: Challenges for Nepal* 15(49): 48.

[68]Prashant Jha, *Battles of the new republic: A contemporary history of Nepal* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

[69]Seira Tamang, "The politics of conflict and difference or the difference of conflict in politics: The women's movement in Nepal," *Feminist Review* 91: 61–80.

[70]Luna K.C. et al, "Changing Gender Role," 178.

[71]Ibid., 180-181.

in combat roles in the Nepalese military until 2003.[72] In a systematic study of combatants and non-combatants across castes, researchers found that Maoist Dalit ex-combatants experienced the highest degrees of gender equality; they internalized empowerment the most, since they came from the most marginalized position and were immediately treated as equals in the Maoist movement.[73] These women grew accustomed to power, since in the movement they participated in decision-making, negotiating, and had important voices in the party.

Shifts in gender roles due to war were not exclusive to combatants. For non-combatants whose male family members or spouses left temporarily, male-coded responsibilities were shifted to women.[74] These responsibilities included running small businesses and participating in local politics and meetings — activities that would have been impossible absent extenuating circumstances. Conflict transformed gender roles temporarily, enabling women to construct "independent resistance and resilience to face the altered realities of their daily lives, something they would never have experienced in the presence of men under normal circumstances."[75]

This shift in gender roles to fill the gaps left by men was temporary because, contrary to the Rwandan genocide, many of these men returned home after the Nepalese civil war ended. However, since the Nepalese civil war lasted for ten years (1996-2006), this shift was notable. In comparison to the Rwandan genocide, which occurred swiftly during the year 1994,[76] the Nepalese conflict allowed women to internalize this shift in gender roles in a matter that was not nearly as abrupt and violent as was the case in Rwanda.

What were the outcomes of this temporary shift? The war left in its wake an awareness that women possessed political will, military tact, and were able to defy roles prescribed by gender, ethnicity, and caste. War can create new economic responsibilities and generate opportunities for women to fill public-facing roles, which is often observed as a bottom-up (rather than a top-down) societal transformation.[77] For combatants and non-combatants alike, the war provided women with a level of awareness that they should not be underestimated.[78] See Figure 1, a visualization of women's political empowerment for five years following the civil war.

Participation in armed conflict has contributed to the destabilization of gender roles, though this has not resulted in the inclusion of women in peace negotiations or in politics, even with the gender quota in place. The adoption of a quota was "a crucial first step to open the doors for women to take part in decision-making in Nepal,"[79] though like any quota, it alone does not guarantee gender equality, nor does it guarantee that women will be taken seriously as political actors or that women's issues will be taken seriously on the political agenda. Women's effective participation in Nepalese politics has been hindered by "pervasive male domination inside political parties," even when women are at the table.[80] Furthermore, increased representation does not make discussing stigmatized issues — such as sexual or domestic violence — easier. Lawmakers note that it is difficult to discuss gender-based violence because it is not a priority.[81] Women are constantly working to dismantle the perception that they are only in government because of affirmative action,

[72]Rama S. Lohani-Chase, "Women and gender in the Maoist people's war in Nepal: militarization and dislocation," PhD Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2008.

[73]Ibid., 181.

[74]Julie Arostegui, "Gender, conflict, and peace-building: How conflict can catalyse positive change for women," *Gender & Development* 21(3): 533–549.

[75]Luna K.C. et al, "Changing Gender Role," 183.

[76]There had been pogroms and violence against Tutsis prior to the genocide, which led to the creation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front. The genocide itself, however, occurred exclusively during 1994.

[77]Judy El-Bushra, "Fused in combat: Gender relations and armed conflict," *Development in Practice* 13 (2–3): 252–265.
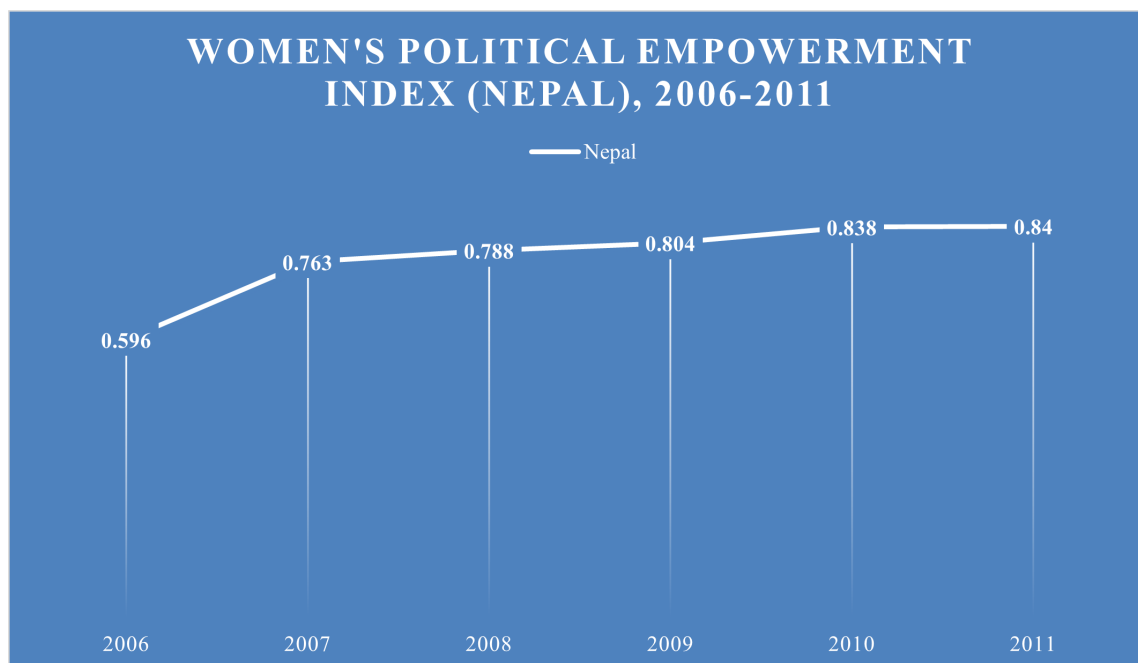
[78]Luna K.C. et al, "Changing Gender Role," 189.

[79]Åshild, "Women's political participation and influence," 23.

[80]Ibid., 23.

[81]Ibid., 23.

Figure 1: Women's Political Empowerment Index Scores in Nepal, five years post-conflict

WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT INDEX (NEPAL), 2006-2011

—— Nepal

0.596	0.763	0.788	0.804	0.838	0.84
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011

Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) v10 Dataset https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset/

and not because of their hard work and political convictions informed by their experiences during the civil war; though these perceptions are false, they weaken women's credibility among other lawmakers.[82]

Consequently, civil society has organized for gender equality outside of official government channels. The People's Movement in 2006 — democratic demonstrations which helped establish the basis of the new parliamentary republic in 2008 — catalyzed a renewed interest in grassroots organizing. According to activists interviewed, "women's organizations have played a central role in promoting awareness on gender equality, and in transforming what earlier were regarded as women's private concerns into wider public issues in Nepal."[83] Women's Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and Constituent Assembly (WAPPDCA) and Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH) are examples of groups which have worked at the grassroots level to form coalitions and educate women about issues such as gender-based violence, peace, and inheritance rights.[84]

It is only after women's organizations have done grassroots, coalitional organizing — which is particularly challenging in Nepal due to the limited accessibility of many rural areas — that the GoN implements and funds similar plans and is lauded for doing so. For example, the GoN declared 2010 the Year to End Gender-Based Violence, creating a prevention fund, hotline, and a plan to pass acts to bring perpetrators to account. The outcome of this plan — the TRC and CIEDP — has been widely criticized for being inadequate. Created by the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act in 2014, the TRC was recognized from the outset as operating under political influence, and thus allowing perpetrators to evade penalties and punishment.[85] The

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[82]Ibid., 24.

[83]Ibid., 27.

[84]Ibid., 26.

[85]Lily Thapa and Deon V. Canyon, "The Advancement of Women in Post-Conflict Nepal," Daniel K. Inouye Asia

most resounding criticism of the TRC, however, has been its inability to perform its basic function: deliver justice to victims of atrocities.[86]

Rwandan Genocide

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was founded in the late 1980s in exile in Uganda after a period of ethnic violence and pogroms against the Tutsi minority in Rwanda; in 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda to liberate the country from then-President Habyarimana.[87] The conflict was settled by the 1993 Arusha Peace accords. The RPF quickly took military control by driving out Hutu extremists and forming a transitional government, deemed the 'Government of National Unity,' in 1994.[88] In the same year, the RPF undertook an ideological program called 'national unity and reconciliation' to build a 'New Rwanda.'[89] The transitional government was supposed to remain in power for five years, though it extended its mandate in 1998. In 2003, a new constitution was approved by national referendum, and presidential and parliamentary elections were held. Since the RPF seized control of Rwanda, President Paul Kagame has shown no indication of forfeiting his own power, despite recent and growing criticism of his human rights record.[90] Though Kagame and the RPF have often been touted as a dramatic post-conflict success story for the continent, many scholars, activists, and genocide survivors have called into question the validity of these claims considering Kagame's increasingly authoritarian control over political opponents, civil society, and the press.[91]

The RPF's approach to women in government is strikingly similar to President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda, in which Kagame was an officer.[92] The RPF established the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) — renamed the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROF) in 1999 — to integrate gender into frameworks for analyzing policy, development, and administration, and to promote gender equity.[93] By mainstreaming women in government and appointing them in key, visible posts — such as justices, ministers, parliamentarians — women became mere "symbols of inclusion," tokenized for their gender rather than valued for their political contributions.[94] Kagame and the RPF received many accolades for gender inclusion, which "appeared to be in line with foreign aid ideas" rather than responsive to the calls coming from civil society organizations such as the *Association des Veuves du Genocide.* Top-down approaches enacted by the Rwandan government are not, however, the extent of action taken to achieve gender equality in the post-genocide era.

A strong culture of grassroots organizing existed before the RPF took political control. In the pre-genocide period, women formed cooperatives, associations, and support networks to tend to local problems and secure income.[95] Many of these grassroots organizations were functionally

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Pacific Center for Security Studies, Occasional Paper: 2.

[86] Human Rights Watch, "Nepal: Transitional Justice Proving Elusive."

[87] Jennie Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs* 107(428): 364.

[88] Ibid., 365.

[89] Ibid., 365.

[90] Lewis Mudge, "No Space for Criticism of Rwanda," Human Rights Watch, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/27/no-space-criticism-rwanda#

[91] "Rwanda," World Report 2019, Human Rights Watch, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/rwanda#eaa21f

[92] Ibid., 366-367.

[93] Ibid., 368.

[94] Ibid., 368-369.

[95] Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing transnational gender politics in post-genocide Rwanda*, (Ashgate Publishing: 2015), 60.

political; the crisis leading to the political transition in pre-genocide Rwanda was "carried on the backs of ordinary Rwandan [women's] discontent with the Habyarimana Regime."[96]

Women's organizations filled material voids after the genocide, emerging from a strong grassroots network of the aforementioned pre-existing organizations and catalyzed by the Third United Nations Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985.[97] The activities of these groups varied based on specific need after the genocide.[98] For example, many female genocide survivors report that the perpetrators who killed their husbands and children spared the women by saying, 'You will die from solitude.'[99] Thus, this population of women self-identified as needing psychological care and formed solidarity groups and a politics of mutual care to address this specific need. Other groups acknowledged that war creates opportunity to challenge traditional notions of womanhood and gender roles.[100] *Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe* is one example of an organization that focused on societal change rather than addressing a specific population's needs. An umbrella organization consisting of smaller, ethnically diverse local networks, *Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe* launched a nationwide Peace Action Campaign with the stated goal of cultivating a culture of peace in the wake of the genocide.[101]

Though grassroots movements in the immediate post-genocide period in Rwanda were strong, they rarely receive the credit often given to top-down approaches to gender equality; additionally, indigenous movements have faced many setbacks. Lack of a universal issue to rally behind has created fractured movements that sometimes come into conflict with each other.[102] Though this is not inherently a bad thing — indeed, I would argue that it is healthy to cultivate contentious and competitive feminist politics — it can be a setback for *all* such organizations when "women's interests" and "women's organizations" are presumed to be a political monolith and universally restricted on the basis of assumed homogeneity.[103] Another setback which Jennie Burnet observed in her extensive fieldwork in Rwanda is a generational gap between younger, educated activists and older, more experienced, but less educated activists.[104] Differing experiences with and memories of the genocide also inform Rwandan politics and activism to this day; women's organizations are no exception.

Another challenge posed to women's organizations has, incidentally, come from the government's own approach to gender equality. The 2003 implementation of the gender quota and the establishment of MIGEPROF has unintentionally harmed civil society organizations working on issues related to gender equality by causing leaders of these organizations to leave their jobs to take government positions, creating a vacuum in leadership.[105] Burnet writes: "the engagement of more women in the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government, as well as in the grassroots administrative structures, has resulted in a loss of human capital from vibrant civil society organizations," weakening the capacity of these organizations to hold government accountable and to organize at the grassroots level.[106]

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[96]Timothy Longman, "Rwanda: Democratization and disorder: Political transformation and social deterioration," in *Political Reform in Francophone Africa* (Routledge): 287-306.

[97]Ibid., 371-372.

[98]Catherine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin, "Confronting the aftermath of conflict: women's organizations in postgenocide Rwanda" in Krishna Kumar (ed.), *Women and Civil War: Impact, organizations, and action* (Lynne Rienner Publishers).

[99]Jennie Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs* 107(428): 385.
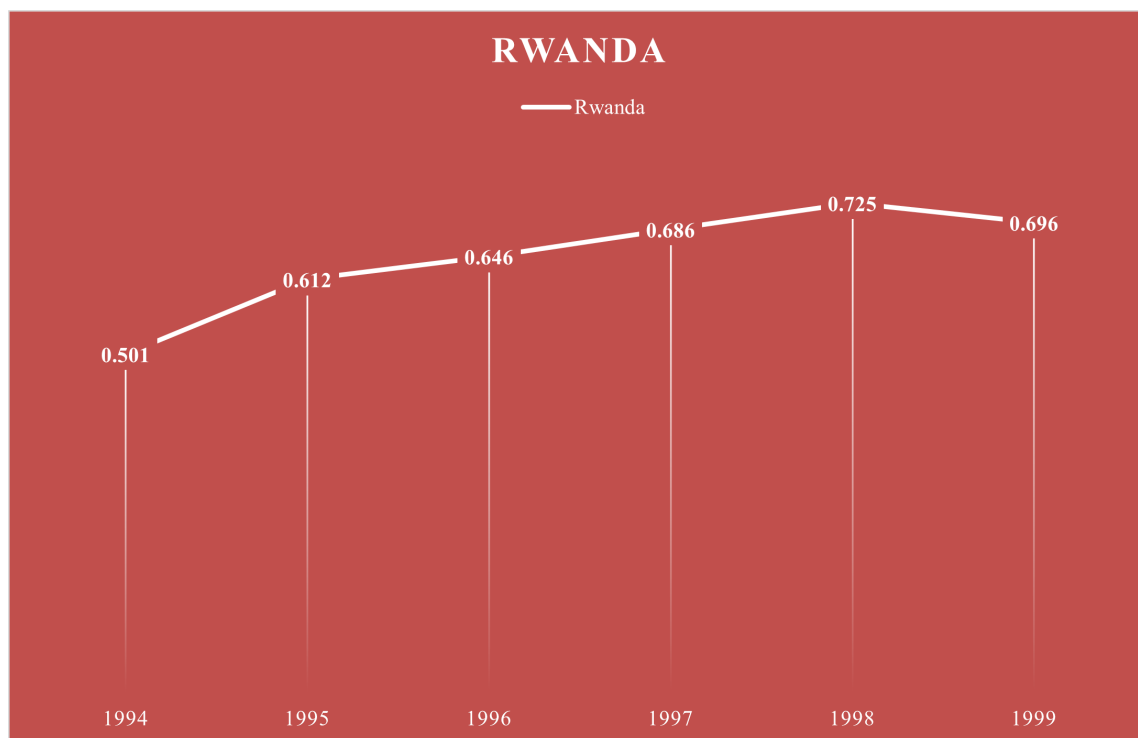
[100]Ibid., 385.

[101]Ibid., 374.

[102]Ibid., 385.

[103]Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," 63.

[104]Ibid., 379.

[105]Ibid., 378.

[106]Ibid., 380.

Figure 2: Women's Political Empowerment Index Scores in Rwanda, five years post-conflict

The most troubling challenge posed to these organizations is the state. The RPF has sought to restrict civil society and has increasingly done so; women's organizations have not been exempt to these measures. In the immediate post-conflict period, organizations working in the area of gender equality were tolerated by the Kagame government, though any organizations deemed 'political' were "either subjected to government-backed competition or banned."[107] The top-down government approach to gender equality has inadequately cultivated equality for Rwandan women, though the government touts the gender quota as evidence that equality has been achieved. In a systematic overview of the government's multifaceted response to the genocide, Rirhandu Madeza-Barthel writes that the regime has employed "stalling tactics" to signify to the international community that gender equality has been achieved with tangible markers[108] For example: Rwanda was an early signatory of CEDAW and soon thereafter ratified the treaty, though it has not substantively implementing measures to remedy widespread discrimination that women face in the legal system, despite calls from civil society organizations to do so.[109] The Rwandan constitution, too, forbids sex-based discrimination, though in practice it has not changed societal attitudes toward gender equality;[110] such is the work of feminism that should be done by grassroots feminist organizations were they allowed to prosper absent government intervention. See Figure 2, a visualization of women's political empowerment for five years following the genocide.

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[107]Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing transnational gender politics in post-genocide Rwanda*, 56.
[108]Ibid., 56.
[109]Ibid., 56.
[110]Ibid., 60.

Qualitative Results

Why is Nepal more gender-equal than Rwanda five years after conflict ends? In Nepal, more reckoning was done on the individual and grassroots level than on the government level. Due to the Maoist nature of the conflict in which many women participated, there was an increased focus on transcending traditional gender roles and upending systems of domination based on economic exploitation and caste-based exclusion; women who were non-combatants experienced a high level of independence during the conflict, assuming political and social responsibilities that otherwise would be restricted to men. Government indicators of gender equality in Nepal have been rightly critiqued for falling short of attaining their goals: the original 1990 gender quota for women in government has been historically restricted based on caste and wealth; the TRC and CIEDP have been subject to political influence; the revised gender quota, though it has facilitated the entry of more women into government, has not made the discussion of gender issues easier, more respected, or mainstream in political discourse. Thus, I find that in the Nepalese case, a focus on micro-level interactions, individual transformation, and women's experiences of gender equality and shifting gender roles during and after the conflict produced a societal recognition that gender equality is possible as a grassroots phenomenon rather than an idea that is implemented through the government in a top-down approach.

Why is Rwanda less gender-equal than Nepal five years after the genocide? In the post-genocide period, gender equality advocates have worked within the folds of the Rwandan state because of the state's role in controlling civil society. Rwanda implemented a top-down approach to gender equality, mounting significant efforts to appoint women in key posts, create new agencies to address gender equality, and institute a gender quota. The post-genocide period was characterized by a "closer relationship" between the state and civil society organizations devoted to gender equality, which has been detrimental for the latter.[111] The establishment of MIGEPROF drew momentum and talent away from civil society organizations, and Kagame's government has received credit for creating gender equality in Rwanda without adequately addressing the needs of the most marginalized populations. The state implemented measures that projected success to the international community but failed to transform societal attitudes about gender equality at home.

Analysis

What explains variation in post-conflict gender equality in the cases of the Rwandan genocide and the Nepalese civil war? How can I account for transformation in the immediate post-conflict period? When I first selected my cases, I observed that Rwanda and Nepal experienced similar levels of gender equality in 2018, according to V-Dem; Rwanda scores a slight 0.036 points higher on the *women's political empowerment index* (See Figure 3). However, upon further inspection, the trajectory of the immediate post-conflict period reveals a pattern that confirms the findings from my case study: Nepal improved more than Rwanda in the five years post-conflict and scores 0.144 points higher on the index scale in the fifth year removed from conflict. (See Figures 1-3).

Based on the international attention devoted to Rwanda, the plethora of literature on the topic, as well as my own exposure to Rwandan attempts to establish gender equality in the wake of the genocide before case selection, I had anticipated that Rwanda was the standard-bearer for gender equality. Similarly, I was relatively uninformed about the Nepalese civil war and its ramifications for gender equality. Thus, I was surprised by the results of my research and case study.

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[111] Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing transnational gender politics in post-genocide Rwanda*, 60.

Figure 3: Women's Political Empowerment Index Edited Graph to show Fifth Year post-conflict

Women's Political Empowerment Index Cross-Country
Comparison, 1989-2018

Nepal   Rwanda
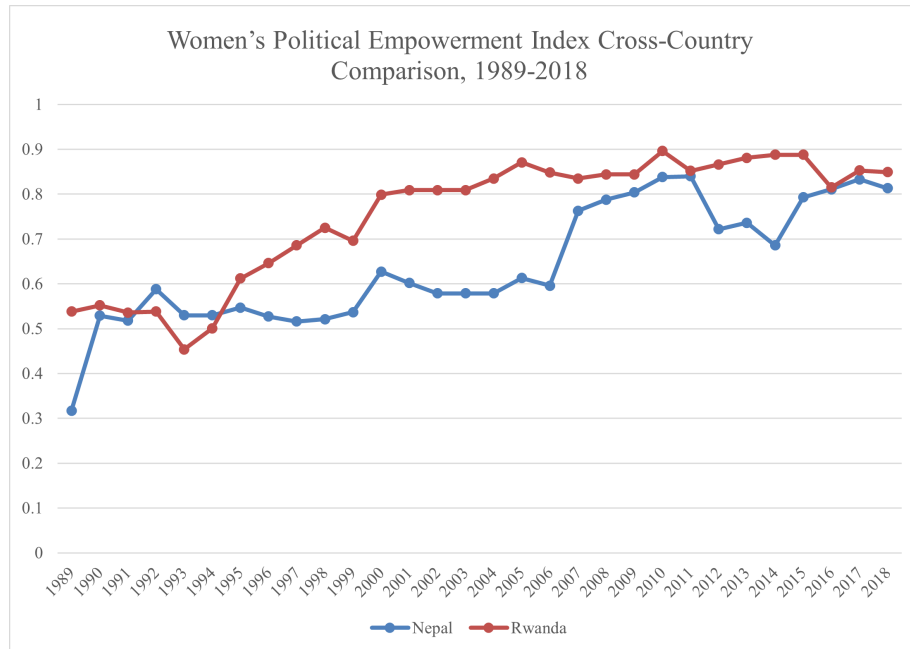
Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) v10 Dataset https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset/

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Regarding the civil society variable, which quickly emerged as the most surprising: my knowledge about Nepal was largely based on the assumption that grassroots organizing would be difficult, since it has been banned for multiple decades. I did not anticipate that individual transformation and participation in conflict and decision-making processes would have such a remarkable ripple effect. On the other hand, I had assumed that, since Rwanda had an active civil society with a plethora of organizations devoted to gender equality and different populations of women's concerns, that the post-genocide period would see an immediate and steep rise in gender equality. I underestimated the role of the state in controlling the agency of civil society organizations.

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