Violent Femininity: Exploring Representations of Women's Violence in Global Politics

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Abstract

Women are becoming increasingly visible as violent perpetrators in global politics, yet the gendered language used to describe them betrays a collective uneasiness with their wilful participation. The inability, or unwillingness, to accept women's capacity to choose their violence has led to gendered representations which seek to obscure their agency in order to uphold the boundaries of permissible femininity. Merging the gendered narratives outlined by Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, 2015), with a strong contextual component advocated for by Seal (2010) allows for a holistic examination of the ways that these representations of violent women seek to portray them as being victimized, mentally disturbed, or defective women.

This research utilizes discourse analysis to analyze these narratives, culminating in an in-depth study of the representations of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, the first woman to be convicted of genocide at an international criminal court for her actions during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

Chapter 1: Introduction

Many efforts have been made to expose and amplify the gendered implications of armed conflict and end the long-standing erasure of women's accounts of violence and its effects. However, raising awareness of women's experiences in conflict has generally been interpreted as highlighting the various ways in which they are victimized, while at the same time turning a blind eye to other ways women experience, and participate in, warfare. As a result, women's experiences of war have been viewed almost exclusively through the lens of victimization, impacting the way we talk about femininity and violence. Presuming women to only be victims leads to the exclusion of men's experiences of wartime victimization, while making female perpetrators invisible. This refusal to recognize women's violence leads to narratives about these women which seek to obscure their agency in their actions and maintain the myth of feminine innocence and purity. As the international lawyer Suzannah Linton suggests, a "credible and truly gender-sensitive approach to violence in armed conflict, one that argues for the holistic appreciation of the experience of armed conflict for both genders, cannot continue to ignore the crimes committed by women" (2016, 201). Thus, to have a truly gendered understanding of war and conflict, female perpetrators must be fully incorporated into any analysis of peace and security. The objective of this research project is to examine how women who commit violence are represented in both popular media and academia, and to uncover any implications these narratives have for the study of feminism and global politics. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that women who commit heinous acts of violence are routinely subjected to gendered storytelling about their actions, in a manner which denies them agency and ostracizes them from womanhood.

There is a significant amount of women's violence in international politics that is covered by their legitimate involvement in war as soldiers and military personnel, and even the most gendered perspectives of conflict generally accept that women can and do occupy space in this realm. This thesis is not concerned with the legal violence perpetuated by women, but rather with the illegal, or proscribed, violence women commit. Proscribed violence is that which is prohibited by national or international law, and is condemned and denounced. It is often assumed that this kind of extralegal violence is committed only by male perpetrators against female victims. When women are the actors committing war crimes and other atrocities, gender subordinating narratives emerge to make sense of their violence and to uphold the limits of heteropatriarchal femininity. As such, for the remainder of this thesis, the violent women in question will be only those who commit acts of violence in defiance of national or international law.

The available evidence suggests that violent female perpetrators constitute a long-ignored trend in the study of war and conflict. "We are not dealing with a situation of insignificance, or a handful of female aberrations, but thousands of women involved in very serious criminality" (Linton 2016, 201). While there is some disagreement over whether women are participating in violence in increasing numbers, or if they are merely becoming more visible, the fact remains that women have historically been a neglected class of perpetrator.

This project is not concerned with investigating why and how women commit violence, because there is a degree of gendered essentialism baked into such a research question. Investigating women's violence as separate from men's assumes that there is something distinct and differential about women's violence, simply because it was committed by a woman. Operating from the misconception that there is something unique and essential to women *as*

women assumes that people share common characteristics or attributes by virtue of their gender. For example, this gendered essentialism has contributed to the pervasive belief that women are inherently more peaceful than men. There is not a common experience that can be attributed to people on the basis of their association with either the female or male gender groups. People understood to be women and people understood to be men both exist and operate in a gendered world with gendered expectations. Women's assumed peacefulness exposes gendered standards of permissible behaviour, which violent female perpetrators transgress. As Laura Sjoberg explains, "gender expectations of people understood to be women include sensitivity, (inter)dependence, passivity, emotionality, quietness, innocence, grace, caring, and purity" (2016, 5). These everyday stereotypes of what women are capable of and/or expected to do sometimes translate into a less public but still well-understood conventional wisdom about men's and women's roles in global politics. Violence, particularly political violence, is traditionally understood to be in the purview of maleness and masculinity. In the first edition of their work exploring women's violence in global politics, Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry explore this further:

> Women's violence is often discussed in terms of violent women's gender: *women* are not supposed to be violent. This is one tenet on which various understandings of gender seem to converge. A conservative interpretation of gender sees women as peaceful and apolitical, a liberal view understands women as a pacifying influence on politics, and feminists who study global politics often critique the masculine violence of interstate relations (2007, 2).

When women do not behave in accordance with the characteristics associated with femininity, and instead act violently, they have violated not only the law but the expectations of their gender as well. This has led to the perception that women who commit acts of violence are somehow

fundamentally different from those that do not, because 'regular' or 'normal' women would not behave that way.

When women act violently, there is a common misconception that if women are the perpetrators of violence in war, it is no longer important or necessary to look at women as victims, or at the gendered impacts of conflict. This mutually exclusive narrative posits that if women are the perpetrators, then they are by definition no longer the victims. As Laura Sjoberg explains, "some argue female war criminals show that women's unequal and sex-specific victimization in war is over – that women cannot both be victims of conflict violence (as a class) and perpetrators (as individuals or as a group)" (2016, 14). Acknowledging women's violence in global politics need not erase a focus on the gendered nature of victimization in conflict, but rather expose the variety of positions that women occupy. There is a pervasive misconception that armed conflicts are an exclusively male domain, but records of conflicts from around the world show that women are active participants in warfare, "not just as peace activists, humanitarian workers, health care providers, politicians and soldiers but also as perpetrators of international crimes" (Ferizović 2020, 455-456). The inconceivability of women as violent perpetrators maintains and upholds myths about the nature of femininity and what it means to be a woman, while subjecting these women to gendered narratives about their actions.

As more women are becoming increasingly visible in the ranks of leadership, they are also becoming more visible as perpetrators of genocide, terrorists, and war criminals. When women who commit violence are made visible, they are frequently subjected to marginalization, sensationism and/or caricaturizing. Positioning the narrative in a way which depicts women's violence as unimaginable exposes a belief in the norms and behaviours ascribed in traditional

femininity. Sjoberg and Gentry explore this idea further in their examination of women' violence in global politics:

> Women who commit acts of violence in defiance of national or international law are not seen as criminals, warriors, or terrorists, but as *women criminals, women warriors, and women terrorists*. The operative element of this characterization is that these narratives include a group that is 'suicide bombers' or 'war criminals' or 'perpetrators of genocide' *and* a separate group that is women who would otherwise be members of these groups, but for their femininity" (2015, 8).

Through these discourses, violent women are distinguished from violent men, and divorced from 'normal' women who do not engage in such behaviour. "This leaves the image of idealized femininity intact and does not challenge idealized masculinity. Both of these polarities do a disservice to both genders by objectifying their idealized types" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 23). The representations and treatment of women who perpetrate violence demonstrates the durability of traditional gender norms, roles, and expectations of behaviour. Perceiving violent women as deviant and separate from 'ordinary' women has contributed to the tendency to portray and represent these perpetrators as anomalies and singular outliers in popular media and academia. The differentiation of women who commit violence from women who do not works to police gender roles and sustain structures of global gender inequality.

Commentators such as Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (2007, 2015) have acknowledged the gendered stories we tell about women's political violence, and have outlined their own categorization of these narratives – mothers, monsters, and whores. As they explain, each of these representations carry with it "the weight of gendered assumptions about what is appropriate female behaviour" (2007, 13). Sjoberg and Gentry highlight how these narratives

isolate and other violent women and do so on gendered terms. The categories of the mother, monster, and whore demonstrate how women who act outside the limits of acceptable feminine behaviour, by participating in political violence, are perceived as having a flaw in their femininity.

Other observers such as Lizzie Seal (2010) describe five gendered representations of women who kill: the masculine woman, the muse or mastermind dichotomy, the damaged personality, the respectable woman, and the witch. Seal explains that the five discourses examined "demonstrate how they can become wider symbols of social shifts and anxieties specific to particular times and places" (2010, 85). Seal's interpretation of the discourses of women's violence has an important contextual element to it, which is not explicitly included in Sjoberg and Gentry's. While Seal's research is centred on women who commit serial murder, which is one step removed from the perpetration of political violence, her analysis is pertinent as it concerns women accused of 'unusual killings', or of women who have multiple victims.

This project seeks to support Sjoberg and Gentry's interpretation of the gendered ways that violent women are represented, while incorporating a contextual component in the analysis as advocated for by Seal. Relying on these insights, this thesis will propose a novel way of categorizing the narratives of women's violence in global politics – the victimized perpetrator, the mentally disturbed perpetrator, and the defective perpetrator. These three classifications all deny women's agency in her violence by attributing her actions to some external factor or flaw in her person. By stripping her of agency, the narratives outlined function to make the female perpetrator less culpable for her crimes, thereby negating the need for a wider societal reckoning with the perceived limitations and imposed boundaries of femininity. A key aspect of these gendered constructions of violent women and women who kill is that "the discourses of

womanhood they reproduce play a role in the wider social regulation of femininity" (Seal 2010, 7). The ways that violent women have their violence represented matters for the study and practice of both feminism and international relations.

The utility of the discourses advanced in this research will be demonstrated through a case study analysis of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko – the first woman to ever be convicted by an international criminal court for the crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity for her role in the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Despite the horrific crimes she was convicted of, her case is not an exceptional one, but it did receive a great deal of attention when it was brought to trial. This notoriety led to a number of gendered discourses to describe her violence, and to situate her far outside the limits of feminine behaviour in order to uphold essentialized female stereotypes. Nyiramasuhuko, like all women, had agency in her choice to commit genocidal violence. The gendered essentialism embedded in many accounts of her violence draws attention away from questions of her culpability for her actions and her motivations for those choices. The narratives of the victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective female perpetrator all have traces in the discourses of her crimes. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's case demonstrates how these three narratives are used to obscure the agency of women whose violence places them outside the limits of what is considered to be acceptable and possible behaviour for women.

Analytical Framework and Methodology

This thesis uses feminist security studies to frame the analysis of female perpetrators of proscribed violence. Much of the theorizing on armed conflict, peace and security relegates women to a marginal, sidelined position. We are often unaware that we perceive the world in these gendered terms, as we have become accustomed to equating what is human with what is

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masculine. Employing a gender analysis to the study of peace and security is crucial for understanding the ways that an individual's gender colours their experience of conflict (Sjoberg 2014, 4-6). Those who study international security from a feminist perspective recognize gender as an essential analytical category for the study of war and conflict and are curious about how an individual's gender impacts their experience of armed violence.

This thesis will employ a feminist theoretical approach when examining the gendered representations of women who commit proscribed violence, and the implications of these portrayals for the study of feminism and global politics. By operating from a position which presumes that a perpetrator's gender matters for how their crimes and criminal trials are portrayed in news media and academia, we can see how female perpetrators have had their actions sensationalized and caricaturized when compared to their male counterparts. This discrepancy in representation speaks volumes of how women continue to be constrained by gendered expectations of their behaviour.

A discourse analysis is used to uncover the gendered stereotypes that permeate the narratives of women who commit proscribed violence. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research approach that explores how discourses give legitimacy and meaning to social practices or institutions (Halperin & Heath 2020, 386). This thesis examines how the language used to describe the actions of violent female perpetrators exposes entrenched gender hierarchies and power structures that go far beyond the perpetrator(s) under analysis. As mentioned above, Sjoberg, Gentry, and Seal's analytical contributions work well in concert together as they can both be improved by incorporating key elements from each other, allowing for an enriched analysis of the narratives used to represent violent women. A discourse analysis is well suited for the objectives of this thesis project because it allows for the examination of how language can be

representative of wider social and cultural phenomena, such as the policing of feminine standards of behaviour. This research project is qualitative in nature, and will be drawing on both primary and secondary sources, including court cases, legal critiques, and a variety of scholarly journals and books which cover feminist security studies and analyses of how violent women are represented in the media.

This thesis will contribute to a growing body of work which seeks to uncover how an individual's gender shapes their experiences of war and conflict. The experiences of women as victims of proscribed violence is well researched, but the class of women perpetrators, and their implications for the study of gender and international politics is understudied. Additionally, the feminist theoretical orientation of this thesis contributes to the expanding field of feminist security studies by investigating how violent female perpetrators betray a deep uneasiness with women straying from accepted norms of feminine behaviour.

Chapter 2: Violent Female Perpetrators Around the World, Women's Agency in Their Violence, Gendered Narratives of Violent Women.

Violent female perpetrators have been participating in war and armed conflict around the globe for centuries in roles that are not traditionally associated with femininity. The number of women involved demonstrates that female violence is not an exceptional rarity or abnormality. Women's continued involvement in political violence challenges the conventional assumption that women are either passive bystanders in war, or its innocent victims. Jasenka Ferizović explains that the fact that the "participation of women in conflict-related violence has been recorded in most conflicts including and since World War II indicates that women's conflict-related criminality is not an anomaly but, rather, a regular feature of wars and armed conflicts" (2020, 468). In other words, women's violence is not new. Women's violence may not be a new phenomenon, but it does receive a disproportionate amount of coverage and analysis when compared to the actions of male perpetrators.

The women that do participate in violent conflict have agency in their choice, which is best understood from the position of relational autonomy. Relational autonomy suggests that all people make decisions within the context and conditions of their wider social and political environment. However, keeping with gendered stereotypes, "the existing literature reveals that the crimes committed by female perpetrators are often attributed to outside factors rather than to the women's own agency" (Ferizović 2020, 482). Embedded in this minimizing of women's participation in violence is the belief that women are incapable of committing atrocities, terrorism, sexual violence, torture, and genocide. The representations of female perpetrators matter in global politics because they function to uphold ideal notions of womanhood and femininity. At first glance, women's participation in violent criminality appears to be a form of gender liberation, but it is merely gender marginalization in disguise because these women are

used as boundary markers for behaviour that falls outside the boundaries of acceptable womanhood.

Violent Female Perpetrators Throughout History

Women have been taking on roles outside of their traditional care labour during war and armed conflict for centuries but have repeatedly had their actions ignored or minimized. As Miranda Alison explains, "since security has traditionally been conceptualized in masculinized, military terms and women having been excluded from this, the experiences and roles of women have rarely been of interest in literature on security" (2004, 447). Any analysis of international security which omits the possibility and existence of women perpetrators is incomplete, and therefore has limited utility.

Although women participate in violence in smaller numbers than men, they have been present in a variety of conflicts and contexts throughout history. Female perpetrators of violence appear more frequently in non-state armed groups than in institutionalized state militaries. Alison explains that "theoretical analysis suggests that anti-state (working against the existing state authority) so-called 'liberatory' nationalisms often provide a greater degree of ideological and practical space for women to participate as combatants than do institutionalized state or pro-state nationalisms" (2004, 448). These non-state groups are more likely to be open to women's non-traditional involvement and may also actively recruit women to their join their ranks because of the gendered benefits they offer. As Mia Bloom (2011) articulates in her work exploring female terrorists, "the number of female terrorists and suicide bombers has increased several hundredfold in the past few years, and the trend has been accompanied by a barrage of misinformation and misperception about what is actually going on" (i). The recent increase of

female terrorists reflects the larger pattern of women being involved with non-state violence broadly. Like their male counterparts, female combatants operate from a particular philosophical position which drives their violence, and are not ideologically different from male perpetrators despite their sensationalism.

Perhaps the most well-known group of women involved in anti-state terrorism are the Black Widows of Chechnya, the suicide bombers fighting for Chechen independence and self-determination from Russia. The Chechens have increasingly relied on terrorist violence, as "they direct the violence at civilians and other soft-security targets in addition to Russian military forces" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 98). In a now infamous attack on a theatre in Moscow in which Chechen terrorists took 800 people hostage for three days, eighteen out of forty-one terrorists were women. Comprising nearly 50% of Chechen forces, the female perpetrators involved are far from being an abnormality. These women became known as 'black widows' after the poisonous black widow spider who kills the male spider after mating. Labelling these woman as 'black widows' draws attention to the female suicide bombers as terrorists and therefore illegitimate actors, rather than as part of a people fighting for national independence.

Women's involvement in non-state armed groups is not limited to terrorism and suicide bombing, as the female guerillas in Guatemala and Colombia demonstrate. Both the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had women among their ranks "who performed similar tasks to men in terms of everyday activities and combat actions, creating an image of gender equality which is common among Latin American guerilla groups, even though women rarely made it to leadership positions" (Weber 2021, 267). At the height of its movement FARC consisted of approximately 18 000 combatants, "making it the largest ever guerilla movement in Latin America, with the highest

number of female combatants, comprising roughly 30% of its membership" (Weber 2021, 269).
The women involved in these movements are far from being a statistical outlier and instead
demonstrate the widespread participation of women in political violence.

In Sierra Leone, female fighters have been implicated in atrocity crimes, including sexual
violence. In her work exploring women perpetrators of wartime rape, Dara Kay Cohen explains
that "while some women committed the actual rape of victims (that is, by inserting objects into
victims' bodies), other women were involved in gang rape by holding down the victim" (2013,
384). Despite entrenched views that women are inherently non-violent, there is increasing
evidence that women in armed groups are acting as more than just cooks, cleaners, and
supportive personnel. According to population-based survey data, nearly one in four incidents of
reported gang rape in Sierra Leone were committed by groups that included women perpetrators
(Cohen 2013, 384).

Women have also become increasingly affiliated with violence through institutionalized
and pro-state armed forces. Despite being sanctioned by the government, this violence is still
considered to be proscribed because it violated international laws. For example, during the Nazi
regime in Germany, it was estimated that 12 million women were working in Nazi organizations,
which was one third of the female population at the time (Smeulers 2015). While these women
primarily participated as administrative and supportive personnel, some women did actively
engage in genocidal violence against the Jews. For example, Ilse Koch was married to Nazi
commandant Karl Koch, who ran the Buchenwald concentration camp during World War II,
where Ilse worked as a guard. "The available evidence suggests that Koch participated in acts of
torture and terror in her time at Buchenwald" (Sjoberg, 2016, 2). Her most well-known
transgression involves her collecting the tattooed skin of the female prisoners at Buchenwald to

craft home decorations, such as lampshades and other household goods. Other German women who were formally members of the German military during World War II were also accused of war crimes because of their actions. Significant numbers of women were actively involved in the Nazi regime's execution of genocide – too many to ignore or discount.

Within institutionalized military forces there exist the possibility of women acting violently and transgressing both legal and gender norms. The events at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004 demonstrate that even within a highly structured military organization, women can commit heinous acts of violence. Female soldiers were active participants in the sexual and physical torture of Iraqi prisoners, with the photos of their abuse being broadcasted across major news outlets. At the time the events transpired, women were excluded from military combat, "which decreases the amount of violence they are allowed compared to men, who are permitted to serve in combat arms positions" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 59). Despite the prohibition on their involvement in active combat, the female soldiers at Abu Ghraib demonstrated their capacity to engage in gruesome acts of violence. The women implicated in the war crimes at Abu Ghraib shocked the world, not because torture in warfare is a new phenomenon, but rather because it was perpetrated by women.

These examples demonstrate the female perpetrators aren't new, and have been engaging in proscribed violence for centuries. Yet, despite this contradicting evidence, gendered essentialisms continue to permeate discussions and analyses of violent women. Presuming that women only participate in violence if they are forced disconnects women from their ability to think rationally, and to *choose* their violence.

Women's Agency in Their Violence

The term 'relational autonomy' is used to describe the social context within which all individuals exist and make decisions. This concept presents a more complex approach to women's violence within global politics by acknowledging women's agency and capacity to make decisions, as well as the social conditions which constrain their available options. Relational autonomy recognizes that people have choices, but that those choices are "both highly and unevenly constrained by social, political, economic, and embodied limitations which all people are subject to" (Sjoberg 2016, 146). This means that all decisions, not just women's, are contextual and contingent on the social and political atmosphere in which they were made. However, all decisions are still *decisions* that people make – it is not only men who are capable of making choices. Violent women have agency in their violence, as well as in other choices they make. The philosopher Catriona Mackenzie explains that "to be autonomous is to have the capacity for self-governing, that is, the capacity to make decisions and to act on the basis of one's own reflective preferences, values, or commitments" (2021, 374). Sjoberg and Gentry take issue with some of the assumptions embedded in this definition and instead argue that "agency is the currency by which political subjects are often recognized in Western, liberal thought – a currency which is gendered and racialized in a number of different ways" (2015, 149). They go on to demonstrate that it is widely presumed that men who commit violence do so purposefully and with agency, whereas women do so without agency, or with very limited agency (2015, 149). The flaw in both these assumptions is that neither is appropriate for understanding people's violent behaviour. All people exist in an environment which produces gendered experiences of social, political, and economic structures which influence both men's and women's engagement in violence. Relational autonomy does not minimize women's agency in their decisions, but

rather acknowledges the social context in which it took place. Women's choices are contextualized within an interdependent, and constraining, social world which influences both the identity of the decision-maker and the availability of choices that she has (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 148). The dismissal of women's agency in their violence contributes to the fantastical narratives that emerge to explain their behaviour. Many attitudes about women still tend to stereotype them as incapable of deliberately engaging in acts of violence and downplays the motivations they had for doing so. When women are seen as incapable of choosing their violence, it means that they are guilty of a double transgression when they do – they have violated not only the law but gendered expectations of behaviour as well. As a result, stereotyped and often fictional accounts of their actions emerge.

'I Can't Believe a Woman Did That' – Gendered Narratives of Female Perpetrators

While it may be tempting to view women behaving violently as a step in the right direction for their full integration into the sphere of global politics, this is an oversimplification of what equality is and how to achieve it. This approach of 'just add women and stir' does not address the root issue of gendered standards of permissible behaviour. "Seeing women in roles, good and bad, traditionally reserved for men often creates the perception that women are achieving equality in global politics when, in actuality, public discourses communicate another message when we read between the lines" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 8). Although it is a comparatively small number of women who engage in political violence, they receive a disproportionate amount of media coverage whose central focus is often on their gender. This unequal coverage of women perpetrators *as women* demonstrates the rising salience of traditional gender norms and expectations.

The narratives about these violent women highlighted above seek to ostracize them from womanhood and divorce them from society. The women involved in proscribed violence around the globe have been treated as abnormalities and have had their motivations behind their crimes minimized and explained away as a flaw in their femininity – something is wrong with them *as women.* They are being judged not on the harshness of their crime, but on their dual transgression of the law and their gender. As Carol Gentry and Laura Sjoberg explain, "women who commit violence have been characterized as anything but regular criminals or regular soldiers or regular terrorists; they are captured in storied fantasies which deny women's agency and reify gender stereotypes and subordination" (2007, 4-5). In most accounts of women's violence, the gender of the perpetrator and the inconceivability of her actions are the central focus.

In their study of women's agency as it pertains to terrorism, Lori Poloni-Staudinger and Candace D. Ortbals outline what they have called the 'CNN Effect', which "amplifies the impact of a terrorist attack, occurring when attacks by female fighters are seen as 'more deadly' than those conducted by male fighters" (2013, 48). Media outlets often replay coverage of terrorist attacks by women, regardless of whether or not they had a higher casualty count, thereby amplifying the effect. They note that "media often react to violent women differently than they react to violent men" (2013, 50). The authors acknowledge that the actions of female terrorists and genocidaires "clashes with our stereotype of the 'peaceful woman' or maternal life-giving behaviour" (2013, 50). The 'CNN Effect' exemplifies the sensationalized media coverage of the crimes of female perpetrators, and the perception that something must be exceptional about them because they were committed by women. While correct in their assertion that female perpetrators receive disproportionate coverage in the media, Poloni-Staudinger and Ortbals do not account for how the social and political context impacts, and is impacted by, the discourses that emerge.

Chimène Keitner examined the representations of violent women in the American criminal justice system, providing a more contextual analysis. "The demonization of violent women in American society illustrates one way in which a country's criminal justice system, including both its formal and informal components, constructs and reinforces norms of appropriate behaviour" (2002, 40). This window into idealized American femininity is extended with Keitner's observation that some women enjoy more lenient treatment by juries in the form of fewer convictions and lighter sentences, but that "only certain women, namely, those who conform to sex-role stereotypes, enjoy the potential for sex-based leniency" (2002, 49). Women who are otherwise marginalized because of their race/'ethnicity', sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics do not have this option of leniency available to them. Grabe et al. explore this further by stating that the media may also engage in this kind of patriarchal chivalry. Under this system, "women who commit crimes that can be explained in a way that does not threaten patriarchal ideology receive so-called lenient media treatment. On the other hand, women who commit crimes that challenge gender expectations might receive unforgiving media treatment" (Grabe et al. 2006, 143). This judicial and journalistic 'chivalry', or leniency, is only extended to certain women who fit comfortably within the traditional feminine gender role, and whose actions do not place them outside of its boundaries and threaten their heteropatriarchal society. Here, the social and political context is critically important as it assists in dictating who this kind of leniency is available to. These narratives, then, are deployed precisely to reinforce and affirm the boundaries of permissible feminine behavior and define who receives membership in that group, and any potential benefits it incurs. This contextual examination of the case of the American criminal justice system provides useful insights into deeply hierarchal, and deeply gendered American society.

Both these examples highlighted above correctly recognize that there is a disproportionate amount of media coverage depicting violence that was committed by women. While acknowledging that much of this coverage features traditional portrayals of what constitutes appropriate behaviour for a woman, the authors stop short of sketching out the implications of these gendered discourses beyond the potential for leniency. Poloni-Staulinger and Ortbals appreciate that the 'CNN Effect' occurs precisely because the implicated women are acting outside of the ascribed boundaries of their gender, but do not stretch their analysis further to investigate what this means for the study of feminism and global politics.

Sjoberg and Gentry provide the most compelling commentary on the relevance of examining the gendered stereotypes used to describe women's violence in global politics:

> The role of the women's lives and the narratives that are inscribed in them in international politics are a critique of the story of international politics as the realm of great men. Violent women matter in global politics, but how they matter is often defined by the mother, monster and whore narratives which confine them to vengeance, insanity, and sexuality and deny the possibility that they could be choosing their actions which impact global politics (2015, 20).

The representations of violent women matter in international relations because these narratives tell us what 'normal' women look like, and assert who the acceptable perpetrators of violence are – a category which excludes women. Sjoberg and Gentry clearly outline the significance of the narratives describing women's violence in global politics, but do not account for how differing social and political conditions affect the pertinence of these discourses. There are certain common attributes associated with femininity that all violent women transgress, but the weight assigned to these narratives, and the effects they have on gender marginalization/subordination

as a result of the social and political context in which they are communicated, is wholly absent from their analysis.

Lizzie Seal is keenly aware of the importance of context across time and place when analyzing the portrayals of violent women. She advocates for an "intersectional approach, which accounts for the complexity of multiple identities, to help account for the power differences between women" (84). There are continuities of narratives across multiple cases which allow us to observe similar constructions of violent women from different periods. However, a "complete and sophisticated analysis of discourses of femininity in unusual cases of women who kill needs to be contextualized in relation to the place and time out of which they emerge" (Seal 2010, 5). Seal correctly identifies the need for a contextual understanding of the narratives of violent women as the stories told can often expose deeper societal fears and anxieties about gender. The gendered representations of women who commit violence needs to be understood against the social background of the times in which the crimes and/or trials and convictions took place.

Women's violence is portrayed differently than that of their male counterparts which has implications for the theory and practice of feminism and global politics generally. The gender essentialism in the representations of women who commit violent crime reveal a deep uneasiness with women behaving in ways which conflict with traditional norms of femininity. These narratives of female violence strip women of their agency and in turn make them appear less responsible for their actions by sensationalizing their violence and exaggerating their abnormality. Seeing women as fully culpable for their actions would necessitate a reckoning with women's ability to think rationally and independently make decisions as capable actors in international relations. Rather, these discourses "exclude the possibility that women choose to engage in political violence. Instead, women's violence is often specially accounted for, and

explained as a flaw in women's femininity and a flaw in their humanity" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 9). This approach implies that women only make choices from a specified spectrum of acceptable options, and violence is not one of them.

Merging the insights of Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, 2015), and Seal (2010) yields a more insightful and holistic understanding of how violent women are represented and the significance these narratives carry. The prevailing social and political conditions in which the crimes took place provide a window into how gender has been constructed in that context. The salience and impact of the gendered narratives are deeply affected by their environment. Integrating the conclusions of Sjoberg, Gentry, and Seal requires a redefining of the gendered narratives told about women's violence. This thesis identifies three distinct representations that are used to account for violent women: the victimized female perpetrator; the mentally disturbed female perpetrator; and the defective female perpetrator. The victimized narratives portray violent women as passive, helpless victims who can't be held fully responsible for their actions because it wasn't really their fault. The narratives of the mentally disturbed perpetrator presume that there must be something wrong with the psyche of the violent woman in order for her to have acted violently. The defective representations of violent women portray them as not 'real women' because 'real women' would never choose to engage in violence. All three of these narratives deny women agency in their choice to engage in violence, and attempt to create a division between women who commit violence and 'normal women'. The victimized, disturbed, and defective narratives of women's violence expose the continued subordination of women who do not fit our inherited conceptions of appropriate femininity.

Chapter 3: Victimized, Mentally Disturbed, and Defective Female Perpetrators

The ways that women's proscribed violence is received and recounted in the narratives of the media and academia betrays a collective inability to come to terms with all aspects of women's autonomous decisions. The women who perpetrate violence outside the boundaries of national and international law are routinely subjected to gender-based scrutiny which often become the defining feature of their actions. The gendered narratives used to depict women's illegal violence are most clearly defined through an understanding of the social and political conditions in which they occur. The victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective narratives of female perpetrators provide a way to account for, and make sense of, their violence without having to confront the idea of *violent women.* By denying women agency in their decision to participate in proscribed violence, these three representations reinforce the limits of acceptable feminine behaviour and exclude women from the realm of legitimate political actors.

The victimized narrative casts women as passive and docile in order for them to be recuperated back into the fold of permissible femininity. This narrative provides an adequate explanation for a violent woman's behaviour – her own previous experience(s) of victimization. We are satisfied when women can be comfortably thought of as victims, because it allows us to maintain the myth of women's purity and innocence.

The mentally disturbed narrative portrays female perpetrators as suffering from mental illness or psychosis, and therefore not criminally, nor legally, responsible for their crimes. This narrative looks to the state of women's mental health as the external factor to explain their violence. By presuming that women need to be sick, or mentally damaged, in some way to perpetrate acts of proscribed violence, this representation polices the spectrum of behavioural options for 'normal' women and reinforces the limits of femininity.

The defective female perpetrator is depicted as no longer being entitled to her humanity –
she is portrayed as an inhuman, evil figure of mythical proportions. This represents the most
extreme form of violent women's ostracization from society, and these women are rarely, if ever,
able to be recuperated back into the realm of appropriate feminine behaviour. These women are
defective *as women,* and can no longer maintain their membership status in that gender group as
a result of their violent transgressions.

While the increasing conviction of violent female perpetrators appears to be a step in the
right direction for gender equality, these narratives used to describe their actions are anything
but. The victimized, mentally damaged, and defective narratives of women's proscribed violence
in global politics suggest that there is still a lot of work to be done in deconstructing gender
norms and dismantling the global patriarchal hierarchy. This desire to preserve idealized
femininity has resulted in gendered representations which marginalize, sensationalize, and
caricaturize women who perpetrate proscribed, illegal violence. In the sections to follow, these
three gendered narratives will be explained in greater depth, demonstrating how each seeks to
deny women agency in their actions, and regulate the roles that women are permitted to occupy
in global politics.

Victimized Female Perpetrators

One of the three groupings of representations and discourses of violence committed by
women is that of the victimized female perpetrator. These representations portray women as
being motivated by grief after suffering a loss or being attributable to the perpetrator's previous
experience(s) of victimization. These narratives betray a collective incapacity to deal with
women's choice to commit heinous violence, and instead attribute their actions to the

perpetrator's emotions, or domination by a male authoritative figure. This in turn perpetuates harmful stereotypes of women's meekness, submission, and their ability to think logically. Seeing violent women as sad victims who otherwise would not have committed such acts were it not for their own loss and victimization results in these women being portrayed as psychologically handicapped, and therefore unable to make their own decisions (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 50). The idea that women can only become violent if they have been victimized by men, or suffered a great emotional loss, fails to see woman as complete and autonomous beings. This narrative depicts these women as a perpetual victim – a victim of oppression and a victim of her circumstance – with the option that she could *choose* to act violently never being considered.

Some established narratives which fall into this category include battered women who kill, the respectable woman, depressed mothers, and the muse. In all these representations, the female perpetrator has no agency in her decisions, and can only be understood as either being forced to commit violence by a man, or acting out of her own experiences of victimization.

Battered Women Who Kill

A common stereotyped portrayal of the depressed female perpetrator is that of the battered woman who kills her abuser. In this story, women become perpetrators of violence *because* they were victims of violence. Through this narrative, violent acts perpetuated by women can only be understood through their passivity as victims of violence – that a woman could commit murder without having been victimized herself is inconceivable. Siobhan Weare (2013) explains that "repeated, unpredictable and seemingly unavoidable abuse by their partners results in battered women becoming increasingly passive and developing a number of characteristics including low self-esteem, anxiety and depression as well as blaming themselves

for the violence they suffer" (Weare 2013, 339). Weare refers to this as a 'learned helplessness',

which women must conform to in addition to the expectations of appropriate feminine behaviour

generally (2013, 339). Labelling battered women who kill as victims who lost control helps to

reconcile the tension between a patriarchal society which routinely casts women in the role of a

victim, and the violation of accepted gender norms that occurs when a woman commits

proscribed violence. The application of the victim label provides an explanation for their actions

with the assumption that the abused woman cannot, and should not, be held accountable for her

actions as they weren't *really* her fault.

Weare (2013) also differentiates between battered women who kill being portrayed as

victims, and as 'mad women'. In the case of the latter, female perpetrators have their agency

denied through the labelling of them as 'mad'. The 'mad' woman is not responsible for her

actions due to the abuse she has suffered causing her to, at least temporarily, go insane. "The use

of [battered women's syndrome] evidence to support a plea of diminished responsibility

simultaneously reflects and reinforces the gender stereotypes surrounding women" (Weare 2013,

342). Although introducing evidence of battered women's syndrome can result in judicial and

journalistic leniency for female perpetrators, "it also ensures that gender stereotypes surrounding

women's mental health remain firmly entrenched" (Weare 2013, 343). Whether as victim or

'mad women', explaining female perpetrators' violence as being precipitated by abuse they

suffer at the hands of a dominating figure denies these women agency by society, the law, and the

criminal justice system.

Although battered women who kill their abusers are a step removed from women who

commit proscribed international violence, women's previous victimization as an explanation for

their crimes is common theme among many representations of female criminality. For example,

in the case of the torture that occurred at the Abu Ghraib prison, Lynndie England was one of the three female soldiers who were implicated in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. In the media coverage of her trial, there was a lot of attention paid to her sexual relationship with her fellow military police (MP) officer (and ex-boyfriend) Charles Graner. An alternate narrative emerged which speculated "that England must have been sexually abused as a child in order to have committed the atrocities that she did" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 68). Although no independent evidence of such abuse exists, the media attempted to portray England as a victim because it makes her atrocities more digestible, and easier to understand. The narratives of England's actions at Abu Ghraib are best appreciated with a contextual understanding. The American military has a unique perception of idealized femininity specific to its institution. At the time of the Abu Ghraib scandal, women were barred from serving in active combat operations within the military, and female soldiers are expected not to threaten the concept of the masculine American warrior. "The idealized female servicemember gains skills and independence and faces challenges, but she is not martial" (Brown 2012, 172). England's actions at the Abu Ghraib prison came at a time when there were larger conversations about allowing women into active combat roles, and her portrayal as a victim who proceeded to torture prisoners because of her (real or imagined) victimization served to reinforce the misogynistic perspective that women were too weak to be allowed in combat. England's atrocities transgressed a specific kind of femininity, American militarized femininity, which had unique consequences for the portrayals of other women in the American military.

Lizzie Seal (2010) describes what she has called the 'respectable woman', who aligns with the traits and representations of the depressed female perpetrator. Outlined by Seal (2010), the 'respectable woman' discourse arises in cases "where a woman is portrayed as embodying

some of the traits of acceptable femininity" and they "are not perceived as deviant or transgressive in terms of social expectations" (63). As she has not breached the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour, the 'respectable woman' is not considered to be dangerous or threatening. Being a victim of violence herself, the battered woman who kills remains within the realm of expected and admissible femininity. Respectability is not always available to all women, however, and Seal (2010) recognizes that it "is a relational concept which varies across place and time and is deeply imbricated in constructions of class, gender, 'race'/ethnicity, and sexuality" (63). As such, the 'respectable woman' narrative is more likely to be available to middle-class white women and is a discourse subject to variability across cases, with uneven benefits.

The 'respectable woman' narrative is not exclusively applied in the cases of battered women who kill, but it is a common representation of the victimized woman. The 'respectable woman' is considered to be 'normal' and would not have engaged in violent behaviour had it not been for her own precious experiences of victimization. An important component of the 'respectable woman' narrative is the process of recuperation, through which a woman accused of murder is incorporated back into intelligible femininity (Seal 2010, 71). Recuperation is most easily accomplished when the female perpetrator is not thought to have crossed the line of acceptable feminine behaviour – when society can still view her as a victim. Recuperation back into acceptable femininity can take place even when the woman does not originate from a 'respectable' background, but as mentioned above, is more widely available for women who embody certain components of privilege. Victimizing the perpetrator can act as a form of recuperation itself, as it removes the woman from the masculine realm of violence and places her comfortable into the feminine sphere of submission.

Belinda Morrissey (2003) expands on the idea that battered women who kill are often portrayed as victims, and explores the potential utility of female perpetrators conforming to the expectations of a stereotypical battered woman:

> If a woman kills her male partner, for example, and can demonstrate his extreme abuse of her, then she might win the right not to be viewed as an active participant in defence of herself, but as her partner's victim. This means that her partner must take responsibility for her acts of violence as well as his own; in other words, he is considered culpable for his own murder. This is not to suggest that the acts of the man do not precipitate violence in the woman, only that such a representation denies her agency (17).

Morrissey (2003) refers to this process as 'victimism', whereby women's agency is denied through the invocation of the stereotyped image of a victim, which insists on the powerlessness of the oppressed (25). Abused women who commit violence are especially perplexing for a heteropatriarchal society because they simultaneously occupy the role of both helpless victim and violent perpetrator. The process of victimism, then, works to bring these women back into acceptable femininity and enfolds them once again within their society as 'good' or 'respectable' women, upholding the dominant heteropatriarchal order which rests on women's lack of agency (Morrissey 2003, 171).

While potentially useful in securing lighter sentences for female perpetrators, the narrative of a depressed, abused woman ultimately works to maintain and uphold negative myths and stereotypes about women's agency. Chimène Keitner (2002) explains that there exists a significant downside to this defence strategy, "the concurrent downplaying and even denial of women's moral agency and capacity for rational choice, even if those choices do not conform to social expectations" (76). Characterizing violent female offenders as victims first and

perpetrators second conforms to dominant gendered understandings of acceptable behaviour – society expects women to be victims and is comfortable when they are placed securely in this role. The battered woman who kills is one example of how the depressed female perpetrator is not responsible for her crimes, negating any reckoning with female agency and acts of violence.

Coerced Victims

In a narrative of women's violence which is centered on women's perceived sexual deviancy, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, 2015) articulate three different subcategories of their whore narrative – erotomania, erotic dysfunction, and sexual slavery. The representation of women as sexual slaves works to portray these female perpetrators as victims, hand in hand with the narrative of abused women who kill. In this depiction, "women are described as whores in the most literal sense, sold to men to be used as pawns in political violence" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 115). This narrative is focused on men's ownership and control of women's bodies, with men being (actually or metaphorically) the owners and controllers of women, physically and emotionally choosing their violence for them. In these accounts, the violence was men's choice and men's plan; the women went along with it because they were physically or emotionally forced. Traces of this narrative appear in the stories told about Lynndie England, that she was under the command and control of Charles Graner, and ultimately cannot be held responsible for her actions. The underlying suggestion of this narrative is that women cannot be making independent decisions to participate in violence, much less political violence. "Instead, they were lured and seduced by men, who now abuse and control them – no part of their participation is either voluntary or political" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 116). The image of the sex slave is one of

extreme victimization, which permits these women to be recuperated back into the fold of acceptable femininity with relative ease.

Lizzie Seal (2010) offers another archetype that can be used to represent violent women through a lens of victimization – the muse. The muse narrative arises when a woman commits violence with a male partner and is thought to be under heavy influence of her husband or boyfriend (Seal 2010, 38). In these cases, the woman in question has almost no agency and the public can sympathize with her because her actions do not reflect her true nature. Seal explains:

> The muse is, to an extent, consonant with approved heterosexual femininity. Women become involved in the perpetration of homicide via their relationships with men and act at their behest. Whilst this may implicate them in behaviour which violates feminine norms, they are frequently perceived as either having been duped, brainwashed, or coerced into participation. The muse is therefore a normal woman, rather than a deviant one" (2010, 39).

Seal acknowledges that "these norms are not fixed and change according to their cultural and temporal context" (2010, 39). There are, however, some generalizations that can be made about heteronormative femininity, including masculinity being the more powerful gender and men generally being more dominant over women. Within these conceptions is the idea that in heterosexual relationships, women will take on a supportive role to men, and may also need male guidance and protection (Seal 2010, 39). As such, "women's willingness to assist their male partners can be interpreted as a comprehensible enactment of the female gender role" (Seal 2010, 39).

The muse and the sex slave represent a different kind of victimized woman – a woman that was only capable of committing such violence because she was acting under the influence

and/or direction of a man. In this representation, the female perpetrator becomes the victim of her male co-conspirator, placing her firmly back into the comfortable realm of victimhood. This process asserts that violence remains a masculine activity, one that women only participate in when they have been coerced or forced by a man.

Depressed Mothers

Laura Sjoberg and Carol E. Gentry (2007) identify a dominant discourse surrounding women who have been accused of atrocity crimes – the mother narrative. These stories of women engaged in violence are often framed in domestic or maternal language and are told as "women who are fulfilling or avenging what is supposed to be women's biological destinies of wife and mother" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 32). This representation of violent women often defines them by their traditionally feminine social roles – their inability/failure to serve as mothers is so dehumanizing (or dewomanizing) that it drives a woman to violence (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 73). The violent woman need not be an actual mother for this stereotypical portrayal to apply:

> Traditional notions of womanhood posit women's action only within quasi-heteronormative boxes. Women, even if they are violent, must still want to be or act from the identities of wife and/or mother – even if this role of wifedom or motherhood does not include the actuality of a husband or children (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 73).

Sjoberg and Gentry differentiate between depictions of a nurturing mother, and portrayals of a vengeful mother. The nurturing mother is relatively non-threatening, and can be considered 'domesticated' (2015, 73-74). Representations of women that align with the nurturing mother narrative highlight the maternal and subservient role that violent women are assumed to have.

The assumption underpinning the narrative of a nurturing mother is that women's psychological compulsion to be of service to others (specifically, their men) will extend to assisting, supporting, and mothering violent criminals (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 74).

While the nurturing mother is domesticated and less threatening, the vengeful mother's onus is still maternal, but violently disturbed. "The vengeful mother is driven by rage because of her maternal losses, maternal inadequacies, or maternal incredulity. Her decision is not calculated retaliation but emotion-driven revenge" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 75). This portrayal of women who commit political violence is particularly prevalent in the field of terrorism studies, and Sjoberg and Gentry (2015) point to many accounts of Palestinian and Chechen female self-martyrs which depicted these women as being heartbroken, or depressed, driving them into terrorism. While these women may not have suffered violence, this narrative depicts their motherly impulses as being so strong that their literal, or metaphorical, maternal loss serves as explanation for their actions as if they were the victims of abuse themselves.

An understanding of the depressed mother narratives is enhanced by an examination of the social and political conditions in which the crimes took place. Representations of women's violence often betrays cultural anxieties about shifting gender roles and expectations. In the case of the torture at Abu Ghraib, for example, the nurturing mother narrative emerges. Megan Ambuhl, one of the other female soldiers involved in the torture at the prison, is often characterized as a kind, and almost maternal figure within the prison, implying that she could not have been directly responsible for the crimes that took place (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 73). Ambuhl's attorney, Harry Volzer, attempted to portray her as a soft, feminine figure when he claimed that some prisoners at Abu Ghraib insisted that Ambuhl was "loving and caring and respected by the prisoners" (Scelfo 2004, n.p.). This pragmatic utilization of maternal narratives

came at a time when there was social anxiety about women acting outside traditional feminine roles, particularly in active military combat. Ambuhl was convicted of conspiracy to commit abuse and demoted within the military but was never convicted of any direct involvement with the acts themselves. The victimized, or depressed, maternal narrative proved useful to her in securing favourable judicial treatment, precisely because her lack of agency in her actions conformed to traditional notions of femininity at a time when many Americans were deeply uneasy with the relationship between women's agentic decision-making and violence.

Conclusion

The victimized female perpetrator has multiple manifestations, but they all share a common thread – that under ordinary circumstances, a 'normal' woman would not be driven to commit such violent acts. It is a narrative which negates women's agentic decision-making abilities and instead attributes their apparent feminine transgressions to irrational, emotionally driven behaviour. A heteropatriarchal society is much more comfortable viewing women as victims who acted under some kind of duress, rather than as capable agents choosing to engage in violence. Siobhan Weare explains that "labelling women who kill as victims denies their agency because the concepts of agency and victimization are understood in opposition to each other" (2013, 350). It is easier to contend with women who commit violence when they are viewed through the lens of victimization rather than as agentic actors because there is no obligation to confront the friction between these women's violent actions and acceptable femininity.

Any examination of the victimized female perpetrator is enriched by gaining insight into the social and political context in which the violent acts occurred. "As boundary markers of the

national culture, the immorality or amorality of women is especially disturbing" (Seal 2010, 44).

In the case of the abuse at Abu Ghraib, the involvement of women in the sexual torture of Iraqi

prisoners was conceived as being an indication of wider social ills as women were gaining more

independence and autonomy. Portraying the women involved in the abuse in gendered terms,

either detrimentally in the case of Lynndie England or pragmatically in the case of Megan

Ambuhl, the victimized narratives draw heavily on the themes of female empowerment and

sexual liberation, with the torture of Iraqi prisoners symbolising the dark side of this new social

order.

Mentally Disturbed Female Perpetrators

The narratives of the mentally disturbed female perpetrator portray women's violence as

resulting from a mental illness, or other psychological flaw. Paula Ruth Gilbert explains that

"society needs to see violent women as different – either as mad or bad – because otherwise, we

would need new discourses to understand that both men and women can be violent" (2002,

1282). Confronting female perpetrated violence, then, necessitates the use of gendered

stereotypes to explain their behaviour and to uphold a heteropatriarchal society. A common way

to ensure that 'violent women' are separate and distinct from 'normal women' is to portray

female perpetrators through a lens of being mentally ill, or disturbed. While some female

perpetrators, like all offenders, do indeed suffer from mental illness, the mentally disturbed

narrative characterizes all women who commit violence as such regardless of whether they meet

the specified criteria required for a diagnosis. This narrative advances the idea that there is

something wrong with these women, which facilitates and explains their violent offences. By

depicting these women as mentally damaged, heteropatriarchal standards of feminine behaviour

are policed through the assumption that a woman must be 'sick' to behave so far outside the limits of permissible femininity.

Sexually Dysfunctional Female Perpetrators

One of the ways to distance female perpetrators from acceptable femininity while providing an explanation to account for their actions is to highlight a real or prescribed disturbance in their psyche, which often manifests in depictions of their deviant sexuality. Sjoberg and Gentry call this the 'whore narrative', which blame women's violence on the evils of female sexuality at its most intense or most vulnerable (2015, 12). They recognize that "descriptions of women who fight in or vigorously support war have been cast in the language of sexual impurity throughout history, a move which distances 'violent women' from the innocence and purity of the ideal type of femininity" (2007, 44). Women's sexual purity is a key component of acceptable womanhood and is often closely connected to what it means to be a 'good' or 'normal' woman. Sjoberg and Gentry acknowledge this affiliation:

> Women's involvement in sexual activity is somehow always closely linked to women's violence in accounts of that violence. Women either commit violence because of their insatiable need for sex with men, men's control and ownership of their bodies, or their inability to have sex with men (2015, 113).

The whore narratives' descriptions of women's sexual deviance can be divided into three categories: erotomania, erotic dysfunction and sexual slavery. Erotomania and erotic dysfunction fit within the category of mentally disturbed female perpetrators – that there is something wrong with them which compelled or forced them to become violent.

In the erotomania narrative of sexual deviance, violent women are seen as being mentally disturbed and acting out of their own perverted impulses. These women are characterized as almost exclusively sexual beings – both themselves obsessed with sex and heavily sexualized by their audiences. As the 'normal' woman is supposed to be sexually submissive (if they are sexual at all), the link between portrayals of erotomania and other forms of behavioural deviance starts to emerge. Women's agency in choosing to commit violent acts is erased, and instead replaced with a tale of erotic fiction, which conceives of women's violence as "stemming from some sort of sexual deviancy within the woman that somehow makes it easier for her to commit violence" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 133). Connecting women's deviant violent behaviour to their sexual perversion ensures that these women remain outside the limits of appropriate femininity and are unlikely to be recuperated back into the fold once these boundaries have been breached. The narrative of erotomania depicts violent women's sexuality as both extreme and brutal, demonstrating the evils of female sexuality at its most intense.

The other end of the spectrum of the whore narrative is focused on the perceived erotic dysfunction of violent female perpetrators. In contrast to the erotomania narrative which seeks to explain women's violence by their insatiable and uncontrollable need to have sex with men, the erotic dysfunction focuses on women's insanity inspired by "their inability to perform their basic function in life, providing men with sexual pleasure" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 114). It is this inability to perform sexually, or to find a mate, that drives women to become violent:

> Many stories of violent women discuss their violence in terms of their *inability* to fulfil that biological destiny, characterizing violent women as somehow *sexually less than* real women. This whore narrative explains violent women as lesbians or otherwise sexually

deviant, as unable to have or rear children, or as sexually failing their men in some way

or another (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 114, emphasis in original).

Lesbianism is a common 'sexual dysfunction' that is used to explain women's violence because

it departs from the accepted boundaries of heteronormative feminine behaviour. A lesbian,

therefore, is no longer a *real* woman, but rather a masculinized woman whose sexual 'deviancy'

explains her transgressions in other areas of femininity, such as violence. Lizzie Seal (2010)

recognizes this link with perceived lesbianism and representations of sexual dysfunction with her

'masculine woman' narrative. The tendency to represent women who commit violent crime as

being more masculine, or masculinized, stems from a societal discomfort with the dual violation

of women not only committing violent crime, but transgressing from the acceptable boundaries

of femininity. As articulated by Seal, there is a long history of sociologists and criminologists

connecting violence to the masculine traits and the male gender:

> These criminological theories on the links between masculinity, femininity and crime
>
> ultimately construct women who perpetrate violent crimes as deviant and pathological.
>
> Whether it is because they are biologically more like men, psychologically damaged or
>
> identify with the 'wrong' gender, the perception of masculinity in women who commit
>
> certain types of crime renders them failed women (2010, 26).

This further serves to create a separation between 'normal women', whose femininity is intact,

and 'violent women', whose femininity has gone awry. The masculine, sexually dysfunctional

woman comes to symbolize the ills of women's sexual liberation as it falls outside the

anticipated behaviours in a heteropatriarchal social order.

Masculinizing a woman who commits crime centres the narrative on a perceived fault, or

deficiency, in her psychosis – a fatal flaw in her femininity. The tendency to masculinize women

who commit violence is especially acute in societies that are experiencing times of great social upheaval and change, as maintaining traditional gender roles functions to preserve some semblance of order. By portraying these women as damaged in some way, the narrative of the mentally disturbed female perpetrator accomplishes this task of separating 'violent women' from 'normal women', while upholding traditional conceptions of womanhood.

The sexualization of female perpetrators is evident in the case of Biljana Plavsic from the former Yugoslavia. Plavsic held a deep ethnic hatred towards Muslims and was a leader during the Bosnian War. Her sexuality has been a consistent theme in news coverage and academic analyses of her crimes. Many stories mention her alleged 'closeness' to male members of the government of the Republica Srpska as a reason both for her political position and for her criminal choices. "Describing Plavsic at once as a sexual predator and as manipulated by sexuality draws attention away from questions of her culpability for her actions and her motivation for those choices" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 157). Because Plavsic's integration into spheres of power and violence threatened the Serbian patriarchal structure, she was dehumanized through sexualization until she no longer posed a threat to male dominance.

Insane Sadists

In addition to the portrayals of the sexually deviant violent women, the narrative of the mentally disturbed female perpetrator includes women whose violence is depicted as being more vicious and gruesome than men. This exaggeration of women's violence contributes to the narratives which depict violent women as psychotic and deranged. Alette Smeulers (2015) acknowledges this clear gender bias with women "often described as mentally insane sadists who are more cruel and sadistic than their male counterparts" (227-28). However, it remains to be

seen whether they are indeed more vicious, or if "they are merely portrayed that way because people have trouble believing that women are capable of such extreme atrocities" (Smeulers 2015, 228). The underlying assumption in this narrative is that 'ordinary' women would not commit such violent atrocities, so the ones that do must be insane, damaged, or suffering from some sort of psychosis. Women participating in and perpetrating political and personal violence fall outside the boundary of what is widely considered to be acceptable feminine behaviour. The women who commit the same crimes as men are portrayed as being driven by an underlying mental illness – meaning that they lack agency and accountability for their actions.

Lizzie Seal advances her conception of the 'damaged personality' in which the labelling of violent women as psychopathic is related to our understandings of what it means to be dangerous. The damaged personality discourse is often present in cases in which the violence appears to be senseless or is lacking a visible motive beyond serving the needs of these women's own twisted psyches, which may be due in part to society's reluctance to conceive of women as operating from a political or ideological motivation. The lack of apparent motivation for their crimes precipitates the construction of these women as inherently mentally ill, or damaged, and therefore dangerous. "Descriptions of the women as being without conscience, liars, cunning and manipulative are in keeping with iterations of psychopathy and severe personality disorders that recall a moral language of evil" (Seal 2010, 62). In this narrative, the gendered effects of a discourse which hint at immorality are often compounded by the woman's transgression from her traditional feminine gender role. In cases where the perpetrated violence appears to conflict with expected feminine behaviour, such as when women kill children and/or commit sexual abuse, the damaged personality discourse also becomes more apparent. Women who commit these crimes

are guilty not only of violating the law, but of transgressing the norms of womanhood –
rendering them especially dangerous.

In addition to being characterized as sexually deviant, Biljana Plavsic was also subjected to narratives centered on her mental health and apparent insanity. At the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), she was charged with, and pled guilty to, crimes against humanity, including charges that she incited and commanded the rapes of uncounted and uncountable Bosnian women with the intent of exterminating the Bosnian ethnicity (Sjoberg 2016, 54). Many Serbian newspapers carried her mental health as a theme in discussing her case, with Slobodan Milosevic calling her a "radical" and claiming that "her outbursts led him to question her mental health" (BBC News 2003). While Milosevic should not be the standard for character references, questioning the health of her mental state provided an explanation for Plavsic's heinous violence that fits within our expectations of femininity while simultaneously discrediting her political ambitions.

Conclusion

Violent female perpetrators are routinely portrayed as though there is something wrong with them, something wrong with their mental capacity, which explains their violence. Whether it is a focus on their perceived sexual deviance or dysfunction, their portrayal as mentally insane sadists, being too masculine, or having a damaged personality, all these depictions represent women who commit violence as being flawed, or damaged, in some way. A woman deciding to commit violence is inconceivable – not only does it violate the boundaries of the law, but it also transgresses the limits of womanhood and acceptable feminine behaviour. As Siobhan Weare explains:

It is easier to give explanations for the actions of murderous women than to recognize their

ability to have made a semi-autonomous decision to act in the way that they did. Indeed, it

is certainly arguable that giving women agency over their murderous actions would disturb

and challenge established gender norms (2013, 352).

The narrative of mentally disturbed female perpetrators resonates because it simultaneously

diminishes women's agency in their decision-making and offers a justification for their

behaviour which does not conflict with the heteropatriarchal feminine gender role. Dialing in on

a real or perceived mental illness as the sole factor to explain and excuse the violence perpetrated

by women fails to recognize, or acknowledge, the ability of female perpetrators to have chosen

their violence.

The narrative of the mentally disturbed female perpetrator is commonly employed during

times of social upheaval and political change. The case of Biljana Plavisc, in which she was

dehumanized through sexualization and had her mental health questioned, illustrates this point.

Plavsic's involvement in the Bosnian war was tolerated during the time of crisis, her violence is

considerably less acceptable in a post-conflict, 'normal' society. Her postwar remarginalization

indicates that she was a threat to the nation's ideological security and cohesion through her

destabilization of gender roles (Allison 2004, 458). Something must have been *wrong* with

Plavsic in order for her to commit her crimes – either through sexual deviancy or insanity, her

presumed mentally disturbed state became the centrepiece in many accounts of her violence.

Defective Female Perpetrators

Female perpetrators who cannot be represented through either the depressed victim or

mentally disturbed narratives are then depicted through the lens of defectiveness. The root of

their defect lies in the belief that for them to have committed the acts they are accused of, then

they cannot really be women – they must be something else. Nicole Hogg (2010) outlines what she and other feminist criminologists have called the 'evil woman theory':

> Whereby some women are deemed to have acted so far beyond society's norms that they are no longer deserving of the chivalry of men and are either de-gendered and treated as 'non-women', since 'real women' do not commit crimes, or dehumanized and treated as 'monsters', that is, even worse than male offenders (100).

The discourse of female perpetrators being divorced from their gender as a result of their violence betrays a greater societal anxiety about women who transgress feminine norms. If we were to accept that violence is one possibility among a range of potential behavioural options available to women, an entirely new discourse surrounding what gender membership looks like would be required. Rather, it is simpler and more comfortable to marginalize these women, to hyperbolize their behaviour, and to depict them as villains of near mythic proportions.

The discourses examined in this section include Sjoberg and Gentry's monster, Morrissey's process of monsterization and mythification, Smeulers' demonizing of female perpetrators, and Seal's mastermind. These narratives all portray violent women in a simplistic and unidimensional light, as nothing more than evil actors whose actions fall so far outside the boundaries of femininity that they can hardly be considered women, let alone human.

Monsters

Women who commit horrendous acts of violence are quickly separated from the rest of society – from 'normal' women – by being represented as something other than a woman, a monster. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) outline that monster narratives "eliminate rational behaviour, ideological motivation, and culpability from women engaged in political violence.

Instead, they describe violent women as insane, in denial of their femininity, no longer women or human" (13). These monster representations explain women's violence as a biological flaw that disrupts their femininity, which renders these female perpetrators less responsible for their actions due to this defect. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) explain:

> Their irrationality in the face of men's rationality makes them not only monsters, but horrific ones not seen since the times of Greek mythology. Violent women defined within the monster narrative are not real women because they are described as both actually evil and psychologically broken, two facets which the ideal-types of womanhood in gender norms exclude (41).

As outlined above, through this narrative, violent women are no longer considered to be 'real women', leaving idealized femininity firmly intact. As a result of the dual transgression of gender expectations and the law, "a monstrous woman's violence is characterized as quite different than male violence. A violent woman is portrayed as more deadly, more of a threat" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 94). The monster narrative simultaneously demonizes violent women by characterizing them as evil, and ridicules them by hyperbolizing their evil (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 94).

The process of portraying women who commit violence as wickedly savage is what Belinda Morrissey (2003) refers to as 'monsterization':

> Monsterization denies agency by insisting on the evil nature of the murderess, thus causing her to lose humanity. She is transformed into a monster from outside society threatening the mainstream, rather than one of its members, produced and enabled by her social and cultural milieu. The agency denial which takes place in this technique is specifically that of

human agency. The murderess is considered to have acted, but not as a human woman (25, emphasis in original).

Through this process of monsterization, as articulated by Morrissey, women who commit violence have acted so far outside the limits of acceptable feminine behaviour that they can no longer be considered women. By divorcing these women from their humanity, the monster narrative reinforces the notion that 'ordinary', 'normal' women are not capable of committing heinous crimes, and those that do are defective.

Morrissey (2003) relates the processes of monsterization and mythification and explains that the two often function together in a pattern beginning with monsterization and progressing to mythification. The mythification technique "relates many who kill to the most frightening of mythic characters, such as Medea or the evil witch, who are designed to increase fear and elicit harsh responses from the lay community as well as legal institutions" (Morrissey 2003, 25). This gendered narrative is effective in distancing the female perpetrator from her gender and society by portraying her as an evil, inhuman character. Vilification, or monsterization, "operates to displace the offender from her society, to insist on her otherness, thereby avoiding the knowledge that she is produced *by* that society" (Morrissey 2003, 24, emphasis in original). The process of monsterization and mythification of violent women demonstrate that when women act outside the expectations of femininity, it is preferable to depict them as defective in some way rather than to confront the fact that women can, and do, choose violence. Our heteropatriarchal society is deeply uncomfortable with women committing murder, rape, torture, and genocide, and refuses to accept her willingness to do it.

The 'Black Widows' of Chechnya illustrate the monster narrative in action. The Russian government deliberately and intentionally sought to 'other' the women of Chechnya in a way

that separated them from their femininity and humanity – they needed to make them monsters and used rhetoric in the press to monsterize them. "The Russian government and much of the press adopted this sentiment and furthered it by offering sensationalist descriptions of the women that made them something 'other'" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 102). The designation of these women as 'Black Widows' works to deny women's agency and fails to contextualize the environment in which they were operating. The Russian government consciously decided to represent these women as something less than human, an arachnid, to draw attention away from the brutality of the war that Russian troops were engaged in.

The Witch

Lizzie Seal explains that the witch discourse is another common representation of women who commit murder. This is not about women accused of witchcraft, but of the middle aged and older women who are accused or found guilty of multiple killings. The witch discourse shapes a particular representation of femininity that bears resemblance to the familiar cultural stereotypes of the witch. Portraying these women as a witch serves a similar function as monsterization, as outlined above. When female perpetrators are represented in a way that separates them from the boundaries of femininity, and humanity, traditional gender norms and expectations remain intact. Seal explores this further:

> As bad carers, women represented through the witch discourse symbolize other social failures. Caring is so intimately tied with women's normative roles, especially culturally acceptable roles for older women (such as the kindly grandmother figure), that its profound breach in the form of multiple killings suggests wider social malaise (2010, 75).

When women, especially older women who are often associated with a nurturing figure, disrupt social norms through their violent behaviour, a gendered narrative accounting for their multiple transgressions emerges. "When revealed as malign, rather than as harmless or caring, these women unsettle norms of older women's femininity and appear almost supernaturally evil" (Seal 2010, 83). In this narrative, witches are seen as dangerous because their evil nature is hidden, and potentially unknowable.

Narratives used to isolate supposedly deviant women from 'normal' women using discourses of witchcraft have existed throughout history. Witches were often "women who existed in problematic relation to established social networks and interactions and took the blame for social misfortunes" (Seal 2010, 75). While this analysis of violent women is not concerned with women who are believed to be witches, many connotations of this historical narrative persist. "Echoes of the witch as a symbol of feminine deviance haunted certain twentieth-century constructions of women who kill" (Seal 2010, 74), and have continued long after the persecution of those accused of witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and seventeenth-century America.

Although there are a number of folkloric characteristics associated with witchcraft, Seal summarizes those which are most common: women who are considered old, or middle aged; widowed; sexually ravenous, with the power to weaken and contaminate men; she is likely to be poor; she possesses the ability to disguise herself to blend in with ordinary women; as well as her malicious intention to cause harm to others, often seemingly at random (2010, 74–75). These characteristics of women who fit easily into the role of the witch together convey the idea that violent women are defective *as women* – making it easier to dehumanize them and their actions. When women who commit violence possess any combination of these traits, a discourse of witchcraft to describe their behaviour is likely to materialize.

The Mastermind

In a violent partnership between a man and a woman, women can be portrayed as either the muse, or the mastermind. While the muse portrays the woman as a passive victim in the partnership, the mastermind side of the dichotomy views the woman as the leading actor. Lizzie Seal's description of the mastermind representation of murderous women outlines that "the woman is the schemer and the plotter, and she may have tricked or persuaded the man to do her bidding" (2010, 40). As the mastermind is the one behind the violent acts, her behaviour places her far outside the boundaries of femininity without the same possibility of recuperation that's available for the muse. Seal explains:

> The mastermind is therefore a dangerous, unsettling figure. Masterminds may be constructed as almost mythically evil, Clytemnestra-type figures, their deviant behaviour placing them beyond earthly femininity. This representation can turn into a monstrous portrayal of feminine malignance (2010, 40).

The actions of a mastermind female perpetrator threaten the acceptable construction of heterosexual desire and relationships as being driven by masculine sexuality and action. When women assume a dominant role over men, "particularly in the unfeminine domain such as the perpetration of homicide, it is counter to the normative feminine role. The notion of women dominating and controlling men challenges the matrix of normative heterosexuality" (Seal 2010, 40). This challenge to traditional gender roles in a heteropatriarchal society makes the female mastermind all the more dangerous, and subjects her to dehumanizing narratives to account for her transgressions.

Seal explains that there is not always a clear separation between the muse and the mastermind dichotomy, and that the two narratives are often used in conjunction with each other.

As both the muse and the mastermind are inter-related, the two narratives can slide over each other, making the women portrayed through this lens ultimately unknowable. Seal outlines how certain social contexts can affect these narratives:

> This in turn contributes to the appearance of the muse/mastermind dichotomy in cases in which particular historical moments evoke social anxieties. The centrality of the male/female sexual partnership to the organization of gender in modern Western societies is what makes it a focus for unease when it appears to malfunction – this is perceived as indicative of wider social breakdown (2010, 40).

In the mastermind narrative, the female perpetrator is viewed as being defective in some way, with her feminine dominance over her masculine partner being reflective of larger social changes. The social and political context matters in the construction of the mastermind narrative because this reversal of the traditional directional flow of power can come to symbolize greater social ills and uncertainty. Similar to the dehumanization and sexualization of violent women portrayed as mentally disturbed, women represented in the mastermind narrative are often scapegoated when their crimes occur during times of social transition and change.

The mastermind is especially dangerous not only for the violence she has participated in, but because she uses her male partner to her advantage, frequently by manipulating his sexual desire for her (Seal 2010, 40). These female masterminds must be defective in some way, there must be something that sets them apart from 'normal' women who do not engage in violence, and perhaps more significantly, do not display dominance and control over men. The construction of the woman in a violent female/male partnership as cunning, manipulative, and dangerous effectively divorces her from other women, as well as affirms what appropriate feminine behaviour looks like.

The women Chechen suicide bombers illustrate the potency of the defective female perpetrator narrative. Being represented by a poisonous spider who occasionally kills the male spider after mating automatically sends the signal that the Chechen women are "poisonous and violent towards a certain population – here, the Russians" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 100). The symbolism of embodying a poisonous insect removes these women from the realm of responsibility and allows the Russian government to continue waging its brutal war in Chechnya. The black widow spider is used to depict the Chechen women fighting for their national independence from the Russian state as mythically – inhumanly – evil.

Conclusion

The female perpetrators who are portrayed as not really women, or defective in some way, have all violated both the law and gender norms. As Siobhan Weare explains, "the immediate difference between so-called good and bad women is the way in which their lifestyle and behaviour either does or does not accord with appropriate feminine behaviour as dictated by gender discourse" (2013, 346). Whether it is result of a biological flaw in their femininity making them less of a woman, being caricaturized as a witch, being seen as a manipulative ringleader, or committing acts of violence that place them so far outside the limits of acceptability, the discourse of defective female perpetrators strips these women of any agency in their actions. In her discussion of women and political violence, Paige Whaley Eager (2008, 3) explains that women who commit violence outside of exceptional circumstances are often viewed as aberrant and 'less than a woman'. The defective female perpetrator is seen as more dangerous and threatening than men who commit similar crimes because she is breaching

established gender norms in a heteropatriarchal society. If she is not a victim, nor mentally damaged, then she cannot *really be a woman* because women do not commit violence.

The power of the defective narrative is best understood with an appreciation of the social and political context. While all women who commit violence are deliberately separated from 'ordinary' women in some fashion, the defective female perpetrator is othered to the extent of no longer being entitled to her humanity. In the case of the Chechen female suicide bombers, the defective narrative proved pragmatically useful in advancing the agenda of the Russian government by portraying their military opponent as less than human. The defective violent woman narrative at once vilifies Chechen femininity and creates a supportive audience for Russia's use of force in Chechnya, while permitting the Russian state to justify whatever means it considers necessary to suppress the Chechen 'black widows', or monsters.

Conclusion

Improvements to women's equality are trending upwards in global politics, but revolve around an ideal-typical notion of femininity and womanhood. A more in-depth examination of the existence, and reception, of women's political violence demonstrates that the situation is significantly more complex. How women's violence is received and recounted points to a consequential marginalization of women whose actions and behaviours place them outside the confines of idealized femininity. This is evident in how violent women are characterized as anything but regular criminals, with their gender membership becoming the defining feature of their crimes.

The victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective narratives of women's violence function to leave intact the notion of idealized femininity as peaceful, while warning of what

happens when women transgress the boundaries of their gender role. The victimized narrative fails to conceive of any motivation a woman may have to commit violence outside of her real or speculated previous experience(s) of victimization. That women could choose to participate in violence is so inconceivable that an alternative explanation is sought to provide an acceptable justification for the violence, and to recuperate the perpetrator back the folds of acceptable femininity. We are used to seeing women as victims, and we are more comfortable when they are understood as such, rather than as agents choosing to act violently. The case of Lynndie England illustrates the victimized narrative in action, as speculation that she had been sexually abused as a child began to emerge in order to provide some explanation for the war crimes that she committed at the Abu Ghraib prison.

The mentally disturbed narratives seek to portray female perpetrators as suffering from some sort of mental illness or psychosis, and therefore not fully culpable for their crimes. Representing these violent women as mentally disturbed polices the limits of appropriate femininity by suggesting that they must be *sick* to have committed the crimes they are accused of. Biljana Plavsic was subjected to this characterization for her actions in the Bosnian Genocide, with her mental health being questioned for her role in the sexual abuse of countless Muslim women.

The narratives of the defective female perpetrator describe violent women as no longer women, and often characterize them as an inhuman, even mythical, figure. These women are defective in that they are defective *as women,* and are no longer entitled to their gender membership. The depiction of the female Chechen suicide bombers as 'black widows' by the Russian government deliberately separates these women from humanity and portrays them as poisonous, or mythically evil. This gave the Russian government's brutal war in Chechnya some

newfound legitimacy and decontextualized the political motivations that these women had for participating in political violence in the first place.

Taken together, these three narratives paint a very different picture of women's equality and inclusion in international politics. Accepting women's violence in global politics would require a reckoning of the boundaries we place on women and men, femininities, and masculinities. Instead, women's violence is often sensationalized in the media through depictions which seek to minimize and explain away violent women as an aberration at best and demonic at worst. These narratives describe violent women with diverse motivations as without agency in their actions and therefore outside the realm of legitimate political actors. Our collective failure to account for female perpetrators renders their victims invisible and permits these women to commit atrocities without accountability or consequence.

One such woman that has been subjected to these gendered narratives of women's violence is Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, for the crimes she committed during the Rwandan Genocide. The significance of Nyiramasuhuko lies in her being the first woman to ever be convicted at an international criminal court for the crime of genocide, with her case reaching levels of notoriety in the press and academic discourse. The following chapter will outline Nyiramasuhuko's role in the Rwandan genocide, and the gendered stories that have been told about her crimes.

Chapter 4: The Rwandan Genocide and the Case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko

Women have been involved in political violence around the world for decades, if not centuries. As a result of the common misconception that women's violence is impossible, many violent women do not face legal, social, or political consequences for their actions. When they are brought to justice, however, their cases are subjected to sensationalism and stereotyping on gendered terms. Female perpetrators of proscribed violence are often portrayed through the victimized, mentally damaged, or defective narratives which contrast their actions with the acceptable norms of femininity as prescribed by the political and social context. During the Rwandan genocide, thousands of women were involved in the efforts to eradicate the Tutsi population of the country. Some of these women faced legal responsibility for their actions, but many have hidden behind the cloak of women's presumed innocence to avoid accountability for their crimes. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is one of the few women who have been brought to justice, and her case has had reverberations in Rwanda and the international community.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is the first woman to be convicted by an international criminal court for the crime of genocide for the atrocities she committed during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. While thousands of women have already been tried and convicted for genocide by national courts around the world, the media picked up on the novelty of Nyriamasuhuko's case being tried by an international tribunal, and her case became sensationalized. The role that her gender came to play in her criminal trial and of the depictions of her case cannot be understated. The narratives of the victimized, mentally damaged, or defective female perpetrator are all present in the representations of her crimes. A complete understanding of the gendered narratives that are used to represent the crimes of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is only possible through a contextual

understanding of how women's participation in the 1994 genocide upended and/or reinforced expectations of permissible feminine behaviour in Rwanda.

The Rwandan Genocide and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

The 1994 Rwandan genocide was primarily perpetrated by Hutus against Tutsis, but these ethnic distinctions weren't always so fixed and unchangeable. The categorization of Hutu and Tutsi historically functioned more as caste divisions rather than ethnic groupings, but the arrival of colonialism cemented their divisions with Tutsis being given a higher status in imperial administrations. After gaining independence in 1962, the perception that the Tutsi minority were of a higher caste than the Hutus prevailed. The country was ruled by two Hutu dictatorships until 1994 which saw waves of anti-Tutsi violence. It is in this strife political climate, and with plenty of warning signs, that the genocide began in early April 1994. President Habyarimana's plane was shot down and the country was swiftly plunged into chaos. Hutu extremists consolidated governmental power in Rwanda and as a result "decades of conflict between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority erupted into a full-scale genocide" (Power 2002, 331). Hutu extremists began an organized, and systematic attempt to eradicate the Tutsi population of Rwanda, marking the "fastest, most efficient killing spree of the 20th century" (Power 2002, 334). Over the course of 100 days, an estimated 900 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically hunted, tortured, raped, and murdered as part of an orchestrated genocide (Brown 2018, 35). The conflict died down in the late summer of 1994 when a Tutsi army known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) began taking control of substantial parts of the country.

The United Nations Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on November 8 1994, to prosecute the individuals responsible for the genocide.

As part of their reconstruction and rehabilitation process the Rwandan government also instituted a judicial process known as the Gacaca court system. The Gacaca system was established in response to the slow progress of the ICTR, and to process the large backlog of suspected genocidaires being held in Rwanda's prisons that were well above capacity. The Gacaca tried both men and women, and with unique judicial mechanisms to encourage confessions in exchange for reduced sentencing, the number of women implicated by confessors as fellow perpetrators, and the number of women tried increased exponentially (Brown 2018, 93).

Women in Rwandan History

Rwandan society prior to 1994 was intensely patriarchal, with a gender-based division of public and private labour instilled from an early age (Hogg 2010, 72). In pre-genocide Rwanda, women's roles were heavily circumscribed, with great emphasis being placed on attaining the titles of wife and mother. Legally, married women had very limited rights – "they were prohibited by law from inheriting property or opening a bank account without the consent of their husband" (Brown 2018, 32). Although divorce was possible, women were expected to remarry quickly, illustrating that "the ideal place for a woman was considered to be under the protection and control of men, whether their husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons" (Keyse 2023, 6). Theoretically, unmarried women had full legal status, but in practice "they were often under the authority of fathers and brothers, with their access to resources dependent on their performance of socially acceptable deference" (Keyse 2023, 7).

The marginalization and subordination of Rwandan women continued in the face of the burgeoning global feminist movement in the 1980s. The ambitions of the movement posed a threat "not just to Rwanda's patriarchal society but to its nondemocratic political system as

well. As a result, these groups were subsequently repressed or manipulated by Hutu extremists who sought to co-op several organizations to further their extremist agenda" (Brown 2018, 32). Rwanda's political and public spheres remained almost exclusively restricted to men, while women were frequently consigned to the home. In a culture which demanded obedience and subservience to men, the roles of Rwandan women were heavily circumscribed, and the acceptable standards of womanhood centered on motherhood and marriage. However, despite these social and political constraints, women in Rwanda still had agency in their actions, albeit limited, and should not be seen as powerless agents.

Following the events of the 1994 genocide, women experienced increased political representation with the introduction with parliamentary gender quotas. However, "this increased political role for some had not led to significant changes in the situations of most Rwandan women, and patriarchal attitudes about feminine roles and status persisted" (Keyse 2023, 9). For example, in promoting the increased political and judicial roles of women following the genocide, the RPF government portrayed them as "peace-loving and more innocent of the genocide than the men" (Keyse 2023, 9). It is only within this shifting local context that the narratives used to represent Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's crimes can be fully appreciated.

Women in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the Crimes of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko

The active participation of women in the violence of the 1994 Rwandan genocide was widespread. As the 1995 report from African Rights acknowledges, "both at the national and international level, women and girls have been described as the principal victims of the genocide in Rwanda, thus obscuring the role of women as aggressors" (4). The mass rapes of Tutsi women fit tidily within our schema of women as victims, but the "involvement of so many women in

perpetrating genocide and other human rights violations is more difficult to explain" (Sharlach 2007, 388). We know that women not only indirectly supported the Hutu extremists by providing food for them and singing their praises for successfully slaughtering their Tutsi neighbours and relatives, but they also took on roles directly involved in the violence. The African Rights report explains,

> Some women, including young girls in their teens, were participants in the carnage, hacking other women and children, and sometimes even men, to death. Some of these women joined the killing willingly. Others were forced in the same manner that men were forced, at the point of a gun, by threats and other forms of intimidation (African Rights 1995, 1).

While women's agency was constrained during the genocide, as it was during all other historical moments in Rwandan history, it was still possible to abstain from engaging in violence. In her work comparing women rescuers and perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide, Sara Brown (2018) explains that the existence of female rescuers demonstrates that there was a possibility to say no, and to refuse to engage in the genocidal violence. There is no evidence to suggest that women's crimes during the Rwandan genocide were unusual. "Rather, they were similar to those perpetrated by men, with the only difference being the gendered reaction that greets women perpetrators" (Brown 2018, 94). Men and women participated in executing the genocide, but it was planned months, even years, in advance. Evidence points to an organized and concerted effort by the government to prepare and plan for the eventual extermination of Tutsis from Rwanda, with lists of those to be targeted being prepared in advance of the onset of violence. Government Ministers and other high-ranking officials are widely considered to be the architects of the genocide.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko was born in the commune of Ndora, in the Butare prefecture of Rwanda, the site where she would later commit war crimes and other atrocities. A well-educated woman, Nyiramasuhuko worked as a social worker before obtaining her law degree and entering politics in the party of President Habyarimana. She was nominated to the position of Minister for Family and Women's Affairs in 1992, where she remained up to the onset of the genocide in 1994. She was also a member of the Council of Ministers, a "cabinet-like body, and therefore privy to most matters of national policy" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 161). In her official capacity, she was accused of helping to orchestrate and perpetrate the most effective genocide in human history.

She was indicted by the ICTR and after a trial spanning a decade, was ultimately convicted in June 2011 of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, extermination as a crime against humanity, rape as a crime against humanity, persecution as a crime against humanity, violence to life as a war crime, and outrages upon personal dignity as a war crime. She was the first woman to ever be convicted of rape as a crime of genocide, and she received a life sentence for her crimes. One of the main incidents contributing to Nyiramasuhuko's conviction are the events that took place on April 24, 1994. The Tutsis in Butare prefecture were ordered to assemble in the local stadium where they were promised food and shelter, but instead Nyiramasuhuko had organized members of the Hutu militia under the leadership of her son, Shalom, to surround the stadium. The Tutsis inside were slaughtered, mostly hacked to death with machetes. Nyiramasuhuko continued to supervise the progress of the extermination of the Tutsi for the next two months until the RPF reached and liberated Butare. "The court found [Nyiramasuhuko] guilty of ordering militiamen to rape Tutsi women before they killed them and she herself aided and abetted these rapes" (Maier 2013, 9).

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is not an aberration, or an anomaly. The active participation of women in the Rwandan genocide was widespread and systematic. These women, like Rwandan men, made a deliberate choice to participate, or not, in a genocide. "Perpetrators, male and female, leader and follower, willfully failed to exercise their moral judgement" (Maier 2013, 15). Nyiramasuhuko was far from being the only woman who participated in the violence, and she wasn't the only high-ranking female official, either. Habyarimana's wife, Agatha Kanziga, was alleged to have assisted in the planning and organizing of the genocide. Major Anne-Marie Nyirahakizimana, a mother of three, was convicted for her active participation and sentenced to death. As Donna Maier explains,

> Not all Hutu women participated in the violence of the genocide, nor did all men. All were surrounded by pressures and years of socializing propaganda that dehumanized Tutsis and anyone who befriended them, yet many chose not to succumb to it, and not to participate in the genocide (2013, 14).

All participants in the 1994 genocide had autonomy when they made their decision to partake in the violence. Yet, the descriptions of female perpetrators often cast them in the light of a victim being forced against her will, an insane woman who forgot her place, or as an evil woman of mythic proportions. Elements of the victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective narratives of women's violence are found in the depictions of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's atrocities. The narratives of Nyiramasuhuko's crimes occur at a particular historical moment when gendered wartime violence was emerging as an object of international concern, as well as when women's roles and status in Rwandan society were undergoing a period of intense change. Her case complicates the conventional portrayals of Rwandan women as peace-loving victims of male-perpetrated violence and has been sensationalized as a result. Whether employed intentionally in

her own defence to gain preferable judicial treatment, or used against her to dehumanize and infantilize her, the narratives used to represent Nyiramasuhuko's active participation in the Rwandan genocide is significant for the study of feminism and global politics.

"By My Very Nature, I Cannot Kill": Victimized Narratives of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko

The victimized narrative has most often been pragmatically utilized by Pauline Nyiramasuhuko herself, in an effort to gain judicial leniency and to be recuperated back into the fold of acceptable femininity in Rwanda. Given the patriarchal context of Rwandan society, and the value placed on women when they become mothers, Nyiramasuhuko has routinely drawn on notions of acceptable femininity, especially motherhood, to assert her innocence. She plays into the heteropatriarchal expectations of women's behaviour and insists that because she is a mother, she cannot possibly have committed the crimes she was accused, and later convicted of. "Drawing on the cultural assumption that women, and particularly mothers, are nurturing and thus unable to commit violence, she simply states that 'by my very nature, I cannot kill'" (Keyse 2023, 12). Traces of Sjoberg and Gentry's mother narrative and Seal's respectable woman representations are present in Nyiramasuhuko's depiction of her own behaviour. Nyiramasuhuko's self-representation as a nurturing and harmless maternal figure was a way for her to cast herself as a respectable woman and try to gain judicial leniency as a result. "Women, playing their role as mothers, even when it has gone awry, are not responsible for their 'maternal instincts', or for the violence they cause because of them" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 170). Nyiramasuhuko's claim that motherhood prevented her from being capable of committing both the scale and type of violence she was convicted of is especially pertinent given the social and political conditions in Rwanda that placed limits on acceptable behaviour for women.

As has been examined above, the intensely heteropatriarchal environment in Rwanda viewed motherhood as the highest achievement for women, and consigned women's role primarily to the home. Playing into these gendered stereotypes was a way for Nyiramasuhuko to demonstrate that she conforms to the traits of appropriate femininity – particularly that of women's nonviolence, and therefore it is inconceivable that she should be found guilty. As Izabela Steflja and Jessica Darden point out in their research on women war criminals, "often when women do not behave as expected in war, an explanation based on their internalization of patriarchal values is given" (2020, 45). Whether or not her statements reflect her true belief in a patriarchal society, or it was a calculated move, Nyiramasuhuko's application of the victimized narrative depicted her as not responsible for her crimes because of her femininity and status as a mother. Throughout her trial, Nyiramasuhuko contended that "as a mother, she was simply incapable of both the quantity and quality of violence she was accused of" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 80).

Gendered narratives were instrumentalized by both the defence and prosecution at Nyiramasuhuko's trial. Her defence strategy made clear attempts to draw up notions of acceptable behavior for Rwandan women, especially Rwandan mothers, to dismiss the allegations against her. To counter this essentialized narrative, the prosecution "aimed at presenting Nyiramasuhuko as politically active and ambitious, in contravention of traditional gendered expectations of women's indirect participation in politics" (Keyse 2023, 10). This narrative, which conflicted with the image of Nyiramasuhuko as a submissive, docile woman who cared only about fulfilling her duties as a maternal caregiver, assisted in separating her from the idealized standards of feminine behaviour and ambition. Rather than fulfilling her duties as Minister for Women and Family Affairs, several witnesses for the prosecution expressed surprise

that Nyiramasuhuko "exterminated families whilst she had the responsibilities of protecting those very families" (Keyse 2023, 10). Both the defence and prosecution played into tropes of idealized femininity to bolster their case – portraying Nyiramasuhuko as either a victimized woman and mother whose perpetration of genocidal violence is inconceivable, or as a woman who has violated her role as caregiver and Minister, thereby transgressing her femininity as well. Central to both strategies is the notion of what a respectable woman should look like in Rwandan society. Nyiramasuhuko either embodies it, as a good mother incapable of violence, or rejects it entirely and harms those she was tasked to protect. Both these narratives place Nyiramasuhuko's gender at the heart of her culpability for her crimes, and work to police expectations of feminine behaviour. By allowing her gender to play such a central role in her trial, the question became whether women are capable of committing genocidal violence, especially sexual violence, rather than investigating if Pauline Nyiramasuhuko perpetrated the crimes she was charged with.

Although it ultimately proved to be an unsuccessful strategy, and she was eventually convicted for her crimes, the perceived utility of casting herself as incapable of committing genocide by virtue of her gender reveals some deeper anxieties in Rwandan society at the time regarding women who breached the boundaries of femininity. The governing RPF government of Rwanda under President Paul Kagame sought to place women back into their submissive role by depicting them as more peaceful and less responsible for the genocide than men (Keyse 2023, 9). This was a deliberate action on the part of Kagame's government, as women became central to his reconstruction and reconciliation process following the events of 1994. Initiatives, like the gender quota in parliament, have been effective in reserving a space in which women can operate in political and public life, but the government still has a long way to go "to ensure real, meaningful, and widespread gender equality" (Brown 2018, 138). Sara Brown explains that

"there exists a continuum of patriarchy within Rwandan society that has yet to be fully unearthed and addressed" (2018,139). Women remain constrained in the private sphere by deeply embedded gender roles that have yet to be uprooted. As a result of these enduring patriarchal conditions, Nyiramasuhuko's attempt at representing herself as an ideally feminine figure, including elements of women's submissiveness and inherent nonviolence, was an especially pragmatic defence strategy. She was trying to appeal to traditional Rwandan beliefs about women, as well as Rwandan and Western feminist approaches which essentialize women as peacemakers (Steflja & Darden 2020, 59).

The media accounts of Nyiramasuhuko's trial paid a great deal of attention to the clothing she was wearing. There were comments about her appearance as being "modest" and resembling that of a "schoolteacher" (Landesman 2002a, n.p.), and other detailed descriptions of what she wore every day to the trial. The media contrasted the horrendous and vicious crimes that she was standing trial for with her apparently conservative and feminine clothing. "Other than the obvious problem of blatantly sexist media coverage that focused on women's clothing, such comments reinforced traditional gender norms through the disbelief that someone as feminine as Nyiramasuhuko could commit horrific crimes" (Steflja & Darden 2020, 56). Perhaps unwittingly, the media coverage of Nyiramasuhuko's trial which paid attention to the outfits she wore reinforced the image she was trying to convey of herself as being pacificist, feminine, maternal, and innocent.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko asserted that her embodiment of conventionally feminine attributes, specifically that of motherhood, precluded her from committing the crimes she was accused of. This gendered representation of her actions illustrates the utility of merging the gendered narratives of women's violence, as advanced by Sjoberg and Gentry, with a contextual

analysis of the particular temporal moment in which the alleged crimes took place, as advocated for by Seal. It was the conditions of Rwanda's enduring patriarchal environment that made her victimized narrative possible as a defence strategy. In spite of the fact that she was ultimately unsuccessful in securing a not-guilty verdict, Nyiramasuhuko's insistence that her gender rendered her physically and socially incapable of participating in, and inciting, genocidal violence was in accordance with traditional conceptions of acceptable femininity. We are comfortable with, and indeed prefer, when women can be viewed as innocent victims that are incapable of committing violence. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko intentionally tried to cast herself in this role, not to justify her violence, but as a way of proclaiming her innocence. By leaning into gendered stereotypes of permissible feminine behaviour, Nyiramasuhuko renders her crimes invisible by virtue of her identity as a mother. She depicted herself as a victim – a victim of patriarchy which prevented her from possessing the autonomy necessary to commit genocidal crimes, and a victim of the ICTR which was tasked with prosecuting her for those same atrocities. By trying to conform with patriarchal notions of acceptable feminine conduct, Nyiramasuhuko's gendered justifications for her innocence perpetuate gendered myths about women's submissiveness and pacifistic nature. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's attempt to portray herself as conforming to Rwandan patriarchal standards of feminine behaviour was ultimately unsuccessful in securing her innocence, but it was not the only gendered construction of her actions in the 1994 genocide.

'She Must Have Been Insane': Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a Mentally Disturbed Perpetrator

The mentally disturbed narrative shows up most prominently in accounts of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's violence which focus on the sexual element of her crimes. Nyiramasuhuko is

nowhere near the only woman who perpetrated sexual violence during the genocide, but her case has been sensationalized in the media, partly because her actions appear to conflict with her professional position as Minister of Women's and Family Affairs. There are several accounts which "document Nyiramasuhuko's specific instructions to the Interahamwe about the methods that they should use to rape women. While there is substantial evidence that other leaders gave similar instructions, none are so publicly detailed as the ones given by Pauline" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2015, 68). Although the accounts of Nyiramasuhuko providing explicit instructions for the Hutu militia to rape Tutsi women are not false, her story has been sensationalized above and beyond the stories of the predominantly male genocidaires who committed similar crimes. Nyiramasuhuko was on trial with five other officials from the Butare prefecture for similar and related crimes, but in news reports of their case, she is consistently singled out. An article from CNN at the time of the groups' conviction states that "four other officials that were accused alongside Nyiramasuhuko and her son were all found guilty of genocide and other charges" (CNN News 2011, n.p.). The article then proceeds to detail the crimes and transgressions of Nyiramasuhuko, with occasional reference to her son, but do not name any of the other defendants in the case. In comparison to the other officials that she stood trial with, there is nothing exceptional about Nyiramasuhuko's offences except that they were committed by a woman, and a woman who was professionally responsible for protecting women and families. Within the context of Rwanda's heavily patriarchal society, her transgressions of femininity become the basis for the narrative that she must be sick, or mentally disturbed, in some way to order the rape and killing of Tutsi women, a violation of international law which she was ultimately convicted of.

The systematic rape of Tutsi women has featured prominently in many accounts of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's story. Much of the coverage of Nyiramasuhuko's engagement in sexual violence during the genocide sensationalized it, overfocused on it, and helped to create gendered and distorted images of the female perpetrator. The crime of rape was only one among a list of many charges brought against Nyiramasuhuko, and yet almost all reports of her conviction highlight it and contrast it with her ministerial position. For example, the Guardian writes that "The ICTR found that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, who was minister for family and women's affairs, helped to abduct hundreds of Tutsis who were assaulted, raped, and killed in the southern region of Butare" (2011, n.p.). Describing her case in this way sensationalizes her violence by juxtaposing it with her professional role as a feminine caregiver. In a similar fashion to the ICTR prosecution attempting to convey that there must be something wrong with Nyiramasuhuko for her to step so far outside her femininity and commit these atrocities, the news media reporting on her conviction perpetuated similar gendered stereotypes about women's capacity to choose violence. For a woman to have committed genocidal violence, especially sexual violence, within the context of Rwandan society, there must be something wrong with her.

The representation of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a mentally disturbed perpetrator is also present in speculations about her motivations for engaging in the perpetration of sexual violence. The erotomaniac whore narrative is prominent in this discussion, as Nyiramasuhuko was accused of ensuring that Tutsi women were raped before they were killed, and of prioritizing rape over killing. Sjoberg and Gentry explain:

She is described as a part of a larger conflict between Hutu and Tutsi women, where Hutu women (like her) hate, despise, and are jealous of the prettier Tutsi women (prettier

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because they are on average taller and more statuesque) because Tutsi women are

perceived as trying to steal *their* Hutu men (2007, 170-71).

In this characterization, Hutu women, like Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, encouraged and even

facilitated the rape of Tutsi women because the act debased their sexuality and exacted revenge

for their perceived sexual prowess. Crediting a rivalry between Hutu and Tutsi women for

Nyiramasuhuko's behaviour dismisses any political motivation she may have had for the

genocidal sexual violence she perpetrated. It also downplays the conflict between Tutsi and Hutu

women as nothing more than a sex-based struggle for the attention and affection of men,

minimizing their political involvement.

Within the context of Rwanda's profoundly patriarchal society, Nyiramasuhuko's actions

were so far outside the acceptable limits of femininity, that her apparent sexual deviancy became

central to many narratives about her. The focus on the sexual nature of her crimes contributed to

the perspective that there was something *wrong with her* that compelled and permitted her to

engage in such behaviour. The apparent sexual deviancy within Nyiramasuhuko somehow made

her commission of genocidal rape easier to understand, and more explainable. Embedded within

Sjoberg and Gentry's whore narrative is Seal's 'damaged personality', in which psychiatric

explanations are sought to better understand her behaviour. Whether or not Pauline

Nyiramasuhuko suffered from a mental illness or personality disorder has not been disclosed, but

the allegation that she must be sick in some way to explain her sex-driven atrocities perpetuates

the myth that 'ordinary' women would never choose to participate in violence, especially sexual

violence. Within this patriarchal environment, for a woman to be so sex-obsessed that she

commands her own son to rape and kill other women, there must be something wrong with her.

The relationship that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko had with her son, Shalom, has received a great deal of attention, not least because of her attempts to portray herself as a nurturing, gentle maternal figure. Nyiramasuhuko's incitement of Shalom, and other members of the Interahamwe militia, to rape Tutsi women was perceived as being particularly shocking. In contrast to the peaceful mother she was trying to emulate, her encouragement of Shalom to sexually violate Tutsi women before they were murdered painted her as not only a bad woman, but a bad mother. In one of the most noteworthy pieces written about Nyiramasuhuko, Peter Landesman writes that "Pauline's son repeatedly announced that he had 'permission' from his mother to rape Tutsi women at a hospital" (2002b, n.p.). Rhian Keyse explains that given the particular emphasis placed on motherhood in Rwandan society, explicitly drawing attention to Nyiramasuhuko's departure from the role of a 'good mother' further separated her from her femininity, and fed into speculations that she must have been crazy (2023, 12). Stripping Pauline Nyiramasuhuko of her identity as a 'good mother' was a way to simultaneously dehumanize her, and to make an example out of her. The attention paid to the sexual nature of her crimes, as well as her encouragement of her own son to rape Tutsi women, cast her so far outside the boundaries of permissible femininity that the only possible explanation was that there must be something wrong with her, she must be mentally disturbed in some way, for her to commit these atrocities. "Far from being clichés, gendered assumptions about the sacredness of motherhood and women's passivity are still real in their function and application in Rwandan society" (Brown 2018, 111), and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's departure from the purity of this role symbolizes her divergence from femininity. Her sexual deviancy explains the supposed deviancy of her violence – being sex-obsessed made her just crazy enough to commit genocide, and to encourage her son to do the same.

The sensationalism of the sexual element in the long list of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's offences takes away the focus from both her crimes and from the possibility that she had any agency in them. "Although she seemed to have an equal hand in the killing of men and the raping of women, her connection to the raping and killing of women plays a much more prominent role in most of the stories about her" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 170). In many portrayals of Nyiramasuhuko, she is both obsessed with sex, and sexualized by her audience. The whore narrative of the erotomaniac female perpetrator characterizes her as an almost exclusively sexual being, with her encouragement of Shalom and other men to commit sexual violence being motivated by her overwhelming perversion. This entirely dismisses her political motivations for encouraging the rape of Tutsi women and casts her in the role of an apolitical figure during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The interest of maintaining the ideal notion of womanhood is a key reason that women's motivations for committing political violence are often analyzed differently than men's motivations (Sjoberg 2016, 13). As Nyiramasuhuko's violence, especially her sexual violence, was in direct conflict with idealized expectations of women's behaviour, an alternative explanation that she must be mentally disturbed began to surface. This narrative of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko worked to uphold the boundaries and limitations of female behaviour in the context of Rwandan society by suggesting that there is something wrong with her, and that 'ordinary', 'normal' women wouldn't commit such offences. The separation of Nyiramasuhuko from her gender assisted in the continuation of essentialized conceptions of femininity in Rwanda, long after the genocide of 1994. This detaching of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko from her femininity is taken a step further in the third narrative used to represent her in which she loses her humanity as well – the defective female perpetrator.

The Monster of all Atrocities: Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a Defective Female Perpetrator

The vilification of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's crimes of the 1994 Rwandan genocide appear most prominently following her conviction at the ICTR in 2011, but hints of her being a defective female perpetrator are present in earlier accounts as well. As Belinda Morrissey explains, the vilification of female perpetrators is done to transform them into a monster "from outside society threatening the mainstream, rather than one of its members, produced and enabled by her social and cultural milieu" (2003, 25). The monsterization of Nyiramasuhuko was a deliberate strategy to distance her from Rwandan society due to her actions placing her far beyond the acceptable limits of femininity. She wasn't acting in accordance with the standards and expectations of women, and therefore was no longer entitled to either her femininity, or her humanity. Within this narrative, there is a focus on her former position as Minister for Women's and Family Affairs, and how her actions during the genocide conflicted with her professional responsibilities to the protection of women. "Nyiramasuhuko is presented as a ruthless killer who had forsaken the very people she was supposed to protect. This represents a clear transgression of gender roles, which present women as peace-loving and nurturing" (Keyse 2023, 10). Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is portrayed as a monster, who violated not only her femininity and professional obligations, but her humanity as well.

Sjoberg and Gentry's 'monster' narrative figures prominently in discussions of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a deviant female perpetrator. She was a monster not because her actions were so horrific, but because they were so horrific *for a woman.* In this narrative, the rape and killing of Tutsi women and men is so far removed from what is acceptable feminine behaviour that she can no longer be considered a real woman and has been described as actually evil – a defective female perpetrator. She is portrayed as being defective both as a woman, and as a Minister whose

mandate included the protection of women and families. In an article in the Toronto Star, Landesman writes that "the crimes Pauline are accused of are monstrous. Her capacity for pity and compassion, and her professional duty to shield the powerless, deserted her, or collapsed under the irresistible urge for power" (2002b, n.p.). Littered with gendered language of obligations and women's intrinsic role as a nurturing figure, Landesman portrayed Nyiramasuhuko as having abandoned her femininity in the pursuit of a masculine goal – power. He goes on to describe the sexual violence that Tutsi women suffered during the genocide, and expresses horror that Nyiramasuhuko was involved: "more shocking still is that so many of these crimes were supposedly inspired and orchestrated by Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, whose very job was the preservation, education, and empowerment of Rwanda's women" (2002b, n.p.). What Landesman believes to be shocking is that as a Minister, but especially as a woman, Nyiramasuhuko abandoned her duties, both feminine and professional. Mark Drumbl states that this essentialism was widespread in the media, with many new outlets remarking that as a minister tasked with the betterment of women's and family affairs, "her choice to order women to be raped and killed all the more incomprehensible and the gravity of her crimes all the more extreme" (2013, 589). Nyiramasuhuko is not unusual in betraying her role as someone responsible for the welfare of society. "Many of those whose position in society was to care for the health and spiritual well-being of Rwanda's people betrayed their positions in a reign of terror against a large number of those same women and families" (Sperling 2006, 658). These included priests, nuns, teachers, doctors, and other government officials at the local and national level who "turned their backs on their citizens and assisted in orchestrating their deaths" (Sperling 2006, 658). The gender-based fascination with Pauline Nyiramasuhuko reinforces the myth that women, by their very nature, are incapable of such atrocities. Her representation as a

defective female perpetrator comes out in support of this delusion – she has acted so far outside the permissible limitations of femininity that she can no longer be considered a woman; she has become a monster.

Belinda Morrissey explains that the vilification, or monsterization, of female perpetrators often functions in tandem with the process of mythification. This technique is used to relate violent women to the most frightening of mythical characters to increase fear and elicit harsh responses from the broader community (2003, 25). Although she is not a new kind of perpetrator, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko has come to represent a new kind of mythic evil, and stories of her atrocities are used as warnings of femininity gone awry in Rwandan society. Sjoberg & Gentry describe how her behaviour has been used to villainize her:

> The terrible stories of her actions are often generalized to make women responsible for the horror of the genocide, which likely disproportionately affected them. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko has been the 'star' of the genocide narratives, perhaps because of the sheer horror involved in her alleged actions, or perhaps as a trope for the terribleness of women offenders (2007, 160).

Nyiramasuhuko has come to symbolize the dangers of femininity, and is used as a cautionary tale to reinforce the standards of appropriate female behaviour in Rwanda. Rather than being compared to a mythically evil figure, she has become one herself. The Rwandan first lady Jeanette Kagame has spoken of Nyiramasuhuko as a villain, directly counterposing her actions "with those of women involved in reconciliation and rebuilding after the genocide, emphasizing the post-1994 change in women's roles, as well as the aberrant nature of Nyiramasuhuko's violence as a departure from acceptable femininities" (Keyse 2023, 16). Thus, Pauline

Nyiramasuhuko has come to embody the potential dangers of femininity, with the ramifications of her atrocity crimes continuing to impact the Rwandan political and social context.

The problem with demonizing female perpetrators in this way, as Donna Maier explains, is that "we separate them, and fail to confront the motives and context of their actions, denying or excusing them, and thus we never achieve justice for victims or deter future mass killings" (2013, 13). Within the intensely patriarchal Rwandan context, women and mothers were not believed to be capable of the things Nyiramasuhuko was convicted of, it is inconceivable that she could have done such things as a woman, and therefore she is not a genuine woman but a defective one. "The female perpetrators are thus depicted as anomalies and monsters, and so placed outside our ability to comprehend human, especially female behaviour" (Maier 2013, 13). Exoticizing Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's crimes as being outside Rwandan gender norms of female behaviour diverts attention away from explaining, understanding, and preventing future genocidal actions.

There are suggestions of the 'mastermind' side of Seal's dichotomy in some of the representations of Nyiramasuhuko which focus on her role in orchestrating and planning the genocide ahead of April 1994. Nyiramasuhuko has been identified as "one of the ministers who played the most direct and systematic role in the killings" (Afrian Rights 1995, 90). As a woman of high rank and authority, "she ordered and supervised abductions, detentions, murders, rapes, and torture that were perpetrated by the Interahamwe and her son" (Brown 2018, 100). In the mastermind representation, the woman "does not necessarily carry out, or equally participate in, the lethal violence but her desires are believed to undergird the actions" (Seal 2010, 40). While Nyiramasuhuko may not have been directly involved in all of violence perpetrated at her request, her commanding role in the crimes makes her appear as more of an unsettling figure. Her

position of authority during the 1994 genocide is counter to the normative female role as civilian/victim and poses a challenge to tradition conceptions of womanhood in Rwandan society.

The narrative of the defective female perpetrator is used to represent Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a monster, an evil figure of near mythical proportions, and a criminal mastermind. In all these portrayals, she has her femininity stripped from her, her agency denied, and her political motivations erased. The depiction of Nyiramasuhuko as a defective woman "perpetuates a patriarchal myth that women by their very nature are implausible agents of atrocities" (Maier 2013, 14). Following her conviction at the ICTR, narratives of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as an abnormal and anomalous woman began to emerge as a way to distance her from her community and maintain the image of the innocent woman in Rwandan society. Being the only woman to have been convicted by the ICTR resulted in portrayals that seek to divorce her from 'ordinary' women who would never commit the same atrocities. Her vilification is a "consequence of the fact that society still struggles to talk about female perpetrators, particularly when their crimes are of a violent, sexual nature" (Steflja & Darden 2020, 70). Nyiramasuhuko disrupted gender stereotypes in a patriarchal society, which contributed to her being represented as a monstrously evil, inhuman figure who is no longer entitled to her femininity or humanity.

Seeing Beyond Her Gender: What Can Representations of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko Tell Us about Women's Violence in Global Politics?

The sensationalism and exotic representations of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's crimes during the Rwandan genocide of 1994 have all worked to uphold idealized femininities in Rwanda and maintain the image of women's innocence. While it is true that women were overwhelmingly victimized during the genocide, believing women to only be victims is too simplistic and

unidimensional. Women's experiences are multifaceted, and it should not be shocking that women are capable of – and do act – in highly destructive ways. The victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective narratives of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's crimes merge gendered representations of violent women with the social and political conditions in which the offences took place. Both Nyiramasuhuko's crimes and her trial at the ICTR took place at a particular historical moment in which notions of femininity and attitudes about gender were shifting in Rwanda. Her self-identification as a submissive, peace-loving maternal figure was a way for her to attempt to remain within the fold of acceptable femininity in Rwandan society and be found innocent as a result. Although it was ultimately unsuccessful in securing a not guilty verdict, the victimized narrative worked to perpetuate stereotypical understandings of women's capacity to commit violent atrocities and maintain traditional conceptions of womanhood. The mentally disturbed narrative of Nyiramasuhuko's crimes is frequently employed to explain the sexual nature of her violence. Women's sexuality was especially restricted in Rwanda, and her apparent sex-driven violence contradicted the norms of femininity. Because it was believed that 'normal' women are not capable of committing sexual violence, the mentally disturbed narrative attributes Nyiramasuhuko's behaviour to her perceived sexual deviancy. The defective female perpetrator narrative surfaces predominantly after her conviction at the ICTR, when recuperation into acceptable femininity was no longer possible. Her conviction was sensationalized to the extent of her coming to embody a mythically evil figure to serve as a warning of the potential dangers of women acting outside of their gender roles. "As we try to grapple with the horrors of genocide, finding sensationalized (and singular) women to blame seems to make the problem more possible to delineate and account for" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007, 171). The construction of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko as a victimized, mentally disturbed, and defective perpetrator renders her

invisible yet essential to the Rwandan genocide, because she simultaneously deflected blame from the men involved and functioned as an explained-away exception to the rule of women's passivity and acquiescence. Women, like Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, are not exempt from the corrupting influence of power and racist propaganda and must be held entirely responsible for their actions without being subject to gendered sensationalism and stereotyping of women's agency and capacities.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The treatment of women who engage in proscribed political violence demonstrate that traditional conceptions and expectations of gender are intact and thriving. Women's violence is represented differently in both the media and academia compared to similar crimes committed by men. Discourses about violent women often seek to explain away their behaviour by some external factor, rather than confronting women's ability, and choice, to act violently. This narrow dichotomy between people who freely choose to engage in violence (usually men) and those who have no choice in their actions (usually women) provides an incomplete picture of what violence looks like in global politics. Any theory of international security that omits women as a class of perpetrator is deficient and of limited utility.

This thesis outlined the stereotyped and gendered ways that women's violence is represented in international relations, while exposing the significance of these narratives for the study and practice of feminism and global politics. The merging of Sjoberg and Gentry's gendered depictions of violent women (2007, 2015) with Seal's emphasis on the localized context (2010) exposes the societal impact of these discourses, which led to the construction of the victimized, disturbed, and defective female perpetrator narratives. All three of these classifications betray a collective uneasiness with women acting outside of their feminine gender role through the denial of their agency in their violence. Women, like men, make choices that are constrained and reinforced by existing social structures and expectations, making agentic decision making complicated and relational. Women's agency is at the heart of this research project precisely because the victimized, disturbed, and defective narratives seek to obscure it.

The case of Pauline Nyriamasuhuko demonstrates the utility of this novel classification system by exemplifying how the Rwandan context impacted the gendered narratives used to

depict her crimes. Nyiramasuhuko's contribution to global politics, however horrific, was downplayed in an effort to prevent women from occupying the domain of legitimate political actor. It is not only the 'good' women that must be included in the study of international relations, but also the 'bad' women, who force us to confront deeply held assumptions about what people are and how they work. As this thesis has demonstrated, violent women are not an aberration or an anomaly, they are a widespread class of perpetrator who have been present in a variety of conflict setting across time and place.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The research for this project was conducted entirely in English, and only English – language media and academic sources were considered. French, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda are also official languages of Rwanda, and this research was limited by the inability to access written materials in these languages for the purposes of conducting a discourse analysis. The researcher recognizes that language is a powerful social force which constructs and is constructed by reality, and the absence of these three languages limits the analysis of the narratives used to depict Pauline Nyiramasuhuko.

Further research that gives voice to the variety of ways that women experience and engage in war and armed conflict should work to avoid gendered assumptions about their capacity to act rationally and with agency. All individuals are relationally autonomous with a variety of experiences, expectations, and socio-political constraints that impact how they engage in global politics. Additional research exploring how gendered expectations impact the discourses used to portray the violence of individuals who do not fit neatly within this gender

binary is needed to provide a more complete understanding of political actors engaging in proscribed violence.

Future explorations of gendered representations of violent women could adopt a comparative approach between the cases under examination. This thesis has highlighted the importance of context in assessing these narratives, which leaves room for variation across different geographical regions and historical periods. There may be variation in the representations of violent women on the basis of other characteristics such as race, age, nationality, and class. There may be patterns across these different features to uncover. Analyzing these discourses across different languages may also yield greater insight into potential patterns that exist across intersectional characteristics.

An additional underexplored methodology is content analysis, with the potential to assess the frequency and consistency of the different characterizations of gendered narratives. Certain media outlets may privilege particular narratives, which could shed light on the reverberations of different depictions of violent women. Revealing which representations resonate with different audiences could help inform the contextual component of this novel categorization.

Ultimately, the view that conflict is a masculine activity that predominantly men participate in needs to be replaced with a holistic approach which seeks to understand the experiences of all individuals, whether they be victims or perpetrators of violence. Anything shy of this preserves idealized gendered expectations of behaviour, and marginalizes those who do not act accordingly.

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