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War, Women, and Power

As a child in the south of Rwanda, Ignatinne had dreamed of becoming a doctor. Despite the trauma of her father's violent death in 1973 during a wave of ethnic violence targeting Tutsi, Ignatinne excelled in secondary school. Because of her ethnicity, however, she was denied entrance to university. When the genocide broke out in April 1994, Ignatinne's husband and many of her family members were killed. After the bloodshed, she found herself alone. As she put it to me in an interview, to move forward "wasn't a choice, it was an obligation. Either you do it, or you die. Either you provide for yourself, your children, or others, or you die" (Interview #7, July 2009).

Instead of dwelling on the loss of her husband, Ignatinne resolved to help the thousands of children who had suffered during the violence. She managed to go back to school, take a job with UNICEF working with children who were incarcerated or living on the streets, and join other initiatives and organizations advocating for children's rights. Soon, desiring to make an even greater impact, Ignatinne felt like she needed to ascend to a higher level. In 2008, she ran for political office. Her first campaign was successful – today, Ignatinne sits in Rwanda's parliament, which boasts the highest percentage of women legislators of any country in the world.

While dominant narratives emphasize the destructive effects of war, this book is concerned with how women like Ignatinne experience war, bear witness to its effects, and exert agency in ways often obscured by analyses of violence that emphasize women's suffering, shame, and victimhood. To do so, I compare the impact of wars in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina on women in their aftermath. I argue that while war is

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destructive, it is also a period of rapid social change that reconfigures gendered power relations by precipitating interrelated demographic, economic, and cultural shifts. Despite the many differences between the cases, I show how war in both countries catalyzed women's mobilization and forged spaces for their political engagement at the household, community, and national levels. War, contrary to expectations, can lead to increases in women's political agency. Ultimately, I also show the erosion of women's gains after war and unpack the various social processes that can fracture women's organizing and undermine women's progress.

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WOMEN AND WAR

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Much scholarship and media coverage have emphasized the destructive effects of war on women (Elshtain 1987; Goldstein 2001). War causes displacement, institutional breakdown, psychological damage, physical suffering, economic collapse, and myriad other harms. In recent violence in Sudan, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, journalists fixated on women's experiences in two primary roles: as victims of sexual violence and as refugees. In contrast, men were shown in combat fatigues, bearing weapons, rendering them "active" subjects meant to protect "passive" subjects such as women and children.[1]

Yet Ignatinne's story reminds us that images of "weeping women, wringing hands" (Del Zotto 2002: 1) obscure the immense range of women's roles and experiences during violence. Further, such depictions do not reflect a robust literature on the active roles women play both during and after episodes of violence (see Aretxaga 1997; Lorentzen and Turpin 1998; Baumel 1999; Enloe 2000; Bop 2001; Sharoni 2001; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; or Thomas and Bond 2015 for an overview). For instance, while relatively few serve as combatants, women's presence in fighting roles continues to grow. In the second half of the twentieth century, women's involvement in Algeria's war of independence from France (1954–1962) revealed the potential for revolution to catalyze processes of women's liberation. Women also played active combat roles in subsequent conflicts in Nicaragua, Vietnam, Iran, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, El Salvador, Argentina, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Lebanon – and, most recently, among Kurdish forces in Syria. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, there has been a markedly increased focus on women's capability to serve as violent actors, especially in light of women serving in militant extremist organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram. Moreover, many Western states – including

the United States – have fully integrated women into combat roles within their militaries (see Segal 1995; Hunter 2017).

In these varied conflicts, women's mobilization in combatant roles has challenged traditional gender hierarchies, sometimes opening space for women to participate in new political roles. For instance, in El Salvador, women's mobilization as guerrillas led to the FMLN integrating women into leadership positions within the political branch of the movement (Viterna 2013). In Mozambique, women's participation in FRELIMO as fighters and organizers helped lead to (albeit incomplete) progress toward women's greater economic and political equality with men in the aftermath (Urdang 1989). Most recently in Nepal, women fought as Maoists and continued fighting against the constraints of both caste and gender for inclusion in the postwar political system (Lohani-Chase 2014).[2]

Women's increased political participation during and after war does not only stem from their participation as combatants; it can also emerge through public protest and civil resistance. In East Timor, an indigenous women's association fought to liberate women from the patriarchal structures of Timorese society and simultaneously challenged the Indonesian military's occupation of the island nation (Franks 1996).[3] In Liberia, a diverse coalition of women organized public sit-ins and protests to demand an end to the civil war, and, mirroring the Greek play *Lysistrata*, led a much-publicized campaign to withhold sex from their husbands until they agreed to put down their weapons (Fuest 2008; Moran 2012). In Israel and Palestine during the First Intifada, feminist organizations like Women in Black organized silent protests to condemn the violence in their homeland and resist the militarization of the conflict (Sharoni 1995; Helman and Rapoport 1997). Since, organizations like Four Mothers and, most recently, Women Wage Peace, have extended this legacy and situated women at the forefront of conversations about building durable peace in the region.

Women's peace movements, particularly many "mothers' movements," also draw on essentialized notions about women's "more peaceful" nature to make their claims. Feminist scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993) have noted that subaltern or oppressed groups sometimes consciously use "strategic essentialisms" to simplify differences that might raise problems in existing structures of power. Groups that highlight women's peaceful and caring nature essentialize women; yet such "essentialisms" can afford women an opportunity to make political claims on the basis of their gender (Helms 2013; Tripp 2016). Some feminist scholars, however, caution that emphasizing women's differences

from men may ultimately exclude women from political spaces and pre-
vent them from gaining sustainable power (Lorber 1994; Epstein 1997).
While mothers' movements typically do not attempt to upend patriarchal
hierarchies or even criticize women's role in society, they establish moth-
erhood as a basis of legitimacy and thereby implicitly challenge conven-
tional gender norms. Motivated by grief over the loss or conscription of
their children, mothers' movements tend to thus invert traditional notions
about women's passive status as "bearers of the nation" by agitating for
justice for crimes committed during the war (Femenía 1987; Noonan
1995; De Alwis 1998; Ray and Korteweg 1999). Members of some moth-
ers' groups have eventually run for political office, and some groups – like
Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, whose activism helped
bring down a brutal regime – have gained official political status (Hunt
and Posa 2001). In these and other contexts, we see how women can
serve as voices of resistance to war, often challenging the male-domi-
nated, patriarchal military machine (see Tickner 1992; Aretxaga 1997).

While the aforementioned scholarship reveals that women are not
simply passive victims during war, recent quantitative studies find some-
thing even more surprising: countries that have experienced war since
the 1980s have higher rates of women in their legislatures than coun-
tries that have not experienced war (Hughes 2009; Hughes and Tripp
2015). Melanie Hughes (2009) incorporated war into standard statistical
models explaining women's political representation (see Paxton 1997;
Matland 1998; Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Reynolds 1999), finding
that certain types of armed conflict in low-income states were associated
with an increased percentage of women in parliament. Her subsequent
study of this phenomenon with Aili Mari Tripp narrowed the analysis to
Africa. They found that states that have experienced civil wars since 1980
had 4–6 percent higher rates of women's legislative representation, sus-
pecting openings in the "political opportunity structure" (Tarrow 2011;
McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) after war – including peace talks, con-
stitutional referendums, and new electoral commissions – as the cause.
In other words, war created opportunities to build new institutions.[4] The
historical timing of the conflict is important, as women's initiatives after
more recent conflicts have built on women's increasing rights to press for
even greater equality (Hughes and Tripp 2015).

Tripp's book, *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa* (2015),
extended this line of research even further. Drawing on data from Liberia,
Angola, and Uganda, Tripp's groundbreaking research found that women
have made remarkable political gains in countries that have experienced

devastating violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, and that the severity of war is positively correlated with the level of political mobilization. At the core of Tripp's argument is that war can require a wholesale renegotiation of domestic power, opening opportunities for the domestication of international frameworks. Critically, Tripp argues that local women's movements are essential for women activists to take advantage of the political openings created by the disruption of war.

Inspired by the scholarship on women and war in general and on war's mobilizing potential in particular, this book offers an important extension of this recent research by illustrating the processes through which large-scale armed conflict can open unexpected spaces for women's increased engagement in public and political roles. Oversimplified depictions of women's suffering, shame, and victimhood do not reflect the full range of identities and experiences women undertake and encounter during war. With these varied experiences in mind, this book compares the impact of war on women in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina, making a processual argument about the specific ways war can precipitate women's increased political engagement. Unlike studies that focus only on women's engagement in formal politics, here I draw from the feminist truism that "the personal is political" to explore spaces of women's political agency that fall both inside and outside the institutional political realm. I show how women's strength and boldness amid the horrors of war led to shifts in gendered power relations at all levels of society. Ultimately, however, I show how many of these gains were short-lived, as the political settlement, international actors, and patriarchal norms intervened to fracture women's organizing and constrain women's progress. This book thus calls attention to crucial issues for social scientists, students, activists, and policymakers concerned with war, women, and power in different contexts across the world.

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF WAR

To understand the impact of war on women, we must first understand war's transformative potential. Historical sociology and political science literatures demonstrate how states experience long periods of institutional stability that are punctuated by periods of flux and structural change. War is the paradigmatic example of a period of flux. Referenced in different literatures as "critical junctures," "crises," or "unsettled times," these periods of significant change reflect an interruption of the status quo and the possibility for new social processes or institutional

arrangements (Swidler 1986; Collier and Collier 1991; Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Mann 2013).

War can transform the people who live through it in myriad ways; it can abruptly destroy lives, families, and material possessions, leading to death, despair, suffering, and financial destitution. War can also bond people together as comrades in arms, victims, or neighbors. For example, World War I veterans saw their experience as a personal transformation that distinguished them from the rest of the population (Leed 1981). In Spain, the Spanish Civil War conditioned political identities and voting patterns in the population decades later (Balcells 2012). Political scientists and economists have looked specifically at the unexpected positive consequences of civil wars (Bellows and Miguel 2009; Blattman 2009; Annan et al. 2011; De Luca and Marijke 2015). Drawing on trauma studies in psychology, Blattman (2009) and Bellows and Miguel (2009) found that individuals and households that directly experienced high levels of violence during wars in Uganda and Sierra Leone were more likely to vote and actively participate in community politics in the aftermath than those who witnessed lower levels of violence. Violence, in other words, can – however terrifyingly and unwittingly – transform individual lives.

Just as war transforms individuals' sense of community and political engagement, it can also have aggregate political consequences. Max Weber understood war as a powerful force leading to state formation and capitalist development in Europe. The development of bureaucratic rationality within militaries was particularly important and eventually allowed for the development of modern state institutions (Weber [1922] 1978). Subsequent scholars have further developed this idea. Charles Tilly (1986) famously identified interstate war as an essential factor driving the formation of modern Europe, noting that "wars make states" because war forces states to develop their administrative, coercive, and extractive capacities and forge strong national identities among the population (Moore 1966; Mann 1986, 1993; C. Tilly 1986). Military structures then transform into civil bureaucracies, and states strengthen as they attempt to harness their populations' productive capacity. Michael Mann argued that "war is ubiquitous to organized social life" (1986: 48) and posited that certain economic and military power relationships culminated in the emergence of the state itself.

In the twentieth century, wars likely killed more than 130 million people (Leitenberg 2006). Since World War II, an estimated 260 civil wars have occurred around the world,[5] and civilians have comprised as many as 90 percent of the casualties (Carnegie Commission 1997; Kaldor

2013). While political scientists and sociologists have used cross-national datasets to quantitatively analyze the outbreak, scale, and duration of war (see Small and Singer 1982; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Sambanis 2004; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009), historical sociologists have looked at war's consequences for other macro-level processes. These processes include the emergence of revolutions (Moore 1966; C. Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991; Mann 1993), the welfare state and civic organization formation (Skocpol 1992; Skocpol et al. 2002), citizenship rights and civic participation (Markoff 1996; Kestnbaum 2002), and the entrenchment of autocracies (Celestino and Gleditsch 2013). These studies illustrate the many ways war can shape institutions and social structures for years to come (see Wimmer 2014 for a review).

However, few studies have used gender to animate war's transformative effects. Research on women and war is typically confined to disciplinary subfields, including feminist international relations or security studies, and principally examines women during war, paying less attention to war's gendered impact on institutions and social structures in the aftermath. Given the ubiquity of war in the first decades of the twenty-first century, this absence seems shortsighted: better understanding the legacy of war on women's power is of fundamental moral and political importance, and of value to both social science theory and policy.

Indeed, war may be one of the few comprehensive disjunctures that opens social and institutional space for women's gains. Women's status across the world has been on a slow, if steady, upward trajectory over the past few centuries. Since Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, women's movements have gradually become more prominent worldwide. In the nineteenth century, women in Europe, the United States, and beyond campaigned for suffrage, education, and legal rights. In 1893, New Zealand became the first country to give women the right to vote, and countries across the world began to extend political rights to women. Progress has not been swift. In the United States, for example, women gained the right to vote in 1920, entered the labor force in great numbers only during World War II, and then were pushed out of these new positions after the war. Moreover, these rights and opportunities were granted primarily to white women; women of color, indigenous women, and immigrant women have long worked the most physically demanding, precarious jobs with long hours, and continue to face substantial obstacles to controlling their legal and political rights. The Civil

Rights Act of 1964 provided women formal protection against sex dis-
crimination, but not until the following decade did the courts clarify the
substantive terms of this protection.[6] Today, women in the United States
lag behind men in many key areas, including in political representation,
income, wage employment, and managerial positions. Women with mar-
ginalized identities lag even further behind their white counterparts in
these areas.

Despite these limitations, the history of American women's rights alerts
us to the transformative role war can play in the quest for gender equality.
The suffrage granted to American women immediately after World War
I was due, in part, to suffragist movements engaging in nonviolent direct
action by joining with broader peace movements during the war effort
(Clemens 1999; Taylor and Rupp 2002). The women's movement gained
momentum during the war, and international feminist organizations,
such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, forged
networks between activists around the world. World War II ushered in a
political sea change in American women's roles, as women's employment
in the wage economy increased by 50 percent during the war (Anderson
1981; Hartmann 1982; Milkman 1987). As the United States mobilized
for war during both periods, women were depicted as essential to the war
effort; they became not only mothers and wives, but also workers, citi-
zens, and soldiers (Hartmann 1982: 20). Women's domestic tasks were
thus infused with a broader nationalist purpose.[7]

Thus, while war indisputably has certain negative impacts on women,
we see how interstate wars also shaped American women's employment
patterns and political rights. Moreover, recent scholarship suggests a
link between war and women's legislative representation in low-income
countries around the globe. Case studies have revealed how women
organized during wars in places like Sri Lanka, Algeria, and Nepal and
challenged traditional expectations about women's roles in the domestic
sphere as they got involved in everyday struggles to demand peace, reject
militarism, and advocate for political change. We also know from the
case-specific literature that wars can shape women's lives by motivating
collective action or inspiring new social bonds.

However, we know little about how war causes structural shifts that can
precipitate ordinary women's mobilization in less formal political capaci-
ties, or about the processes that facilitate women's mobilization after war
has ended. Such ordinary political action is not captured in quantitative
cross-case analyses on women's parliamentary representation after war,
nor in historical accounts that look principally at macro-level outcomes.

That is where this book comes in, utilizing Rwanda and Bosnia as case studies for understanding the demographic, economic, and cultural processes through which mass violence impacts women's political mobilization, and employing a theoretical approach that conceptualizes political participation from two perspectives: "everyday" politics and the formal political realm.

UNDERSTANDING FORMAL AND EVERYDAY POLITICS

Studies of political participation have tended to distinguish between formal participation in elections, political parties, and government offices on one hand, and informal participation in neighborhoods, communities, and identity-based activities on the other, reflecting a long-running debate about the opposition between public and private spheres. The public, formal political realm is centralized, highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, permanent, resource-intensive, and largely concerned with *de jure* change. It is based on particular forms of cultural and social capital – such as formal education and credentials – which, throughout history, have predominantly been afforded to men from dominant groups. Such formal political spaces require little explanation: women's legislative representation is one of the most visible indicators of women's status, as underrepresentation is one of the most pronounced forms of inequality in the world today.

Yet debates endure over *substantive* versus *descriptive* representation when it comes to women's formal participation (see Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Phillips 1995; Walby 2005; Wangnerud 2009). In 2017, Rwanda had the world's highest percentage of women in parliament at 64 percent. Comparatively, in the United States, women hold approximately 20 percent of the seats in both houses of Congress, and in countries like Lebanon, Haiti, Thailand, and Tonga, women comprise less than 5 percent of the legislature (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017). While women's legislative representation serves as an indicator of women's formal political power, and understanding the political, social, cultural, and economic conditions conducive to the advancement of women in politics has been the subject of extensive study, such statistics are a poor indicator of women's power more broadly. This is only in part because the advancement of women in formal political positions is often done for the benefit of the patriarchal status quo and ruling male political elites. More alarmingly, recent scholarship has drawn much-needed attention to the fact

that gender-sensitive legal reforms or women's empowerment efforts can
be used instrumentally to mask more nefarious political motives behind a
guise of progress (see Goluboff 2007; Berry 2015b; Lake, Muthaka, and
Walker 2016; Berry and Lake 2017). For instance, in Rwanda, women's
political power has been used to distract international donors away from
human rights abuses conducted by the authoritarian-leaning regime.
Such limitations of women's formal political representation call for our
increased recognition of spaces of women's political agency that fall out-
side of the formal politics.

Further, the boundaries between the formal political sphere and the
private one are not always clear.[8] Limiting the analysis of political partici-
pation to the formal sphere overlooks vast arenas of women's informal
political action. Informal political spaces, by virtue of their deinstitution-
alized nature, require more explanation. They are more decentralized, less
bureaucratic, emotional, emergent, resource-light, and more concerned
with immediate, *de facto* gains. Such realms privilege forms of social and
cultural capital beyond formal education or credentials.

To further explore informal political realms that bridge the public/
private divide, I borrow from the micro-politics and resistance paradigms
pioneered in works by James C. Scott (1985, 1990), Lila Abu-Lughod
(1990), Asef Bayat (1997, 2007, 2010), and others. These approaches are
useful for understanding political activities that occur outside of formal
political realms and help reveal the complexity of power relations in a
given society. Moreover, in political or cultural contexts where organized
resistance is infeasible, such an approach investigates alternative spaces
and forms of struggle. Foucault's (1980: 96) notion of decentered power
underscores much of this perspective, holding that power exists in the
center as well as in more regional and local institutions at the "extremi-
ties" of society and works through the "citizen-subjects" themselves. For
Foucault, power circulates; it therefore is not confined solely to state
institutions. Similarly, Gramsci's (1971) concept of civil society views
power as rooted in institutions outside of the formal political realm.

In order to make sense of how everyday activities can be political,
I draw in particular on Bayat's (2010) work that discusses a "politics
of practice": the idea that the ordinary activities of the subaltern can be
political, even if they look different than most Western understandings
of contentious politics. Instead, people selling items in public, working
outside of the home, building houses, pursuing education, playing sports,
and the like can be political as they quietly impinge on appendages of the
state and accepted behavior, reflecting a "social nonmovement" within