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**Gender and the Responsibility to Protect:
A Study of Protection Narratives in
International Intervention**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not previously been published or submitted for a degree or qualification at another university.

Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of protection language and its gendered content on UN intervention policies and practice within the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework. R2P was first proposed in 2001 and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005, with the aim of ensuring timely and effective international intervention to prevent or halt mass atrocity crimes. While the existing literature on R2P has engaged extensively with its reliance on concepts of responsibility and sovereignty, less attention has been paid to the concept of protection as it operates within R2P. This thesis undertakes a qualitative analysis of protection discourses in R2P-related policy documents and statements between 1999 and 2018, supplemented by semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts and practitioners. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on gender and R2P by examining how gender operates within efforts to mobilize and legitimize specific interventions. The thesis argues that reliance on gendered protection language undermines the potential of R2P to form a new approach to international intervention. Instead, gendered power disparities between masculinized international ‘protectors’ and feminized local civilians are reproduced, the assumed expertise of international actors is reinforced, and the knowledge and perspectives of local people are excluded. By demonstrating how protection language limits the ability of interveners to effectively meet the security needs of those intended to benefit from interventions, the thesis concludes that protection-based intervention narratives address not the security vulnerabilities of local civilians, but rather the political vulnerabilities of the international actors whose legitimacy depends on their status as protectors. Attention to gender and a commitment to gender equality are necessary to fully understand and address this limitation within R2P.

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CNDP	National Congress for the Defence of the People
DFS	United Nations Department of Field Support
DPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IR	International Relations
MONUC	United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PoC	Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RDF	Rwanda Defence Force
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army

SPLA-IO	Sudan People’s Liberation Army-in-Opposition
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

1. Introduction

I first became aware of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), a model for international intervention that seeks to prevent or halt mass atrocity crimes, at an event held by and for civil society delegates to the 2007 meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which I attended as a representative of a small NGO. My memories of what was said during that event have faded, but I recall leaving the discussion with an impression that R2P was being promoted as a development that would contribute to UN efforts to achieve gender equality, and that would be good for women in particular. I also recall a photograph that was used in the promotional materials, handouts outlining the purpose and the content of R2P. It showed a UN peacekeeper from the mission in Timor-Leste, on patrol and accompanied by a group of local children. In the photograph the group is seen from behind, and the soldier is looking down at the children, who have their arms around each other's backs and appear to be having fun. The photograph elicited from me a strong and positive emotional response. At the same time, I remember thinking that its selection sent a clear message about how UN actors should be viewed within the context of R2P and that this message drew heavily on gendered identities, presenting a very specific image of protective masculinity. The soldier in the photograph is male and carries not a gun, but a bottle of water. His relationship to the children, who all appear to be boys, seems almost paternal. He is protecting them but also educating them, modeling a version of manhood that appears both glamorous and benign. The photograph is reassuring, suggesting that UN interveners are reliable and safe. Such an image arguably obscures the significantly more complex motivations, outcomes and power relationships associated with international interventions. It struck me that gender was being used, deliberately or not, to establish a simplified version of an intervention narrative, one which might be appealing enough to divert focus from the messy and often violent contexts in which interventions occur and to which they sometimes contribute.

This research on gender and R2P has emerged out of my interest in and dual commitments to feminism as an emancipatory political movement and the UN as an institution dedicated to the promotion of human rights and the establishment of peace through international cooperation. Prior to beginning my research, I worked for the UN in New York, as well as working for and with civil society organizations

advocating for gender equality and women's rights in connection with the work of the UN. Through these experiences I encountered firsthand some of the institutional barriers and forms of resistance to gender equality work within the UN, many of which have been well-documented by feminist researchers.¹ The difficulties of doing gender work at the UN at times seem prohibitive and raise strategic questions about whether the UN continues to be a worthwhile focus for feminist efforts to improve the lives of women throughout the world and promote the freedoms for both women and men that can come only from fundamental changes in the way societies are ordered around gender. At the same time, the UN remains unique among human institutions—the only one we have in which a truly global group of representatives comes together for the purpose of confronting our collective problems. In this light, it is too important an arena to concede to the status quo. Particularly for feminists interested in understanding and counteracting the dangerous forces of militarism, gender work at the UN is a project driven by a sense of urgency. The lives of countless individuals—their safety, their opportunities and the overall conditions of their lives—are at stake.

The policy agenda of R2P speaks to this sense of urgency. The problem it seeks to address is at heart a problem of how the world responds, or fails to respond, to human-made emergencies. Through its universalist perspective—its claims that action to prevent atrocity crimes is a moral duty conferred by our common humanity, that human rights are fundamental rights for all people, and that respect for national borders cannot justify inaction in the face of widespread human rights abuses—it brings into focus the self-destructive aspect of organized, systematic violence. It posits that our inability, so far, to effectively prevent or halt such violence, in addition to subjecting individuals to extreme danger and suffering, damages our common humanity. It seeks to oppose the human impulse for destruction by codifying and elaborating the human impulse to help. In these ways, it seems well-aligned with feminist emancipatory goals and feminist activism that envisions a world free from gendered violence.

Examination of the founding texts of R2P, however, reveals forms of gender blindness common in many UN contexts, reflecting a refusal to take on board the

¹ See, for example, Gibbings (2011), Puechguirbal (2010), Charlesworth (2005) and Whitworth (2004).

feminist insight that entrenched forms of militarism and systematic violence are not only gendered in their impact but are gendered at their roots. Given the tone of urgency that pervades these texts, and the sincere desire of the individuals writing and advocating for them to address the problem they identify, the continued rejection of serious engagement with gender questions—and the attending lack of attention to women’s lives, concerns and experiences—is bewildering. It also mirrors experiences I had while working for and with UN personnel, individuals (mostly men) who viewed the promotion of peace and human rights as their lives’ work and had a deep and genuine personal stake in its success, yet who were unwilling to take gender seriously as a relevant factor and who viewed it essentially as a ‘box-ticking exercise’. A paragraph or two on violence against women included in reports of the Secretary-General, and the obligatory references to Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Security Council documents and peacekeeping mandates, are concessions made to the political achievements of feminist advocates in putting gender officially on the agenda. Yet in most cases these paragraphs could be removed without substantially altering the meaning of the reports and resolutions they inhabit. Gender questions remain peripheral and are not seen as vital to the success of UN efforts. In emergencies they are easily abandoned.

My interest in R2P comes, in part, from its sense of emergency and my curiosity about how gender operates in such circumstances, when events feel out of control. I also see R2P as emblematic of the larger UN project, reproducing many of its core assumptions and highlighting the shortcomings of how the UN system in general approaches questions of gender in connection with violence prevention and response. In this light, I am especially interested in the claim that R2P represents something new in the work of the UN and the tensions that emerge around this question of newness—what fundamental change would look like and whether the range of actors (governments, experts, diplomats and bureaucrats) involved in the negotiation and implementation of R2P view such change as desirable. By taking seriously the workings of gender and the meanings and identities it constructs within R2P narratives, and particularly within the language of protection around which such narratives take shape, this thesis aims to shed some light on questions of why the UN has such a poor track record of change in relation to gender equality, how this failing limits its potential for success in addressing the problem of systematic violence, and how it might begin to do better. These issues are much too large to be

comprehensively addressed in a single thesis, and they have been and will continue to be central to diverse feminist research on gender and the UN. I contend, however, that R2P represents an important development in ongoing UN efforts to live up to the objectives expressed in the organization's Charter, and as such is central to understanding how gender operates within UN security policy. A thorough understanding of how gender has shaped and operated within R2P will also be important to the next iteration of the vital project of counteracting the human capacity for violence.

Background

Speaking to the UN General Assembly in 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented his vision of the central challenge facing the organization in the coming century: 'to forge unity behind the principle that massive and systematic violations of human rights – wherever they may take place – should not be allowed to stand' (UN Secretary-General, 1999, SG/SM/7136). The world had recently witnessed crises in Rwanda and Kosovo that had presented two enduring problems in how a globalized world might respond to such violence. In Rwanda the world had failed act, standing by as genocide unfolded. In Kosovo a NATO-led coalition had intervened without Security Council authorization, in what many saw as a morally legitimate, though technically illegal, military action. Annan interpreted these events as marking out a balance that must be struck in thinking about international intervention for humanitarian purposes: how to avoid, simultaneously, the danger of inaction and the danger of illegal action. Both posed a serious threat to the legitimacy and identity of the UN. The organization could not continue to be relevant in a world that either ignored its authority and the obligations of states under its Charter or viewed its authority as morally bankrupt and incapable of responding effectively to the greatest injustices and most appalling violence.

Responding to Annan's call for a rethinking of the intervention problem, the government of Canada convened a panel of policymakers and academics with a mandate to address the questions Annan had raised. This panel, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), produced a report in 2001 outlining the 'Responsibility to Protect'—a discursive reframing of the problem that it hoped would overcome past political difficulties and lead to new policy approaches in addressing the worst atrocities. The Commission identified the

UN as the primary actor in promoting this new vision and as the forum in which debates around intervention must necessarily take place. When the General Assembly adopted language on the R2P in 2005, it took up the challenge of making this vision of intervention palatable to member states and implementing its principles in the work of the UN. R2P became associated with the identity of the UN and, by extension, the international community. Failure to intervene to prevent genocide, the language of R2P suggested, represented a failure of humanity. Framed in this way, the international community could not claim its role as an enlightened provider of stability and human values while ignoring or responding ineffectively to such violence.

At stake in R2P, then, is the meaning and legitimacy of the international community, made up of sovereign states and organized around the UN Charter. This was recognized from the outset, in Annan's address to the General Assembly and in the 2001 report of the ICISS. Less analytic attention has been paid to the stake that others might have in the language of R2P, how it is interpreted and what versions of international authority it promotes. The question of gender is omitted almost entirely from the early work on R2P, which ignores the gendered content of its conceptual underpinnings—the ways in which international authority has traditionally been coded as masculine, drawing on gendered narratives about capable, benevolent protectors and their legitimate exercise of authority over vulnerable and incapable others. In considering the history of international intervention, the ICISS identified past failures as failures of will rather than capacity. R2P expresses little doubt in the ability of the international community to intervene effectively and for the good, if only it would put aside political disagreements and recognize its moral obligation to do so.

A 'new approach' to international intervention

R2P was drafted in an effort to directly address the problems and controversies that had arisen during the 1990s surrounding the question of 'humanitarian intervention'. Taking note of these concerns, the report of the ICISS claimed that R2P represents a 'new approach' to international intervention: a response to an evolving security environment encompassing new actors, new security challenges and new sets of expectations about the role of the international community (ICISS, 2001a). The Commission framed its report as simultaneously a

normative, a political and a discursive project, and this view has continued to shape discussions of R2P in the years since the report's publication. The call to action contained within the report is based in a normative appeal to common humanity (Evans, 2008a, p. 296; Papamichail and Partis-Jennings, 2016, p. 85). Through this appeal, R2P aims to generate timely responses to 'conscience-shocking situations crying out for action' (ICISS, 2001a, pp. XIII, 55), and puts forth a vision in which all states share a 'universal and enduring' commitment to human protection (Bellamy, 2010, p. 158). In setting out this vision, the Commission recognized that there are serious political barriers to applying R2P as a normative framework to all contexts in which atrocity crimes might occur. This is especially true in connection with the direst cases, in which military intervention might be justified. In such cases, the Commission suggested, a military response is justifiable only if it is reasonably likely to prove successful and unlikely to result in expanded violence: 'It will be the case that some human beings simply cannot be rescued except at unacceptable cost – perhaps of a larger regional conflagration, involving major military powers. In such cases, however painful the reality, coercive military action is no longer justified' (ICISS, 2001a, p. 37). A reasonable application of R2P involves working to overcome political barriers resulting from power disparities within the international system, while also recognizing that this will not be possible in every case.

If intervention policy must at times be selective, however, proponents argue that the underlying R2P principle should be seen as universal (Luck, 2010, p. 353). Responding to the urgent moral need identified by the ICISS, R2P is presented as a break with past intervention practices in which the international community either failed to respond when necessary or failed to align perceptions of legality with moral legitimacy. The ICISS report made several significant claims to newness (ICISS, 2001a, p. 17). First, it suggested that by changing the terminology associated with intervention, R2P shifts the focus of intervention policy away from the rights of states and toward the needs of people. Second, it argued that the language of R2P serves as a bridge between questions of intervention and sovereignty, reframing state sovereignty in a way that emphasizes the responsibilities states bear toward their populations, and suggesting that the international community would intervene only in cases where states lack the capacity or the will to meet their responsibilities. Third, it emphasized the importance of prevention and rebuilding, alongside reaction, as vital elements of international intervention. Proponents have suggested

that, in this way, R2P successfully overcomes the perceived conflict between the principle of state sovereignty and humanitarian claims, filling ‘a crucial normative gap’ in the old approach to ‘humanitarian intervention’ (Thakur and Weiss, 2009, pp. 35, 39).

This view places a high level of importance on language, suggesting that changes in language can effect substantive changes in intervention practice, potentially sidestepping longstanding political barriers to successfully halting mass atrocities. The report’s proposed discursive move from ‘humanitarian intervention’ to ‘responsibility to protect’ was intended to resolve the political difficulties encountered in the 1990s, recognizing that the language of humanitarian intervention had become unacceptable to a majority of UN member states (Hilpold, 2012, p. 66), a concept too weighed down with ‘historical baggage’ (Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 46). Framing intervention as a moral responsibility in certain limited cases, rather than as a right for intervening states to act in line with national interests, was seen as potentially less threatening to norms of state sovereignty and was intended to be less confrontational (ICISS, 2001a, pp. 16–17). To this end, the Commission proposed a formulation of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’, suggesting that this view of the moral obligations of states toward their populations ‘has become the minimum content of good international citizenship’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 8). The Commission argued that legal precedent for this view can be found in the UN Charter, an agreement voluntarily undertaken by sovereign states that effects ‘a re-characterization’ of state sovereignty, shifting the concept from ‘sovereignty as control’ to ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 13). At the same time, the ICISS report sought to lend new weight to this principle, linking it with the concept of human security in order to harness state power for the task of meeting the real security needs of people, addressing internal security problems and prioritizing this approach above defence against hypothetical external threats (ICISS, 2001a, p. 15). While ‘responsibility’ does the work within R2P of reframing questions around state sovereignty, the emphasis on human needs and human security is meant to be accomplished through the language of ‘protection’.

These linguistic changes have been identified as a strategic move on the part of the Commission, with the emphasis on ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ serving as an acknowledgement of the continued primacy of nation states as security providers for the populations within their borders—a view more politically palatable than one

focusing only on the role of the international community as potential interveners (Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 24). At the same time, the change in language was driven by a sense that ideas matter in deeply significant ways (Evans, 2004, p. 88), shaping how policymakers think about and act on questions such as international intervention. In this view, the use of specific language can anchor politically contentious debates, supplying a common framework, providing a sense of credibility and potentially ‘activating deep layers of social and psychological meaning’ (Papamichail and Partis-Jennings, 2016, p. 90). In this way, it is argued, the R2P framework of ‘responsibility’ and ‘protection’ carries with it a ‘rhetorical and conceptual lineage that resonates strongly and offers a mechanism by which discussion and debate can be streamlined’ (Papamichail and Partis-Jennings, 2016, p. 90). The ICISS anticipated in its report that this new terminology for intervention would accomplish the necessary changes in intervention practices, overcoming the controversies surrounding the sovereignty question through its emphasis on responsibility, while simultaneously placing the victims of violence at the centre of security policy through its emphasis on protection. This discursive framework, the report claimed, ‘refocuses the international searchlight back where it should always be: on the duty to protect communities from mass killing, women from systematic rape and children from starvation’ (ICISS, 2001a p. 17).

Given the rhetorical power of these concepts and their ability to evoke entrenched systems of social meaning, it is questionable how new R2P truly is in its approach to international intervention. Advocates for R2P hail its success in quickly taking hold as a linguistic framework, yet some have suggested that it was initially acceptable to UN member states not because it represented a huge step forward but because they did not view it as a significant challenge to existing security practices (Welsh, 2013, p. 373). Paul Hilpold argues that neither view—seeing R2P as a fundamentally new approach or merely as a declaration of pre-existing norms—is entirely convincing (Hilpold, 2012, p. 77). This potential contradiction is reflected in much of the UN language on the subject of R2P, with the UN Secretary-General arguing in his 2009 report on the subject that R2P is ‘firmly anchored in well-established principles of international law’, not altering but only reiterating the obligations of states under the UN Charter (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 3). In the same report he goes on to outline current UN policies which could be made more effective through coordination under the heading of R2P, while avoiding

‘radically new approaches’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 68). Read in the context of the justification for R2P, based in claims that past failures on the part of the UN and the international community must be addressed in order to be avoided in the future, this seems to espouse a contradictory view that there is nothing essentially wrong with existing approaches. The distance between the ambition of the ICISS report and later UN interpretations of R2P can be understood, in part, by considering how R2P has developed within the institutional framework of the UN system.

R2P, the UN and the ‘international community’

In setting out the principle of a responsibility to protect populations from ‘avoidable catastrophe – from mass murder and rape, from starvation’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. VIII), the ICISS assigned this responsibility to sovereign states in the first instance and, when states fail, the international community. The Commission did not explicitly state what it meant by ‘international community’, but uses of the term throughout the report suggest that it refers primarily to the community of states represented in the UN.² My use of the term in this thesis reflects its use within core R2P texts and refers to the member states, diplomats, experts and international civil servants who collectively make up the UN. To a certain extent the term might be used interchangeably with the name of the UN, yet its language conveys an additional layer of meaning that is important in the context of R2P, asserting that the actors involved make up a ‘community’—an entity to which members recognize a meaningful connection and in which they bear some responsibility for the wellbeing of others. This is reflected in the ICISS report, which asserts that ‘the very term “international community” will become a travesty unless the community of states can act decisively when large groups of human beings are being massacred or subjected to ethnic cleansing’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 75).

The report clearly identifies the UN as the sole institution with the moral legitimacy, political credibility and administrative impartiality to mediate, moderate and reconcile the competing pulls and tensions that still plague international relations. People continue to look to the UN to guide and protect them when the tasks are too

² See, for example, p. 13, ‘responsible to [...] the international community through the UN’; p. 52, ‘Only the UN can authorize military action on behalf of the entire international community’; p. 74, ‘an assertion of the threefold responsibility of the international community of states’.

big and complex for nations and regions to handle by themselves.
(ICISS, 2001a, p. 52)

The Commission likewise concluded that the Security Council is the primary forum within the UN to make decisions about international intervention, given its mandate in the UN Charter to promote the maintenance of international peace and security (ICISS, 2001a, p. 47). While recognizing the structural limitations of the Security Council, including its history of political deadlock and the problem presented by the veto power given to the five permanent members, the report states that ‘the Commission is in absolutely no doubt that there is no better or more appropriate body than the Security Council to deal with military intervention issues for human protection purposes’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 49). The Commission suggested that in cases when the Security Council cannot or will not act, other bodies such as the General Assembly might step in as a ‘possible alternative’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 53). Nevertheless, its powers under Chapter VII of the UN Charter make the Security Council the best and most legitimate forum in which to make decisions regarding intervention, especially when such decisions involve coercion or use of military force.

The Security Council is not the only part of the UN system that has played a central role in the development of R2P. Crucially, in 2005 the General Assembly expressed its commitment to R2P through two paragraphs in the World Summit outcome document (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, paras. 138 and 139). This provided an important stamp of legitimacy for R2P, since General Assembly decisions are negotiated and voted on by the entire body of UN member states, unlike the Security Council which contains only fifteen voting members at a time. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, however, General Assembly approval required a significant narrowing of the scope of R2P to what came to be known as the four atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, para. 138). The result is a version of R2P that is far more conservative in its implied commitments than the vision set out by the ICISS report, reflecting a political reality that institutional approval can only be gained within the UN by addressing the concerns of member states. The brief General Assembly paragraphs on R2P stand in strong contrast to the 85-page report of the ICISS. The annual reports of the Secretary-General, beginning in 2009, on R2P and its implementation also reflect the political necessity of

reassuring member states that nothing radically new has been proposed. I argue in Chapter 3 that the gender content of protection language plays an important role in providing such reassurance, while working against the imperative for change.

Thesis aims and argument

This thesis considers the R2P framework from a gender perspective in order to address the following research question: *How has the gendered language of protection adopted by the Responsibility to Protect shaped UN intervention policy?* Drawing on feminist International Relations theory and feminist interpretations of protection and international authority discussed below and in Chapter 2, I approach this question through a qualitative analysis of protection discourses in R2P-related policy documents, Security Council meetings, and statements from relevant actors, supplementing this analysis with semi-structured research interviews with experts and practitioners. Through this analysis, I examine the ways in which R2P language is interpreted in the context of existing UN interventions. A feminist approach to International Relations involves critical attention to the ways in which the exercise of power is gendered, as well as to the differing roles assigned to men and women, whether in practice or symbolically, within gendered power hierarchies. In the context of R2P, I am particularly interested in the implications of gendered protection language for the ability of interventions to recognize diverse security needs and incorporate a range of perspectives—including those of local people, and women in particular—in the shaping of intervention policy. It is not only the legitimacy and power of the international community that is at stake in the moral vision promoted by R2P, but also the pressing security needs of the people expected to benefit from international interventions. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, the narrative distinction within R2P between masculinized international rescuers and feminized local civilians in need of rescue raises concerns about how power is operating through these interventions. It is worth asking who truly benefits, and this question cannot be adequately answered without attention to gender and the diverse experiences of people positioned differently within intervention narratives, across divides of masculine and feminine, international and local, protector and protected.

This thesis makes an original contribution to the literature on gender and R2P by re-problematizing the concept of protection within the R2P context, bringing the insights of feminist criticism to bear on this development in international efforts to

confront the problem of mass atrocities. In doing so, I examine at length how gender operates within efforts to mobilize and legitimize interventions in this specific context, diverging from existing literature, which tends to focus on the usefulness of R2P as a policy tool that might be aligned with the promotion of gender equality.³ Additionally, this thesis contributes new empirical material through the research interviews I have conducted and focuses on assessing how the gendered context of R2P shapes interventions responding, or failing to respond, to specific incidences of mass atrocity crimes. My view of R2P is a critical one. Yet I view its core objectives—of changing how the international community approaches interventions to stop mass atrocities and placing human needs at the centre of such interventions—as vital to the effort, embodied in principle by the UN, of counteracting the human capacity for organized, self-destructive violence. The success or failure of R2P as a UN policy agenda has not yet been fully determined, though enough time has passed since its adoption by the General Assembly in 2005 to conclude that it has not so far achieved the conceptual shift in intervention policy that the authors of the ICISS report intended. I am interested in R2P as much for its failures as its successes. It is unlikely to be the final effort of its kind, and so it is important to seek to understand where it has fallen short and why. I contend that such understanding cannot be reached without attention to gender at all levels of intervention policy and discourse, addressing the centrality of gender in shaping the meanings and implementation of intervention language.

This thesis argues that the gendered language of protection around which R2P is built undermines efforts to create a new approach to intervention, instead reproducing a protector–protected dichotomy in which masculinized protectors are assumed to be capable and benevolent, while the protected are feminized and assumed to be uniquely vulnerable and dependent on others for security. In this way, R2P reproduces gendered logics of masculinized international authority contrasted with feminized local helplessness—a model for legitimizing intervention that fails to recognize the complexities of the international–local relationship, erasing the vulnerabilities faced by ‘protectors’ and the capacities of local people to participate in their own security. The protection narratives reproduced by R2P exclude

³ See, for example, Davies et al. (2015), Davies (2016), Dharmapuri (2013), Hewitt (2016) and Lito (2013).

important sources of knowledge and expertise, limiting R2P's potential for success in creating interventions that meet the needs of the people they are intended to help. Ultimately, these narratives effectively address not the vulnerabilities of the local civilians who make up the 'protected' category, but rather the political vulnerabilities of the UN itself. Within R2P, gender works as a subtext to make interventions for 'protection' purposes feel familiar and legitimate, securing the position of the UN as a vital source of international 'protection' and ensuring that existing forms of authority within the international arena remain unchallenged.

R2P, gender and feminist International Relations theory

My interest in examining R2P through the lens of gender is grounded in feminist IR theory, which presents a challenge to traditional state-based forms of analysis and asserts the centrality of gender, and of women's positioning in particular, to the international system. Feminism is at heart an emancipatory political project, aimed at the liberation of women through the achievement of gender equality (Tickner, 1997, p. 616). Within this deceptively simple statement, however, exists a large diversity of feminist theories and insights into the operation of international politics. Feminism may appear from the outside to be 'small, confined, and with a clear, straightforward and manageable purpose', yet 'its boundaries are constantly being reinvented' (Zalewski, 2006, p. 59).

A primary point of contention within feminist theory, as well as in social science generally, is how to understand gender in relation to the (often assumed to be natural and immutable) categories of 'female' and 'male'. In one view, gender constitutes a system of social meanings assumed to be based in biological sex differences. This means that while gendered characteristics may vary between individuals, time periods or cultures, the biological sex categories of female and male remain stable and bear some relationship to the socially constructed categories of feminine and masculine. While some feminists adopt this understanding of gender, over time many have come to see social gender categories as having no automatic or 'natural' basis in biology. In particular, poststructuralist feminist theory has challenged the validity and naturalness of biological sex categories, arguing that our interpretations of sexed bodies are themselves constructed through socially determined systems of gendered meaning such that, in effect, sex in a biological sense does not exist independently of gendered discourse but rather is constituted by

it (Shepherd, 2010, p. 150; see also Butler, 1993). This view raises questions about feminist claims to the political ground of liberation for 'women': If no such objective category of 'women' exists, what might emancipation for women mean? If, on the other hand, 'women' is taken as a stable category, is there not the risk of reproducing the oppressive, socially determined gender identities that feminists seek to alter? These questions, Ann Snitow argues, are at the core of feminism and form a tension 'between needing to act as women and needing an identity not overdetermined by our gender' (Snitow, 2015, p. 22). Likewise, Kathy Ferguson writes that feminism exists within 'the struggle between efforts to redefine the gendered subject by centering it in women's experiences and efforts to deconstruct the gendered subject altogether' (Ferguson, 1993, p. 15). This is a 'paradox we live with' (Snitow, 2015, p. 26), and the view that one takes on the solidity of the 'women' category at any one time may be as much strategic as ideological—there are gains and losses to be found on both sides of the question (Snitow, 2015).

For the purposes of this thesis, I find Laura J. Shepherd's conception of gender as a 'noun/verb/logic' particularly useful. In this view, gender is not a static variable through which to analyse the workings of power, but rather '*gender itself is a power relation*' (Shepherd, 2013, p. 12, emphasis in original). To illustrate her meaning, Shepherd provides the example of an individual deciding which bathroom to use in a public place: knowing which door to choose requires knowledge of the categories male and female, masculine and feminine (gender as a noun), and through the action of making the choice gender operates as a verb, determining what that choice will be (Shepherd, 2013, p. 12). Finally, gender is a logic 'because the figure on the door that you eventually go through might not bear any resemblance to the way you actually look but you understand that you are expected to recognise yourself in one sign or the other *and then behave accordingly*' (Shepherd, 2013, p. 12, emphasis in original). Gender constitutes systems of meaning through which power relationships become intelligible—separated from an understanding of gender, the symbols on the doors of public bathrooms will have no meaning and will lose the power to compel certain choices on the part of individuals. Imbued with gendered meaning, however, the power of such symbols becomes difficult to resist, imposes a social cost on resistance. In this way gender as a logic actively shapes and limits the ways in which individuals behave and the choices they make.

Following on this view, I do not see gender as based in immutable biological characteristics, but rather as a set of power relations that alter over time and in different contexts. In spite of this potential for variation, such power relations consistently privilege masculinity over femininity (Zalewski, 1995, p. 341). Thus gender is not merely produced by power relations but is also a constitutive part of them. Gender identities combine with other identity factors—such as race or ethnicity, nationality and economic status—to position individuals within the international system, determining possibilities and limitations for the choices individuals make and their status as political actors, as well as the range of potential meanings attached to their choices and actions. Gender is not ‘real’ in the sense of being rooted in and determined by biological difference. It is, however, profoundly real in the impacts it has on the constitution of social life at every level, from the individual to the international. Consequently, the categories of ‘women’ and ‘men’ remain relevant to political analysis and organizing, and feminist methodology requires a form of double vision—an ability to keep in view the very real impacts of gender and the privileging of masculine over feminine, while also maintaining a suspicion of these gendered categories.

Feminist questions and feminist epistemologies

Gender, then, is not rooted in unchanging biology but rather is determined by and constitutive of power relationships. In light of this, feminist IR theory posits that international relations cannot be adequately understood without paying close attention to how women are positioned within the international system. Cynthia Enloe advocates for a form of ‘feminist investigation’ that begins with asking questions about women: where they are located, what they are doing to support or resist the dominant political agendas, and how their lives are shaped by context-specific ideological commitments to particular types of masculinity and femininity (Enloe, 2014). These questions are directly linked to questions about power: what forms it takes, who uses it and for what ends, and how gender operates to disguise certain forms of power as natural or inevitable (Enloe, 2014). This approach does not treat women as a unified class, advocating instead for specificity and detail in seeking to understand how individuals are positioned within systems of power. Enloe writes, ‘If one fails to pay close attention to women—all sorts of women—one will miss who wields power and for what ends’ (Enloe, 2014, p. 32). This type of

curiosity about women's lives has the benefit of exposing the operations of power in ways that are invisible to gender-blind forms of analysis (Enloe, 2014, p. 33), shedding new light on an international system that often treats women 'as unheralded resources for men and their institutions' (Sylvester, 1996, p. 267).

Building on feminist commitments to emancipation for women, feminist IR research often begins with a focus on women, yet inevitably this also involves raising questions about men, and about how forms of femininity and masculinity are interconnected, each dependent on the other for its boundaries (Carver, 2008, p. 71). Feminist approaches recognize that the categories of 'women' and 'men' do not exist in isolation from each other (Tickner, 1997, p. 621), but rather 'they presuppose each other' (Peterson, 1992, p. 9). Consequently, the act of raising questions about women also makes men visible, not as ungendered representatives of the human race, but specifically as men, exposing ideas about masculinity and their role, enmeshed with ideas about femininity, in shaping the international system (Enloe, 2014, p. 335). Thus 'gender' is not only about women but is about the ways in which identities tied to masculinity and femininity take shape in connection with and in opposition to each other. At the same time, gender questions cannot be adequately studied nor gender inequalities adequately addressed without attention to women: to understand masculinity and how it impacts the lives of men, 'one must take women seriously' (Enloe, 2014, p. 335). In this way, feminist theory poses a challenge to 'the often unseen androcentric or masculine biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all the disciplines' (Tickner, 2006, p. 20). Such androcentric epistemologies fail to recognize women as potential knowers, producers or 'agents of knowledge' (Harding, 1987, p. 3).

Feminists assert, in contrast, that our ability to 'know' the world is inseparable from our existence within gendered bodies (Peterson, 1992, p. 9). Researchers are not neutral authorities producing unchanging, objective knowledge, but rather are individuals with their own historically and culturally determined gender identities and their own agendas and assumptions—a view which poses a direct challenge to the 'objectivist' approach that assume knowledge can be separate from the context in which it is produced (Harding, 1987, p. 9). As J. Ann Tickner writes, 'All knowledge is partial and is a function of the knower's lived experience in the world' (Tickner, 1992, p. 16). By excluding women as sources of knowledge,

traditional forms of IR theory produce severely limited pictures of the international system.

Feminism and R2P

These feminist insights regarding the inherent partiality of knowledge and the importance of recognizing the limitations of depending on any single source as the authoritative knowledge producer have implications for a project such as R2P, which aims to shape the practice of international politics in ways that will prove beneficial to individuals and communities, and not only to states. This objective of displacing states as the sole level at which to think about security is one that clearly aligns with feminist methodologies, since concern for the lived realities of specific women or specific men necessarily requires attention to how security operates at the human level. The report of the ICISS is filled with references to populations and communities; there are also sparse references to women and children, although not explicitly to men, as people who suffer from extreme forms of insecurity (ICISS, 2001a). The report and subsequent R2P texts, however, stop far short of embracing a feminist vision of security, any version of which must assert that ‘a truly comprehensive security cannot be achieved until gender relations of domination and subordination are eliminated’ (Tickner, 1992, p. 23). On its surface, R2P appears to be concerned with a much narrower security objective—the effort to stop the four atrocity crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, para. 138)—and proponents might argue that a problem as large and complex as gender inequality is beyond the scope of the doctrine. Certainly it is unsurprising that R2P reflects the larger context out of which it emerged in its failure to engage with gender questions, and nobody expects that the types of intervention envisioned by R2P could singlehandedly address deeply rooted gender-based inequalities. Yet the forms of violence that R2P seeks to address are gendered violence, with different roles envisioned for men and women in relation to atrocity crimes, in which individuals are often recruited and targeted based on gender identity. The failure to recognize them as such, I contend, can only be overcome through a feminist commitment to incorporating the knowledge and experiences of women into the ‘expertise’ produced and relied upon by the international community in shaping its interventions.

Policy language, gender and discursive practice

As discussed above, the framers of R2P recognized the importance of language to their project, and the 2001 report posits that a change in how interventions are conceived and carried out can be achieved through a change in language—through an approach focused on ‘shifting the terms of the debate’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 16). Shifting from discussions of a ‘right to intervene’ to a ‘responsibility to protect’, the Commission argues, is not merely a change in terminology but also represents ‘a change in perspective, reversing the perceptions inherent in the traditional language, and adding some additional ones’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 17). First among these added perspectives is the idea that ‘the responsibility to protect implies an evaluation of the issues from the point of view of those seeking or needing support, rather than those who may be considering intervention’ (ICISS, 2001a p. 17). Such a change, if achieved, would be radical, significantly altering the normal practice of states engaging in diplomacy and conflict management at the international level. R2P, then, is built around the idea that language matters. The specific words that are used, and the contexts from which they draw meaning, are capable of producing and altering power relationships. It was hoped that the new language of R2P would accomplish a move away from state security and toward human security as the primary objective of what were formerly called humanitarian interventions.

This thesis undertakes a qualitative analysis of R2P language and draws on methodological approaches developed by feminist researchers focusing on discourses as sites where subjectivities, ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ are contested and reproduced (Shepherd, 2010; Hansen, 2006; Lazar, 2007). Shepherd understands discourses as ‘systems of meaning-production rather than simply statements or language, systems that “fix” meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world’ (Shepherd, 2008a, p. 20). In this view, discourses can be understood as practices that produce and shape material realities (Shepherd, 2010). Studying them involves asking questions about how certain policies and texts come to mean what they mean, and what work ideas about gender, masculinity and femininity are doing to produce this meaning (Shepherd, 2010; Zalewski, 2006; Charlesworth, 2010). This approach recognizes the workings of power through

language and the important role of language in shaping the ways in which individuals and institutions think and behave.

In the UN contexts on which my research focuses, a distinction is often made between the shaping of policy language and the process of implementation. The actors who draft the specific language of peacekeeping mandates are generally not the same people who are responsible for interpreting the mandates and implementing them in the field. Likewise, the people who originally decided on the language of a ‘responsibility to protect’ are not the decision-makers within the UN Secretariat and Security Council who may decide whether and how to apply the principle in peacekeeping mandates. Any intervention consequently involves multiple layers of interpretation, and it is useful to consider the relationship between the activities of interveners and the language of the policy documents from which they draw legitimacy—a way of thinking that seems to assume a stable distinction between language and practice. To a certain extent, in this thesis I have adopted this terminology of language on the one hand and implementation/practice on the other, as it is recognizable to and used by the policymakers and practitioners who are the main participants in debates around R2P and its development. (The annual reports of the Secretary-General on R2P, for example, are positioned as forming a bridge between language and implementation, taking the R2P language adopted by the General Assembly and making proposals for how it should be implemented.) Nevertheless, I recognize language as itself a form of practice, both shaped by and (re)productive of discursive systems of meaning.

Importantly for this thesis, recognizing discourse as practice makes the language around which policies are built ‘worthy of analytic attention’ (Shepherd, 2007, p. 241). This may be especially true of texts within the realm of ‘security’, where the label ‘security’ itself may confer special forms of power and legitimacy on the people or institutions framed as security actors (Hansen, 2006, p. 35). Security discourses allow for policies that push beyond the ordinary boundaries within which actors operate—in the case of R2P, allowing for the violation of state sovereignty norms in order to secure the populations living within states. Such discourses also impose a special form of responsibility, a characteristic that is likewise clearly identifiable in the language of R2P. As Lene Hansen argues:

Security discourses are thus characterized by a dual political dynamic: they invest those enacting security policies with legitimate

power to undertake decisive and otherwise exceptional actions, but they also construct those actors with a particular *responsibility* for doing so. These mobilizations of power and responsibility are intimately linked: the construction of something as so threatening as to warrant decisive action is followed by a responsibility for answering those threats. (Hansen, 2006, p. 35, emphasis in original)

Consequently, attention to discourse is vital to understanding how power operates within security policies and how it determines the thoughts and actions of security actors.

Recognizing that discourses are intertextual, with apparently dominant discourses ‘always inflected and inscribed with traces of other discourses’ (Baxter, 2003, p. 78), this thesis focuses on interactions between the surface discourses of security, state power and humanitarianism within R2P and the largely subtextual discourses of gender that lend meaning and emotional salience to the R2P narrative. Carol Cohn defines gender discourse as being ‘not only about words or language but about a system of meanings, of ways of thinking, images and words that shape how we experience, understand, and represent ourselves as men and women, but that also do more than that; they shape many other aspects of our lives and culture’ (Cohn, 1993, pp. 228–229). Such meanings enable certain forms of thinking while limiting others, so that some feelings, questions, modes of expression or actions may be ‘preempted’ by gender discourse (Cohn, 1993, p. 232). In other words, certain forms of thought, feeling or action are not merely ruled out of bounds but are, for the most part, never thought of in the first place—are made, in effect, unthinkable. I am interested in considering R2P in light of how the gendered discourses upon which it is built enable thinking about some forms of intervention while limiting others, as well as how such discourses mark some actors as expert and capable political actors while excluding others.

Feminist critical discourse analysis

My methodology, consequently, is centred around feminist critical discourse analysis. Michelle M. Lazar argues for a specifically feminist approach to critical discourse analysis as one that aims

to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities. Such an interest is not merely an academic de-construction of texts

and talk for its own sake, but comes from an acknowledgement that the issues dealt with (in view of effecting social change) have material and phenomenological consequences for groups of women and men in specific communities. (Lazar, 2007, p. 142)

This approach questions the traditional distinction between theory and praxis, recognizing that theorizing is itself a form of praxis with implications for the feminist project of creating change to produce a more just social order (Lazar, 2007, p. 145). As such, it mirrors the central premise of R2P that language matters in shaping action: a linguistic intervention can alter, in fundamental ways, the implementation of an on-the-ground intervention of the types envisioned by R2P.

At the same time, feminist critical discourse analysis poses a challenge to the framing of R2P to the extent that it insists on taking gender seriously as a lens through which to identify and understand workings of power and, more radically, to the extent that it understands gender as constitutive of power relations. While social practices may appear to be neutral or natural, feminist critical discourse analysis provides the analytic tools to question this appearance and identify the ways in which such practices are gendered. Lazar argues that gender operates both as an interpretative category, providing meaning and structure to particular social practices, and as ‘a social relation that enters into and partially constitutes all other social relations’ (Lazar, 2007, p. 145). Thus power relationships cannot be adequately understood without engaging in gender analysis. Such analysis requires attention to and curiosity about interactions of masculinity and femininity, as well as the lives and identities of particular men and women (Enloe, 2014), recognizing that identity does not exist outside or prior to discourse. Rather, identity is produced through discourse and, importantly for gender analysis, is always relational: a ‘self’ can be clearly conceptualized only in relation to ‘others’ (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). In researching the impact of a policy agenda such as R2P, attention to gendered discourse is vital because of the ways in which R2P both relies on pre-existing and often implicit gendered identities and perpetuates them, constructing ‘men’ and ‘women’ in ways that fit and sustain the larger narrative.

Reading silences

Applying the principles of feminist critical discourse analysis, Annica Kronsell suggests an approach of studying silences, paying attention not only to how texts deal explicitly with gender but also to the places where texts appear to be silent

on gender questions. This involves ‘sometimes “reading” what is not written, or what is “between the lines,” or what is expressed as symbols and in procedures’ (Kronsell, 2006, p. 109). Such an approach is vital to discursive studies of gender and gendered power relations because hegemonic masculinity functions in a way that obscures its operation in shaping norms and practices, making it necessary to read the norms and practices themselves as gendered rather than merely watching for explicitly gendered language (Kronsell, 2006, p. 110). This involves ‘a form of double reading that exposes historically derived norms [sic] underlying concepts’ (Kronsell, 2006, p. 110)—a methodological insight that is particularly relevant to UN policy documents, in which the gendered content is often below the surface. In such documents gender is often included only within specific sections or paragraphs set aside to address the concerns of women. It is nevertheless possible to see gender working implicitly throughout documents or policy agendas (Shepherd, 2010, p. 149).

In the case of R2P, an initial search for surface-level engagement with gender—focusing on terms such as ‘gender’, ‘sex’, ‘women’ or ‘men’—makes clear the necessity of learning to read silences. Such language appears in R2P texts only very rarely, and to the extent that gender is explicitly discussed at all, it is treated as a women’s condition. Through attention to silences it is possible to challenge this nearly exclusive association of gender with women, establishing men and masculinities as equally gendered categories for analysis, no longer neutral but political (Kronsell, 2006, p. 110). In this way, discourses constituted by gendered language, norms and practices cease to appear self-explanatory and are situated in relation to their history and larger context (Kronsell, 2006, p. 100). The authors of R2P consciously locate their work within a specific UN security discourse and acknowledge the history of that discourse as one that changes over time:

Our work reflects the remarkable, even historic, change that has occurred in the practice of states and the Security Council in the past generation. Thanks to this change, no one is prepared to defend the claim that states can do what they wish to their own people, and hide behind the principle of sovereignty in so doing. (ICISS, 2001a, p. 75).

They seek to embed R2P within this shifting discourse, pushing the change that has already happened further in shaping how interventions are understood. In adopting and building upon this discourse, they also take on its silences around gender, embracing without critical reflection the power relationships that such silences

reflect and perpetuate. Feminist critical discourse analysis provides the tools to elucidate these silences and expose the gendered ways in which power operates through intervention narratives.

Thesis structure

This thesis proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I examine academic debates around R2P, sovereignty and security, in light of the stated objective within the ICISS report to create a new approach to intervention that would refocus the debate on the security needs of people above those of states. I then focus on the centrality of protection language in R2P, bringing in feminist critiques of the ways in which such language is gendered and works to reproduce existing assumptions about gender identities and gendered power relationships. Next, I situate this thesis in relation to existing literature on gender and R2P, before going on to outline in further detail the scope of my research and my methods in carrying it out. I argue that debates around R2P have not so far paid adequate attention to the concept of protection, and that a gender analysis of R2P is required to understand its claims regarding the necessity and benefits of protection.

Following this, in Chapter 3, I track how protection language operates within UN contexts, what is meant by protection in policy terms, and the ways in which protection proves difficult to define, creating problems of unrealistic expectations about what protection can deliver while also making protection a usefully flexible discursive term for legitimizing UN policies. I focus on uses of protection language and attempts to define its meaning in humanitarian, human rights and peacekeeping work and discuss how its use in R2P relates to these areas of UN work. I then discuss the ways in which protection language works against the type of far-reaching change envisioned in R2P. I argue that the gender content of protection makes it symbolically useful in spite of the practical problems it raises and undermines efforts to create substantial change.

In Chapter 4, I examine the ways in which the protection language that underpins R2P relies on the construct of women as victims of violence, in need of special forms of protection, to legitimize and mobilize interventions. I focus on how the assumed victimhood and vulnerability of women operates within discourses around conflict-related sexual violence as the one form of violence within R2P's four atrocity crimes that is consistently recognized as gendered. Looking in

particular at reports to the Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict, Margot Wallström, I consider the implications of women's status as perpetually vulnerable for efforts to ensure women's participation and the substantive inclusion of women's perspectives in shaping how interventions are carried out. I argue that by working against the inclusion of women's perspectives, and especially the diverse experiences and knowledge of local women, protection language undermines the potential within R2P to intervene effectively.

In Chapter 5, I look at the roles of masculine identities within intervention narratives and the ways in which protection can be used to justify militarized forms of masculine authority and to legitimize violent forms of intervention. This chapter focuses in particular on the 2009 Kimia II military operation, undertaken jointly by the government forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, which resulted in widespread retaliatory attacks against civilians and arguably made UN forces complicit in violence against civilians committed by their counterparts in the Congolese military. I argue that this case in which military objectives were justified by language of protection and prioritized over the safety of civilians, despite clear warnings from civil society groups, raises serious doubts about the types of authority promoted by protection narratives and the ability of R2P to shift intervention policy away from military approaches.

In Chapter 6, I examine the linkages between the gendered concepts of protection and vulnerability, as they operate within UN language, in more depth. In this chapter I look at a range of vulnerabilities not recognized in official UN language, which tends to treat vulnerability as a feminized concept and not a universal human condition experienced by 'protectors' as well as those they aim to protect. In doing so, I focus on the 2013 'open the gates' decision in South Sudan, sometimes viewed as a moment of success for R2P, in which civilians sought shelter from ethnically motivated violence within the walls of UN compounds and bases, and a case of 'failure to protect' in 2016, also in South Sudan. I argue that protection narratives do little in practice to address the vulnerabilities of women and feminized groups such as local civilians, and that such narratives create blind spots regarding the dangers and vulnerabilities that 'protectors' such as UN peacekeepers face on the

ground. Instead, these narratives work to mitigate the political vulnerabilities faced by the UN at institutional and policy-making levels.

Finally, I summarize the central argument of my thesis and discuss the implications of my findings, as well as areas for further research. I argue that reliance on gendered protection language undermines the potential of R2P to form a new approach to international intervention, instead reproducing gendered power disparities between masculinized international ‘protectors’ and feminized local ‘protected’. By demonstrating how protection language limits the ability of interveners to effectively meet the security needs of those intended to benefit from interventions, I conclude that protection-based intervention narratives address not the security vulnerabilities of local civilians receiving ‘protection’, but rather the political vulnerabilities of the international actors whose legitimacy depends on their status as protectors.

2. Sovereignty, Security and Gender in the R2P Debate

Introduction

As discussed in the introductory chapter, in proposing R2P the ICISS aimed to create a ‘new approach’ to international intervention (ICISS, 2001a). By framing interventions in terms of ‘responsibility’ and ‘protection’, they hoped to shift the focus of the debate away from the rights of states and toward the people in need of help. This, they argued, could be accomplished through a reformulation of state sovereignty as ‘sovereignty as responsibility’. Likewise, through the use of protection language, they aimed to shift the concept of security away from a traditional state-based model and toward a human security model. In the years since the 2001 publication of the ICISS report, an extensive literature has grown around the subject of R2P. Writers on the subject include proponents of R2P—including several members of the original Commission who continue to produce academic work on the subject—and critics who raise diverse concerns about the claims and objectives of the R2P project and evaluate its successes and failures in political terms. The debate tends to focus on issues of sovereignty and responsibility, raising important questions about whether R2P achieves the intended shift from focusing on state security to focusing on human security, yet this is only part of the conceptual framework invoked by language of a responsibility to protect.

Notably absent from much of the literature are questions addressing the concept of protection: What does a protection-based model of intervention mean in concrete terms in this context, and what are its prospects for success? Who benefits from it, and who runs the risk of being disadvantaged by it? Protection language is not neutral, but rather carries the potential to create and perpetuate profoundly unequal power relationships between actors seen as protectors and those seen as the protected. The literature surrounding R2P, however, largely neglects this topic, seemingly taking ‘protection’ as a given—a concept with fixed content that does not need to be elaborated—and an unquestioned good for the people receiving it. The R2P debate centres on arguments regarding why and when protection is necessary, paying significantly less attention to what protection means and what versions of authority it reproduces.

This chapter will situate this thesis within current academic debates relevant to R2P, and will further outline the focus of my research and my methods in carrying

it out. It will begin with a discussion of how R2P is framed by its primary academic proponents, considering claims about the newness of R2P, its reformulation of state sovereignty, and the attempted shift toward human security through adoption of language of protection. It will then examine a range of feminist critiques of protection language in order to demonstrate that such language is gendered in ways that require analytic attention. Next, it will outline existing literature on gender and R2P, locating my work within this small but growing body of literature. Finally, it will discuss the focus and the limitations of this thesis and outline my research methods. As will be discussed below, protection is a concept evoking highly gendered identities and perpetuating gendered forms of power imbalance. I argue that the concept of protection has not so far received adequate attention in debates around R2P, and that the claims of R2P regarding the necessity and benefits of protection cannot be adequately understood independently of a gender analysis of R2P language and its policy implications.

R2P, security and the question of sovereignty

The members of the ICISS viewed concerns over state sovereignty as the main hurdle that any new approach to international intervention would have to overcome. This is evidenced by the concept's inclusion in the Commission's title, and by a section near the beginning of the report outlining in detail how the Commission understands sovereignty and views respect for the sovereignty principle as being compatible with a commitment to international intervention for human protection purposes (ICISS, 2001a, pp. 9–10). For the ICISS, respect for sovereignty should not mean privileging the rights of states over the needs of people:

This Commission certainly accepts that issues of sovereignty and intervention are not just matters affecting the rights or prerogatives of states, but that they deeply affect and involve individual human beings in fundamental ways. One of the virtues of expressing the key issue in this debate as “the responsibility to protect” is that it focuses attention where it should be most concentrated, on the human needs of those seeking protection or assistance. The emphasis in the security debate shifts, with this focus, from territorial security, and security through armaments, to security through human development with access to food and employment, and to environmental security. The fundamental components of human security – the security of *people* against threats to life, health, livelihood, personal safety and human dignity – can be put at risk by external aggression, but also by factors within a country, including “security” forces. (ICISS, 2001a, p. 15, emphasis in original)

This section looks at academic debates around questions of sovereignty and state versus human security, and outlines existing literature on the topic. This literature includes proponents of R2P who argue in favour of its conceptualization of sovereignty and critics who question the success of R2P in meeting its objective of overcoming past barriers to create a new model for international intervention. Language of protection is recognized as a key strategy for shifting focus to human security, yet it also poses difficulties for setting the parameters of interventions and reinforces assumptions about the inherent capability of ‘protectors’.

The sovereignty debate

The controversy surrounding the meaning and importance of state sovereignty is at the centre of much of the literature on R2P. Proponents of R2P reiterate the claim of the ICISS that the perceived conflict between the rights of states and the human rights or humanitarian needs of individuals is resolved through reinterpretation of sovereignty (Hilpold, 2012, p. 68), or at least clarified in a way that allows the issue to be addressed directly (Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 23). In this formulation, sovereignty is no longer seen as ‘a license to kill’ (Evans, 2008a, p. 284; Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 23). There is a recognized history of abusive governments hiding behind sovereignty claims while perpetrating crimes against their populations (Weiss, 2006, p. 743). At the heart of R2P is the argument that ‘states should no longer be allowed to get away with murder’ (Welsh et al., 2002, p. 497).

While the ICISS report may have been groundbreaking in its clear declaration of this principle, there is evidence that views of sovereignty were already evolving and the idea of conditional sovereignty was not a new development (Welsh et al., 2002, p. 494). The concept of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ can be traced to the work of Francis M. Deng and Roberta Cohen in the early 1990s (Weiss, 2006, p. 744), while Samuel M. Makinda, writing in 1996, noted that international opinion was ‘gradually moving toward a reinterpretation of state sovereignty’ (Makinda, 1996, p. 149). These changes in the perception of the sovereignty norm, however, have continued to be politically contentious, and the drafters of the original report on R2P may have been overly confident in anticipating what such a shift in thinking might achieve, or in deciding that redefining sovereignty was the best path to addressing the problem of intervention. Gerrit Kurtz and Philipp Rotmann argue

that, in taking up the sovereignty question, supporters of R2P may have made a political miscalculation, framing their case in a way that could be perceived as eroding the protections against interference by strong states into weaker states in the midst of a ‘unipolar moment’, when interventions by the United States were dominating international politics (Kurtz and Rotmann, 2016, p. 19). In this context such an approach may have been an example of ‘liberal hubris’ willing to dismantle entire states, when it may have been less controversial and more effective simply to argue against non-intervention in the face of mass atrocities without suggesting that it had any implications for state sovereignty (Kurtz and Rotmann, 2016, p. 19).

Others have suggested that in spite of its rhetorical claims, R2P has done very little to address the conflict it identifies between state sovereignty and the rights of individuals living within states. An international society built around a community of sovereign states has value to the extent that it allows for peaceful coexistence and the maintenance of order, without which there is little hope for individuals to live their lives free of injustice and violence (Wheeler, 1996, pp. 133–134). Jef Huysmans argues that states derive their legitimacy from their role in providing a sense of order, not only at a basic practical level but at a deeper psychological level, providing individuals with a sense of identity and the ability to order the world—to identify insiders and outsiders, allies and enemies, making sources of insecurity appear to be concrete and knowable (Huysmans, 1998, p. 230). Yet within this ordering function states retain their capacity to enact violence, in many cases themselves posing security threats to the people living within their borders. Additionally, the exclusionary nature of states—the act of drawing boundaries between who is inside and who is outside, based on a wide array of identity factors—may itself perpetuate the specific types of violence that R2P aims to prevent (Fishel, 2013, p. 210).

While R2P acknowledges that states may be the perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes, it leaves in place the system under which states are assumed to be the primary protectors against such violence. Stefanie Fishel argues that the work of the ICISS does not adequately consider the state-based system that produces the violence it hopes to address (Fishel, 2013, p. 205). The discursive shift identifying sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a right ‘evades the deeper questions that remain about the violence inherent in the state and the international system of states’ (Fishel, 2013, p. 209). In formulating its view of responsibility, R2P relies too

heavily on the liberal internationalist concept of the ‘good state’, undermining any efforts toward understanding states in terms of the threats they may pose to their populations (Fishel, 2013, p. 2009). Consequently, structural causes of violence are overlooked, and this distorting oversimplification of the sources of violence results also in oversimplified and ineffective solutions (Fishel, 2013, p. 2009).

In outlining the responsibility to provide protection against mass atrocities, R2P asserts that states are the first line of defence, bearing the primary responsibility to protect (ICISS, 2001a; UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, paras. 138 and 139). This responsibility devolves to the international community only in cases where states have failed to fulfil their role as protectors. In its approach to the question of state sovereignty, R2P fails to fully address the potential for ‘protectors’ to themselves be perpetrators of violence, relying on an assumption that states are generally good actors in promoting security and that cases where they fail are aberrations. This is mirrored in the role R2P envisions for the international community as the second line of protection. The relationship between ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ is assumed to be essentially benevolent—a reliable model for the provision of security that meets the human needs of its recipients. This assumption, however, obscures important power dynamics at work within the discursive framework proposed by R2P.

Human security needs and the limitations of state-based protection

While the question of state sovereignty in relation to international intervention is widely recognised as a controversy requiring resolution, the literature on R2P pays significantly less attention to potential disagreements over the concept of protection. The desirability of protection is seen as a given (Welsh et al., 2002, p. 512), and the need to provide protection to people threatened by mass atrocities is claimed to be ‘far more widely accepted than is generally understood’ (Kurtz and Rotmann, 2016, p. 15). If the value of sovereignty is seen as contentious within this debate, the value of protection is not. Protection becomes controversial only when it begins to cross the line into the sovereignty debate, with much of the R2P literature questioning the boundary between legitimate protection efforts and arguably illegitimate efforts toward regime change (Bellamy and Williams, 2011, p. 835; Roberts, 2002, p. 159; Welsh et al., 2002, p. 506), while also at times suggesting that regime change in the name of protection is not necessarily illegitimate (Bellamy,

2014, p. 190). The assumed moral imperative to protect is the largely unquestioned foundation of R2P.

Through its emphasis on protection, advocates claim, R2P achieves a refocusing of security policy away from the interests of states and onto the human needs of victims of violence (Arbour, 2008, p. 448; Evans, 2004, p. 82; Weiss, 2006, p. 744; Welsh et al., 2002, p. 494). In articulating this goal, R2P draws heavily on the concept of human security, which likewise emphasizes the ‘securing of people’ rather than national borders (Marhia, 2013, p. 20), bringing about a shift ‘from a security dilemma of states to a survival dilemma of people’ (Hudson, 2005, p. 163). This move constitutes a recognition that the security interests of individuals may differ or conflict with the security interests of the states in which they live, and human security is in part a critique of states’ frequent failures to meet the security needs of populations within their borders (Browning and McDonald, 2011, p. 243). At the same time, human security can be read as a reinforcement of the state-centred approach to security, enhancing rather than doing away with the role of states as protectors. While recognising that states often fail to protect (Axworthy, 2014, p. 150), human security preserves the function of states as security actors, pushing for a vision of security in which state security is not the end goal but a means to achieving meaningful security for individuals (Hudson, 2005, p. 165).

This understanding of security is replicated within R2P, which extends the protector role to include not only the primary state in which human security concerns are at stake, but also the larger community of states that may step in if the primary state fails to protect. In this way, human security serves as a useful foundation for R2P, yet it also brings with it a set of difficulties that arise when attempting to shape a human security-based policy agenda. Human security is often interpreted to encompass a wide range of non-traditional security issues, while R2P aims to focus on a very narrow set of security problems that it defines as mass atrocity crimes. Viewing security concerns from the level of the individual ‘inevitably widens the parameters of what security means’ (Hoogensen and Rottem, 2004, p. 158). In contrast, R2P is meant to be applicable only in cases of the most extreme forms of violence, and cannot be ‘about protecting everyone from everything’ (Evans, 2008a, p. 294). Edward C. Luck argues that the goals of preventing and resolving conflict, while related to R2P, are separate to the extent that they present different policy challenges (Luck, 2010, p. 350). Unlike human security, R2P is meant to be invoked

only under a very specific and limited set of circumstances, preserved for when it is ‘really needed’ (Evans, 2008a, p. 295).

The questions of what forms protection should take and who should decide when it is ‘really needed’ pose ongoing difficulties in the evolution of R2P as a normative and policymaking framework, and these issues have yet to be fully addressed. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the meaning of protection varies even within the work of the UN, yet R2P does not specify which prior understandings of protection it might be relying on. In a case study of R2P and the crisis in Darfur, Alex de Waal argues that the debate over the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission neglected questions of operations and strategy, reflecting the wider R2P debate ‘which has concentrated on when and whether to intervene, not how to do so and with what aim in mind’ (De Wall, 2007, p. 1045). Despite claims to the contrary, the language of protection has not effectively refocused the debate on the needs of the people receiving it. Instead questions of what protection means and what specific needs it will address are treated as less pressing and less in need of discussion than the problem of state sovereignty, which plagued earlier approaches to international intervention as well as R2P.

When employing expanded models of security, Mark Neufeld argues, it is important to pay attention to how they are used and what purposes they serve (Neufeld, 2004, p. 121). Human security concerns cannot be fully addressed when the security needs of individuals are assumed rather than identified by the individuals in question (Hoogensen and Rottem, 2004, p. 156). Yet R2P does not substantively address the varying security needs that might arise even within its narrow scope of mass atrocity crimes, and does not propose any mechanism by which the beneficiaries of protective interventions might register their particular security needs. Instead the approach outlined in R2P seems to rely on the ability of states and the international community—the identified ‘protectors’—to know in advance what the security needs are and how best to meet them.

Reliance on protection language supports rather than challenges such assumptions, which are based in gendered narratives about the relationship between protectors and the protected that are felt to be natural, a matter of common sense, and thus do not need to be elaborated or explained. While the language of R2P at first appears gender-neutral, it builds on identities of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ that resonate because of their unspoken gendered content. These identities are not neutral

but perpetuate gender-based imbalances of power, reinforcing the legitimacy of the power wielded by ‘protectors’ while undermining the inclusion of outside voices and the differing security concerns that they might raise. The following section will examine the ways in which the assumptions within R2P about the concept of protection are based on gendered power relations and the identities of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’.

Feminist readings of gender and protection narratives

Going back to the 1980s, feminists working in International Relations have raised concerns about the concept of protection, its often unspoken gendered content, and the ways in which it not only describes but reproduces gendered imbalances of power (Elshtain, 1982; Stiehm, 1982). By adopting the language of protection without fully clarifying its intended content—who the protectors are, who can expect to receive protection, and what forms such protection should take—R2P invokes deeply held beliefs about the different roles and capabilities of women and men in relation to armed conflict, relying implicitly on the reassuring familiarity of traditional gender identities associated with categories of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’. Such categories are woven throughout the just war tradition and the body of humanitarian law that serve as foundations for R2P, and are powerful enough to appear to negate any need for elaboration. As Zillah Eisenstein notes, gender and race categories require less defence the more they take root in people’s sense of what is ‘natural’ (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 77). The academic and policy debates around R2P seem to accept ‘protection’ as a natural, common-sense approach in this way; responsibility and sovereignty may be contentious points in the discussion, but everyone can agree that protection is a clear and obvious good not requiring much further debate. In this section, I will argue that feminist critiques of protection narratives are relevant to the R2P debate, raising important concerns about the gendered roles of protector and protected and the power imbalances such roles perpetuate. The insights generated by a feminist approach to the question of protection offer useful ways of thinking about what protection means in relation to international intervention and how intervention policies might take shape based on this meaning.

In their most basic form, protection narratives expand on a traditional patriarchal model of the family, in which men bear responsibility for protecting the

women and children belonging to their household, while in exchange women and children owe the male protector deference and obedience (Young, 2003, p. 2). This model, while placing women in a subordinate position to men, makes such power imbalances seem tolerable by ‘enlist[ing] the desire’ of the relatively powerless (Young, 2003, p. 6) and making the exercise of power appear benevolent, the result of love and a ‘natural’ bond between the protector and his dependents (Young, 2003, p. 6; Willett, 2010, p. 147). It constructs an ideal of ‘good’ masculinity in which a privileged position is earned through care for the weak or vulnerable. Iris Marion Young argues that this family-based model of protection becomes a metaphor employed domestically by states, which promise protection to their populations in exchange for obedience: ‘To the extent that citizens of a democratic state allow their leaders to adopt a stance of protectors toward them, these citizens come to occupy a subordinate status like that of women in the patriarchal household’ (Young, 2003, p. 2).

In the context of international intervention the metaphor is adapted and expanded, with protectors responsible not only for the security of ‘their’ vulnerable populations, but for the protection of the vulnerable anywhere they might be encountered. Humanitarian law, and thus the claim of intervention for humanitarian purposes, posits a distinction between combatants and civilians in which civilians are a protected category, an illegitimate target for violence. Although in practice civilians are often men and combatants are often women, these categories are symbolically gendered. Helen M. Kinsella (2006) argues that the distinction between combatant and civilian is reliant on gendered discourses, without which it would not make sense or carry the moral weight that it does. She suggests that we take seriously the emphasis within humanitarian narratives on groups perceived as having special vulnerability—women, children and the elderly. This emphasis can be seen not only as descriptive of current humanitarian priorities, but as a rationalization of the civilian–combatant distinction that makes some acts of war permissible while others are not (Kinsella, 2006, p. 163). Such groups are supposed to be spared from violence because they are ‘innocent’, and innocence in this discursive context is based in incapacity—a lack of reason, authority, or the ability to act in self-defence (Kinsella, 2006, pp. 176–177). Gender is foundational to the meaning of the distinction because, while childhood and old age are temporary conditions tied only to particular stages of life, femaleness is seen as a permanent incapacity: women ‘are

made civilians as if by nature' (Kinsella, 2006, p. 177).

This assumption of natural and unchangeable sex difference lends a perception of stability and clarity to the 'civilian' category, while also providing an interpretative logic for the role of 'combatant'. The 'good' masculinity of the domestic patriarch is identified here with respect for civilian immunity. Taken one step further, this logic asserts that 'good' men are those who protect vulnerable civilians from 'bad' men, and such goodness is made visible and defined by its opposite (Young, 2003, p. 4). Within intervention narratives, the benevolent masculinity of the protector is dependent on an opposite, brutal masculinity that poses a threat to women; likewise, it depends for meaning and justification on the continued incapacity of women to come to their own defence. Such narratives problematically treat violence as a necessary response to threats against civilians (Orford, 1999, p. 709), using protection of women as a justification for military action in 'crisis' situations, while simultaneously ignoring the 'everyday' and structural forms of violence that women face (Engle, 2007, pp. 218, 224).

It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that the masculine role of protector is accessible only to men. Anne Orford argues that humanitarian intervention narratives are structured similarly to a cinematic model that invites both male and female viewers to identify with a masculine hero (Orford, 1999, pp. 685–686). This 'has the effect of imposing masculinity as the spectator's viewpoint' and allows women as well as men access to 'a powerful sense of self' (Orford, 1999, pp. 686, 683). But the hero role cannot exist independently of a helpless, feminized 'other' in need of rescue. In filling this need, Orford argues, intervention narratives take an imperialist turn, offering Western women a chance to imaginatively step into the powerful role of protector, 'but only if we are willing to sacrifice others to the feminine role of pitiable victim' (Orford, 2002, p. 284). Following historical patterns associated with colonization, the countries subjected to intervention become a space for action in which white men are 'imagined as having enormous freedom to act and create ideal worlds' (Orford, 1999, p. 686), while white women can step outside the 'protected' role and participate in the 'project of soul-making through civilizing mission' (Orford, 2002, p. 284).

In this way, protection narratives reproduce gendered power imbalances that are also racialized power imbalances. Without explicitly employing the language of civilization, R2P claims for the international community a role as a civilizing actor

through its use of protection language. To the extent that ‘good’ men are distinguished from ‘bad’ men by their treatment of civilians—who are on a symbolic level conflated with ‘women’, whether the civilians in question happen to be women or not—this distinction is also useful in drawing the line between ‘civilized’ men and ‘barbarians’ (Kinsella, 2006). The existence of barbarians, who act without respect for civilian immunity, justifies the existence of protectors. The protector as civilizing agent ‘wag[es] war on behalf of civilians against those who would target civilians’ (Kinsella, 2005, p. 184), confident in his right and ability to determine who is innocent and therefore deserving of protection (Kinsella, 2005, p. 183). With a majority of UN interventions taking place in formerly colonized parts of Africa, and with the decision to intervene resting primarily with the five permanent members of the Security Council (among whom Britain, France and the United States are the three powers that tend to favour intervention), this model of intervention arguably fits Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s reading of a colonial relationship in which ‘white men are saving brown women from brown men’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 296). The ‘civilized’ intervener and the ‘barbarian’ perpetrator come to represent contrasting racialized masculine identities constructed around their relationships to ‘protection’ of women and children. As with past narratives of humanitarian intervention, the types of rescue envisioned by R2P construct the ‘international community’ in the civilizing role.⁴

A narrative in which ‘innocent civilians’ are feminized and defined by passivity—an inability to protect themselves or to act effectively on their own behalf—leaves the knowledge and capabilities of the protector unchallenged. The drafters of R2P framed their project as a response to the international community’s failure to act in the face of mass atrocities (ICISS, 2001a, pp. 2–3), seemingly without considering that the model of protection might itself be flawed. Yet in some

⁴ The ICISS report and General Assembly paragraphs on R2P are as silent on questions of race as they are on questions of gender, and the report engages only in a very limited way with the legacy of colonialism, acknowledging that less powerful states are likely to be ‘suspicious of the motives of the most powerful in their midst’ and suggesting that in some cases regional organizations might enjoy more legitimacy as interveners, in light of this suspicion (ICISS, 2001a, p. 54). It likewise asserts that the ‘process of devolving responsibility back to the local community is essential to maintain the legitimacy of intervention itself’, avoiding the possibility that interventions might be perceived as ‘a form of neo-colonial imperialism’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 45). The report does not, however, reflect on the ways in which ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ identities may be racialized. Although not the focus of this thesis, important academic work has been done in this area. See, for example, Razack (2004), Mamdani (2009), Pratt (2013), Al-Ali and Pratt (2016) and Richter-Montpetit (2016).

cases a failure to protect has occurred not at the level of international policymaking, but due to lack of action or capability by ‘protectors’ on the ground (this will be further discussed in Chapter 6). Feminist work on the subject of protection often includes the simple empirical observation that while protection is frequently promised to women in a wide range of contexts and by a wide range of actors, it rarely materializes in concrete policy terms (Willett, 2010, p. 147; Sjoberg, 2006, p. 890). In the UN context, peacekeepers are assigned the role of protector of women and children—repeatedly identified as the most vulnerable groups during armed conflict—yet the policies enacted by peacekeeping missions rarely result in actual protection for women or children (Willett, 2010, p. 147). Laura Sjoberg identifies protection as an ‘illusion’ that not only fails to deliver on its promises but adds to women’s burden in war contexts, making them appear as liabilities to their own communities (Sjoberg, 2006, p. 898). Protection narratives portray women as helpless dependents, rather than as capable adults with contributions to make.

In raising the question of why protection so often fails, feminists have focused on gendered power imbalances that both reinforce protection narratives and are perpetuated by those narratives. Protective actions and the policies built around the objective of protection repeatedly frame women as a group with special types and levels of vulnerability. At a basic level all human bodies have a common set of needs for survival (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 36), and technological changes in the way wars are fought often make physical strength significantly less relevant than access to weaponry. Yet in relation to armed conflict women’s bodies are consistently viewed as naturally more vulnerable to violence, and this vulnerability is understood primarily in sexual terms. Nadine Puechguirbal argues that in addition to being defined as vulnerable and as civilians, women are frequently defined in essentialist terms as mothers (Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 172). This goes some way toward explaining the persistence of ‘women and children’ language in UN texts, despite decades of feminist critiques of this construction (Enloe, 1993, pp. 166–167). Women are perceived as similar to children in terms of physical vulnerability and dependence on others, while also being viewed as primarily responsible for the wellbeing of children—a view that treats women as an entirely homogenous group defined purely in biological terms, independently of the choices individual women might make or the different roles they might fill in their societies (Puechguirbal, 2010, pp. 175–176). Additionally, women are seen as naturally more vulnerable to

sexual violence. This can be seen in the language of the ICISS report, which discusses women only as victims of sexual violence while also implying that victims of sexual violence can only be women.

Feminists argue, in contrast, that the particular vulnerabilities of women, to the extent that they actually exist, are the products of gendered hierarchies and social conditions that privilege men and particular types of masculinity associated with authority, protection and the use of violence. Paula Donovan, an advocate for women's rights at the UN, argues that women's protection needs are not natural, but rather that, 'like subjugated groups throughout history, women have been overpowered. Women need protection from the *unnatural* order imposed on our universe' through structural factors such as laws and customs that privilege men (quoted in Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 176, emphasis in original). Far from being natural, women's relative powerlessness is a necessary condition to the privileging of protective masculinity, which 'is necessarily framed in opposition to subordinated femininities'—there can be no heroic rescue without there being someone in need of rescue (Sjoberg and Peet, 2011, p. 168). The masculine protector—whether the family patriarch, the national army or government, or the international community—must justify his existence and his claim to the benevolent exercise of power in relation to someone who can be represented as being clearly in need of protection.

While this gendered discourse of protection appears on the surface to address women's security needs, it may actually contribute to the socially determined vulnerabilities that women must contend with. Language identifying women with children and marking them explicitly as objects of protection has the effect of negatively stereotyping women, making them appear automatically helpless and therefore 'easy targets for violence', incapable of retaliation (Sjoberg, 2006, pp. 891, 901–902). In this narrative framework women are a liability during war, requiring special efforts on the part of male combatants to ensure women's protection and safety. The protector bears the burden of women's incapacity, since a failure to protect might be interpreted as a failure of his masculinity (Stiehm, 1982, p. 372), heightening anxieties around gender identity and possibly resulting in more rigid and violent expressions of masculinity (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009, p. 505). Reading intervention narratives through the lens of feminist film criticism, Orford additionally suggests that the anxiety produced by women's perceived incapacity for self-defence may result in women being blamed for their relative weakness or

passivity (Orford, 1999, p. 687), a situation which, in turn, may find expression in misogyny and in violence targeting women, even on the part of the those tasked with protection (Whitworth, 2004). This is a problem that plagues UN peacekeeping operations, in relation to which many cases of systematic sexual violence against local civilians have been documented.⁵

All of these factors—the burden taken on by protectors, the assumed weakness and incapacity of the protected, and the perceived naturalness and benevolence of the relationship between protector and protected—contribute to the widespread exclusion of women and others perceived as lacking the necessary types of masculinity from roles in public life, whether in the governance of their countries or in policymaking and decision-making at the international level. Beginning with Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000 and reaffirmed repeatedly in the work of the Council, the UN has formally recognized the need to promote women's participation in peace and security efforts, as well as the need to increase the number of women employed by the organization in its Secretariat and peacekeeping missions. The recruitment and hiring of more women should be a relatively easy objective to meet, yet progress in this area has lagged for over fifteen years, with the Secretary-General reporting in 2014 that at the current rate of progress gender parity would not be achieved within the Secretariat until 2028 (UN Secretary-General, 2014, A/69/346, para. 134).

Feminist work on protection discourses suggests several reasons for the persistent disparity between the stated goals in this area and what has actually been achieved. At the most basic level, the strong association of women with characteristics of innocence and vulnerability not only suggests an incapacity for self-defence, but also an incapacity for politics and full citizenship, with calls for protection of women undermining women's full participation in public life (Kinsella, 2006, p. 185; Scully, 2009, p. 119). Going further, Kinsella argues that acts of agency, and particularly sexual agency, on the part of women pose a destabilizing threat to the existing order, which requires an assumption of women's innocence and incapacity to maintain its key distinctions between combatant and civilian, civilized

⁵ Countries where sexual violence committed by peacekeepers has been reported include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste (Ferstman, 2017, p. 12).

and barbarian (Kinsella, 2006, pp. 178–179). In national contexts, the need to protect women is often linked with the need to control their behaviour and limit their sphere of action, since women's safety carries such profound symbolic weight (Sjoberg and Peet, 2011, p. 169). At the international level, it seems possible that government representatives and UN officials alike resist the inclusion of women at equal levels with men because such a visible form of gender equality disrupts, consciously or unconsciously, the predominant narratives about the role of the international community, how it is constituted and how it frames its claims of legitimacy. The identity of the international community as the ultimate moral authority and enforcer of that universal morality rests heavily on the claims of the protector to know what is best for those in need of protection, and the protector role cannot credibly exist without its symbolic opposite, the protected.

Gender, protection and R2P

Despite appearances of gender blindness, then, R2P is gendered to its core: the protection logic that serves to legitimize and mobilize international interventions. Yet much of the R2P literature does not engage with gender questions at all. It is only in recent years that a significant body of literature on gender and R2P has emerged, largely drawing on insights related to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda⁶ to make the case that gender is relevant to R2P and noting a consistent 'failure to substantively connect' WPS and R2P (Davies et al, 2015, p. 229). Gender has yet to be mainstreamed in debates around R2P, despite its clear centrality to questions of protection, state power and the role of the international community as the final guarantor of humanitarian and human rights principles.

The literature on gender and R2P can be roughly divided into two complementary perspectives. The first seeks to strengthen and expand the R2P principle by improving its gender sensitivity and providing gender analysis to questions of how it might be applied. The second critiques R2P from a discursive perspective and raises questions about whether the R2P agenda is viable, given the troubling gendered content and power relationships of its core assumptions. This

⁶ There is an extensive body of literature on the WPS agenda. See, for example, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security* (2019), Davies, S. E. and True, J., eds.; the special issue of *International Affairs* (2016), 92(2); and the special issue of *International Peacekeeping* (2010), 17(2). See also, Cohn et al. (2004), Shepherd (2008b), Tryggstad (2009), Cook (2009), Puechguirbal (2010), Gibbins (2011), Shepherd (2011), Pratt (2013), Davis (2019) and True and Wiener (2019).

thesis falls into the second category, although I see great value in the first. This section will discuss the existing body of literature and locate my research within it.

R2P and the Women, Peace and Security agenda

Building on the pre-existing Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (PoC) agenda, in 2000 civil society organizations successfully advocated for Security Council attention to questions of gender and security, resulting in the adoption of Resolution 1325 and establishing the WPS agenda. Unlike R2P, the WPS agenda attempts to shift focus from victimhood to agency, promoting the idea that women have important roles to play in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities while also acknowledging that armed conflict often impacts women differently from men. Resolution 1325 also adopts the language of protection, emphasizing ‘the protection, rights and the particular needs of women’ (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325, para. 6) and calling on ‘parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence’ (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325, para. 10). The resolution also contains language expressing the Council’s ‘willingness to ensure that Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women’ (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325, para. 15), and since its adoption the resolution frequently has been referenced in the text of other resolutions and reports. Most language regarding R2P, however, remains silent on questions of gender or women’s rights and does not build on or seek to complement the achievements of WPS.

Much of the existing literature on gender and R2P focuses on the possibilities for aligning it with WPS. While critiquing the absence of gender analysis from the early iterations of R2P, and the absence for the most part of women from the ICISS process, this work suggests that there is common ground, both in language and in normative objectives, between R2P and WPS (Davies, 2016). Additionally, both agendas recognize sexual violence as potentially a war crime, crime against humanity or act of genocide in some situations (Davies, 2016). This literature views WPS as the best strategic path for raising gender issues in the context of R2P (Bailey, 2018; Davies et al., 2015; Davies, 2016; Dharmapuri, 2013; Hewitt, 2016; Lito, 2013). While there are political obstacles to aligning the two agendas—including concerns that the relatively narrow focus and still controversial status of R2P might weaken WPS, which still faces political resistance to gender equality

within the Security Council (Davies et al., 2013; Hall and Shepherd, 2013; Lito, 2013)—the value of applying the achievements of WPS to R2P is generally seen to outweigh the risks. The alignment may likewise have benefits for WPS, adding ‘political and normative force to implement WPS commitments’ (Davies et al., 2015, p. 245).

From a pragmatic perspective, this approach has the benefit of drawing on pre-existing language and commitments agreed by the Security Council, avoiding the difficulties associated with gaining new recognition for gender equality within UN discourses. It is easier to advocate for the inclusion of gender perspectives by referencing established language and attempting to adapt it to new contexts rather than starting from scratch. Resolution 1325 and the WPS resolutions that followed⁷ have achieved an important shift in the work of the Security Council and have provided activists with tools to push for their own participation in international peace processes and claim their right to access the halls of power (Hewitt, 2016, p. 10). The language of these resolutions also contains its own set of limitations, however, meaning that the approach of conceptually linking WPS with R2P risks uncritically replicating pre-existing problems.

In part, the limitations of WPS stem from the limitations inherent in the political context of the UN and the Security Council. Sheri Lynn Gibbings (2011) argues that it is necessary for perceived outsiders—civil society representatives, gender equality advocates—to adopt the dominant language of the UN in order to be taken seriously by the state representatives and UN officials who play official roles in determining policy agendas. In one sense, she suggests, this strategic use of language can be understood as a form of agency, a way for advocates to use existing norms to their advantage (Gibbings, 2011, p. 527). But it also imposes limits on what it is possible to say in a given context. Resolution 1325 and its successors exist within the bounds of conventional UN language, reiterating the need for protection of the vulnerable, and asserting women’s agency through the acceptable, perceived-as-feminine roles of peacebuilder and civil society advocate. Such narratives rest on an assumption that it is possible to generalize women’s experiences and priorities, suggesting a universality to the category of ‘women’ that fails to recognize the role

⁷ Resolutions 1820 (2008, S/RES/1820), 1888 (2009, S/RES/1888), 1889 (2009, S/RES/1889), 1960 (2010, S/RES/1960), 2106 (2013, S/RES/2106), 2122 (2013, S/RES/2122), 2242 (2015, S/RES/2242) and 2467 (2019, S/RES/2467).

of other identity categories in shaping women's experiences, opportunities and vulnerabilities (Lee-Koo, 2013, p. 43).

These same narratives are reproduced in R2P (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 242–243), making it questionable how much of a difference inclusion of WPS language would make to how gender and protection are conceptualized in relation to R2P interventions. A more convincing case for linking the two can be made at the practical level. Although implementation of Resolution 1325 has been uneven and often painfully slow, it is a process that has consistently asserted women's agency, albeit in a limited fashion, and produced experience in the value and the difficulties of achieving meaningful participation for women in UN peace processes (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, p. 74; Lee-Koo, 2013, pp. 46–50). Likewise, the emphasis on women—who are still largely excluded from high-level decision-making roles, and who are recognized in R2P language primarily as victims or civil society actors—poses a potentially useful challenge to R2P, which Hilary Charlesworth (2010) identifies as promoting a top-down approach to intervention and failing to adequately consider the impact of interventions in the lives of people on the ground. WPS, through insisting on women's participation, advocates an approach to security that is human rights-based and centred on people rather than states, and has also led the way in clearly identifying systematic and widespread sexual violence as a crime against humanity (Dharmapuri, 2013, p. 148)—both important, though unacknowledged, reinforcements of R2P discourse.

Discursive readings of gender and R2P

A second approach within the literature on gender and R2P focuses less on practical efforts to make R2P in its current form work for women, instead taking a more critical view of how gender works within R2P and the power relationships it produces and reproduces—a view that calls into question the viability of R2P as a means of shaping interventions that will have positive outcomes for both women and men. Charlesworth analyses R2P through feminist understandings of international law, asking, 'What work is gender doing?' and answering that R2P deploys gendered imagery in a way that 'makes it appear a logical, strong and appropriate response to violence' (Charlesworth, 2010, pp. 245–248). While noting some areas in which R2P might prove hospitable to feminist principles, she argues that its limited focus on the most extreme cases neglects everyday, structural forms of discrimination and

violence that arguably cause greater harm to women (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 243). Charlesworth concludes that R2P in its design ‘has been influenced by men’s lives and the dominance of masculine modes of reasoning’ (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 240).

Lucy Hall and Laura J. Shepherd take a similar approach in their reading of R2P, treating gender analysis less as a technocratic approach to making policy work better for women than as a means of understanding how power functions within international discourses. Adopting a methodological approach of understanding gender as a logic that makes discourses intelligible, they argue that R2P creates and relies upon a masculine–feminine distinction between the masculinized ‘international community’ and feminized ‘failed’ states, sustaining power hierarchies in which the international community is a legitimate, masculine authority regardless of whether its interventions might themselves prove to be sources of insecurity (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, pp. 65–66). They likewise identify ‘women-as-victims’ as ‘a foundational concept’ of protection within R2P, arguing that R2P is ‘made intelligible through a gendered logic of protection’ (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, pp. 68–70). This dynamic works to uphold existing gendered hierarchies, both in terms of the power disparities between states within the international system, and in terms of the problematic bolstering of state authority, despite the evidence, recognized within WPS, that neither states nor the international community can be assumed to be reliable sources of protection (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, p. 76). Ultimately they suggest that an alignment of R2P with WPS should not be attempted until R2P undertakes a more serious engagement with feminist concerns about its traditional, masculinist views of sovereignty and authority (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, pp. 76–77).

This thesis aligns more directly with the approaches adopted by these critiques of R2P than it does with the literature focused on the potential linkages between R2P and WPS. While recognizing the monumental achievements of the WPS agenda and the positive impact that such achievements can have for the promotion of gender equality and improvement of women’s lives, I do not view the central problem within R2P as being one of gender blindness that might be remedied by applying a gender analysis to existing R2P language and practice. Though gender blindness—the omission of explicit identification and analysis of how interventions might differently impact women and men—is a serious problem within R2P, a more fundamental issue is the ways in which R2P relies on implicit gendered assumptions

and identities for its meaning. Thus R2P's gender problem is not one of absence but one of unspoken, pervasive presence. Gender is at work throughout the language of and debates around R2P. Building on the work of Charlesworth, Hall and Shepherd, as well as feminists who have critiqued protection language in other contexts, this thesis examines how protection comes to mean what it does in the specific R2P context, how this plays out in specific examples drawn from UN interventions in the DRC and South Sudan, and what implications this has for the effectiveness of UN interventions that seek to do good for people at risk of mass atrocities.

Thesis focus

In this section, I will outline the scope and limitations of my research. R2P has evolved since the original ICISS report in 2001 and has been further elaborated by diverse actors including governments, think tanks, civil society groups and academics, in addition to its evolution within the UN. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the impact of R2P within intervention discourses in the UN context. The UN itself is not a monolithic actor, and UN actors relevant to the development of R2P include the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Office of the Secretary-General, and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Other parts of the UN system including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Human Rights Council and its special procedures, and the Peacebuilding Commission have had roles in the interpretation and implementation of intervention policies including protection work and the normative core of R2P—the idea that states in the first instance and the international community as a whole have a responsibility to protect civilians at risk of atrocity crimes. Each of these agencies and the actors associated with it operate within their particular institutional contexts and according to particular, though similar, institutional cultures. Consequently, R2P itself is not a single or uniform discursive factor across these contexts. My research has focused on R2P narratives as they have developed within the specific context of the UN Security Council. This is not to discount the importance of other areas of the UN system or the contributions of civil society and government experts who have advocated for or against R2P, suggested changes, or played a role in implementation of R2P-related policies. It is instead a reflection of my desire to understand the workings of R2P in its most universally recognized forms—the 2001 report of the ICISS, which proposed the language of a

‘responsibility to protect’ and set out the legal and ethical rationales behind it; and the World Summit outcome document, adopted by the General Assembly in 2005, containing two paragraphs that define R2P as recognized collectively by the member states of the UN.

My decision to focus on how these versions of R2P have evolved within the work of the Security Council follows the recognition within the ICISS report that the UN ‘is unquestionably the principle institution for building, consolidating and using the authority of the international community’ and that, within the UN system, ‘there is no better or more appropriate body than the Security Council to deal with military intervention issues for human protection purposes’ (ICISS, 2001a, pp. 48–49). While military intervention is not the sole form of intervention advocated by the Commission or by later interpreters of its work—one of the central objectives of R2P is to shift interventions away from military approaches and the danger and controversy they entail—it remains an integral part of intervention practice, and within the UN system it is only the Security Council that can authorize use of military force. As a result, the Security Council is the primary venue in which questions about when intervention should happen, what forms it should take, and who should carry it out are debated and decided. Due to the inevitable limitations of a PhD thesis, the decision to focus on R2P as it plays out in the work of the Security Council was a necessary means of narrowing the scope of my primary research question.

As another means of narrowing the scope of my thesis, while also providing opportunities to examine the operation of R2P in specific contexts, I have chosen to focus on UN interventions in two countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. My thesis does not address these interventions as full case studies but rather draws on specific events or issues within them to better understand how the language of R2P contributes to shaping interventions and their outcomes. The conflicts in these two countries share a number of similarities that make them relevant to my research. Both have been subject to a range of UN interventions including the deployment of military and civilian peacekeepers, the provision of humanitarian aid, and efforts to support unstable governments and build capacity for effective governance. Both conflicts have involved significant levels of gender-based violence, and both have experienced what are often termed ‘failures to protect’—incidents in which the UN actors on the ground, most often peacekeepers, have

failed to take the necessary actions to prevent or to halt extreme forms of violence against civilians. There are also significant differences, however, between the two conflicts and the role of the UN in each country. The conflict in the DRC and UN involvement in it go back decades, pre-dating the adoption of R2P and making the mission in the DRC one of the older missions within UN peacekeeping. South Sudan, in contrast, has only been an independent state since 2011, and the UN mission there was established alongside the newly independent government. I have chosen to focus on these two contexts not for the sake of comparison or because I believe they are representative of the totality of UN intervention practices. They were chosen instead because of their relevance to key issues around the meanings of protection language that this thesis examines, and because of their relevance within the larger debate surrounding R2P, which was evident in the discussions I had with interview subjects as part of this research. Below, I will briefly outline some of the key features of each intervention and how it relates to debates around R2P.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The current conflict in the DRC is widely recognized as a regional conflict, with roots in the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the subsequent flight of Hutu genocidaires across the border into the DRC, which led in 1996 to an invasion of the DRC carried out by Rwanda and Uganda. The government of the DRC was supported by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe in a military effort to expel Rwandan and Ugandan forces from the country, and in July 1999 an accord known as the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement was signed by all of the government parties to the conflict. In November 1999, the UN deployed a peacekeeping mission—the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)—in support of the ceasefire agreement. Violence within the country has continued, however, and further international efforts to end the conflict came with a 2003 peace accord signed by the DRC and Uganda. Despite official agreements to end hostilities between government forces, the DRC remains an arena for regional conflict carried out by a variety of rebel groups.⁸ Among these, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), made up of Hutu militants from Rwanda, has played a major role in perpetrating large-scale violence against

⁸ For a comprehensive list, see <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2013/10/31/armed-groups-eastern-drc>.

civilians and engaged in fighting with the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and UN peacekeepers.

MONUC was established in November 1999 by Security Council Resolution 1279 (S/RES/1279), and in February 2000 was given one of the earliest peacekeeping protection mandates in Resolution 1291 (S/RES/1291). This resolution expanded the mission to 5,537 military personnel and authorized it under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to ‘protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence’ (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1291, para. 8). Over time the size of the mission has fluctuated, and in July 2010 it was reconfigured as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). In setting out this change, Resolution 1925 (S/RES/1925) also devoted significant attention to the imperative to protect civilians, emphasizing that ‘the protection of civilians must be given priority in decisions about the use of available capacity and resources’ and authorizing the mission ‘to use all necessary means, within the limits of its capacity and in the areas where its units are deployed, to carry out its protection mandate’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/RES/1925, para. 11).

As a result of this robust protection mandate, MONUSCO has been the focus of large amounts of international attention regarding its efforts, and in many cases its failures, to deliver on protection promises. Such attention is bolstered by the length and size of the mission, which at its height in 2010 included 22,016 uniformed personnel (military and police) and currently includes over 16,000 military and 1,300 police personnel, as well as more than 4,000 civilian peacekeepers.⁹ Combined with the strength of the mandate, this has led to expectations that the mission will act as a guarantor of civilian safety in the areas where it is deployed, yet the mission has consistently failed to meet these expectations. In this sense, it provides an interesting context in which to consider the impact, real or intended, of R2P, raising questions not only about how interventions are mobilized and deployed in the first instance, but how they are equipped to carry out the protection tasks assigned to them.

The mission in the DRC also provides unique insights into the state of protection efforts, as it has been viewed by the international community as an arena

⁹ See MONUC Facts and Figures, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/facts.shtml>; MONUSCO Facts and Figures, <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/facts-and-figures>.

for innovation in protection practices which have come to be recognized by the UN under the heading of ‘best practices’ that might be applied in other contexts as well (Boutellis, 2016, p. 737). Under the heading of ‘civilian protection’, the mission has provided controversial military support to operations carried out by the FARDC—an escalation of the military role of UN peacekeepers that will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Due to the prevalence of sexual violence as a systematic tactic in the fighting, the conflict in the DRC has also come to be understood internationally as one in which gendered violence is a defining feature, with Margot Wallström, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence, describing the country as the ‘rape capital of the world’ (BBC, 2010). For all of these reasons, it is a relevant case in debates surrounding UN intervention and R2P.

South Sudan

In contrast with MONUC/MONUSCO, the current mission in South Sudan has only existed since July 2011, years after the adoption of R2P by the General Assembly. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was established alongside the newly independent state of South Sudan and tasked with consolidating peace and helping the new government to build capacity for effective governance. Resolution 1996 (S/RES/1996) drew on R2P language in setting out the mission’s mandate, committing it to advising and assisting the South Sudanese government ‘in fulfilling its responsibility to protect civilians, in compliance with international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law’ (UN Security Council, 2011, S/RES/1996, para. 3.b.iv). As with MONUSCO, the mission is authorized ‘to use all necessary means, within the limits of its capacity and in the areas where its units are deployed, to carry out its protection mandate’ (UN Security Council, 2011, S/RES/1996, para. 4). Although it is authorized to act under Chapter VII, which allows for use of force, the initial mandate falls primarily within the second pillar of R2P identified by the Secretary-General: the responsibility of the international community to assist states in meeting their primary responsibility to protect. UNMISS was initially significantly smaller than the mission in the DRC, with initial authorization of 7,000 military and 900 police personnel (UN Security Council,

2011, S/RES/1996, para. 1). Currently, however, it is authorized for up to 17,000 military and 2,101 police personnel.¹⁰

The conditions in which the mission operates altered drastically in December 2013, following an outbreak of violence between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir, from the Dinka ethnic group, and those loyal to Vice President Riek Machar, from the Nuer ethnic group. This resulted in widespread fighting, including systematic targeting of civilians based on ethnicity, which led to thousands of internally displaced persons seeking shelter within the walls of UN compounds and bases. In what came to be known as the ‘open the gates’ decision, UNMISS leadership ordered that civilians fearing for their lives be allowed to enter UN bases—a decision which may have saved thousands of lives, but which proved to be more complicated than official narratives suggest and which also resulted in the establishment of unplanned refugee camps labeled ‘protection of civilians sites’. Initially expected to be temporary, these camps have persisted since 2013 and have presented the mission with a new set of challenges in meeting its protection mandate (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6). In the years following 2013, there have been a number of efforts to negotiate peace, resulting in the establishment of a unity government in April 2016. In July 2016, however, there was another outbreak of violence, resulting in more attacks on civilians including UN and other humanitarian personnel.

The role of UNMISS is, to a certain extent, viewed as an example of success by R2P advocates. The act of opening the gates is seen as constituting the type of ‘timely and decisive’ response envisioned in the R2P paragraphs adopted by the General Assembly (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, para. 139)—an example of a situation in which the need for protection was clear and those responsible took the necessary action. The mission has also been plagued by failures to respond, however, including during attacks on UN civilian personnel during the July 2016 violence (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6). As in the case of the DRC, the violence aimed at civilians includes sexual and gender-based violence, and the UN has so far proved largely ineffective at addressing such violence. All of this combines to present a case that is directly relevant to understanding the impact of

¹⁰ See UNMISS Facts and Figures, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/facts-and-figures>.

R2P on protection efforts in practice, as well as on how interventions created in the post-2005 period are conceptualized and carried out.

Research methods

In this section, I will provide details on my data sources, which included a range of UN texts and policy documents and supplementary qualitative interviews with experts and practitioners, as well as my approach to analysing this data. I will then go on to discuss some of the obstacles and limitations I encountered in conducting my research.

Documentary sources

My primary sources of data for this thesis were a range of UN Security Council texts addressing interventions. In order to understand how the concept of protection functions within R2P and how R2P's use of protection language draws on pre-existing protection agendas within the UN, my research draws on five categories of documents:

1. The texts that address R2P specifically, including the 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; the 2005 World Summit outcome document in which the General Assembly formally adopted the principle; the annual reports of the Secretary-General, beginning in 2009, elaborating and interpreting the text adopted by the General Assembly; and a number of Security Council resolutions that include the language of a 'responsibility to protect'.
2. Security Council resolutions under the agenda heading of 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', beginning in 1999.
3. Security Council resolutions under the agenda heading of 'Women, Peace and Security', beginning in 2000.
4. Documents related to the UN interventions in the DRC and South Sudan, including Security Council resolutions; verbatim transcripts of public meetings of the Security Council; reports of the Secretary-General; reports and testimony submitted to the Security Council by relevant experts, including special rapporteurs and panels of experts tasked with investigating aspects of the UN missions in these two countries; and the public elements of

reports submitted by independent investigators following specific incidents in which UN actors did not meet their ‘protection’ obligations.

5. Firsthand accounts by UN actors who witnessed or participated in events discussed in my thesis, including those published in books and in reports published by civil society organizations.

As stated above, my discussion of the cases of the DRC and South Sudan is not comprehensive. Due to time limitations and the volume of documents available, I focused my research on several specific issues that illustrate the complex workings of gender within R2P and protection narratives: the conceptual linkages of women with victimhood and vulnerability in discussions of systematic and widespread sexual violence, the one form of atrocity crime that is regularly recognized as being gendered within R2P; the tendency toward militarism in UN interventions and its linkages with particular forms of masculinity; the gendered aspects of language on vulnerability and its role in promoting and sustaining particular forms of UN authority; and the ongoing problem of ‘failures to protect’ in which UN actors do not respond effectively to large-scale violence against civilians. These themes were selected based on my reading of existing debates surrounding UN interventions and suggestions from the experts and practitioners I interviewed, based on their experiences in the field and their engagement with the concept of gender and its relevance to R2P.

Supplementary interviews

In addition to my analysis of UN texts and related documents, my research draws on open-ended qualitative interviews with experts and practitioners in the areas of R2P; gender and the WPS agenda; and research and fieldwork involving peacekeeping, protection of civilians and promotion of gender equality. In total, I interviewed three representatives of civil society organizations, one UN staff member currently deployed to a field mission, two former UN staff members with experience in peacekeeping missions and protection of civilians, and three experts conducting research on protection of civilians for a think tank. These interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity, allowing the interview subjects to speak candidly about their perceptions of controversial issues. In addition to these interviews, I spoke with one current UN staff member and one researcher who agreed to speak only for the purpose of providing background information, and who

are not cited in this thesis. Due to limitations of access and resources, the interviews do not provide a representative sample of individuals working in these areas, but rather provide supplementary data and elaboration of issues raised in my documentary sources. The interviews were particularly valuable in identifying gaps between the official narratives produced at the level of the Security Council and the Office of the Secretary-General and the perceptions of individuals working in the field. They were also useful in identifying the conceptual questions, controversies and events perceived as most salient by practitioners.

The interviews were loosely structured, beginning with a few general questions about the interviewee's understanding of protection work and gender equality and then branching into each interviewee's particular area of expertise and allowing for detailed follow-up questions. The interview sessions were between thirty minutes and ninety minutes in length, based on the participants' availability. One was conducted via Skype, while all of the others were conducted in person during two field visits to New York. Participants were selected based on their areas of expertise and recommendations from fellow experts in the fields of R2P and protection of civilians. With the exception of the two interviews in which the subjects requested not to be cited, all interviews were audio-recorded and relevant sections of the conversations transcribed.

Data coding and analysis

My approach to data analysis of documents for each of my substantive chapters involved two rounds of thematic coding. I conducted a first reading of the documents in order to identify the relevant sections and sort the information based on source (e.g. official UN documents, civil society documents, reports of independent experts) and general theme (e.g. background information, protection, gender, vulnerability, etc.). I then conducted a second reading of the highlighted sections grouped thematically, in order to identify underlying narratives, linkages or contradictions between different texts, and the explicit or implicit gendered content of the language around intervention policy and practice. This process was conducted independently for each substantive chapter, as each chapter deals with different, though interconnected, themes and issues. My analysis of interview transcripts was less structured, as I already had a clear sense of their content following the transcription process. I revisited each transcript as part of my preparation for writing

each chapter, in order to highlight the material relevant to the subjects of individual chapters.

Thesis limitations

The scope of my research was limited by several factors including language limitations, time and resources available, and access to potential sources. Although the UN operates in six official languages (Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, English, French and Russian), I was only able to analyse the English versions of official documents due to the limitations of my language skills. Consequently, my findings regarding UN uses of specific language and concepts are applicable only to the work of the organization as conducted in English. While the UN aims to maintain substantive consistency across translations of a particular document, the nuances of gendered terminology and potential interpretations may be different in non-English versions of the documents, with implications for the discursive impact of gender. English is, in practice, the primary language in which the UN operates, and thus the English versions of texts are likely to have the strongest influence in shaping UN approaches to intervention. The question of how discourses of gender and intervention vary across the six official languages is important, however, and would likely be a fruitful area of investigation for researchers with the necessary language skills.

My thesis was likewise shaped by the time limitations involved in any research. The publicly available UN documentation relevant to questions of protection and gender is extensive, and the process of reading and analysing every available document could fill years. It was therefore necessary to limit the range of documents I considered as part of my data set. As discussed above, this was achieved in part by narrowing my focus to the work that happens in and around the Security Council, though if time were not an issue my research might have included the work of the General Assembly and other bodies such as the Human Rights Council and Peacebuilding Commission. My thesis focus is also limited to the time period between 1999 and 2018, and this decision was based on the history of UN uses of protection language. Although protection language goes back much further, 1999 was the year that the first Security Council resolution on PoC (Resolution 1265, S/RES/1265) was adopted, establishing protection as a recurring agenda item for the Council. Finally, in the area of intervention practice, I narrowed the scope of

relevant documents by choosing to focus on the interventions in the DRC and South Sudan, and, within these interventions, the several themes outlined above.

Limited financial resources were also a significant factor in decisions regarding fieldwork. My initial plan involved field visits to relevant UN missions, but this proved not to be feasible due to limited funds as well as questions of access. Instead I focused my fieldwork on New York, where I have a number of existing professional contacts at the UN, and where logistical concerns including language and security were more easily navigated. This decision also made travel and accommodation easier to arrange and more affordable. It had implications, however, for the extent to which I was able access specific information about the field missions relevant to this thesis. I was unable to interview current mission personnel in either the DRC or South Sudan, although I did speak with former staff members of the mission in the DRC who spoke about their experiences in the field. Access to current UN staff members proved difficult as a result of organization policies that restrict unauthorized staff from discussing their work with outside sources, making current staff members nervous about speaking even on the condition of anonymity. I made efforts to conduct interviews remotely with relevant mission staff, but as part of this process I was asked to report back to the mission public relations office about who I spoke with, and this made it unworkable to conduct interviews based on anonymity.

Finally, and most significantly, I was unable to speak with local civil society groups in the DRC and South Sudan to incorporate local perspectives into my analysis of the UN interventions in these places. This was due to distance and language barriers, and my lack of existing contacts from which to draw potential sources. As a result, this thesis is limited to analysing the ways in which UN actors and New York-based advocates for R2P and gender equality understand and apply protection narratives and their perceptions of how UN interventions impact the people they aim to protect. Through my research interviews I spoke with people who have valuable expertise and who are deeply concerned, in their own work, with expanding the capacity of the UN to do real good for people facing armed conflict, violence and humanitarian crises around the world. Their perspectives on question of gender and R2P are in most cases informed by experience working in partnership with local civil society groups and human rights advocates. They remain international actors, however, in the power disparity inherent in the ‘international’

and ‘local’ categorization and are unable to speak from direct knowledge about the variety of ways in which local actors experience UN interventions. This is a gap that might be addressed by further research undertaken with a wider range of connections in places where UN interventions have occurred and with greater resources to support travel and extended fieldwork. As discussed in the conclusion of this thesis, research with the aim of incorporating a more fully representative range of voices would contribute invaluable knowledge to both academic and policy debates around UN interventions and R2P.

Conclusion

Academic debates around R2P have confronted a number of conceptual issues raised by the language of a ‘responsibility to protect’. Chief among these is the issue of state sovereignty—whether R2P can overcome the political barriers to intervention presented by an enduring commitment to the norm of sovereignty, and whether this norm can be reformulated in terms of responsibility to make it compatible with an intervention principle. Less analytic attention has been paid to the concept of protection as it operates within R2P, and I contend that this oversight limits the capacity to recognize how gender works in R2P intervention narratives, subtextually aiding the case for intervention and enhancing the legitimacy of interventions claiming to provide protection.

This chapter has discussed several bodies of literature relevant to gender and R2P, including literature on how R2P seeks to reframe issues of sovereignty and security, how protection language is gendered in ways that sustain and reproduce gendered power imbalances, and how feminists have approached questions of gender and R2P. I have located this thesis within the growing literature on gender and R2P and outlined the scope of my research and the methods I have used in carrying it out. This thesis aims to address a gap within the existing literature on R2P, critiquing R2P’s reliance on gendered protection language and arguing that a gender analysis is required to understand how protection language shapes and limits potential interventions within R2P. In taking this position, I have argued that the concept of protection has not so far received adequate attention in the literature on R2P. The following chapter will look at uses of protection language in multiple UN contexts in order to gain a fuller picture of how it is used within the R2P context.

3. Protection Language at the United Nations

Introduction

In order to understand how protection language functions within the R2P framework, it is necessary to consider the larger context of protection language and how it is used in various aspects of the work of the UN. An examination of this background raises questions that are central to the meaning and the operation of R2P within the larger organization, as well as to what R2P itself hopes to achieve: how protection within R2P relates to the multiple existing versions of protection, what types of activities protection involves, which UN actors are responsible for carrying them out, and how to balance the need for protection against the limits of what is achievable. Because R2P posits that a change in language will lead to a change in practice (ICISS, 2001a)—mobilizing the international community to act when necessary, and refocusing interventions undertaken by states on the needs of the people they are meant to protect—the ability to answer these questions with clarity is vital to the success of the R2P project. An examination of R2P’s place within the larger UN context, however, provides little clarity and suggests that protection language itself may be a significant source of confusion.

This chapter will look at how protection language is understood within several key UN contexts, as well as how it operates within R2P. In the first section, I will consider some of the difficulties in arriving at a clear and consistent definition of protection; how the concept is used in the contexts of human rights, humanitarian affairs and peacekeeping; and the implications of protection for perceptions of UN legitimacy. While protection is central to a number of areas of work within the UN system, I will focus on the areas of human rights, humanitarian affairs and peacekeeping as the ones most relevant to the types of crises that R2P is intended to address. Within each of these areas there are questions of how protection is defined, what activities it entails, and which actors are mobilized to provide protection. In the following section, I will consider how protection language operates within R2P, looking at how the doctrine has developed over time through questions of when protection is required, what ‘protection’ is taken to mean, and what might be different or new about protection as conceptualized by R2P. In the final section, I will discuss the commitment to change that R2P represents and will argue that protection language, through its gendered meanings and associations, works against

efforts to create substantive change in the work of the UN. I contend that protection language operates on two levels within R2P: a practical level and a symbolic level. While the adoption of protection language leads to numerous practical difficulties which the R2P framework does little to address, it carries a symbolic weight that obscures the need for clarity and creates a sense of legitimacy around interventions in ways that are profoundly gendered—a problem that will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. At the same time, it ties R2P to established UN practices and undermines the call within R2P for substantial change.

A definitional problem

At the centre of questions surrounding protection is a problem of definition. Delivering the Cyril Foster Lecture at the University of Oxford in 2011, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon outlined his vision for the role of the UN in relation to human protection. While not explicitly addressing them, the text of this lecture reflects the central tensions at work in the task of defining and implementing a protection agenda. Ban begins with a relatively simple definition: he views human protection as one part of a broader human security agenda. While human security encompasses a range of traditional and non-traditional security concerns, human protection ‘addresses more immediate threats to the survival of individuals and groups’ (Ban, 2011). Protection, in this view, deals exclusively with urgent life-or-death issues, excluding broader concerns like political and economic rights or the long-term stability of countries or communities.

Having presented this definition, however, Ban quickly gives in to the temptation to expand it. He goes on to outline a vision based in ‘a responsibility to ensure protection of human beings from want, from war, and from repression’—a vision in which ‘protection is more than standing guard over vulnerable communities’, and a vision in which the state is central to protection efforts and which thus must be concerned with promoting functional state institutions over the long term (Ban, 2011). Across the range of UN activities receiving the label of protection, in the attempts of individual or institutional actors to define protection as it applies to their own work, and within the R2P debate, this definitional difficulty is a recurring problem. Adopting a broad understanding of what protection entails would commit the UN to countering the effects of deeply entrenched structural inequalities, underdevelopment, and histories of violence—an approach that makes

failure appear likely, if not inevitable. In recent decades, the UN has grown sensitive to the dangers of a gap between expectations created by lofty language and the hard reality of limited resources and capacities. Yet a narrow approach to protection also carries a serious risk of failure, leading to interventions that respond only to the emergency at hand, often arriving too late to meet the most urgent needs, and that neglect the structural causes of violence that underlie each crisis.

Ban's lecture also reflects the extent to which protection has become central to a range of UN activities, as well as to the identity of the organization. He notes that protection 'is entrenched in our operational practice', discussing its connections to the work of the Security Council, peacekeeping, natural disaster response, refugee assistance and human rights (Ban, 2011). And he concludes by stating, 'The UN recognizes that human protection stands at the centre of both its purposes and principles' (Ban, 2011). If it cannot meet protection commitments, the organization risks abdicating its normative power, growing increasingly irrelevant in a world still dominated by state interests. It is this problem that R2P was designed to address. In reproducing protection language, however, it also reproduces the definitional confusion that plagues the UN's rhetorical commitments. To understand where R2P fits within the larger UN project, it is useful to look at how different parts of the UN attempt to define and enact protection. This section will consider how different actors have attempted to define protection, the importance of the concept to perceptions of UN legitimacy, and what might be gained or lost through the use of gendered protection language.

UN actors are generally aware of 'conceptual confusion' surrounding protection efforts (Holt et al., 2009), and a 2009 study commissioned jointly by DPKO and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) identified three primary ways of understanding protection within the work of the UN: (1) a broad definition, sometimes referred to as 'rights-based protection', most often associated with humanitarian and refugee assistance; (2) a narrow definition, emphasizing physical protection from violence, best represented by the PoC agenda; and (3) an approach which views protection as an outcome of UN engagement rather than an activity undertaken in the present. In this last view, protection can best be achieved through building sustainable peace and supporting states in fulfilling their protective function over the long term (Holt et al., 2009, p. 170). Each of these versions of protection has strengths and weaknesses, and each provides different

answers to the questions of what activities should be considered part of protection efforts and who should be responsible for taking action.

A rights-based approach

In defining protection, humanitarian actors often refer back to a definition drafted by the 1999 Workshop of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a body made up of multiple UN entities with roles in humanitarian response. This definition states: ‘The concept of protection encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. [human rights] law, [international humanitarian law], refugee law)’ (IASC, 1999, p. 4). Referred to by some as the ‘rights-based’ approach, this definition is firmly grounded in international law, situating protection efforts within a well-established set of international norms. It is also, notably, a definition that emphasizes active engagement. Protection is defined in terms of activity, both on the part of humanitarian protectors and, to a certain extent, on the part of those in need of protection. This definition puts the establishment of individual rights at its centre, with rights viewed as something to be exercised by the individuals that hold them.

This engagement-focused definition is reflected in the types of activities envisioned by humanitarian actors as falling within the boundaries of protection. In this view, humanitarian protectors must

understand and seek to prevent, mitigate or end actual and potential risks [...] producing the harm that affected persons experience during a conflict or disaster. This requires a continuous analysis of risks people face, of threats, vulnerabilities and capacities of affected persons, and of the commitment and capacities of duty bearers to address risk factors (IASC, 2016, pp. 2–3).

All humanitarian actors have protection responsibilities, as their work will impact protection efforts, intentionally or not (Oxfam, 2016). Protection is not merely reactive or limited to emergency and crisis response efforts, although such efforts are clearly included within this definition. The objective of preventing and mitigating both current and potential risks suggests the necessity of addressing structural factors behind vulnerabilities to poverty, natural disasters, and violence.

The rights-based approach to protection has flexibility working in its favour. The breadth of this definition ensures that no security concern can legitimately be

dismissed as irrelevant or not provided for within a protection mandate. Claiming a basis in human rights law, this version of protection arguably encompasses health, education, social and political equality, and religious and intellectual freedom—a much wider set of issues than are often considered within UN protection efforts. It also leaves space for agency to be exercised by those receiving protection, and states that international humanitarian actors must be careful to support and not undermine protective actions taken by people, families or communities in self-defence (Oxfam, 2016). The IASC notes that protection ‘demands meaningful engagement with affected persons during all phases of a response in a manner that recognizes and is sensitive to age, gender and diversity’ (IASC, 2016, p. 3).

To this end, the IASC has produced ‘The gender handbook for humanitarian action’, with a chapter devoted to explaining ‘how to integrate gender equality into protection programming’ (IASC, 2017, p. 298). The document is intended to provide practical guidance to humanitarian actors, building on lessons learned and highlighting ‘the main challenges faced in ensuring that gender is adequately integrated into humanitarian planning and programming’ (IASC, 2017, p. 3). Yet there is an unavoidable tension between these two benchmarks—what is practical and what is adequate to meeting existing needs—that emerges in the first pages of the section devoted to protection. Successful integration of gender within a protection agenda, the IASC states, will achieve the following:

- ‘ensure the rights of women, girls, men and boys to a life free from violence and abuse’;
 - ‘provide access to documentation and registration’;
 - ‘enhance access to justice and accountability’;
 - ‘enhance security from protection threats to women, girls, men, boys and LGBTI individuals’;
 - and ‘counter harmful cultural practices and social stigma’
- (IASC, 2017, p. 299).

Within these broad criteria there are many practical measures that might be implemented through provision of legal assistance, policing, support for government services such as providing identification documents, and messaging campaigns to counter misogyny and homophobia. It is telling, however, that the first point on the list seems to require the prevention of all violence against all people at all times. In this context, ‘protection’ becomes so broad as to be almost indistinguishable from other areas of UN work. Any activity undertaken by humanitarians might easily be

considered part of protection efforts, making it difficult once again to determine exactly what is meant by ‘protection’ as opposed to other humanitarian actions.

Applying these criteria also makes effective protection virtually unachievable. It is unlikely that any humanitarian action, working with limited resources and a limited timeframe, will be able to prevent all violence or significantly alter structural conditions that lead to violence. And in spite of wider commitments, humanitarian actions are often organized in response to specific emergencies, when people have urgent needs that must be met in order to preserve life or provide the most basic forms of security. Gender equality advocates resist the tendency of UN actors to sideline gender considerations during emergencies, arguing that failure to integrate gender into response efforts will have negative consequences down the line, and risks causing harm to the people meant to benefit from such efforts. Inclusion of a gender perspective leads to a number of practical and potentially life-saving actions, such as setting up food distribution points and sanitation facilities in areas that are safe and accessible for women and girls, as well as men and boys (IASC, 2017, p. 126). At the same time, ensuring full respect for human rights at all times is likely beyond the capacity of any humanitarian mission. A rights-based approach to protection, while acknowledging that the ultimate goal of humanitarian action is the full implementation of human rights and international humanitarian law, may fail to adequately contend with on-the-ground realities, where the focus must be on urgently meeting basic needs (Stevens, 2016, p. 265). Despite attempts by humanitarian actors such as the ICRC to produce a comprehensive and consensus-based definition of protection, some argue that the rights-based approach has proved too broad to be useful as a common definition that can be applied in practice (Bonwick, 2006, p. 271; Foley, 2015, p. 719).

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and the role of peacekeepers

Alongside broad human-rights-based definitions of protection, UN actors often focus more narrowly on protection in the context of armed conflict. This approach has its basis in activity within the Security Council, beginning in 1999 with a meeting and presidential statement on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, in which the Council noted ‘its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’ and affirmed ‘the need for the international community to assist and protect civilian populations affected by armed conflict’ (UN

Security Council, 1999, S/PRST/1999/6). This was followed later in the year by a report of the Secretary-General on PoC (UN Secretary-General, 1999, S/1999/957) and Security Council Resolution 1265 (S/RES/1265), which emphasized that civilians are increasingly targeted by armed groups during conflict and expressed the Council's 'willingness to respond to situations of armed conflict where civilians are being targeted or humanitarian assistance to civilians is being deliberately obstructed' (UN Security Council, 1999, S/RES/1265, para. 10). PoC was established as a recurring item on the Security Council's agenda and has been elaborated through a series of reports and resolutions in the Council, alongside related agenda items of Children and Armed Conflict and WPS. This has marked an important shift in the work of the UN. Where once the Security Council would have taken a hands-off approach to crises occurring within the borders of a single state, upholding a clear distinction between the domestic and the international, it is now assumed that the Council is mandated to act in situations of extreme violence against civilians, regardless of where they occur (Bonwick, 2006, p. 272).

In concrete terms, the advent of the PoC agenda has had a direct impact on UN peacekeeping, altering how mission mandates are constructed and what responsibilities peacekeepers are expected to undertake in relation to civilian populations. Nearly all UN peacekeeping missions are now mandated to protect civilians, reflecting growing recognition that peacekeeping missions 'are generally the only international entity responsible for playing a direct role in the provision of protection from physical violence' and that, as a result, peacekeepers 'have a unique responsibility among protection actors' (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 7). This reality highlights the need for a clear definition of protection within the PoC context, leading to a common understanding of the range and limits of peacekeepers' responsibilities in this area. Again, however, an unambiguous definition proves elusive, and the boundaries between different versions of protection are blurred, with the result that a 'lack of an operational concept for peacekeeping missions, and the confusion between other concepts of protection, undermines the ability of missions to define their role and develop coherent strategies at the most fundamental level' (Holt et al., 2009, p. 11). Even within the relatively limited context of UN deployment of military peacekeeping missions, the difficulties in defining protection re-emerge.

The simplest approach to understanding the specific role of peacekeepers in relation to PoC is to focus on protection from physical violence. The expert report commissioned by DPKO and OCHA notes that peacekeepers ‘cannot “protect everyone from everything”—and they need to manage expectations’ (Holt et al., 2009, p. 12). Peacekeepers may provide security in the short term, ‘but they are not designed to substitute for a stronger political intervention’ that might be undertaken by the Security Council or individual states (Holt et al., 2009, p. 12). The resources and capabilities of individual peacekeeping operations are necessarily limited, and expectations must be managed in a way that does not commit peacekeepers to achieving protection objectives that are unrealistic or impossible given their limitations. At the same time, while acknowledging that protection from physical violence is often the most easily visible form of protection and therefore becomes the criteria for determining mission ‘success’, DPKO and the Department of Field Support (DFS) assert that PoC in the peacekeeping context ‘goes beyond the domain of physical protection from imminent threat’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d, p. 4).

What, then, are peacekeepers’ responsibilities in relation to PoC? To answer this question, DPKO and DFS have set out ‘an operational concept [...] organized around a three tiered approach to protecting civilians’: tier 1 involves ‘protection through political process’; tier 2, ‘providing protection from physical violence’; and tier 3, ‘establishing a protective environment’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 1). The first tier deals with the mission’s role in supporting political negotiations or the implementation of peace agreements in the states where they are deployed, while the second tier encompasses ‘the mission’s efforts to prevent, deter, and if necessary, respond to situations in which civilians are under the threat of physical violence’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d, p. 8). These appear to be well-established and relatively straightforward parts of any UN intervention for protection purposes, although underlying difficulties with the task of providing physical protection will be addressed in later chapters. They are also objectives in relation to which military peacekeepers have a clear and unique role to play, since unlike humanitarian actors they have the capacity and the mandate to use force when required in defence of civilians. The third tier is less distinctly tied to peacekeeping and again reflects the tendency to push beyond narrow or limited definitions of protection, shifting focus from what is likely to be achievable to what is felt to be necessary. While the DPKO/DFS guidance provides a short list of activities that fall within tier 3—

emphasizing legal protection, facilitation of humanitarian work, and support for the host government (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 9)—the definition here drifts back toward the rights-based framework in which protectors are responsible for promoting human rights in ways that go beyond addressing the immediate effects of armed conflict.

Protection and legitimacy

The definition of protection, then, can be expanded or contracted depending on who is producing the definition, what they perceive as the existing need for protection, and what they hope to achieve under its label. This leads back to the third understanding of protection identified in the 2009 report commissioned by DPKO and OCHA, the view that ‘civilian security is ensured through the building of a durable peace and a functioning state over the long term, rather than through specific action along the way to achieving those objectives’ (Holt et al., 2009, p. 170). Seen through this lens, protection might arguably encompass every activity undertaken by the UN in the field, since all are intended to contribute to long-term stability and peace. Yet if ‘protection’ includes all UN activities—a view supported by the difficulty that various UN entities have encountered in attempting to identify clearly delimited definitions of what protection means within their specific areas of work—how useful a category is it? Why is protection language so central across the UN system, and what is gained from using it?

At the practical level, ‘protection’ may function as a useful buzzword, facilitating access to funding and lending a sense of importance to projects labelled as protection. Its lack of clear definition may be part of its appeal—it can mean as much or as little as is required. Within the work of the UN it is everyone’s responsibility, but this means the sense of responsibility is spread thin, so that no single person or entity is solely accountable for protection successes or failures. The gap between what protection appears to promise and what it might actually deliver arises as a problem even in connection with the most straightforward and clearly defined versions of protection. As suggested by an expert on PoC and former civilian peacekeeper interviewed for this thesis, regardless of the breadth of definitions that exist on paper, in practice protection is ‘a lot about physical protection, when it comes down to it’, but even in this limited sphere the UN regularly falls short of its commitments, and ‘in most, if not all, instances of physical protection the UN fails’ (Interview, former civilian peacekeeper, 14 Feb. 2017). What this suggests is that

protection proves too large a commitment to be fulfilled, and the reiteration of protection mandates undermines UN efforts to limit expectations on the part of the people it aims to protect and outside observers.

In spite of ongoing practical difficulties, however, protection language has been established as important within UN discourses on the maintenance of international peace and security. Protection language is an almost automatic means of framing a range of activities, and PoC mandates are now standard for peacekeeping missions, whether or not there is a clear need for protection activities in each case where a mission is deployed. In Mali, for example, PoC was less an area of concern than force protection for the peacekeepers themselves, yet the mission was structured to include protection advisors and teams focussed on protecting civilians (Interview, former civilian peacekeeper, 14 Feb. 2017). This prioritization of PoC suggests that it was viewed as automatically relevant to the mission in Mali, regardless of conditions on the ground. Protection is viewed as not merely one within a range of UN commitments and policy objectives, but as central to the meaning and legitimacy of the organization itself. This is especially true in relation to UN peacekeeping, where there is growing recognition that local populations and the international community will not see missions as legitimate if they are unable to establish the conditions for sustainable security for civilians in the aftermath of conflict (Holt et al., 2009, p. 22). This has implications for success at the level of individual missions, but is also ‘central to the legitimacy and credibility of the entire UN system’ (Holt et al., 2009, p. 4). In this view, the range of challenges that fall under the heading of ‘protection’ must be taken on if the UN is to remain relevant and credible in its commitment to the long-term objective of ending war.

Yet why are these challenges framed specifically as ‘protection’ challenges? The question of how protection language operates at the symbolic level, the forms of meaning it evokes and the identities it constructs—as well as how such identities are dependent on gender for the psychological resonance they achieve—is central to this thesis and will be discussed at length in later chapters. It is important to note here, however, that protection language has gendered symbolic weight, which lends it value in spite of the practical challenges it entails, while also contributing to these practical challenges by undermining attempts to limit expectations or to commit to narrowly defined and specific protection objectives. Drawing on familiar narratives in which the categories of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ take on gender identities and

reflect gendered power imbalances in their relation to each other (Young, 2003), protection language obscures the need for critical attention to such relationships. It comes with a built-in sense of familiarity and the assumption that protection is good for the people (imagined primarily as women and children) receiving it. At the symbolic level, protection promises safety and implies that those taking on the role of protectors are fully capable of ensuring the safety of the protected. Protection language is useful in the effort to legitimize UN actions because of its gender content, which associates capability, benevolence and expertise with the masculine role of ‘protector’. Protection is also a moral imperative, an assertion that the strong owe to the weak their best efforts to ensure the world is safe and just—a narrative around which the UN has built its purpose and identity since its inception. The UN Charter, which pledges the ratifying states ‘to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security’ and to use force only ‘in the common interest’, identifies the purpose of the organization as nothing less than ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ (United Nations, 1945, Preamble).

Protection language speaks to the largeness of this vision, implicitly promising that rescue is always possible. Yet the versions of protection outlined above simultaneously seek to limit its scope in practice, reflecting a tension between the symbolic value of the concept and the practical limitations in applying it, as well as some ambivalence about what the UN is, or should be, capable of achieving. Following the most ambitious interpretations, such as the commitment to create ‘a protective environment’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 1), protection language seems to suggest an ability on the part of UN actors to transform aspects of social life—such as gender-based, racial or class inequality—that contribute to an insecure environment for the people it promises to protect. The narrower approach to protection, viewing it as a simple commitment to prevent physical harm to the people receiving it, seems a more realistic goal in practical terms. Yet the UN has often fallen short in meeting even this basic commitment, suggesting that incidents of physical violence might not so easily be detached from wider social inequalities and vulnerabilities. By framing interventions in terms of protection, R2P inherits this definitional difficulty, a concern that will be discussed in the following section.

Protection within R2P

Protection language is essential to the meaning of R2P. Gareth Evans, a co-chair of the ICISS and one of the chief advocates for R2P since 2001, has reiterated his view that the shift toward protection language was a central achievement of the Commission. Of the contributions made by the ICISS, he argues:

The first, and perhaps ultimately the most useful politically, was inventing a new way of talking about “humanitarian intervention.” We sought to turn the whole weary—and increasingly ugly—debate about “the right to intervene” on its head and recharacterize it not as an argument about the “right” of states to do anything but rather about their “responsibility”—in this case, to protect people at grave risk. The relevant perspective, we argued, was not that of prospective interveners but of those needing support. If any “right” was involved, it was of the victims of mass atrocity crimes to be protected. The searchlight was swung back where it should always be: on the need to protect communities from mass killing and ethnic cleansing, women from systematic rape, and children from starvation. (Evans, 2008b, pp. 39–40)

In this context, the adoption of protection language by the framers of R2P can be seen as a strategic move—an attempt to apply old, familiar language in a new way. Although still very new in 2001, the PoC agenda in the Security Council had been validated by states through the adoption multiple resolutions, and new peacekeeping missions were being sent to the field with mandates to protect civilians. Use of protection language grounded R2P in existing UN rhetoric and practice and lent itself well to the effort on the part of R2P’s framers to walk a difficult political line, proposing a ‘new approach’ to intervention without making it sound so new as to alarm member states and undermine the change before it could begin. The ICISS report argues that the legal basis for R2P already existed prior to 2001, referencing the UN Charter, the Genocide Convention, the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as sources in which justification for coercive forms of intervention, even including the use of military force, can be found (ICISS, 2001a, p. 16).

At the same time, uncritical reliance on protection language has burdened R2P with the same conceptual confusion found in other areas of work within the UN system. Questions remain about what, exactly, is meant by ‘protection’, and these questions take on a new urgency when paired with the language of responsibility—if states and the international community made up of states are morally and perhaps

even legally responsible for providing protection, it is vital to understand precisely what it means. Building on the discussion in the last section of various ways of understanding protection, this section will explore different iterations of the attempt to draw boundaries around the ‘responsibility to protect’. Focusing specifically on how the ICISS, the UN General Assembly and the UN Secretary-General have approached this question, the analysis draws on different dimensions of the UN’s earlier commitment to humanitarian work and the PoC agenda. I will then consider the areas where R2P breaks with previous understandings of protection, specifically in relation to questions of state sovereignty and UN commitments to the principles of neutrality and host government consent.

Determining when protection is required

The ICISS was commissioned by the government of Canada—a country with an international reputation for constructive involvement in multilateral projects including peacekeeping, the promotion of human rights and the establishment of international criminal justice (Martin and Young, 2009, p. 351). The Commission was careful to ground its approach to addressing the problem of humanitarian intervention within the wider security agenda promoted by Canada and other interested UN member states. In addition to identifying R2P as a proposal building on the already established norms of international humanitarian law and the human rights conventions, the ICISS report links its analysis to discourses of human security and just war theory. This early version of R2P imports from these sources a set of assumptions that all people have the same basic rights and needs, that governments are responsible for the welfare of the people living within their borders, and that human needs cannot legitimately be neglected in favour of state interests.

The ICISS report likewise draws heavily on the work of Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, two scholars associated with the Brookings Institution whose work centres on UN policies to address the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and who first proposed the idea of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’, a phrase used in the ICISS formulation of R2P. Beginning in the early 1990s, Cohen and Deng argued that sovereignty was not an absolute right of states but something that must be earned through provision of protection to the people living within states (Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 28; Bode, 2014, p. 290). This allowed for international attention to focus on the needs of IDPs, now a part of the international human rights agenda

and not merely a domestic concern to be addressed by states (Bode, 2014, p. 291). This approach not only inspired R2P's emphasis on responsibility (Bellamy, 2013, p. 7), but also provided an early example of the principles of human security applied to UN policy: in the view put forward by Cohen and Deng the individual rather than the state is the central concern of politics (Kurtz and Rotmann, 2016, p. 12). Although the main ICISS report does not explicitly acknowledge its debt to the work of Cohen and Deng, the supplementary volume to the report notes that the 'sovereignty as responsibility' concept was 'most explicitly formulated by Francis M. Deng, the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons' (ICISS, 2001b, p. 11).

This early association with refugee policy, as well as the emphasis on human rights and human security within the ICISS report, lead to a broad interpretation of situations in which international intervention for protection purposes might be required. It is widely recognized that host states and international organizations not only owe refugees and IDPs a refuge from threats of physical violence, but are also responsible for meeting basic needs such as food, shelter and medical care (Stevens, 2016, p. 276). The language of the ICISS report likewise goes beyond questions of physical violence or armed conflict, with the Commission arguing that reframing security issues as issues of 'protection' works to broaden the scope of situations that are considered relevant: 'The emphasis in the security debate shifts, with this focus, from territorial security, and security through armaments, to security through human development with access to food and employment, and to environmental security' (ICISS, 2001a, p. 15). The Commission thus argues that it is the responsibility of states and, when they fail, the international community to protect people from 'avoidable catastrophe – from mass murder and rape, from starvation' (ICISS, 2001a, p. VIII). The category of 'avoidable catastrophe' is potentially much broader than the types of organized mass atrocities to which later versions of R2P have been limited.

When adopting R2P language in 2005, the UN General Assembly sharply narrowed the doctrine's scope as laid out in the ICISS report, asserting instead that it applies only in situations involving genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, para. 138)—what came to be known as the four atrocity crimes. Within this language there is little room to interpret R2P as applying in situations of natural disaster, famine or

other humanitarian crises not involving systematic physical violence. This narrower interpretation of protection responsibilities reflects a political reality that agreement among states could be achieved only if there were clear limitations regarding when R2P applies (Breakey and Francis, 2011, p. 41). The Secretary-General warned in his initial report on R2P that any attempts to broaden the scope would risk undermining the 2005 consensus (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 10(b)), which has proved fragile in the years since R2P language was officially adopted. The General Assembly paragraphs additionally stress that individual states bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations, and that the international community may take coercive action to protect only in cases when the relevant state has manifestly failed to live up to its responsibility (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, paras. 138 and 139).

Yet the limitations imposed by the General Assembly paragraphs have at times proved inadequate to people's sense of what is required, as happened in 2008 in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, when the government blocked outside humanitarian aid to the 1.5 million people affected (Tun, 2008). In his capacity as French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner directly linked the situation to the promises of R2P, stating: 'We are seeing at the UN if we can't implement the "responsibility to protect", given that food, boats and relief teams are there, and obtain a U.N. resolution which authorizes the delivery [of aid] and imposes this on the Burmese government' (quoted in Asia-Pacific Centre, 2008, p. 4). This suggestion was rejected by officials such as John Holmes, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Assistance at the time, and the British and Chinese governments, which both argued that R2P is not applicable to natural disasters (Asia-Pacific Centre, 2008, pp. 2–3). It was taken up by media commentators, however, as well as by some R2P experts, such as Roberta Cohen, who argued that while the impact of the cyclone had begun as a natural disaster, through government neglect and incapacity it became a human-made disaster that could qualify as a crime against humanity (Cohen, 2008).

The debate surrounding when to apply R2P encompasses moral and political questions, and the example of Myanmar suggests that at times the two perspectives may not be reconcilable. In commenting on Myanmar, Cohen noted the political struggle 'to define the concept in a way that promotes robust collective action but at the same time packages it in a non-threatening way so that it will be internationally

acceptable and encourage R2P's application'—a task that she suggested 'could be mission impossible' (Cohen, 2008). The structural political realities of how the Security Council operates, the ever-present problem of the veto power held by the five permanent members, and the deep-seated suspicion of any form of international humanitarian intervention (felt especially by China and Russia) all impose limitations—and a need for caution—on attempts to apply R2P to current crises and establish R2P as a norm within the work of the Council. In this context, the political barriers appear to dictate that the imperative to protect must be narrowly defined if it is to be recognized at all.

At the same time, the moral catastrophe of the Myanmar situation presents a challenge to existing attempts to draw lines around what constitutes an atrocity crime, and results in a feeling among many that *something* must be done, whether the government in question approves of it or not. The question of what that something might be—what forms of aid, backed up by what level of force—is one that the General Assembly paragraphs on R2P address only briefly, noting that R2P can be applied using non-coercive means under Chapters VI and VIII of the UN Charter or, 'should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations' from the four identified atrocity crimes, using force under Chapter VII of the Charter (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, para. 139). The task of elaborating what protection means in practice under R2P, what forms it should take and how it might differ from other forms of protection work undertaken by the UN, was not taken up in the negotiations among member states, but instead was left to the UN Secretary-General and Secretariat to elaborate, primarily through reports of the Secretary-General.

Interpreting what 'protection' means

Following the adoption of R2P by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General undertook the work of interpreting in detail the language of the 2005 World Summit paragraphs, addressing questions of implementation through a series of annual reports. The first report, written in 2009, sets out a framework for understanding and debating R2P as a formally adopted UN policy, and is supplemented by subsequent reports that deal with specific aspects of R2P such as the importance of prevention, early warning, and the role of regional organizations in implementing the doctrine. As with earlier versions of R2P, and protection language

more generally, the reports grapple with questions of how broadly or narrowly to interpret the concept of ‘protection’. The approach embraced by Ban Ki-moon, particularly through the initial 2009 report, has been one of emphasizing the limited scope of R2P as a justification for forceful intervention—perhaps a necessary political concession to governments nervous about the implications that such interventions might have for the principle of state sovereignty—while simultaneously seeking to broaden beyond military force the range of international responses that might be recognized as intervention for protection purposes.

The Secretary-General outlines a vision of R2P in which ‘the scope should be kept narrow’ but ‘the response ought to be deep, employing the wide array of prevention and protection instruments available to Member States, the United Nations system, regional and subregional organizations and their civil society partners’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 10(c)). He fleshes out the R2P language adopted by the General Assembly, arguing that R2P is made up of three pillars of equal importance: pillar one, the protection responsibilities of states; pillar two, the international responsibility to provide assistance and capacity-building; and pillar three, the international responsibility of ‘timely and decisive response’ when the other two pillars fail (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 11). In this way he incorporates the original vision of the ICISS, which called for international preventive action and commitment to rebuilding in addition to the traditional focus on military intervention at moments of crisis. Of the three pillars, only the third may involve coercive action, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and the international assistance delivered under pillar two is intended to prevent the need to invoke pillar three. This vision places emphasis on the UN’s role in helping states to meet their obligations, not replacing states as the primary protectors (UN Secretary-General, 2012, A/66/874, para. 14).

The emphasis on prevention and assistance under pillar two in many ways appears to replicate earlier UN commitments and approaches to protection, raising questions regarding what might truly be ‘new’ about R2P. The answer can be found in pillar three, which—despite attempts to frame it as only a minor part of the doctrine, applicable only in the most extreme cases and as a last resort—represents a clear break from the versions of protection discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. Across humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, the UN has maintained a commitment to principles of neutrality and consent on the part of the host

government, a concession to the principle of state sovereignty but also an implicit recognition that to operate without host government consent would likely prove too difficult and dangerous in most cases for UN personnel to be effective in their roles. Agencies such as OCHA, in the years since the adoption of R2P, have used language that recognizes the protective role R2P sets out for the international community—an ability to step in and provide protection in cases where the relevant government does not—while maintaining the caveat of consent: ‘When national authorities or other parties to conflict are unable or unwilling to meet these obligations, humanitarian organizations may—with the parties’ consent—provide assistance to the affected population’ (UN OCHA, 2012). Likewise, UN peacekeepers, when exercising their protective function under PoC, ‘must reflect and uphold the principles of UN peacekeeping, namely, consent of the host government and the main parties to the conflict, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 2). If consent is at any point withdrawn, ‘a peacekeeping environment no longer pertains, and action at the strategic level, including by the Security Council, must be considered’ (UN DPKO/DFS, n.d., p. 3).

This distinction is an important one, and while R2P in theory is clear that interventions can be undertaken, in certain limited circumstances, without consent of the relevant government or parties to conflict, there is little evidence that it has proved convincing that the UN has the capacity to do so. Developments in Darfur in 2007 and 2008 provide an example of UN actors proving hesitant to implement the coercive third pillar of R2P in a situation that many saw as an unfolding genocide. Instead of intervening without the consent of the Sudanese government, the Security Council spent nearly a year working to establish a joint UN and African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur that would not be rejected by the government of Sudan (Sebastián and Gorur, 2018, p. 15). In an interview, a think tank researcher with expertise in the conflict in Darfur stated, ‘I’ve never had the sense that when people in the UN use the word protection they are using it in the same sense as R2P advocates use the word protection’ (Interview, think tank researcher, 14 Feb. 2017). The key difference here is found in the underlying assumption about the extent to which protection is possible. Despite the efforts of R2P proponents to argue that the international community is not only capable of intervening, but is morally obligated to intervene, in cases where the government is itself a perpetrator of atrocity crimes and thus unlikely to agree to a role for international protectors, the UN in practice

remains unwilling to attempt interventions under such circumstances, reflecting recognition that the practical obstacles to success are too large to be ignored.

This refusal by the UN to undertake non-consensual interventions also represents ongoing concern about the controversial nature of such interventions. Despite the desire of the ICISS to overcome the controversies of the 1990s surrounding humanitarian intervention, the idea that state sovereignty can be set aside in cases when a government fails to meet its basic responsibilities to the populations within its borders remains politically toxic in the view of many key actors. One expert on PoC argued to me emphatically that PoC should be viewed as entirely separate from R2P because of the danger that it might be infected by the controversy surrounding R2P:

People didn't have any unanimous feelings about R2P. It was very controversial because you had all these things about intervening against states, sovereignty and everything. But Protection of Civilians was this great concept that was not talking about that. It was only about, in the beginning, we are already in place, and we're just saying that when we are facing threats to civilians we will intervene. (Interview, PoC expert, 14 Feb. 2017).

This concern is also reflected in the cautious tone of the reports of the Secretary-General, which seem designed to reassure anxious member states and UN actors alike that R2P does not represent a truly significant change in existing UN practice and interpretations of the legal frameworks that underpin these actions. This stance is, in one sense, supported by the centrality of protection language, which demonstrates continuity with accepted UN discourses of the recent past, potentially framing R2P as only one minor step in the evolution of UN practice in humanitarian and security interventions. At the same time, it is undermined by the large promise implicit in protection language, and the difficulty in drawing clear boundaries around the meaning of protection and its limitations. The final section of this chapter will consider how protection language functions in relation to this apparent ambivalence toward change and how the gendered aspects of protection narratives work to undermine substantive change.

R2P, 'protection' and the difficulty of change

There is a sense among people working under the heading of 'protection', both within and around the UN, that the doctrine of R2P has failed: 'R2P is considered a failure, basically. I mean, it was a total abuse of power in Libya. And

then it hasn't been used since then, has it?' (Interview, PoC expert, 14 Feb. 2017). Although R2P language has continued to be used in resolutions adopted by the Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as in Security Council presidential statements and statements made by a range of UN officials,¹¹ there is a sense that little has changed in the protection work of the UN, while R2P itself has become too strongly associated with controversies such as the 2011 military intervention in Libya¹² to be viable as a policy agenda. Looking back to the 'protection failures' of the 1990s, there is evidence to suggest that feelings surrounding humanitarian or protective interventions shift significantly over time, depending on how recent events have played out. Consequently, it may be too soon to conclude that R2P has failed or that it is no longer relevant to UN intervention debates, and, regardless of the status of R2P, the problem of mass atrocity crimes that it seeks to address will continue to be a focus of those debates. Thus R2P is likely to remain an important reference point in the evolution of how the UN (and the international community more broadly) understands its roles and responsibilities in preventing or responding to widespread atrocities. This section will discuss the difficulty R2P has faced in creating the change it seems to promise and how the gender content of protection language works against such change.

The ambivalence about change that runs throughout R2P texts is an essential part of understanding what the doctrine attempts to achieve, how protection language operates within it, and why it may not have taken hold in the way that R2P proponents hoped it would. This internal contradiction can be seen originally in the ICISS report, which is the boldest version of R2P in claiming to be a break from the past, while also seeking to ground its arguments in existing and widely accepted

¹¹ See the website of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect for a compilation of R2P references in UN documents and statements: <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/about-R2P/the-un-and-R2P/un-resolutions-and-statements>.

¹² Security Council Resolution 1973, adopted on 17 March 2011 and using R2P language, authorized UN member states 'to take all necessary measures [...] to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack' from Libyan government forces, 'while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of the Libyan territory' (UN Security Council, 2011, S/RES/1973, para. 4). It also established a no-fly zone and authorized member states 'to take all necessary measures to enforce compliance' (UN Security Council, 2011, S/RES/1973, para. 8). Under the auspices of this resolution, NATO took military action against the government of Muammar Gaddafi, ultimately deposing Gaddafi. While permanent Security Council members China and Russia had initially abstained from exercising their veto in relation to Resolution 1973, they felt in the aftermath that the NATO mission had exceeded the bounds of what could be justified as civilian protection by effecting regime change in the country (Brockmeier et al., 2016).

legal and normative frameworks. It can perhaps most clearly be seen, however, in the 2009 report of the Secretary-General on 'Implementing the responsibility to protect'. This report, like earlier R2P texts, identifies the need for change by referencing the failures of the recent past: 'the brutal legacy of the twentieth century speaks bitterly and graphically of the profound failure of individual States to live up to their most basic and compelling responsibilities, as well as the collective inadequacies of international institutions' (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 5). Mass atrocities in places such as Rwanda and Srebrenica serve as evidence that the UN and its member states 'remain underprepared to meet their most fundamental prevention and protection responsibilities' (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 6). This presents a picture of states and institutions in clear need of significant change, and the report asserts that the UN 'can, and must, do better' (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 6).

Yet this report and the ones that follow are careful to avoid any appearance that they are proposing something radically new. Citing the 2005 paragraphs on R2P adopted by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General argues that they are 'firmly anchored in well-established principles of international law' and suggests that R2P merely reinforces the existing commitments of states under the UN Charter, rather than creating new responsibilities (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 3).

He goes on:

The United Nations and its range of agencies, funds and programmes have in place critical resources, activities and field operations that are already making important contributions to the elimination of these man-made scourges. They could do that much more effectively if goals relating to the responsibility to protect, including the protection of refugees and the internally displaced, were mainstreamed among their priorities, whether in the areas of human rights, humanitarian affairs, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, political affairs or development. Each of these areas of United Nations activity have much to bring to the common effort. The emphasis of the present report is therefore on forging a common strategy rather than on proposing costly new programmes or radically new approaches. (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 68)

Through this language the Secretary-General implies that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the way the UN responds to atrocity crimes or widespread, systematic violence. He suggests that any existing shortcomings can be addressed through better coordination of resources and the work of the various UN

agencies involved, and through mainstreaming the commitments of R2P across the work of these agencies—two common UN responses to calls for change. The implication is that all of the elements for effective protection are already present in the UN's work, if only they can be merged into a coherent and consistent strategy. The UN system can continue doing what it has done all along, only possibly with more efficiency and under new labels. This conservative view of R2P is repeated in subsequent reports, which argue that sovereignty as responsibility is 'not a new or radical idea' (UN Secretary-General, 2011, A/65/877, para. 10), that few of the policy proposals put forward are 'completely new' and that '[r]adical change thus may not be required' (UN Secretary-General, 2013, A/67/929, para. 74).

This language may be motivated, at least in part, by the necessity of keeping member states on board. At the same time, the hesitancy to take positions that might alienate states or cause alarm about the possibility of change betrays a core aspect of R2P: the commitment to making necessary change happen, not because it is in the interests of states but because it is needed by people. It also directly contradicts the Secretary-General's language within the same report about the UN system's lack of preparedness to address atrocity crimes. In this context, and considering the scale of the violence that R2P is intended to address, the retreat from the desire within R2P for fundamental change appears to be a failure of courage. The conservative approach of emphasizing better coordination of existing resources and commitment to 'protection mainstreaming' in some ways mirrors the organization's 'gender mainstreaming' strategies for addressing gender inequality—an approach that feminist critics have identified as suffering from 'a lack of bite' (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 16). 'Mainstreaming' posits that existing institutional structures can remain in their current form while incorporating new language and policy objectives, neglecting to consider the ways in which these structures themselves might form a part of the problem that mainstreaming efforts seek to address.

I contend that because of its gendered content, protection language serves as a bridge between the potentially disruptive claim within R2P that states have a responsibility to act to halt atrocity crimes, even when they might not see it as being in their interest to do so, and the impulse to oppose significant change. The gendered power relationship between protectors and the protected, implicit in protection language, works to reassure states, as well as UN structures 'permeated [...] with highly masculinized attitudes' (Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 182), that R2P will not

threaten their positions of masculine authority. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, protection language perpetuates an assumption that ‘protectors’ are capable and have the best interests of those they are protecting at heart. By placing states and the international community in the role of protector, R2P leaves these actors entirely in control of decision-making processes around intervention.

Meanwhile, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, protection language associates the ‘protected’ with feminized qualities of vulnerability and helplessness, undermining the perceived authority and relevance of potential non-state critics of intervention policy.

In this way, the gender content of protection language undermines the push for change within R2P. While attempting to refocus interventions on the needs of people, by relying on protection narratives R2P reinforces the traditional authority of states and, by extension, the international community composed of states, at the expense of any potential redistribution of power in the direction of those more directly impacted by interventions. This is not to suggest that the framers of R2P were disingenuous in seeking to question past intervention practices and thus improve the capacity of the international community to meet the security needs of people. If carried further, this line of questioning around failed interventions of the past might lead to troubling conclusions about the expertise and legitimacy of the UN as an intervener. The language of protection, however, works against such questioning, repeating the assumption that protectors are necessarily capable and leaving the assumed authority and expertise of the international community, as represented by the UN, firmly in place.

This discursive resistance to change is further strengthened by the symbolic role of women within protection narratives. As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, women are positioned within UN intervention narratives as victims of violence, and particularly of sexual violence, perpetually in need of outside assistance if they are to live in security. Sexualized violence serves as the basis for a clear logic of protection: the moral repugnance of the crimes, and the discursive positioning of women as the sole and perpetual targets, seems to perfectly fit the category established by the ICISS of ‘conscience-shocking situations crying out for action’ (ICISS, 2001a, pp. XIII, 55, 74). Yet action rarely happens in response to these crimes, and when it does is rarely as effective as such language demands. The

imperative for change is at the heart of R2P. This thesis argues that ‘protection’, as the answer to the question of what must be done, works against that imperative.

Conclusion

Protection language is central to a number of areas of work within the UN, and this chapter has discussed the recurring difficulty of defining what is meant by protection in these contexts. The difficulty is primarily a question of scope—what protection efforts might realistically be able to achieve and what they seem to promise—and through its reliance on protection language R2P encounters a similar problem. Adoption of a broad definition of protection runs the risk of over-promising, while a narrow definition may result in interventions that neglect vital security needs that go beyond the need for immediate physical protection. At the same time that protection proves so difficult to define, however, it also seems to sidestep the need for a clear, settled definition. Calling up gendered associations with the categories of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’, such language provides a sense of familiarity: people feel that they know what it means, even without an agreed definition.

Despite the practical problems associated with it, then, protection carries symbolic weight that proves useful in lending interventions a sense of legitimacy. In the context of R2P, this chapter has argued, the gender content of protection language also works to reassure states that the proposed change to how interventions are conducted is not as radical as it might initially seem, undermining the transformative change that R2P hopes to achieve. Protection narratives assume capability on the part of masculine ‘protectors’ and helplessness on the part of feminine ‘protected’, leaving existing gendered forms of authority within the international system unchallenged. Within such narratives, women fill a crucial symbolic role. The next chapter will consider the symbolic positioning of women within discourses of protection, looking at the development of R2P alongside the Security Council’s WPS agenda, attempts to shift discussions of women’s roles from ‘protection’ to ‘participation’, and why these attempts so often seem to fall short. It will also examine in depth the focus within R2P on sexual violence as the one explicitly ‘gendered’ atrocity crime and the persistence of narratives of women as victims—as well as how this positioning of women is important to sustaining protection narratives as justification for intervention.

4. Women, Sexual Violence and Political Exclusion

Introduction

The 2001 report of the ICISS outlining R2P contains no explicit references to gender, either as an analytic concept that might be applied in seeking to understand atrocity crimes or as a factor impacting the security needs and concerns of individuals. Women as a gendered category receive only slightly more attention, with two references to women as victims of sexual violence. Under the heading of ethnic cleansing, the report identifies ‘the systematic rape for political purposes of women of a particular group (either as a form of terrorism, or as a means of changing the ethnic composition of that group)’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 33). And, in defining what is meant by a ‘responsibility to protect’, the Commission asserts, ‘Our preferred terminology refocuses the international searchlight back where it should always be: on the duty to protect communities from mass killing, women from systematic rape and children from starvation’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 17). This is repeated by Gareth Evans in his book-length defence of R2P (Evans, 2008b, p. 40) and appears to be at the core of how the ICISS understood its project. Women are central to the meaning and legitimacy of R2P, existing alongside communities and children as ever-present potential victims of mass atrocities. It seems that to the ICISS this was so obvious as to hardly require mentioning. It is a story that everyone knows: when societies break down into armed conflict or systematic violence, ‘women and children’ are the victims.

Feminist interventions in the work of the UN have often been premised on an understanding that leaving that narrative unspoken means leaving it uncontested, and a significant part of advocacy for gender equality within the sphere of UN influence, leading up to and following the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000, S/RES/1325), has focused on the effort to make women and the circumstances in which they live visible. It is an area in which substantial progress has been made in recent decades, with the inclusion of mandates for women’s participation in peacebuilding work; the collection of gender-disaggregated data that provides policymakers with a clearer picture of structural gender inequalities; new focus within the Security Council on the crime of conflict-related sexual violence; and the creation of UN Women, a new entity within the UN system that aims to give gender equality a higher profile and more substantial resources and authority within the

organization. Much of this work occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, at the same time that the concept of R2P was being developed and taking hold, and in this context it is strange that the founding documents of R2P—both the ICISS report and the 2005 paragraphs adopted by the General Assembly as part of the World Summit outcome document—appear almost entirely gender blind. At the same time, the linguistic building blocks of ‘responsibility’ and ‘protection’ are shared with the WPS agenda in a way that demonstrates the two developments exist within the same broader discursive framework—that of the Security Council and its mandate to uphold international peace and security. Why, then, in attempting to locate itself within the work of the Security Council, does R2P not engage with the WPS agenda or the insights it generates?

This chapter will suggest that despite attempts by feminist advocates to establish protection and participation as two pillars of UN efforts toward women’s empowerment, highlighting both victimhood and agency as important parts of women’s experiences in relation to armed conflict and atrocity crimes, the protection narrative dominates UN actors’ understanding of women’s roles and women’s needs. This can be seen through the ways in which R2P reflects and overlaps with aspects of the WPS agenda—especially through the emphasis both place on sexual violence as the most urgent security threat faced by women—as well as through attention to which parts of the WPS language are left out of R2P discussions. Recognizing that gender functions as a logic from which texts draw meaning and their ability to make sense in the minds of readers (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, p. 53), I contend that calls for protection are more easily reconciled with prevalent understandings of gender in UN discourse than are calls for participation. This makes it possible for R2P to ignore questions of participation and women’s agency altogether, while maintaining the symbolic importance of women within intervention narratives as a group perpetually in need of protection. The focus within R2P on sexual violence as the one atrocity crime in which gender plays an explicitly recognized role, and the assumption that women are virtually always the targets of sexual violence, both reflects and perpetuates an understanding of gender that is profoundly limiting for women and their ability to act as agents in their own security.

The chapter will begin with a discussion of how R2P’s understanding of women aligns with previous UN language on women as a uniquely vulnerable group that is fundamentally different from the masculine norm; how WPS resolutions

attempt to counteract this marginalization of women, advocating a commitment to participation for women alongside protection; and how sexual violence has become the central focus of the Security Council's work in the area of WPS. From there, the chapter will examine how the tensions between protection and women's participation play out within UN intervention narratives, looking specifically at language surrounding sexual violence and contrasting UN reports of sexual violence with the Security Council testimony of Margot Wallström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict. I will suggest that Wallström's testimony, focused on bringing the voices of women from the DRC to the Council debates, demonstrates the potential for substantive participation of local women to transform how the UN understands the issue of sexual violence. This testimony also reflects a number of significant limitations on women's speech within the UN, however, and the next section will discuss these limitations and their implications for interventions to combat the atrocity crime of systematic sexual violence. I will argue that women's positioning within protection narratives undermines their agency and calls for meaningful participation by limiting the ways in which they are allowed to speak and the topics they are considered capable of addressing. The still largely unchallenged association of sexual violence crimes with female victims erases the experiences of male victims while upholding a sense that women are the automatic, obvious targets of gendered violence. This, in turn, weakens the ability of interventions within R2P to effectively address the security needs of the people they are intended to benefit, limiting the types of information available to interveners and privileging international over local priorities.

Women as 'different' in UN language

When the original R2P concept was drafted in 2001, it entered—and made no attempt to challenge—an established UN discourse surrounding gender equality and the roles of women in armed conflict and peacebuilding. By centring 'protection' as its justification for a range of interventions, up to and including military intervention, R2P bought into a narrative in which women play an important symbolic role as helpless, infantilized victims, incapable of self-defence and therefore continually in need of masculine protection. As Enloe notes, 'women and children' dominate the media narratives that underpin military intervention, which 'would be harder to justify if there were no feminized victim' (Enloe, 1993, p. 166). This logic extends to

UN language on interventions as well. In order to understand how such language functions within UN texts, this section will consider how the UN approaches gender as primarily a women's issue and how the question of women's agency is framed, and arguably limited, in relation to calls for protection and participation.

At the centre of the UN understanding of gender is a narrative that women are different. This phrasing is important. The language of Security Council resolutions and Secretary-General's reports, and the few mentions of women in the core texts of R2P, do not identify men and women as different from each other, or even necessarily women as different from men. Rather women are different from the norm—the usual, ungendered way of doing things. In this view a gender-sensitive approach to policymaking does not require a complete rethinking of current practices, but instead can be achieved by simply adding women and their special needs as one more variable for consideration. Women are defined by special vulnerability, a gaping lack (Shepherd, 2008a, p. 87). Lacking rights, resources, or the capacity for self-sufficiency, women appear as one more problem to be added to the list of the international community's responsibilities in underdeveloped or conflict-prone places.

This approach to gender may result, in part, from lack of expertise within the UN, but it also proves convenient as a means of being seen to take action on gender without having to make fundamental changes in how the UN operates.

Understanding gender as a women's problem allows for a problem-solving approach that fits gender into existing UN structures—the process of 'gender mainstreaming', which is intended to bring women and their concerns from the outside in, but leaves the core work of the organization unchallenged (Väyrynen, 2004, p. 138).

Mainstreaming appears to offer a clear, achievable set of objectives for UN policymakers (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 3). In practice, however, even some of the most basic mainstreaming targets, such as increasing the number of women in senior positions, have proved unexpectedly difficult to achieve. Feminists have long critiqued this 'add women' conceptualization of gender as inadequate to the task of confronting and ending gender inequality (Cohn et al., 2004, p. 137), an imperative embodied in UN texts covering the range of UN activities in human rights, development and security (UN General Assembly, 1979; UN General Assembly, 2000; UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325).

Within this language of difference, women are continually marked by inherent and special vulnerability, with many UN texts repeating the phrase ‘women, children and other vulnerable groups’.¹³ Other language notes that ‘women and children are particularly vulnerable to serious human rights violations’ (UN Secretary-General, 2002, S/2002/1300, para. 31), have ‘special protection needs’ (UN Secretary-General, 2005, S/2005/740, para. 38) and require ‘special arrangements’ (UN Security Council, 2001, S/RES/1379, para. 4) to meet their needs. Feminists have argued that this language essentializes women as mothers, indelibly linking their wellbeing to that of children and erasing the differences in individual women’s lives (Carpenter, 2005; Puechguirbal, 2010). Likewise, it reproduces the idea that there is something fundamentally different about women—their needs are unusual, and require an additional effort to meet them, beyond what would normally be expected. The ‘other vulnerable groups’ include refugees and internally displaced persons, yet those identities are at least potentially temporary, and childhood is a state eventually outgrown. Only women are permanently vulnerable, in a way that the others are not (Kinsella, 2006). In a sense, through their consistent association with children, women are permanently infantilized.

That such constructs of women’s vulnerability are problematic is clear. Yet efforts by gender equality advocates to shift perceptions of women and their capabilities have produced, at best, mixed results. The question of what language might accurately and comprehensively describe women’s experiences in relation to violence, while avoiding the perception that there is something particular about women that places them permanently in the role of victims, remains a difficult one. As the foundation for the WPS agenda, Security Council Resolution 1325 largely replicates the earlier language of difference. It notes the ‘special needs of women and girls’ and urges ‘special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence’ as part of UN peacekeeping operations (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325). Although the adoption of the resolution was ground-breaking, such language is not, as can be seen from decades-old texts calling for the ‘special protection of women and children’ during armed conflict and humanitarian crises (UN General Assembly, 1974). Similar language recurs in UN documents in part

¹³ See, for example, UN Security Council Resolutions 1265 (1999, S/RES/1265), 1296 (2000, S/RES/1296), 1379 (2001, S/RES/1379) and 1894 (2009, S/RES/1894); and Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (2005, S/2005/740).

because of the nature of texts negotiated between governments. It is easiest to take as a starting point language that has already been agreed to in the past, and feminist critics have noted that accepted UN language often becomes so dominant as to make alternative language virtually unintelligible in the UN context (Whitworth, 2004, p. 120). Others have suggested that reducing gender sensitivity to an imperative to protect women is a comfortable position for member states (Skjelsbaek, 2013, p. 86). The reproduction of language reducing gender to a women's problem leaves the concept of gender diminished, and divorced from 'any radical or political potential' (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 16).

At the heart of the problem faced by gender equality advocates attempting to alter the bureaucratic and governmental structures of the UN is the hard reality that, to a certain extent, women are different—not by nature, but rather because of the institutional history of treating men's experiences and concerns as the universal human norm, and because of the gendered nature of armed conflict and the widespread exclusion of women from political processes both inside and outside of international organizations (Puechguirbal, 2010). As a remedy for this situation, the effort to simply make women visible in international security texts is an important first step. It is not sufficient, however, and by framing gender in terms that will be acceptable to governments, feminists simultaneously gain and lose ground in the struggle to free both women and men from the constraints of traditional gender identities and the danger of gendered forms of violence.

Participation and women's agency

The WPS agenda aims to solve this dilemma, in part, by emphasizing women's agency alongside their vulnerability to gender-based violence. Resolution 1325 pioneered this approach with language stressing 'the importance of [women's] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution', as well as calling for increased participation of women in peace processes and higher numbers of women in decision-making roles (UN Security Council, 2000, S/RES/1325). This reflects the view that 'agent' and 'victim' are not opposing identities (Interview, WPS advocate, 15 Feb. 2017) and that women occupy both positions in relation to conflict (Cook, 2009, p. 128).

The emphasis on agency and participation alongside protection has pitfalls as well, however, and risks ‘replac[ing] one essentialised vision of women with another’ (Lee-Koo, 2013, p. 42). Increased participation of women is a worthwhile goal, but language calling for participation leads to new questions: participation for which women, and on what terms? Within UN language the category of ‘women’ tends to be internally universalized (Lee-Koo, 2013, p. 43). While ethnic or religious identity is often central to acts of violence during conflict—including sexual violence, which is generally viewed primarily as a crime committed against women—UN language on women’s special needs and vulnerabilities decontextualizes the experiences of specific women, assuming that all women experience all conflicts in similar ways. This has the effect of privileging gender as a marker of identity—erasing women’s other identities based in class, sexuality, nationality, religion or race—and ignores power disparities between groups of women (Lee-Koo, 2013, p. 44). As a result, it is assumed that any woman can be taken as representative of all women (Lee-Koo, 2013, p. 44), simplifying the task of achieving ‘women’s participation’ while also significantly narrowing the range of women’s security concerns that must be addressed.

Although some progress has been made in recent years, UN narratives still mostly assume that women are victims of conflict and not active participants who might serve as combatants or have political loyalties to one side of the conflict. Here again the tendency arises to view ‘women’ as a monolithic group, making it unnecessary to specify which women should participate, since any women can represent all women. Yet especially in situations of armed conflict—the specific context which Resolution 1325 addresses—it is not safe to assume that one group of women is interchangeable with another, as if women had no political stake in the conflict and no potential affiliations with one side or another. Likewise, it cannot be assumed that all participation is equal. Women may be present at the table for peace talks without having any real influence on the outcome (Shepherd, 2011, p. 509). Getting women in the door is important but is not an end in itself.

What emerges from the UN language surrounding women’s participation is a view of women as reliably apolitical advocates for peace. Women are relegated to the role of civilians, assumed to be universally in favour of peace and opposed to violence, and presented as having a ‘natural’ talent for peace-making in connection with their role as mothers (Puechguirbal, 2010). Often women’s participation is

envisioned as happening at the grassroots and civil society level, rather than including women in official or governmental roles (Hall and Shepherd, 2013, p. 70). Women's speech is constructed as uncritical and non-partisan (Gibbings, 2011, p. 534), suggesting little potential that it will create change, while women's presence alone is paradoxically assumed to be capable of effectively addressing gender inequality (Valenius, 2007, p. 513). This view comes closer to portraying women as resources for peacebuilding that the international community can draw upon than as agents with their own perspectives and agendas (Gibbings, 2011, p. 529).

This framing of women's agency, in which women's participation is valued primarily for the contributions it might make to international peace and security, presents a version of womanhood that remains strangely passive, consigning women again to a supporting rather than a central role. There is a risk that women's participation gets reduced to a benefit for the UN and its governmental partners—a useful form of assistance in achieving their goal of protecting civilian populations, envisioned as being made up primarily of women and children. Women's speech in international forums may be hemmed in by global expectations about what their agenda should be (Lee-Koo, 2013), and women are expected to join the international community as neutral brokers of peace (Gibbings, 2011). Their participation is seen as supporting rather than challenging established practices.

In this way women's agency is 'idealized and undervalued' (Willett, 2010, p. 143). Here the positioning of women in the participation narrative begins to mirror women's position as the protected. Protection is an international agenda in which women play a vital symbolic role while their individual security needs very often go unacknowledged and unmet. And despite the intentions of its feminist advocates, women's participation has likewise become, for governments, a largely symbolic agenda—one in which the presence of any woman seems to check the box, without attention to which women are represented or how seriously their contributions are taken. Their protected status requires women to maintain their 'political innocence and virginity' (Sjoberg, 2006, p. 896), and 'participation' poses no threat to women's apolitical status as long as political differences are erased—both differences among women and differences between the specific women asked to participate and the peacebuilding agenda of the international community. While getting some women in the door—of peace negotiations, UN conference rooms, or the Executive Office of the Secretary-General—is undoubtedly an achievement, a more serious and

sustained analysis of power dynamics within these spaces is necessary for the achievement of gender equality.

The persistent difficulty of inequality can be seen in the highest ranks of the UN Secretariat, where the organization has for years recognized in rhetoric the need to promote more women to decision-making positions, while in practice consistently failing to meet its commitments. There are no obvious reasons why it should be difficult to approach gender parity in senior decision-making roles within the UN—no shortage of qualified women candidates or women interested in doing the work—yet gender parity remains a distant goal. Kirsten Haack has analysed data on UN appointments of women at senior levels and found that while there have been periods of progress, such as at the start of Ban Ki-moon's first term as Secretary-General, 'Glass ceilings may settle again as the status of women in the first year of Ban's second term shows' (Haack, 2014, p. 45). The timing of increases in appointments of women suggest recognition of the symbolic value of women in leadership positions, rather than a firm commitment to substantive change (Haack, 2014, p. 45). As so often happens with 'protection', the symbolic role of women takes precedence over concrete changes that might benefit specific women.

Across UN activities, women's participation appears to be viewed as a concession made by leadership and not an integral part of the organization's work. Likewise, governments may view commitments regarding women's participation as voluntary (Interview, WPS advocate, 15 Feb. 2017). In spite of the progress made through the WPS agenda, language referencing participation can easily be omitted without any significant reworking of protection narratives, as can be seen through its absence in the language of R2P. Despite the aim of R2P to make the needs of people central to any intervention, the ICISS report and the General Assembly paragraphs alike omit any mention of participation of local civilians, women or men, in UN interventions. This leaves the distinction between 'protectors' and the 'vulnerable' firmly in place and consigns women and other feminized local civilians to their traditionally passive symbolic role in the narrative.

The ease with which participation commitments are abandoned signals that they are not a core part of existing intervention narratives. The participation of women as discussed by the international community is something to be added on to existing practices, whether through the inclusion of women's NGOs in peace negotiations or through appointments of women to senior positions within the UN.

These actions are perceived as optional, and the work of the organization will go ahead with or without them. Protection, in contrast, is perceived as a central promise on which the UN has staked its legitimacy. And though the promise of protection is not made to women, it is made about them. Women's vulnerability—to disaster, to conflict, to sexual violence—is identified as the reason protection is necessary, yet protection is not entirely about solving these problems. It is also about establishing the goodness and the strength of the protectors, a priority which at times conflicts with meeting women's actual security needs. This conflict of interest has been evident in multiple areas of protection work, but perhaps most starkly in UN responses to sexual violence committed by UN peacekeepers, which have often seemed directed more toward protecting the reputations of UN missions and troop-contributing countries than protecting the victims (Abdenur, 2017).

What emerges from the language on protection and vulnerability is a picture of women's lives circumscribed by the violence inflicted upon them.

Overwhelmingly, gender appears in intervention texts only in relation to violence, and especially in connection with sexual violence. The following subsection will consider how the focus on sexual violence operates within intervention narratives, framing local women as inevitable victims, limiting their ability to participate in intervention debates, and upholding gendered dichotomies that preclude the ability of local people to shape the protection priorities of interventions or pose a challenge to international authority.

Women, victimhood and sexual violence

Women's lives, seen through the lens of intervention narratives, are defined by violence, and especially by sexual violence. A reader unfamiliar with the term 'woman' could easily conclude from these texts that to be raped is an essential aspect of womanhood. And although violence is a daily reality faced by many women, both during conflict and during times of relative peace, this emphasis on violence as the single women's issue in relation to security is not inevitable or automatic.¹⁴ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), for example, serves as a foundational text for women's

¹⁴ Even during wars, scholars have argued, 'everyday' life goes on (Parashar, 2013, p. 618), and women can experience agency and 'a shared sense of purpose' alongside insecurity (Penttinen, 2013, p. 83).

human rights without ever mentioning violence. Later General Recommendations produced by the Convention's monitoring committee have clarified that the comprehensive definition of discrimination against women in Article 1 of the Convention includes violence against women within its scope and have asked states parties to report on violence against women,¹⁵ and such violence is undoubtedly a critical threat to women's human rights. The original text, however, chooses to emphasize 'the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field' (UN General Assembly, 1979, Article 1).

This stands in stark contrast to the narrow depictions of women within Security Council texts on protection of civilians, and even within the WPS resolutions, which have aimed to establish that women are agents as well as victims. That the WPS agenda, since the adoption of Resolution 1325, has used further resolutions to emphasize the need for a comprehensive and effective response to conflict-related sexual violence appears on one level to be a sound strategic choice. There is no disputing that sexual violence during war is a pervasive crime that forms a major security concern for women and consequently shapes how they live their lives. It is likewise an issue that has proved to have traction outside of the WPS resolutions, and Niamh Reilly identifies the adoption of Resolution 1674 (2006, S/RES/1674) on PoC—the first resolution after 1325 to address the issue of sexual violence—as a pivotal moment in determining how the WPS agenda would take shape (Reilly, 2018, p. 642). She notes that Resolution 1820 (2008, S/RES/1820) on conflict-related sexual violence cites both 1325 and 1674, positioning itself within both the WPS and PoC agendas (Reilly, 2018, p. 642). Subsequent WPS resolutions¹⁶ firmly establish sexual violence as the highest Security Council priority in relation to women's security and, through their focus on ending impunity and enhancing monitoring mechanisms, potentially 'could contribute to Security Council authorization of the use of force, ostensibly to protect civilians from such violence' (Reilly, 2018, p. 643).

¹⁵ See CEDAW General Recommendations 12, 19 and 35, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/recommendations.aspx>.

¹⁶ UN Security Council Resolutions 1888 (2009, S/RES/1888), 1960 (2011, S/RES/1960), and 2106 (2013, S/RES/2106).

While representing a strategic choice, the focus on sexual violence is also a significant narrowing of the WPS agenda and one which some have suggested makes the subject ‘safe’ by drastically limiting the scope of the changes it calls for (Davies and True, 2017, p. 78), as well as by emphasizing an issue of physical violence above more controversial ‘cultural’ issues related to gender inequality (Hultman and Johansson, 2017, p. 133). While the task of stopping conflict-related sexual violence faces a number of practical and conceptual difficulties, it is still a simpler agenda than the larger feminist concerns with addressing structural gender inequalities and examining the gendered roots of militarism and armed conflict. By focusing on one egregious form of gendered violence, the Security Council can be seen to be acting decisively while also avoiding less tangible and more challenging forms of violence perpetuated by gender inequality.

R2P has similarly emphasized sexual violence as the primary atrocity crime relevant to women, or to gender questions more broadly. This reflects, in part, the simple reality that sexual violence, unlike other pervasive forms of gender-based violence, has been officially established as a crime against humanity (Rome Statute, 1998), and thus falls within the scope of R2P’s four atrocity crimes. It also doubtless reflects the history of successful feminist activism aimed at making visible ‘rape as a weapon of war’ as part of the international peace and security agenda. I contend, however, that the focus on sexual violence, and the narrow conceptualizations of both gender and women that established narratives of wartime sexual violence embody, are not merely imposed on R2P by what came before, but also represent a convenient approach to sidestepping gender questions for a doctrine promoting intervention for protection purposes. Such narratives make a strong emotional appeal, while highlighting a truly egregious and widespread crime that, in the language of the ICISS report, cries out for action. At the same time, these narratives grossly over-simplify their subject, presenting only partial pictures of the complex topics of sexual violence and women’s security—a means of ‘adding gender’ without upsetting established practices or power structures. The assumption of women’s inherent vulnerability to sexual violence underpins these texts and appears central to them. Yet women themselves are largely relegated to silence within UN language and debate on the topic, and the voices and the vulnerabilities left out of the official texts may be just as relevant as the ones that are included to understanding how interventions intended to address sexual violence take shape. The

following section will consider one attempt to bring women's voices to Security Council debates on sexual violence in the DRC, contrasting how Congolese women frame the issue with the way it is discussed in more typical UN language.

Sexual violence narratives in Security Council meetings on the DRC

The narratives surrounding women's victimhood in connection with wartime sexual violence have serious implications for women's positioning within political debates about intervention and their ability to speak in international forums such as the Security Council. This section will consider how local women's perspectives have been incorporated, in significantly limited ways, into Security Council meetings on the situation in the DRC, a conflict that has been defined by sexual violence in much of the international news coverage. The inclusion, indirectly through the testimony of UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Margot Wallström, of local women's voices in these debates can be seen to shift their tone, adding human elements of depth and complexity to these often-formulaic discussions. At the same time, local women speak in this context only as women who are victims of sexual violence, and only through the agency of a UN representative, reinforcing their exclusion from political debates that are not seen as touching on women's issues or as being about gender in any particular way.

UN language on conflict-related sexual violence

In UN texts and discussions, the problem of sexual violence often appears inseparable from the problem of women's (and children's) vulnerability, and consequently their need for protection. Through its resolutions, the Security Council frames sexual violence as a weapon used to control and terrorize civilian populations (Davies and True, 2017, p. 76). As such, it is understood as being used by armed groups as a tactic that is not aimed at opponents directly through attacks on opposing combatants, but indirectly through attacks on the civilians they seek to protect. This view of sexual violence—its uses and its motivations—has two important implications for women's positioning within intervention narratives. First, it relies heavily on a protection framework in which (mostly adult male) fighters are justified and bolstered by their ability to defend the (assumed to be female or not of fighting age) civilians with whom they are associated. Far from disrupting this narrative, the Security Council response reinforces it by inserting the international community as

an additional layer of protection, most typically in the form of armed peacekeeping missions. Second, the idea that entire communities or ethnic groups can be attacked through sexual violence aimed at women, while serving as an accurate description of how sexual violence often functions as a tactic of armed conflict, potentially frames women's vulnerability itself as an internal threat to those communities. International discourses on conflict-related sexual violence repeatedly and insistently define it as a women's problem, in spite of evidence that men are also victims of sexual violence, suggesting a desire to keep the vulnerability of victimhood safely contained.

Although, in the years since the adoption of Resolution 1820 (S/RES/1820), reports of the Secretary-General have increasingly moved away from the passive language of the past—women are raped, children are abducted—to active sentence structure that identifies specific perpetrators,¹⁷ the central problem from a protection perspective remains that the victims are vulnerable, not that the perpetrators are violent. This emphasis on vulnerability implies an innate helplessness, precluding the possibility that women play active roles in the politics and armed conflicts within their societies, or even in the daily concern of keeping themselves and their families safe. As a result, the voices of the women most directly concerned are missing almost entirely from the international policy debates on sexual violence, as if the world is working from the assumption that they have nothing relevant to contribute.

An examination of UN discussions around the problem of widespread, systematic sexual violence in the DRC holds some clues to understanding what is lost by overlooking the knowledge and experiences of these women. Speaking to the Security Council in February 2009, John Holmes, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, addressed an ongoing crisis of sexual violence in eastern sections of the DRC in an unusual level of detail. Unlike many of the individuals involved in shaping UN policy in the DRC, he had been to the relevant regions in person and had spoken with victims of violence directly.

My most recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in September 2007, focused on gender-based violence and on how the

¹⁷ See, for example, UN Secretary-General, 2015, S/2015/741: 'On 15 and 16 July, FRPI elements allegedly raped three women and two girls at Koni village near Aveba' (para. 24); UN Secretary-General, 2017, S/2017/826: 'MONUSCO recently coordinated the surrender and transfer to the national judicial authorities of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, a rebel commander designated on the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List, who was wanted for his command responsibility in the rape of at least 387 civilians in 2010, in North Kivu Province' (para. 44).

UN and the international community could fight the scourge of rape in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unfortunately, I cannot say that the situation has improved since. Women I met at the Heal Africa hospital in Goma and in the camps bore disturbing and eloquent witness to the fact that little has changed. Sexual violence, particularly by those with guns, continues to be a horrific feature of everyday life.

[...]

Nevertheless, there have been some positive moves. I had the sense that public opinion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself may be shifting, thanks largely to the efforts of Congolese civil society and Congolese women themselves, including the President's wife, Mrs. Kabila. (UN Security Council, 2009, S/PV.6083, p. 3)

This statement presents Congolese women as shattered by the violence of their everyday lives, yet not resigned to it. In his view, they are agents of change, at least in connection with the issue of sexual violence. This is not the typical view that emerges from UN language on sexual violence.

Reports of the Secretary-General, in contrast, present sexual violence as a relatively faceless problem, continuing across years and decades. These reports list individual instances of sexual violence, happening at specific times and in specific places, while the victims appear mainly as numbers and categories of people.

PARECO militias were reported to have attacked the Bukombo groupement in Rutshuru territory and killed 51 civilians and raped three women, including a child, between September 2007 and May 2008. (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/151, para. 47)

Some 1,100 rapes were reported each month, with an average of 36 persons raped every day. (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/160, para. 69)

On 22 June, a riot in Goma prison led to the rape of 20 female prisoners and the death of two people. (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/472, para. 38)

In December 2009 alone, 286 incidents of sexual violence were reported in North Kivu, and 360 additional incidents in South Kivu. (UN Secretary-General, 2010, S/2010/164, para. 73)

[O]n 16 and 17 August, a group of FDLR and Mayi-Mayi Cheka had carried out an attack on the village of Mubi during which at least 40 women and girls were victims of sexual violence. (UN Secretary-General, 2010, S/2010/512, para. 11)

In January and February, at least 65 people, including minors, were reportedly raped by FDLR combatants during four attacks carried out

in the locality of Bwala, Fizi territory, South Kivu. (UN Secretary-General, 2011, S/2011/298, para. 41)

Between April and September in Kasongolunda territory, Bandundu Province, a captain of the armed forces, along with men composed of demobilized soldiers and civilians, reportedly raped and tortured 82 women in 23 villages, including 9 minors, and subjected 22 people to ill treatment. (UN Secretary-General, 2011, S/2011/656, para. 43)

This is on one level an important catalogue of information, from which one can draw the necessary conclusion that not all incidents are alike, undermining the sense that sexual violence during war is inevitable. Yet the information presented—the numbers and the place names, the ages and genders of the victims—risks having a desensitizing effect. Rarely does an incident merit more than a sentence or two, and the humanity of the individuals involved is invisible. The listed events appear removed from time, without warning signs or after effects. As the agency of the individuals involved is erased, these events appear unpreventable, a litany of tragedies in a hopeless country.

Women's voices in the testimony of Margot Wallström

Margot Wallström, acting as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict from 2010 to 2012, approached the topic from a different perspective. In two presentations she made to the Security Council in September and October 2010, she provides an example of how inclusion of the perspectives of women alters the debate and expands what is knowable about the violence in question. Her stated mission in visiting the DRC is 'to engage with all stakeholders and, above all, to listen to the survivors' (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 10). Her role, in her view, is 'to bring the voices of Congolese women to this Council, as I promised them to do' (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 2). In doing so, she provides a number of insights omitted from the more traditional and formulaic language of official UN documents.

Notably, Wallström's reports disrupt the sense that incidents of sexual violence are in any way isolated or contained. In contrast with the language of the Secretary-General's reports cited above, what immediately emerges from her statements is a picture of sexual violence as a constant, daily threat to women's lives.

[T]he sad reality for many women in the eastern DRC is that they are tired. They are tired of wondering when their time will come to be robbed, tortured and raped. For them, there is no safe place. They are

raped when harvesting crops, when going to market, when fetching water and firewood, when carrying their babies, and when in their homes at night among their loved ones. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 7)

Wallström's language highlights sexual violence as so pervasive that it constitutes an assault on normality, fundamentally altering social life and women's place within it.

Families prefer to sleep in the forest since they do not feel safe in their own homes. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 2)

There are Congolese women whose tragic experiences have led them to conclude that being gang-raped by many men is normal for a woman. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 8)

In this view, individual rapes are not isolated moments in time. Instead, the violence stretches outward into both the future and the past, inflicting damage on the continuity of social life and individuals' sense of connectedness and meaning.

Rape does not end when the violence is over. Many survivors are permanently traumatized, unable to return to the fields to earn an income, resulting in increased poverty, isolation and despair... A ripple of devastation emanates from each crime. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, pp. 7–8)

The rapes of elderly women left the communities reeling with shock. They served to shatter social taboos and the shared heritage that hold people together. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 2)

"A dead rat is worth more than the body of a woman" were the words of one distraught young woman in Walikale. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 2)

Such language highlights sexual violence as a problem afflicting entire communities, creating trauma that lasts far beyond the end of the violence. Wallström walks a difficult discursive line of insisting that women's problems are human problems without losing focus on the specific experiences of women.

Wallström frames women's experiences of wartime sexual violence not merely as a call for rescue or a cause for pity, but also as a vital source of knowledge. The everyday character of the threat described by the women she quotes means UN personnel should not wait for reports of sexual violence as the only form of evidence that it is happening.

We must be more keenly attuned to other indicators, including the movement of armed groups, their proximity to civilian centres, patterns of looting and pillage, their actions to block off access to certain areas, and the concerns of local women about the security situation. These should all now be considered to be signals that the

population is at risk from exactions, attacks and, increasingly, sexual violence. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 8)

In other words, Wallström argues that it is important to trust that women know when they are at risk, listen to their concerns and take them seriously.

This approach of framing the issue through perspectives of individuals on the ground challenges the listeners to engage in an empathic act of imagining the experiences of others. It is an approach that also leads Wallström to view other important actors in more human terms, resulting in a more comprehensive analysis of how the UN might begin to address the problem. She describes perpetrators as ‘participants and architects’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 9)—an acknowledgement that mass rapes do not just happen but are planned by individual people. And, she argues, ‘where sexual violence is planned, it must also be viewed as preventable. Systematic responses to sexual violence have been elusive because, until recently, it was dismissed as an unavoidable consequence of war’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 8). In part, she argues, prevention will come from increasing the costs to perpetrators. Wallström advocates for targeted sanctions imposed by the Security Council and for improved records of prosecution, not only as deterrence but as an important signal to victims ‘that the world is not blind to their plight’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 3) and as an end to the ongoing terror of knowing one’s attacker is still free: ‘For these women, justice delayed is more than justice denied; it is terror continued’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 5). Complicity in sexual violence must become a liability not only for individual perpetrators but for the groups with which they are associated: ‘When commanders can no longer rest easy in the certainty of impunity, and when it begins to cross their mind that they may be turned in by their own for commissioning or condoning rape, that is the moment when we open a new front in the battle to end impunity’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 3). Also, ‘avenues for future political roles and governance should be closed to those who commit acts of rape’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 3). These proposals aim to change the culture in which such crimes are normalized and send a clear message that positions of authority carry a responsibility for one’s own actions and the actions of one’s subordinates—such positions must not be open to individuals who commit or enable sexual violence.

Through the eyes of local women, other actors—both protectors and perpetrators—also come into view in more complexity. Wallström similarly speaks with more detail than is typical about the experiences of UN personnel working in the field and the difficulties facing interveners:

I want to take a moment to focus on our peacekeepers themselves. I have witnessed firsthand their determination to do all they possibly can to protect civilians, but the reality is that they are overstretched and underresourced. They are demoralized by the sheer scale of the problems and by the constant barrage of criticism from all quarters. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6400, p. 4)

She notes that peacekeepers require better training if they are to be effective in responding to sexual violence and argues that better communication with local communities is essential to obtaining timely information about potential attacks on civilians (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, pp. 8–9). At the same time, a sense of urgency must be maintained: ‘The sad reality is that incidents of rape have become so commonplace that they do not trigger our most urgent interventions’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 8). This suggests that the international community—from the governmental representatives sitting in the Security Council Chamber to the field staff implementing intervention efforts—needs to find a way of better understanding the human impact of war crimes, seeing them as an ongoing part of the social conditions in which individual people must live. The response must move beyond soldiers with guns protecting civilians from other armed groups when the reality on the ground is so complex—and the perpetrators so numerous and dispersed—that women ‘cannot distinguish protector from tormentor’ (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 7).

At heart this is a question of sources of knowledge. Speaking about the question of how knowledge is produced around the situations and crises on the Security Council agenda, an NGO-based advocate for R2P noted that ‘information is a commodity’ (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017). The larger, wealthier states tend to provide the majority of the information received by the Council because they have more people on the ground—diplomatic as well as intelligence personnel, who report to their governments what they are witnessing from day to day. ‘And so then you’ve got the highest decision-making body in the world essentially relying on...whatever information they can get’ (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017). Although it is not her stated purpose, Wallström’s presentations to the Council

suggest the possibility of alternative practices in information gathering. The information she presents calls for a different, more nuanced response to the problem, and her testimony represents a departure from the often-formulaic language public Security Council meetings.

Limits of women's speech in the Security Council

Wallström's reports to the Security Council demonstrate the transformative potential of including local women's perspectives. At the same time, they highlight several significant limitations imposed by the consistent positioning of local women as victims within intervention narratives. This section will examine some of the limitations imposed on women's speech in this context: the inclusion of local women's voices only specifically as victims of (sexualized) violence, for the purpose of speaking about their victimhood; the assumption that all victims are women; and the practice of including local women's voices indirectly, through 'expert' reports often delivered by international UN personnel. Alongside their potentially positive contributions, Wallström's reports risk reinforcing dominant narratives of women as victims, victims as necessarily women, and the role of an enlightened international community in combatting the 'brutal' violence perpetrated by local men against local women.

The assumption that all local women are victims

In a lecture for the *London Review of Books* tracing the topic of women's public speech from classical literature through to modern Western traditions of public speaking, Mary Beard notes that while women were generally banned from public speech in the classical world, there was an exception allowing women to 'in extreme circumstances publicly defend their own sectional interests, but not speak for men or the community as a whole' (Beard, 2014). Beard identifies the issue of women's public speech as being interconnected with the subject of sexual violence, with classical women such as Lucretia¹⁸ portrayed as speaking publicly only to denounce their rapists, while modern women often face threats of rape for daring to publicly express political opinions. Rape is both the primary subject that women

¹⁸ According to a story from Ancient Rome, Lucretia was a Roman matron who was raped by Tarquin, the king's son. She publicly accused Tarquin of the rape and demanded justice before committing suicide.

may speak about and the threatened consequence for speaking too much or being too political.

A similar pattern of women being allowed to speak as women only on subjects viewed as ‘women’s issues’, and not on broader political agendas, is present in Security Council debates. In this forum there are two primary categories of women speakers. Women may speak not specifically as women, but as international representatives on a purportedly gender-neutral range of issues. This category includes the still relatively rare women ambassadors who represent their governments in international bodies and UN officials who provide expert briefings to such bodies. Alternatively, women may speak as women, most often as representatives of civil society organizations, on subjects seen as being of particular concern to women. In this context, ‘women’s participation’ as an institutional commitment is predicated on an assumption that the participating women will limit any influence they might have to ‘women’s issues’, the only areas in which they are seen as having relevant knowledge or expertise. Local women’s groups, when they are consulted, are generally expected to talk about issues such as sexual and gender-based violence, not the weapons proliferation that provides arms to militia groups committing such violence. Wallström’s decision to ‘bring the voices of Congolese women’ to the Security Council specifically to address sexual violence is of course a reflection of her mandate as special rapporteur. Yet the tendency to consult women only on sexual violence both reflects and reproduces the assumption that victimhood is women’s primary, if not their only, role in relation to armed conflict. To the extent that sexual violence is viewed as the most egregious form of women’s assumed victimhood, it also becomes the central ‘women’s issue’ that interests the international community, to the exclusion of other political or security needs that women themselves might identify (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013, p. 94).

Wallström’s reports similarly reflect limitations placed on the ways in which women are able to talk about ‘women’s issues’. Her mandate is to report on sexual violence in conflict—an intersection point between multiple sets of security issues including strategic targeting of civilians during armed conflict, the role of gender inequality in contributing to women’s and men’s insecurity, and the causes and meanings of sexual violence more broadly. The problem of conflict-related sexual violence is unlikely to be solved without also addressing these broader contributing factors, and the voices of the women Wallström quotes challenge the boundary

between conflict and peace, depicting a damaged social fabric unlikely to recover quickly if the conflict-related violence were to suddenly end, and a state of insecurity for women that extends into every aspect of daily life. Yet the Security Council remains, for the most part, disengaged from efforts to combat sexual violence outside of armed conflict or the wider security impacts of gender inequality. By limiting the discussion to sexual violence as a tactic of war, women's speech on the subject is kept within the boundaries of the protection narrative, excluding instances of 'peacetime' sexual violence as well as sexual violence committed by 'protectors' such as UN peacekeepers.¹⁹ To acknowledge sexual violence as a persistent and widespread threat to women in times of relative peace as well as in times of conflict would make the protection task too large to be undertaken within the bounds of normal UN practice. To consult women on the security threat of sexual violence outside conflict would pose too great a challenge to existing practice.

The assumption that all victims are women

Another striking omission from Wallström's testimony is the existence of male victims of sexual violence during armed conflict. Men appear only as perpetrators or protectors, and sexual violence is framed exclusively as a crime perpetrated by men against women, creating the impression of a strict division of labour in which women's work is caring for and feeding their families while men's work is the perpetuation of conflict. In Wallström's language, women carry babies and men carry guns (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6378, p. 7). Men create fear, and women live with it. There is an appealing simplicity to this narrative, and its use by Wallström may be strategic, painting a clear picture of the dire situation faced by women in the DRC. The full picture of how sexual violence operates in conflict is much more complex, however, and is not accurately reflected by the predominant women-as-victims narrative. Ignoring this complexity has negative consequences for both women and men, as well as for the effectiveness of UN interventions to prevent sexual violence.

Feminists and non-feminists alike have traditionally viewed sexual violence as a form of violence enacted on the bodies of women (see, for example,

¹⁹ The UN maintains a clear linguistic distinction between sexual violence committed by UN personnel, which is discussed under the heading of 'sexual exploitation and abuse', and sexual violence committed by parties to armed conflict, labeled 'conflict-related sexual violence'.

Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 1976). Often the perpetrators are not specifically named within UN texts (Becerra, 2018, pp. 185–188)—the text of Security Council Resolution 1820, for example, refers to women only as victims and does not mention men at all—but the perpetrators are widely assumed to be men. These assumptions are not entirely detached from the reality of sexual violence during armed conflict, which often targets women specifically as women. Examining accounts of sexual violence during the war in the former Yugoslavia, Lisa S. Price argues that ‘hatred and loathing are palpable in many survivors’ descriptions of sexual torture and mutilation’—acts which are often biologically specific to the female bodies they target (Price, 2001, p. 214). Yet looking at sexual violence only as a crime committed by men against women is insufficient to understanding the diverse causes and motives behind wartime sexual violence, which is rarely indiscriminate (Alison, 2007, p. 79) and not always aimed at women.

Miranda Alison argues that it is important to pay attention to group affiliations of both victims and perpetrators of sexual violence during armed conflict—a crime that ‘is intentionally committed by specific men against specific women (and men) – namely “enemy” women (and men)’ (Alison, 2007, p. 79). Women’s and men’s experiences of sexual violence will differ depending on their national, ethnic and religious identities, as well as the differing roles they play within the conflict. To recognize this reality is not to underestimate the importance of gender in determining how sexual violence happens and what motivates it. These crimes, especially when committed in a widespread or systematic fashion, are often aimed not exclusively at the individual victims but rather at the humiliation or destruction of entire groups. Women are targeted, in part, as a result of essentialist assumptions about their roles within their communities; they are seen as the biological reproducers as well as the symbolic bearers of culture for specific ethnic or national groups (Alison, 2007, p. 80). This means that attacks on women function as attacks on the community as a whole, obliterating its ability to reproduce itself. It is in this context that widespread or systematic rape has been recognized as a genocidal act (Copelon, 2000, p. 223).

The intention to humiliate is also vital to understanding conflict-related sexual violence, and is especially important in explaining why men may also be targets of sexual violence (Myrtilinen, 2018; Meger, 2018). Feminists have long recognized the ways in which sexual violence targets men indirectly, through the

bodies of women (see, for example, Sjoberg and Peet, 2011; Stamnes, 2013). Within the logic of protection, manhood is determined in part by a man's ability to protect the women of his family or community from sexual violence committed by other men, as well as to enact dominance over other men by attacking the women of their families or communities, making them failed protectors. This narrative is often bolstered by misogynist constructions of 'good' and 'bad' women—the women of one's own group are good and deserving of protection, while the women of other groups are unchaste, lacking the sexual morality that defines good womanhood (Alison, 2007, p. 80). Attacks against women of specific groups are seen as making tactical sense because of cultural narratives in which a man's honour is tied to the sexual purity of the women associated with him (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013, p. 55). These types of rapes humiliate and terrorize women directly, while also humiliating and terrorizing 'enemy' men indirectly.

Less well-recognized have been forms of sexual violence targeting men directly, and this omission reinforces an essentialist narrative in which female bodies are uniquely vulnerable to sexual violence, while male bodies can only fill the roles of perpetrator or protector. Here the role of perpetrator is associated with particular, racialized groups of men, and the narrative of an international community capable of 'saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak, 1988, p. 296) re-emerges. In this context, interventions are intended to have a 'civilizing' effect, bringing places such as the DRC in line with enlightened international standards, and '[s]exualized and racialized depictions of Congolese armed men as particularly bestial, and violence as particularly chaotic and naturalized – evoking familiar images out of the colonial lexicon, and proffering the 'Congo' as ethical shorthand for the scourge of wartime rape – pepper many accounts of rape in the DRC' (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013, p. 24). International protectors exist in contrast to, and are justified by, this vision of local men as perpetrators.

This distinction between categories of men—'international' and 'local', 'protector' and 'perpetrator'—is central to the masculine authority claimed by the international community (discussed at length in Chapter 5). It is also potentially threatened by the recognition of the male victim of sexual violence, a figure that 'disorients, obstructs and interrupts' (Kirby, 2018, p. 122). To recognize the existence of Congolese men who are victims of sexual violence challenges the racial and gendered frameworks for understanding individuals' relationships to violence

within the larger intervention narrative, breaking down the seemingly clear distinction between (male, local) perpetrators and (female, local) victims and raising the prospect that individuals may be both victims and perpetrators of violence (Muthaka, 2018, p. 249). To the extent that the role of ‘protector’ depends on maintaining the clear distinction between perpetrator and victim, the international community has a stake in perpetuating the dominant narrative of female victims requiring protection from male perpetrators. This narrative also works against the ability to respond effectively to sexual violence, however, reproducing an international understanding of sexual violence in which ‘male victims are marginalized and women’s agency is curtailed’ (Grey and Shepherd, 2012, p. 117).

It may be more productive to think instead in terms of masculinity and femininity, identity categories that are not fixed or necessarily tied to specific types of bodies, although Eriksson Baaz and Stern have noted that this approach, which they label the “‘Gendered” Story’, is ‘haunted’ by the more essentialist “‘Sexed” Story’ (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013). This approach recognizes rape as an act of masculine dominance which aims to humiliate the victim by feminizing her or him and often, by extension, her or his community (Alison, 2007, p. 81; Meger, 2018, p. 105). It counters a view of ‘men as vulnerable to their own biology’ (Higate and Henry, 2004, p. 490) by recognizing that given forms of masculinity are not inevitable but rather must be constructed and maintained through specific acts. It helps to explain why the high levels of sexual violence associated with conflict often persist into the post-conflict period, when women may be targeted for sexual violence by men within their own communities, as retaliation for straying into traditionally masculine territory, through gains made in education or financial independence during the social upheaval that accompanies armed conflict (Meger, 2010, p. 121). Crucially, by recognizing the importance of masculinity and femininity in shaping the meaning of violence, these acts can be seen as reproducing rather than merely reflecting gender identities (Shepherd, 2007, p. 240, Meger, 2018, p. 104).

That sexual violence perpetuates destructive forms of gender identity for both women and men is a vital insight, helping to explain why patterns of gendered violence are so difficult to break. The mapping of a perpetrator–victim binary onto a male–female one ‘effectively leaves the gendered paradigm unquestioned’ (Lewis, 2014, p. 208), silencing male victims and suggesting that women and girls are the

natural targets of such violence. Although in recent years UN reports have begun to document sexual violence against men and boys as well,²⁰ the symbolic positioning of women as victims remains dominant, and sexual violence committed by men against women is still the narrative that we most often expect to hear. Wallström's reports to the Security Council do nothing to challenge this assumption.

Indirect speech and the question 'which women?'

Within the discursive boundaries of the Security Council, then, all women are (actual or potential) victims and all victims are women. In this context, it is important to note the further limitation that Wallström speaks as an 'international' actor on behalf of 'local' women, channelling their voices through her official function as a UN special rapporteur. The women whose words she reports are not present to speak for themselves. This may be due in part to logistical limitations, though it is conceivable that local people in the places where the UN has missions and field offices could be invited to speak to the Council through phone or video technology. Equally if not more relevant, however, is the challenge such speech would likely pose to the norms of the Security Council—the exclusivity of access to the Security Council Chamber, the formal language in which its agenda items are discussed, and the dispassionate tone of the debates. If the establishment of the WPS agenda mandates that women must at times be allowed to speak, carefully limiting women's access—and which women have access—serves as a means of ensuring that no fundamental changes take place.

This raises the question not only of when women should participate but also who is allowed to participate. Wallström's role in bringing women's voices into the debate highlights the extent to which these women are still treated as incapable of speaking for themselves. Their access to UN decision-makers is channelled through a single European woman designated as an expert on the issue of sexual violence. Her presence as an intermediary seems necessary to lend their voices legitimacy in the Security Council Chamber. The reporting function also allows the Council to remain one step removed from the state of victimhood, diluting the pain and terror that a more direct encounter might communicate. The problem is contained, and women's vulnerability is kept at a comfortable distance.

²⁰ See Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013, S/RES/2106).

Through the contrast between Wallström's voice and access and those of the local women whose experiences of sexual violence she strives to represent in Security Council discussions, the emphasis on women's inherent difference from the masculine standard within UN discourses becomes visible. Wallström has been invited to speak as an official providing expert testimony to the Council. The dichotomies produced and reproduced by the gendered logic behind protection language—the distinctions between protector and protected, international and local, agent and victim—are so powerfully associated with masculinity and femininity as understood in this context that they effectively override the individual gender identities of the people who fill those roles. In her official capacity, Wallström is a relatively unthreatening intermediary for the Council, an international actor speaking through the masculine channels of official mandates and expertise. Women as 'women', local and victimized, are not directly heard.

The strength of the narrative that constructs women as always potential or actual victims of violence arguably has negative consequences for local civilian men as well as local civilian women. The problem, identified by WPS advocates, of local women's exclusion from UN-led peace talks can be read in two ways: that women are excluded because they are women, and that women are excluded because they are rarely the leaders of armed parties to conflict, and participation in peace talks has traditionally been limited to international diplomats and the leaders of warring factions. Local civilians in general, male and female, are shut out of these talks. Yet both interpretations point to gender discrimination, to the extent that civilians are symbolically coded as women and children. UN actors are of course aware that in reality many civilians are men. But within the logic of protection they occupy the position of women, by definition helpless, and so are included in the assumption that feminized local civilians have nothing to contribute in the areas of diplomatic expertise or political power.

Conclusion

To be a woman in UN protection discourses is to be pre-emptively labeled powerless. This assumption is reproduced in the founding texts of R2P, which recognize women only as victims of sexual violence, targeted in some cases because they are members of specific ethnic groups, but in all cases because women are the obvious targets of gendered violence. This severely limited representation of

women's roles and experiences in relation to the types of violence R2P is meant to address has consequences for the extent to which women's voices can be heard in forums such as the Security Council, where decisions about interventions are made and their forms take shape. The exclusion of women in general—and more specifically women local to the countries where interventions take place—is an undeniable injustice. It is also a lens through which to view the gendered power dynamics at work within intervention narratives, and an omission that undermines the ability of interventions to meet the core objectives of R2P: ensuring that interventions are mobilized when necessary to prevent or halt atrocities, and that these interventions meet the most critical security needs of the people they are meant to help. Interventions undertaken without full and equal input from women are likely to fail on both counts. They will likely fail to recognize gendered forms of violence that meet the criteria of being widespread and systemic, but that do not fit the predominant narrative in which sexual violence is the only 'gender' crime that falls within the R2P framework. They will also likely fail to adequately address women's and men's security needs within specific contexts, instead assuming that gender violence—in this narrative, almost always limited to sexual violence targeting women—takes similar forms in all contexts.

This chapter has examined the ways in which the association of women with vulnerability and victimhood in UN language both underpins protection narratives, providing the symbolic justification for protective interventions, and limits the ability of women to exercise their agency in ways that might challenge existing practices and power structures. In these ways, women's assumed victimhood serves an important purpose within R2P, securing the meaning of 'protection' and helping the controversial intervention doctrine to gain acceptance, aligning it with existing UN practice. It is also profoundly dangerous, however, not only for the women whose complex experiences of violence and conflict are suppressed, but for local civilian men as well. To the extent that the gendered dichotomy between agent and victim maps onto the dichotomy between international and local in the structure and power dynamics of UN interventions, the tendency to view women's contributions as peripheral reinforces a tendency to treat the contributions of local people as an afterthought, not central to the planning of interventions. Consequently, interventions take shape according to the assumptions and priorities of international actors, often following militarized models tied up with the masculine authority and

identity of the international community. The next chapter will consider the role of masculine identity in shaping interventions; how this is reinforced by the protection language of R2P; and the sometimes catastrophic consequences it has for local civilians.

5. Protection, Militarism and Masculine Authority

Introduction

One of the central controversies within R2P is the question of military intervention—when it is appropriate, what forms of authorization are necessary to give it legitimacy, and how it might be carried out effectively. Debates around humanitarian intervention in the 1990s largely conceived of intervention in military terms, and this association with military action on the part of powerful states that might threaten the sovereignty of others was a significant factor in resistance to the idea of intervention for humanitarian purposes. Concerned that this controversy might prevent interventions that were both justified and necessary, the framers of R2P worked to shift the focus away from a right to military intervention—and the concern that states might seek justify self-interested military actions by framing them in humanitarian terms—and toward a duty to intervene in a range of non-military ways. The ICISS report outlines three aspects of responsibility under R2P: the responsibility to prevent, the responsibility to react, and the responsibility to rebuild (ICISS, 2001a, p. XI). Within this framework, it stresses that ‘prevention is the single most important dimension of the responsibility to protect’, and non-coercive measures should always be considered the first and best options for addressing the threat of atrocity crimes, with military intervention undertaken only in the most extreme cases and as a last resort (ICISS, 2001a, p. XI). Should military intervention become necessary, such action entails on the part of interveners a responsibility to remain engaged throughout the post-intervention recovery period, providing assistance for rebuilding efforts and ensuring that the root causes of the crisis are addressed.

The 2009 report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of R2P likewise stresses the importance of prevention and non-military options when setting out the three-pillar framework (see Chapter 3). Under pillar two—‘international assistance and capacity-building’—the international community is responsible for supporting states in cases where ‘national political leadership is weak, divided or uncertain about how to proceed, lacks the capacity to protect its population effectively, or faces an armed opposition that is threatening or committing crimes and violations relating to the responsibility to protect’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 29). In such circumstances, assistance might take the form of human

rights monitoring, advocacy and education; facilitation of dialogue between parties to the conflict; development programmes; and pressure, exerted privately or publicly, to make clear the costs of failing to prevent atrocity crimes. These efforts will ‘largely depend on civilian, not military, expertise and presence’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 39). In some cases, however, and particularly when non-state actors are committing crimes that meet the threshold of R2P, the report states that ‘collective international military assistance may be the surest way to support the State in meeting its obligations relating to the responsibility to protect and, in extreme cases, to restore its effective sovereignty’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, A/63/677, para. 40).

This tension between military and non-military approaches that runs throughout R2P is, in part, a product of a particular historical moment. R2P is a direct response to the debates of the 1990s around humanitarian intervention and a ‘right to intervene’—a phrase likely to engender profound anxieties around the question of state sovereignty. Additionally, the ICISS report was published in December 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States—an event that began a period of militaristic American foreign policy, often framed at least partly in humanitarian terms.²¹ The impact of the political pressures of the early-2000s, concern about reckless use of military force, and the co-opting of humanitarian narratives by self-interested states should not be underestimated. At the same time, this tension speaks to fundamental questions about the role of military force in a project such as R2P, which aims to mitigate if not halt entirely the systematic use of violence to achieve political objectives.

Enmeshed in the debate around military and diplomatic interventions are a number of questions about masculine identities and the forms of authority they engender. This chapter will seek to understand how this tension shapes interventions by considering the forms of masculinity at play in interventions that fall within the framework of R2P, focusing specifically on how protection language both relies on and reproduces particular forms of masculinity within the UN context. Because ‘protection’ efforts include both military and non-military engagement from UN

²¹ See, for example, the radio address delivered by First Lady Laura Bush on 17 November 2001, describing the US invasion of Afghanistan as an initiative to help Afghan women and children who lack adequate food, healthcare, education and personal freedoms (Bush, 2001). See also the 13 September 2007 speech by President George W. Bush arguing that without the continued presence of the US military occupation, ‘Iraq could face a humanitarian nightmare’ (Bush, 2007).

actors, it is important to pay attention to the multiple masculinities that are invoked by intervention narratives, as well as the power disparities between them. The first section of this chapter will discuss how protective masculinity takes shape in both military and non-military terms and how protection language reinforces masculine forms of authority claimed by UN actors, privileging international ‘expertise’ above local knowledge in gendered ways. The second section will look at the tendency to conceptualize and enact intervention policies in military terms—in spite of the intentions of R2P to shift the intervention debate away from military options in the majority of cases—and will question what versions of ‘protective’ masculinity gain and lose by reverting to militarized forms of protection. In doing so, it will consider the example of the partnership between the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC and the Congolese government to undertake offensive military actions against the FDLR rebel group in 2009—an action in which the UN mission appears to have actively undermined its mandate to protect civilians, ignoring expert warnings and contributing to circumstances in which civilians faced increasing levels of violence.

By examining the role of militarism within R2P, this chapter will argue that gendered protection language undermines the objective of breaking away from the military intervention model. The difficulty of setting limits around what ‘protection’ means, the forms of masculine authority that are reproduced by protection narratives, and the likelihood of failure to live up to the promises implied by protection language all work to support military actions that have the benefits of being relatively easy to define and highly visible, both to people on the ground and to the international community. Such actions are also highly risky, however, and have a poor record of meeting protection commitments. The continued draw of militarism, even within an organization committed to ending organized violence, has potentially dangerous consequences, both for the military personnel filling the role of protectors and for the civilians meant to receive protection. This raises questions about whose interests are truly served by militarized UN interventions.

UN masculinities

‘Like any other institution,’ writes Enloe, ‘the UN is susceptible to masculinization and militarization’ (Enloe, 1993, p. 30). This claim, on its surface, may seem counterintuitive. The UN is an organization devoted to peace, disarmament and the promotion of human rights—an agenda seemingly

incompatible with militarism or the forms of masculinity on which militarism depends. Masculine forms of authority are at the centre, however, of UN interventions, their military components, and the claims of expertise on which they are often based. This section will discuss forms of masculinity at work within the UN, how they are involved in the framing of UN interventions, and how these masculine identities are both necessary to and enabled by the protection narratives on which R2P is based. I will suggest that these narratives include a moral claim about protective forms of masculinity, relying on protection language to call up ideas of what it means to be a good man and, by extension, a good intervener.

Protection as a masculine responsibility

As outlined in Chapter 2, feminist scholars have shown how, in their most basic form, protection narratives expand on a familial model of protection in which male protectors are responsible for the protection of the women and children in their family, and in exchange are owed obedience and loyalty (Young, 2003, p. 2). Within this model, ‘good’ masculinity involves care for the weak or vulnerable. Although the narrative relies on the appearance that it is natural, theorists of masculinity note that the concept does not have predetermined, ‘natural’ content, but rather is socially constructed and historically contingent. R. W. Connell posits a theory of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which recognizes that there are complex power structures and hierarchies within masculinity, as well as between masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity is not fixed but is ‘a historically mobile relation’, adaptable to change and interacting with other identity categories such as race, class and sexuality (Connell, 1995). Because masculinity has no fixed content, it depends for its existence on a relational, opposite concept of femininity (Connell, 1995, p. 68), and theorists argue that this masculine/feminine distinction is critical to understanding how masculinity operates—‘The crucial characteristic that is shared by all masculinity discourses is that they are not feminine’ (Hutchings, 2008, p. 401). This contrast allows for a sense of continuity in masculine identity, in spite of changes and internal contradictions (Hutchings, 2008, p. 401). While the content of different forms of masculinity and their power relations to each other may change over time, men overall maintain a position of dominance relative to women, and while not all men gain equally from what Connell calls ‘the patriarchal dividend’, a majority do benefit from the subordination of women (Duncanson,

2009, p. 65; Connell, 1995, p. 79).

Crucially, any form of masculinity that achieves hegemonic status is in danger of losing that position of dominance. Although patriarchal privileging of masculinity over femininity has proved durable and flexible, it is not invulnerable to change. It requires legitimation at every stage of its history (Connell, 1995). In this context, the patriarchal narrative of protection identified by Young serves the important function of appearing to naturalize the bonds between protector and protected and, consequently, the dominance of masculinity over femininity. Arguably this function has grown in importance as arguments for gender equality take hold and societies no longer uncritically accept male monopolies on wealth and positions of power. The image of the masculine protector not only maintains a version of protective masculinity in a position of power, but also disguises the workings of power under an image of self-sacrifice. In fact, UN protection work often does involve great risk and sacrifice, as well as privilege, and its complexities cannot be adequately understood without considering the role of masculinity and the various forms it takes within UN protection narratives.

Benign, rational protectors

The institutional history of the UN is intertwined with ideas of protective masculinity and the images of capable, benevolent authority associated with it. Elements of this discourse, which has evolved and persisted over time, can be found in the language and moral reasoning of R2P—a strategic linking of R2P with the wider UN project of ending war and promoting human rights around the world. Addressing the General Assembly in 1961, President John F. Kennedy drew on ideas of rationality, morality and protection to present the UN in starkly masculine terms. He was speaking at a moment of crisis for the organization. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld had died under suspicious circumstances in a plane crash only the week before, heightening Cold War tensions around the question of choosing his successor and calling into question the future effectiveness of the organization. Kennedy confronted the crisis in the opening lines of his speech: ‘We meet in an hour of grief and challenge. Dag Hammarskjöld is dead. But the United Nations lives’ (Kennedy, 1961). He went on to outline his vision for the UN as the guarantor of international peace and the rule of law—a vision very much in line with the role the organization has aspired to throughout its history, and one which proposes a

masculine ideal of rationality, fair dealing, and the type of quiet courage that does not choose to fight but will not back down in the face of unjust violence.

In framing the UN as a rational, moral force for justice, Kennedy makes two central points. The first is about the precarity of the UN itself, which he says ‘will either grow to meet the challenges of our age, or it will be gone with the wind, without influence, without force, without respect’ (Kennedy, 1961). The authoritative position of the organization is not a given, but must be reinforced by proving its continued relevance and power—a view which remains relevant today, and which often appears in UN texts as concern about the gap between the large promises implied by protection commitments and the reality of what the UN is able to deliver. Kennedy suggests that the relevance of the UN comes from its protective function: citing violence in Laos and Vietnam, he says the world community confronts a question of ‘whether measures can be devised to protect the small and the weak from such tactics’ (Kennedy, 1961). In order to fulfil its protective function, he argues, the UN will require a new Secretary-General who mirrors the protective qualities of benevolence and strength, ‘a man endowed with both the wisdom and the power to make meaningful the moral force of the world community’ (Kennedy, 1961). The UN must survive and remain powerful, he argues, because without it humanity will be unlikely to survive.

This leads into Kennedy’s second point on the continued relevance of the UN: that the organization represents a fundamental choice facing humanity between rationality and self-destruction: ‘Mankind must put an end to war—or war will put an end to mankind’ (Kennedy, 1961). Although he does not explicitly frame it in these terms, he is presenting a choice between contrasting models of masculinity. On one side is strength disconnected from justice, a primitive order in which power is derived from violence and the weak must live in a state of terror. This terror most immediately takes the form of the nuclear threat, ‘a sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness’ (Kennedy, 1961). Although his own country bears the primary responsibility for the existence of such a threat, Kennedy disassociates his government from the madness and criminality nuclear weapons represent by aligning himself with the principles of the UN as representative of the alternative model of masculinity he is promoting, based on justice, generosity, clear thinking and a commitment to use force only as a last resort, in defence of the defenceless. This

rationalist, protective version of masculinity, he suggests, is confronted with the moral and political task of counteracting its less enlightened predecessor, and in this context the UN functions as ‘a means of holding man’s violence within bounds’ (Kennedy, 1961). Ultimately, through commitment to rationality and principle, and rejection of unbounded violence, the world can achieve an age ‘in which the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved’ (Kennedy, 1961).

What is notable about this vision, framed as it is in lofty rhetoric, is its reiteration of a status quo in which the security of the weak depends on the goodness of the strong—a construct founded on the masculine–feminine divide in which the masculine is powerful as if by nature. Kennedy is not proposing any fundamental change in the power structures of the international order, or of human life more broadly, but only urging the powerful to behave more responsibly within those structures. He is not presenting a challenge to the dominance of masculinity over femininity and all of the power relations that stem from that basic arrangement, but rather promoting one version of masculinity over another. The problem, in this view, is powerful men and powerful, masculine states behaving badly. The solution is not that they give up any of their power, but simply that they learn to behave better.

Citing the UN Charter’s commitment to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ (United Nations, 1945, Preamble), Kennedy appears to assume that this can be achieved through rational choice. The existence of nuclear weapons—representing as they do the ultimate form of irrationality, the impulse of the human race to destroy itself—is not taken as a counterpoint to his faith in the rationality of man, but rather serves to clarify the choice he is presenting: if war was, at some point in the past, a rational undertaking, this is no longer the case in the age of mutually assured destruction. The change he calls for is vital to the survival of humanity, but limited, leaving in place the conditions that make war an option in the first place. The threat of unbounded violence and its opposite, benevolent rationality, remain two sides of the same masculine coin, defined in opposition to each other yet agreeing to the subordination of the weak as the condition from which they draw power and relevance. This power, however, is made to appear gentle—the kindest possible response to a natural order in which some are strong and others are weak.

This distinctly unradical approach to rescuing the world from organized, systematic violence is reflected in the faith, running through decades of UN work, in the possibility of technocratic solutions to the problem. Such violence is viewed as a

problem that can be addressed through expertise in negotiation and peace settlements, disarmament, humanitarian assistance, and development. As in the familial protector narrative, the power exercised by UN actors is legitimized by their capability and their desire to use that capability for good. This narrative and the authority it promotes are convincing when protectors are seen to be, in Kennedy's formulation, both wise and powerful. When discussing UN leadership, it is common to pose the question 'secretary or general?' (see, for example, Chesterman, 2007)—a deliberate misreading of 'general' in the Secretary-General's title. The question implicitly acknowledges that there are two competing models of authority within the UN—one diplomatic and one militaristic—each associated with its own set of masculine characteristics.

International civil servants, rationality and expertise

One prominent model of masculinity within the UN is that enacted by the individuals who fill the senior ranks of the Secretariat, the experts who design and implement UN policy, and the political aides of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. These international civil servants in many ways embody the qualities identified in Kennedy's address to the General Assembly, the ideals of which are mirrored in internal guidance for UN staff. This guidance includes a document titled 'Standards of conduct for the international civil service', initially produced in 1954 and updated periodically. In its first paragraph this document notes that the UN system 'embodies the highest aspirations of the peoples of the world' (United Nations, 2014, p. 5). Consequently, 'international civil servants have a special calling' to uphold the principles of the organization (United Nations, 2014, p. 6). To work as part of the UN, this language suggests, requires a largeness of purpose beyond the type of civil service work that exists in other contexts. The UN asks its personnel to abandon loyalty to a particular nation or government and pledge it instead to the core set of ideas contained within the UN Charter, to 'share the vision of their organizations' and work in accordance with a wide set of ideals (United Nations, 2014, p. 6). In effect, this document asks international civil servants to align their personal identities with that of the UN system and treat its mission as their personal mission.

The UN's purpose continues to be framed in masculine terms of protection, rationality and benevolent authority, and the ideal international civil servant will be

characterized by a similar set of values: ‘competence, integrity, impartiality, independence and discretion’ (United Nations, 2014, p. 5). This description is strikingly similar to what Charlotte Hooper identifies as the ‘bourgeois-rational’ model of masculinity, an ideal that is ‘less aggressive, more egalitarian and democratic’ (Hooper, 2001, p. 98). In contrast with more stereotypical versions of masculinity, which may be characterized by aggression and dominance, it includes characteristics of tolerance, respect for diversity, service to others, and a willingness to work collaboratively—all qualities outlined in the ‘Standards of conduct’ (United Nations, 2014) and which prioritize intellectual ability and integrity above physical strength (Hooper, 2001, p. 98). To a certain extent, this model of masculinity may prove compatible with a feminist worldview, and the UN stresses respect for gender equality as an important condition of employment, at least in principle. Like other forms of masculinity that achieve hegemonic status within a particular context, however, this version of masculine identity seeks to maintain its hold on power. While some women may gain acceptance into the senior ranks of these competent, tolerant and impartial international experts, the form of authority they represent remains masculine in character, defined in opposition to the feminine in the form of local people, assumed to be less knowledgeable, capable and enlightened than their international counterparts. With the shift from inter-state to internal conflicts (Ryan, 2013), the irrationality of war is increasingly viewed as something that happens at the local level, while international experts and the peace agenda they represent provide the rational solution.

The masculine character of UN institutional practice has remained relatively stable over time, in spite of inroads made by feminist advocates in support of the WPS agenda and creation of the new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The UN hierarchy, Puechguirbal writes, ‘exhibits a persistent resistance to change and power-sharing’ (Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 182), and within the UN there is a strong culture of respect for precedent and the way things are done. This is perhaps most apparent in the tendency of UN intergovernmental bodies to repeat language in the resolutions they adopt. While there is room for evolution over time, change tends to happen in small increments, and significant breaks from past language and practice are rare. Behind this are factors including the inertia of a large bureaucracy and hesitancy on the part of member states to take political risks or create new commitments for themselves.

Young's analysis of how power operates within protective relationships—with promises of protection lending the inequalities within such relationships a benevolent, natural feel—may also go some way toward explaining this implicit commitment to the status quo. Why question what is natural to the organization or the ways in which it has always operated? It is easier to preserve present arrangements, leaving the privileges associated with benevolent, reasonable, protective masculinity unchallenged.

This is not to suggest that senior UN officials and civil servants are disingenuous in their expressed commitments to the principles of peace, justice and human rights, or that they are consciously clinging to power by seeking to maintain the relevance of their organization or bolster perceptions of their unique skills and expertise. If, as Young suggests, protection is seductive to the relatively powerless, enlisting their desire to underpin the arrangement that keeps them in their powerless position, it is, in the UN case, also seductive to the protectors. It conceals any elements of coercion from those who would prefer not to see them, protected and protector alike, and unlike the paternalistic states Young discusses, the UN does not include domination among its political objectives. Paternalism on the part of the UN may be largely motivated by a genuine desire to do good, and the desire to maintain a hold on power wrapped up with a belief that keeping the power of the UN in the hands of traditional UN actors is the most likely path to securing good outcomes.

The power disparities remain, however, both between masculinity and femininity and between differing forms of masculinity. The privileging of masculinity over femininity can be seen in the ongoing difficulty of achieving a gender balance in senior roles within the organization. Women have often been excluded from the highest levels of diplomatic leadership because they are seen as 'not having the political skills and the diplomatic gravitas' necessary for mission leadership (Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 182). There appears to be an unspoken, and perhaps unconscious, assumption that men are simply better suited to diplomatic leadership roles, while female employees often find themselves stuck in supporting roles. While the UN has recently made some progress toward gender parity at the professional level and higher—43 percent of professional-level positions are held by women, and 36 percent of positions at the director level and above are held by

women²²—the organization does not provide comparable statistics for the general service category.

The privileging of this model of masculinity within the UN is also based in contrasts with other forms of masculinity. One such contrast is the one, set out in Kennedy's speech, between rational protectors who aim to defend the weak and irrational warmongers who exercise strength without morality, victimizing the weak. A second contrast exists within the protection logic underpinning UN masculinities: that between the policymakers, diplomats and bureaucrats, whose power is based in intellect and expertise, and those who carry out the policy priorities, determined by leaders in New York and Geneva, in the field. When it comes to protection efforts, the actors in the field are often military peacekeepers tasked with using force in limited circumstances—a complicated position to occupy in relation to UN values of diplomacy and peacebuilding.

Peacekeepers and militarized protective masculinity

While use of military force is one of the more easily recognized forms of protective masculinity, UN military peacekeepers must contend with complex and possibly contradictory roles in applying force for the purpose of promoting peace and security. Despite attempts to reframe intervention in ways that avoid military action, the prevalent and expanding role of peacekeeping within the UN system means that military peacekeepers are often on the front line of protection efforts, carrying out policies determined by Security Council meetings and consultations in New York. Increasingly, protection of civilians is seen as a primary purpose of most peacekeeping operations, and continued widespread violence against civilians in places where missions have been deployed is viewed as failure on the part of peacekeepers to fulfil their mandates. The traditional protection narrative is not quite as simple as it might appear, however. In the contexts of R2P and international intervention, protectors are responsible not only for the security of 'their' vulnerable populations, but for the protection of the vulnerable in the places where they are deployed. While maintaining the core narrative and its strong emotional appeal, this brings multiple versions of masculinity into play and complicates the question of what protection entails.

²² United for Gender Parity dashboard, <https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard>.

Military peacekeepers are primarily soldiers. Academics working on questions of masculinity have identified the military context as one of the primary sites where masculinity is defined and enacted, as a male-dominated environment (in spite of recent moves toward greater inclusion of women in national militaries), and as a thoroughly masculinized institution.²³ Although far from monolithic—Claire Duncanson notes that militarized masculinities can vary significantly when comparing the expectations and experiences of soldiers of different ranks—masculinity within the military is understood in relation to a warrior model, associated with physical strength and willingness to commit violence (Duncanson, 2009). As is the case with other forms of masculinity, it is defined in sharp contrast with what it is not: femininity, which is associated with weakness and frequently denigrated as part of military training (Whitworth, 2004, p. 156); non-military or civilian versions of masculinity (Duncanson, 2009, pp. 72–72); and racialized ‘others’ in the military forces local to the places where soldiers are deployed, who are often portrayed as overly aggressive and irrational, less civilized and less disciplined (Duncanson, 2009, p. 73). Women are constructed as passive, in need of protection (Duncanson, 2009, p. 71), while the idea of a civilian man becomes ‘a contradiction in terms’ (Sjoberg, 2006, p. 896).

Paradoxically, militarized forms of masculinity may be exceptionally unstable, requiring consistent reaffirmation to maintain their sense of coherence (Whitworth, 2004, p. 165). Because masculinity in a military context is defined in opposition to what it constructs as a lack in others (Price, 2001, p. 213), and particularly the lack represented by femininity, qualities understood to be feminine are viewed as dangerously corrosive, a threat to militarized masculinity (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009, p. 499). Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern argue that the ideal of militarized masculinity, in which all femininity is rejected by the soldier, is not truly achievable—a discrepancy potentially leading to frustration and anxiety for the soldiers meant to embody the ideal and a situation requiring constant concealment, both through institutional practices and through individual enactment of masculinity (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009, p. 499). The result is a form of masculinity constantly under threat and yet unable to acknowledge vulnerability—

²³ See, for example, Basham (2016), Duncanson (2015), Eichler (2012), Enloe (2000), Hearn (2012), Higate (2003), Higate and Henry (2004), Welland (2013) and Whitworth (2004).

a masculinity that finds its clearest affirmation in the enactment of violence (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009; Welland, 2013; Whitworth, 2004).

Military peacekeeping, then, presents a unique challenge to masculine identity. While soldiers in combat are not only permitted but required to act violently, UN peacekeepers are expected to use force only in very limited circumstances—a restriction that can be experienced as emasculating by military peacekeepers (Duncanson, 2009, p. 69). Although military peacekeeping often involves humanitarian activities associated with traditionally feminine caregiving, the individuals carrying out these activities are soldiers trained in combat and expected to adhere to the masculine norms of military life. Feminists have suggested that this mismatch between the experience, training and identities of soldiers, on the one hand, and the on-the-ground requirements of a peacekeeping mission, on the other, present an ongoing problem for UN peacekeeping operations (Whitworth, 2004, p. 152).

Peacekeepers may also find themselves in uniquely vulnerable situations, deployed on missions where civilian protection and restraint in use of force are prioritized alongside or above the safety of soldiers, requiring different tactics and entailing different risks from regular combat. In this context, masculine narratives of protection may be a double-edged sword, glorifying and privileging protector masculinity over feminized, helpless civilians (Sjoberg and Peet, 2011, p. 168), while also offering up the protectors as fearless, willing sacrifices. The reality for individual soldiers is likely to be quite different from this idealized narrative. International peacekeepers are deployed to unfamiliar environments and asked to undertake dangerous actions, not for the benefit not of ‘their’ vulnerable civilians, as would be the case in a more traditional combat situation, but for the benefit of foreigners. Meanwhile, the traditional restraints of militarized masculinity leave few outlets for fear, frustration or boredom, and the spectre of mission failure looms.

At the same time, the soldiers deployed to UN peacekeeping missions do not fully occupy the privileged positions of most protectors. While they undoubtedly occupy a position of power relative to local populations, the majority of peacekeeping contingents come from nations that are not the primary decision-makers in UN intergovernmental bodies. The regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America contribute upwards of 90 percent of the soldiers and police officers in UN missions, while the majority of the budget comes from Western nations and China,

creating an impression that powerful states send ‘hired help’ to do the most dangerous peacekeeping work (Weiss and Kuele, 2019). Meanwhile, protection strategies are requiring peacekeepers to adopt new, more dangerous approaches. Slogans such as ‘Action, not inaction! Proactive, not reactive! Mobile, not static! Feet, not wheels!’ (quoted in International Crisis Group, 2014, pp. 7–8)—drafted by Martin Kobler during his time as head of mission for MONUSCO—encourage soldiers to leave their bases and vehicles in order to more effectively provide protection to local civilians, at greater risk to their own safety. Increasingly, UN peacekeepers are also being tasked with offensive military operations alongside or in support of host government forces—a shift in policy that has raised concerns among some troop-contributing countries but has been largely favoured by the Western powers, as well as some African states (Weiss and Kuele, 2019). These changes, and the divide between states that contribute personnel to dangerous missions and those that fund peacekeeping operations and hold seats of power in the Security Council, mean that peacekeepers on the ground may be asked to perform in ways opposed by their own governments. These soldiers are international, not local to the countries or in some cases the regions where they are deployed, yet they are cut off from the power of decision-making bodies like the Security Council and the governments of the permanent members who wield veto power. Thus, while military peacekeepers fill an overtly masculine role in protection efforts, exercising use of force in the name of ‘protection’ and taking on a large portion of the risks associated with it, their position within the UN hierarchy is more precarious than might be expected for traditional masculine protectors.

The militarism of ‘protection’

Within the UN, then, the militarized masculinity of military peacekeepers is subordinate to the rational-bourgeois model embodied by diplomats, senior officials, experts and policymakers. Both models draw legitimacy, however, from their protective function, and while peacekeepers may be required to use force directly as part of their deployment to conflict zones, the commitment to protection also serves to justify UN decision-makers in authorizing use of force. Despite its clear identity as an anti-war institution, the UN is not an anti-military institution. Rather than seeking to do away with militarism entirely, it aims to redeploy military force into more legitimate and widely beneficial channels. The logic of protection provides an

answer to the question of how this should be done. In Kennedy's words, the strong must be just in order for the weak to be secure, and until that vision is achieved the UN must stand protectively between the weak and any unjust use of strength. In more recent formulations of the same underlying idea, the international community must recognize and fulfil its responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

To do away with militarism entirely would be a much more difficult project, requiring a reworking of how power is understood and used within the international system—a project not likely to generate support from governments. There is also a strong case to be made that, in the world as we find it, military force is not only justified but also necessary in response to the worst atrocity crimes. This is a part of the argument of R2P. What this thinking does not adequately account for, however, is the continued appeal of militarism, even within the UN context. This section will consider questions of what is gained and lost by 'protection' strategies based in military deployment and use of force, how protection language itself might encourage such approaches to intervention, and why UN interventions seem to be trending in this direction even after the adoption of R2P. In doing so, it will draw on the example of the 2009 'Kimia II' military operation in the DRC.

Protection, prevention and political will

Beginning with the 2001 ICISS report, the concept of prevention has been integral to R2P. Although the importance of prevention was not a new idea, the report stresses the need to 'close the gap between rhetorical support for prevention and tangible commitment' (ICISS, 2001a, p. 19). The Commission envisioned prevention as primarily a state responsibility, but one in which the international community must play a vital supporting role. This framework was taken up the Secretary-General in setting out the three pillars of R2P (see Chapter 3)—pillar two emphasizes the international responsibility to support states in their efforts to fulfil protection responsibilities—and in his 2013 report on 'Responsibility to protect: state responsibility and prevention' (UN Secretary-General, 2013, A/67/929). The emphasis on prevention can also be seen in the work of the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, which outlines on its website five key areas of work: early warning, advising and mobilizing, enhancing capacity, raising awareness, and advancing R2P implementation. These are centred around a strategy to strengthen the 'capacity of the United Nations to identify situations at risk of

genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (atrocity crimes), take early action to prevent them, and improve protection of populations' (UN Office on Genocide Prevention, n.d.). If carried out effectively, it is hoped, prevention efforts will eliminate the need for emergency responses to atrocity crimes and, in the most extreme cases, military action, which involves both greater cost and greater risk than prevention.

In the years since the adoption of R2P, however, little progress has been made in changing the way interventions are enacted to favour preventative, non-military approaches. Instead, in the area of peacekeeping, the UN has expanded mandates to allow for use of force in a wider range of circumstances, stretching understandings of 'protection' in the process. The continued emphasis on military approaches over non-military prevention efforts may in part be explained by the relative invisibility of prevention when compared with crisis response. One advocate for R2P identifies a paradoxical situation in which prevention of atrocity crimes is assumed to be more politically palatable—perceived as less controversial and posing less of a challenge to state sovereignty—but a militarized response to existing violence may be easier to mobilize:

I think people outside of our work zone would kind of assume that talking about peacekeepers and talking about troops going into a situation is difficult. It was actually a lot easier to talk about Central African Republic once it had reached a point of disaster, where you had intercommunal violence, interreligious violence, complete and utter breakdown of the rule of law, and widespread fighting around the country. Because it was so palpably clear what was going on. (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017)

Essentially, the more visible the crisis, the easier it is to mobilize action on the part of governments reluctant to commit resources or take political risks. The visibility of the response may also be a consideration, and there is nothing in the UN toolbox with higher visibility than military peacekeepers in blue helmets, driving white vehicles with 'UN' in black letters on the sides. DPKO and DFS have identified this visibility as a factor that may be effective in deterring violence before a situation escalates to the point that peacekeepers are called on to use force: 'The physical presence of a contingent with the credible capacity to use appropriate force through for example foot, vehicle or air patrols may be sufficient to deter or de-escalate a volatile situation' (UN DPKO/DFS, 2017, p. 6). Following this logic, the presence of peacekeepers may itself have a preventative effect against certain types of violence,

but the question of militarism remains. If R2P aims to promote preventative measures that reduce the need for military intervention, the strong association between protection commitments and military response is an ongoing problem.

The high visibility of military peacekeepers may have political as well as practical benefits. As discussed in Chapter 3, the commitments implied by protection language prove troublingly expansive, so that ‘protection of civilians’, while often intended to refer only to deterrence of widespread, systematic violence against civilians, may lead people to expect a more comprehensive responsibility for providing security on the part of UN or other international actors. Here again there may be a contradiction between what appears most effective and what is actually most effective. Military peacekeepers, whose presence is highly visible and potentially reassuring to local and international audiences alike, are simply unable to provide physical protection for all civilians at all times in their areas of deployment. At the same time, non-military preventative efforts to promote cultures of human rights and gender equality, support local judicial systems, assist in development and expand good governance, while likely to be more effective in the long term, are significantly less visible and do not ease the sense of urgency that is felt in relation to crisis response. The emotional appeal that is made by protection language speaks to a sense of emergency much more directly than it does to the idea that longer-term, less dramatic efforts are necessary and beneficial.

The importance of being seen to be doing something, consequently, may contribute to a preference for military over non-military options. Such options, however, are not necessarily more effective at meeting protection objectives and may do harm as well as good, especially in cases where military missions are not directly tied to support for achieving a political settlement. Speaking to the problem that military action alone does not achieve sustainable security, one expert with extensive experience in the field noted that ‘attack helicopters have never solved anything’ (Interview, former civilian peacekeeper, 14 Feb. 2017). At best, such measures can deter violence only in the short term, and once military forces have been deployed it is difficult to determine a clear end point for a mission. After a UN peacekeeping mission is on the ground the political risks and benefits shift, and withdrawing troops can become riskier, in political terms, than leaving them in a conflict zone, since any subsequent violence may be blamed on the decision to withdraw (Interview, former civilian peacekeeper, 14 Feb. 2017). This difficulty

may result in long-term deployments in places such as the DRC, where the UN has maintained a mission across decades without many signs of improvement in the security situation.

To understand how this happens, it is helpful to return to Young's analysis of protection based on the traditional patriarchal family, in which the power of the protector is obscured by his benevolence and willingness to sacrifice himself to defend others (Young, 2003). The element of self-sacrifice within this protection narrative—the apparent willingness on the part of the protector to subordinate his individual interests to those of the family unit, in exchange for which he is owed loyalty and obedience—suggests that the interests of the protected necessarily align with those of the protector: when protectors are powerful and strong, those who are dependent on their protection will be better off. That such an assumption often proves untrue is obvious; masculine 'protectors' within the family home may be perpetrators of domestic violence and other abuses of power. At the state and international levels the variety of interests invoked by protection language is even more complex, yet such language discourages investigation into the interests of protectors as potentially opposed to the interests of those they are protecting. In the case of international interventions, the intervening states are likely to be operating based on their own perceived national interests, in addition to (and potentially in opposition to) a humanitarian commitment, while individual 'protectors' may be motivated by ensuring their own security as well as the security of those they are 'protecting'. When interventions take a military form that may cause harm as well as good to the 'protected', questions must be raised about how the priorities of such interventions are determined and whose interests they benefit.

Kimia II and the consequences of militarized 'protection'

The logic of protective masculinity assumes that protectors are capable, in control and focused on the best interests of the protected. This assumption leaves little room to question the motivations or the abilities of protectors, making 'protection' a convenient path to legitimizing use of force. This potential problem is reflected in the evolution of the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC—originally MONUC, later renamed MONUSCO—which has increasingly been tasked with 'peace enforcement', seen by some as a departure from traditional understandings of

peacekeeping (Tull, 2018). Discussing the impact of the PoC agenda, one expert on PoC in the Congo reported:

Protection of civilians...became this key concept at the UN that can justify everything. It became so important and changed the culture of peacekeeping operations in a way that now full protection of civilians can make peacekeeping a different thing. You can actually advocate for offensive operations, use of force, maybe in some areas counterterrorism—for the sake of protection of civilians. (Interview, PoC expert, 14 Feb. 2017)

Serious questions remain, however, about the effectiveness of such operations for protection purposes, as well as the motivations for undertaking them. Despite the initial sense of clarity that may come from use of military force—a clear sense that something serious is being done to address a crisis—the power relationships, capability and motivations of the ‘protectors’ are far from clear.

One example of the dangerous complexity of military intervention for protection purposes is provided by the Kimia II military operation, in which MONUC partnered with local government forces as part of an offensive military operation against the rebel group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in Eastern Congo. Between January and February 2009, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) had conducted a joint operation named Umoja Wetu, aimed at taking back territory from the FDLR, and had had some success in achieving the surrender and repatriation of Rwandan militants fighting within the FDLR, as well as in building confidence between the Congolese and Rwandan governments (Doss, 2014, p. 723). The Congolese government did not want Rwandan forces to remain within the DRC indefinitely, however, and shortly after the end of Umoja Wetu a second operation was planned separately from the RDF, with the objective of solidifying and building on the gains that had already been made against the FDLR (Doss, 2014, pp. 723–724). For this operation, named Kimia II, MONUC provided support to the FARDC in several key areas, assisting with military planning and logistics, provision of food and fuel, training, evacuation of casualties, and, in some cases, fire support from mortars and attack helicopters (Thomas-Jensen et al., 2009). The operation lasted from March to December 2009.

From the start, there seems to have been some lack of clarity about the objectives of Kimia II and the role of MONUC in supporting them, although UN

actors repeatedly referenced protection of civilians as a central motivation for MONUC's engagement in the operation. In March 2009, the Secretary-General reported the mission's objectives as follows:

The joint FARDC-MONUC operation, "Kimia II", is aimed at protecting civilians and pursuing the neutralization of FDLR by preventing it from reoccupying former positions and cutting its lines of economic sustenance. MONUC is also providing logistical and fire support to FARDC in the context of that operation and is aiming to ensure that all FARDC units involved in those operations abide by international humanitarian law and prioritize the protection of civilians. (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/160, para. 15).

What is meant by 'neutralization' is vague, however. Reporting to the Security Council in his capacity as the head of MONUC in December 2009, near the end of the period of UN support for Kimia II, Alan Doss described the operation as 'focused on disrupting and dispersing FDLR forces in order to end their control of population centres and to weaken their capacity to exploit the country's natural wealth' (UN Security Council, 2009, S/PV.6244, p. 2). He stressed that the purpose of the operation was not to defeat the FDLR or entirely neutralize the threat they posed, but rather to regain ground that would then be held by the FARDC and MONUC forces working in cooperation, and to prevent the FDLR from regrouping. All of this would be undertaken with protection of civilians 'at the core of these operations' (UN Security Council, 2009, S/PV.6244, p. 3)—a crucial point for the legitimacy of the operation in connection with the longstanding UN peacekeeping principles of 'impartiality' and 'non-use of force except self-defence or defence of the mandate' (UN DPKO/DFS, 2008, p. 31). UN participation in a military offensive in support of one party to a conflict appears to violate these principles, but 'protection of civilians' provides cover on both counts, since MONUC was mandated to use force to protect civilians and since policymakers could argue that establishing government control over territory formerly held by rebel groups was a form of civilian protection.

This prioritizing of civilian protection, however, is called into question by the UN's failure to respond to concerns raised by NGOs and some mission personnel, prior to the start of Kimia II, that a military offensive against the FDLR would result in unacceptable increases in the level of violence against civilians. These warnings came from a variety of sources, including the Congolese Advocacy Coalition of 64 different groups, and raised a number of concerns: that the operation lacked the

necessary firepower to defeat the FDLR; that a partnership between the FARDC and UN forces would provide legitimacy to an army with its own long record of human rights abuses; and that offensive action against the FDLR would provoke strategic, retaliatory attacks on civilian populations (AIDS-Free World, 2010). Some officials within MONUC likewise expressed concerns about the ability of the FARDC to comply with international humanitarian law and the possibility of disastrous consequences for civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 137). The Security Council, however, ‘arrogantly, cavalierly ignored knowledgeable local and international civil society groups on the ground’ and went ahead with the operation (Donovan, 2010).

Predictions about the dangerous consequences of the operation proved accurate, and a 2009 report by Human Rights Watch extensively documents the surge in violence against civilians committed by the FDLR. Similar reporting has come from official UN sources including a Group of Experts mandated by the Security Council to report on the situation in the DRC and Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, who described the implementation of *Kimia II* as ‘absolutely catastrophic’ for civilians (UN News, 2010). The numbers of reported casualties vary slightly across different sources, based on the timeframes they apply, but the scale of the violence was clearly disastrous. Human Rights Watch reported more than 1,400 documented cases of deliberate killing of civilians in the period between January and September 2009, as well as 7,500 cases of sexual violence reported to health centres—nearly double the number that had been reported in 2008 and not including unreported cases (Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 10). Additionally, the organization reported more than 600 homes burned and 900,000 people displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2009b). Directly addressing the question of proportionality implicit in the claim that an operation to expand government control of rebel-held territory would ultimately benefit civilians in spite of any initial costs, they noted that ‘for every rebel combatant disarmed during the operation, one civilian has been killed, seven women and girls have been raped, six houses burned and destroyed, and 900 people have been forced to flee their homes’ (Human Rights Watch, 2009b).

These attacks on civilians were foreseeable because of their strategic, systematic nature. The UN Group of Experts viewed and documented written threats from an FDLR commanding officer sent to both civilian and military authorities in

Bunyakiri in March 2009, promising retaliation if Kimia II operations commenced in the area (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 348). In the following weeks, the promised attacks were carried out, consisting of killings, rapes, abductions, forced labour and burned houses (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 348). In the following months a FARDC brigade stationed in Busurungi received five letters of warning from the FDLR before an attack on the area that resulted in upwards of 60 civilian deaths (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 353). FARDC forces discouraged the local population from fleeing prior to the attack, but proved unable to defend them against the FDLR attacks (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 352). The Group of Experts noted in their report that these systematic attacks constituted a clear violation of international law and might rise to the level of crimes against humanity (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 352). Motivated by a desire on the part of the FDLR to maintain control over the civilian populations of the territory they held, such attacks were most likely to occur in areas where neither the FDLR nor the FARDC, nor any other party to the conflict, were entirely in control of the territory (Levine, 2011, p. 101). Consequently, the destabilizing effect of Kimia II on the FDLR's ability to hold territory increased the incentives for the group to engage in targeted violence against civilians.

The violence aimed at civilians during the Kimia II operation was not, however, limited to that committed by the FDLR, and the number of crimes perpetrated by FARDC soldiers during the period of active collaboration with MONUC raises serious questions about the role of protector, blurring the line between protectors and perpetrators. The FARDC record of widespread human rights abuses was well-known before the start of Kimia II, and NGOs criticized the UN for its decision to partner with the FARDC without setting preconditions or formally raising human rights concerns ahead of the launch of the operation (Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 138). Pre-existing problems with FARDC operations included poor discipline, unreliable pay for soldiers, and a hurried integration process through which former members of the rebel group National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) were brought into the FARDC without adequate planning or dismantling of CNDP command structures (Thomas-Jensen et al., 2009). As a result of this disorganized approach to integration, some FARDC units appear to have had divided loyalties, and the Group of Experts uncovered multiple cases of

FARDC officials diverting weapons, ammunition and other military equipment to armed groups, sometimes directly to the FDLR, during the period when the operation was supposed to be weakening the ability of the FDLR to hold territory and threaten civilian populations (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 52).

Even more disturbingly, the Group of Experts documented 530 incidents of FARDC forces committing abuses against civilians including killings, sexual violence, torture, looting and arson (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 358). The FARDC was also implicated in recruitment and use of child soldiers (UN Security Council, S/2009/603, paras. 321–323) and ten attacks on NGO staff, including one killing (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, para. 377). Human rights workers documented attacks particularly aimed at Rwandan refugees and civilians viewed as FDLR dependents (UN Security Council, 2009, S/2009/603, paras. 359–365). While carrying out these politically motivated attacks, the FARDC was also failing to protect civilians targeted by the FDLR. The result, according to the Enough Project, was a situation that proved to be ‘the worst of both worlds for civilians: they face predatory behavior from Congo’s abusive and haphazardly integrated national army, yet are not protected from predictable and devastating reprisal attacks from the FDLR’ (Thomas-Jensen et al., 2009). Belatedly, the UN announced a policy of withdrawing support from any FARDC units found to be acting in violation of human rights or humanitarian law, yet in a December 2009 report the Secretary-General continued to stress that ensuring civilian protection was ‘first and foremost the primary responsibility of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, adding that, with MONUC in a supporting role, ‘the Government must take the measures necessary to transform FARDC into a protector of the Congolese people’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para. 93). Despite its partnership with the FARDC in carrying out an offensive military operation with grave consequences for the security of local civilians, and its repeated emphasis on protection of civilians as the top priority for MONUC, UN actors proved hesitant to take direct responsibility for the outcomes.

R2P and the motivations of ‘protectors’

The circumstances of the Kimia II operation, the abuses against civilians committed by both government and non-state combatants, and the consequent blurring of the line between protectors and perpetrators, state and non-state actors,

all raise serious questions about the protection logic at work within R2P, which despite its international character embraces a state-based approach to prevention of atrocity crimes. Engaging in offensive as well as defensive military operations in direct coordination with the government of the DRC, MONUC pushed beyond the traditional limits of peacekeeping and moved in the direction of the less cautious, more proactive approach to intervention advocated by R2P—an approach that casts the international community in a supporting role, bolstering state power wherever possible as the clearest path to ensuring security. At the same time, by providing military as well as political support, the UN mission went beyond the types of capacity-building assistance envisioned by pillar two of R2P, devoting a portion of its limited resources instead to supplying and backing up the Congolese armed forces, which have their own record of atrocity crimes. The doubtful benefits and clear risks of this approach seem at odds with MONUC’s mandate to protect civilians. An examination of UN accounts of the operation suggests, however, that it may have been the burdens associated with this commitment that drove the decision to participate in Kimia II.

Despite the seeming decisiveness and clarity of a military intervention, the position of MONUC in relation to Kimia II appears to have been shaped by difficult tensions between contradictory objectives, political motivations and practical limitations. This tension is reflected in the language with which the Secretary-General framed the operation, and which is strikingly different from the language used by NGO critics and other, less prominent UN actors. The December 2009 report, submitted at the end of the operation, notes that the ‘FDLR was dislodged from strongholds in Lubero, from its military and political headquarters in Masisi and from trading places in Nyabiondo and the surrounding area’ and ‘pushed back from areas where it had been illegally collecting taxes’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para. 6). While the operation had never intended to defeat the FDLR entirely, at its end the ‘FARDC controlled all territorial capitals and all major population centres in the Kivus’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para. 6). Additionally, ‘MONUC’s support was critical’ in holding territory taken during the earlier Umoja Wetu operation (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para. 5). The report acknowledges the controversy surrounding the operation and notes that the deteriorating humanitarian situation presented ‘major challenges’ to Kimia II. At the same time, the report suggests that MONUC’s participation helped to mitigate

potential negative consequences, noting that ‘by providing rations and logistical support to the troops involved in Kimia II, [MONUC] continued to help prevent 16,000 troops from living off the population’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para.10).

That the Secretary-General and his staff would attempt, in their reports to the Security Council, to present the operation in the most positive light possible is unsurprising. Yet the subordination of humanitarian concerns to the value of tactical military successes appears inconsistent with repeated statements that civilian protection was the highest priority. On the subject of the costs to civilians, the Secretary-General observes: ‘While Operation Kimia II against FDLR achieved significant military gains, it was accompanied by a high humanitarian cost’ (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/623, para. 91). Similar language was used by Doss when reporting on Kimia II to the Security Council, where he spoke of ‘humanitarian consequences’ (UN Security Council, 2009, S/PV.6159, pp. 2, 3). Contrasted with the detailed and direct language from other sources, this terminology seems to downplay the human tragedies resulting from the operation. Weighing the limited tactical gains of the military offensive against the widespread violence against civilians that resulted from it, outside observers definitively stated their conclusion that the costs were too high. UN leadership does not appear to have reached the same conclusion.

Given the warnings from civil society and experts on the ground before the operation started, and considering the complexity of the conflict and the position of danger in which the operation was likely to place UN troops, why did the UN act as it did? Returning to the logic of protective masculinity and the temptations of militarism embedded in UN intervention narratives helps to explain the strange positioning of the organization in relation to Kimia II and its attending risks—both physical, for troops on the ground, and political, for UN leadership—and to recognize the ways in which the interests of ‘protectors’ and the interests of the ‘protected’ might diverge from each other. Staking its legitimacy on the role of protector, the UN must not only provide security to the people it claims to be protecting, but must also maintain perceptions of its capability, relevance and expertise. A good protector must appear to have the situation under control, leaving little space for the UN to adopt a hands-off approach to ‘protective’ military efforts

undertaken within the territory where its largest peacekeeping force has been present for many years.

Running through accounts of the lead-up to Kimia II is a sense that the UN had little choice about whether to support the operation. MONUC had not been part of either the planning or the implementation of the preceding Umoja Wetu operation, and through interviews with UN officials Human Rights Watch concluded that MONUC leadership had been ‘caught off guard’ (Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 135). Confronted with the plan for Kimia II, the mission hoped to avoid being sidelined a second time, and one official told Human Rights Watch, ‘We were left with no choice, either we were in or we were out....We believed that being on the inside would give us a better chance to help protect civilians’ (quoted in Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 136). UN leadership also appears to have felt public pressure to take action. As Doss stated to the Security Council, ‘The international community has consistently advocated action to dismantle armed groups operating in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’ (UN Security Council, 2009, S/PV.6159, p. 2). Participation in Kimia II, though deeply flawed, was a response to that call. The launch of such operations, the Secretary-General argued, ‘demonstrates the commitment’ of the Congolese government to addressing the problem posed by rebel groups and achieving security in the region (UN Secretary-General, 2009, S/2009/335, para. 69). UN leadership may have felt that MONUC’s participation in Kimia II would likewise demonstrate the UN’s commitment to its protection responsibilities and its relevance in the role of protector. Speaking about the 2013 Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC, also tasked with carrying out offensive military operations, one PoC expert characterized the policy as ‘a demonstration of force to show they were doing something about [protection of civilians]’ (Interview, PoC expert, 14 Feb. 2017).

At the same time that the UN was confronting its limited options in relation to the military plans of the Congolese government and choosing action over inaction, it was ignoring the urgent concerns raised by advocacy groups about the impact Kimia II was likely to have on civilians. And, in contradiction to the idea that by taking part in the operation MONUC would be well-positioned to ensure protection measures were put in place, the mission appears to have made no demands that the FARDC address serious issues with its integration process and other structural problems prior to the operation’s launch (Human Rights Watch, 2009a, p. 138).

Discussing Kimia II and its protection failures, one advocacy group argued that the operation ‘is harrowing evidence of MONUSCO’s lack of connection with the complexities of the situation, and lack of willingness to listen to those who do understand those complexities’ (AIDS-Free World, 2010). This also aligns with the central requirement of the masculine protector role—the appearance, if not the reality, of having the situation under control, of possessing the knowledge required to master it.

This points to a fundamental problem with the protection logic that underpins R2P: an assumption that the best protection strategy is to strengthen the protectors, evidenced by the clear focus within R2P on the responsibility of states to protect and role for the UN in helping states to build capacity to meet their protection responsibilities (UN General Assembly, 2005, A/RES/60/1, paras. 138 and 139). As one interviewee noted, most peacekeeping missions are now mandated to support state authority in the countries where they operate, but this can be problematic in places where the state and its security forces are themselves abusers (Interview, former civilian peacekeeper, 14 Feb. 2017). The example of Kimia II demonstrates that it is often unrealistic to expect that the relevant state has either the capability or the desire to protect civilians, even when presented with extensive international pressure and support. It is likewise unrealistic to expect that the UN can step into the role of protector without a state partner, given its limited resources and political capital. The entities in the protector position, both states and the UN, additionally have their own sets of interests that do not always align with the interests of the civilians most at risk. In deciding to take part in Kimia II, the UN appears to have weighed the political imperative to maintain its position of relevance and ability to influence decisions against the foreseeable costs in civilian lives and livelihoods, and taken the decision in favour of its own political interests. There is truth in the idea that vulnerable civilians have a stake in a strong UN, capable of advocating on their behalf and providing humanitarian and development assistance. Civilians likewise have a clear interest in the establishment of state authorities capable of maintaining order and stability. Focusing on these conditions alone, however, is not sufficient to ensure the security from systematic violence that R2P hopes to achieve, and in spite of sincere intentions to shape interventions according to the needs of the people at risk, protection narratives continually shift focus back to the protectors, serving as

justification for use of force that helps to preserve the protectors' position of strength but is not necessarily in the best interest of the so-called protected.

Conclusion

The 'responsibility to protect' confers both privileges and burdens on individuals and institutions filling the role of protector—a role that is enmeshed with ideals of protective masculinity, defined by benevolence, strength and capability, in opposition to feminized helplessness. This chapter has discussed ways in which versions of protective masculinity are interconnected with militarism, pushing interventions for protection purposes in the direction of military actions despite the original framing of R2P. The expansive responsibility implied by 'protection' commitments and the difficulty of living up to this expectation leads protectors to favour actions that will appear decisive, serving as demonstration of their commitment and capability. At the same time, protection narratives obscure the exercise of power that happens within protective relationships, urging not only the protected but also the protectors to view these relationships as characterized by unfailing benevolence. These pressures contribute to the ongoing problem of interventions that fail to accomplish their stated purpose of preventing or halting violence against civilians, and encourage protectors to take actions necessary to preserve their own power above actions that will most directly benefit the people at risk.

While 'protectors' occupy positions of privilege relative to the 'protected', there are also important power disparities between different models of protective masculinity. These disparities can be especially stark in the context of UN interventions, where the diplomats and civil servants who shape policy at headquarters buildings in New York and Geneva face very different sets of privileges and vulnerabilities from those faced by personnel in field missions, both civilian and military. The imperative to maintain control of unfolding events takes different forms in these varied settings, and the possibility of failures carries different risks. The following chapter will consider the risks to interventions and the people who design and implement them posed by failure and vulnerability—two concepts central to the intervention narratives proposed by R2P and which speak to gendered anxieties that shape interventions and interpretations of their outcomes.

6. UN Vulnerability and Failures to Protect

Introduction

In December 2013, Juba, the capital of South Sudan, was overtaken by politically and ethnically motivated violence, beginning an unforeseen chain of events that left the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) vulnerable to a range of new challenges and security concerns. Although the mission was mandated to protect civilians, much of its energy and resources had previously been devoted to supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan. Now thousands of civilians were amassing outside of the UN compound in Juba, in fear for their lives. The mission was faced with exactly the type of emergency that had led to the development of R2P: Would it take unprecedented action to save civilian lives or fall back on established procedures that were wholly inadequate for addressing the immediate fallout of the crisis? In what came to be known as the ‘open the gates’ policy, the mission leadership took the decision to provide refuge to tens of thousands of people within the UN bases, both in Juba and, in the days that followed, other parts of the country. Many proponents of R2P viewed it as a moment of success. In contrast with past failures, the UN had acted quickly to prevent mass slaughter.

A closer reading of the crisis presents a more complicated picture, however, and raises questions about the extent to which the UN was truly able to play an active decision-making role that shaped rather than merely reacting to events. The language of R2P, and of UN interventions more broadly, assumes a clear dichotomy between capable international actors and the helpless local civilians in need of protection, perpetuating a false distinction between strength and vulnerability. The experiences of UNMISS stand in direct contradiction to this picture of the role the UN plays in relation to on-the-ground events, suggesting that it is not only civilians, but also UN actors and the UN itself, that experience vulnerability in the context of armed conflict and security crises.

The preceding chapters have considered areas of complexity around the question of what protection means in the context of R2P: the difficulties of settling on a clear definition or drawing distinctions between activities that count as ‘protection’ and those that do not; the tendency, despite the goal within R2P to reshape intervention policy according to the needs of people rather than the interests

of states, to take a reductionist view of local civilians, stereotyping them (and women in general) as helpless—not partners in peacebuilding, but objects of protection; and the recurring problem of militarism in international interventions, at times to the detriment of civilian security. I have argued that these difficulties are gendered in a variety of ways, yet behind all of them is the central protection story, a narrative in which capable, benevolent men protect women and children from uncivilized, dangerous men. Although the gendered roles within the narrative are rarely so explicitly named in UN texts—and although in reality men and women both cross the traditional boundary between masculinized combatants and feminized civilians—the gender content of these identities remains just below the surface, with each actor defined by her or his relationship to violence: protector, victim, perpetrator.

The strength of that core story, its continued effectiveness in calling up emotional responses, and the almost automatic sense of legitimacy it confers on intervention narratives constructed in its image are central to the project of R2P. Consciously or not, the drafters of the ICISS report drew heavily on the idea that rescue is both necessary and possible, and that there is a stable distinction to be made between the rescuers and those in need of rescue. The distinction seems obvious, natural, in part because of its gender content. It maps onto a deeply rooted and familiar framework of what it means to be male and masculine, female and feminine. Its apparent simplicity masks the need to discursively confront the complexities that protective interventions inevitably face in practice. That nobody can say with certainty what protection means is no barrier to the ubiquitous reliance on protection language within UN texts and mission mandates. We feel that we know what it means, in spite of the difficulty of committing to any clear definition. We recognize it as a call to action.

In adopting protection language, R2P aims to serve as a call to action in response to and prevention of atrocity crimes: ‘We want, above all, to strengthen the prospects for obtaining action, on a collective and principled basis, with a minimum of double standards, in response to conscience-shocking situations of great humanitarian need crying out for action’ (ICISS, 2001a, p. 74). The ICISS framed the recurring problem of inaction primarily as a deficiency in political will—a reluctance on the part of states to live up to their protection responsibilities and to commit to enforcing humanitarian principles at the international level, and perhaps

also inadequate efforts on the part of UN leadership and international civil society to promote such principles and remind states of their obligations. The Commission recognized a range of political obstacles including states' interest in upholding the principle of sovereignty, disagreements between states about when intervention is warranted and, within states, lack of domestic support for costly and dangerous international interventions. The ICISS set out, in part, to offer proposals of solutions to these political problems, suggesting ways of reframing the debate in order to align international humanitarian imperatives with the interests and concerns of individual states and assuage concerns about the erosion of sovereignty and resulting abuses of intervention doctrine by powerful states.

What this approach overlooks is a more basic problem of inaction in the face of atrocities committed against civilians. It seems to assume that interventions need to be mobilized only at the start, marshalling the necessary resources and overcoming political disagreements about whether an intervention is necessary and what forms it should take. Stepping away from these political debates and struggles among states that take place in the Security Council or the General Assembly, there is the decision to mobilize that must be made repeatedly by actors on the ground, often in the context of missions that are already in place. And such moments of decision—whether individual battalions, soldiers or leaders will act when faced with a specific, immediate incident of violence targeting civilians—go to the root of the protection problem. Despite the apparent emphasis on mobilizing intervention to halt such acts of brutality, the core R2P texts do not grapple with a basic, unasked question: Why—when faced with atrocities not on the other side of the world, but 15 kilometres away, just outside the gates, even within the compound's walls—do UN 'protectors' so often choose to take no action at all? In such cases the definitional problems with protection dissolve, and the essential narrative with its clear roles—protector, perpetrator, victim—comes back into view. There are instances of apparent success, such as the 'open the gates' moment. And yet too often the narrative falters. Put to a real-world test, it does not accomplish what it seems to promise.

I contend that an explanation for this problem can be found, in part, in an examination of the concept of vulnerability—how the UN deploys the concept, which vulnerabilities it highlights, which it attempts to erase, and how such vulnerabilities are gendered. Building on the previous chapter's analysis of

protective masculine identities and the limitations associated with them, this chapter will examine the associations between vulnerability and gender, and the ways in which protection language both depends on and perpetuates a gendered construction of what it means to be vulnerable. Through analysis of UN security texts, I will argue that the UN deploys language of vulnerability in very limited ways, reflecting an underlying view of vulnerability as a characteristic belonging to others—those outside of the traditional mechanisms of UN authority, especially the local and the feminine. This has political implications for those labeled as vulnerable, the ‘women and children’ who are assumed to be helpless and whose voices are regularly excluded from decision-making processes that have very real consequences for their lives and security. It also has political implications for the protectors—those included in decision-making, their hold on power and the types of authority they exercise.

Women’s vulnerability is symbolically important to the meaning of protection language, serving as the justification for protective action. It is also potentially infectious. Civilian spaces—those occupied by ‘vulnerable women and children’—are themselves constructed as vulnerable, and R2P is premised on the idea that this vulnerability can spread to entire states if governments are unable or unwilling to fulfil their protective function. Protection in this construction is the antidote, not to the vulnerability of the protected, which is a necessary, enduring condition, but to the potential for vulnerability in the protectors. States become vulnerable to atrocity crimes, and then to intervention, when they fail as protectors.

At stake in R2P is not the vulnerability of people or states alone, however, but the unspoken potential for vulnerability within the international community, and particularly within the UN as an institution. From its founding, the UN has been a highly ambitious project and one whose existence and relevance has remained precarious across decades. Its claims to authority are essential to its survival, but are unstable. I will argue that the gendered divisions perpetuated by UN security texts’ reliance on the concepts of protection and vulnerability serve a vital purpose in walling off the UN’s own destabilizing potential for vulnerability, enabling the identity based in benevolent power, capability and expertise that is central to R2P and UN intervention narratives. I contend that the limited understanding of vulnerability contained within these texts serves not only to disenfranchise the women it marks as always potentially subject to violence, but also to insulate UN

actors and governments from considering too directly their own vulnerability in the context of interventions.

This chapter will begin by examining how different theorists approach the concept of vulnerability, the contested narratives surrounding the ‘open the gates’ moment in South Sudan, and how a focus on vulnerability is useful in reading UN intervention through the events of the December 2013 crisis. It will then apply the lens of vulnerability to instances in which UN ‘protectors’ have failed to act to stop violence against civilians, raising questions about how the UN frames such incidents and consequently how it responds to them. Finally, it will consider the implications for UN policymakers and the UN as an institution—what type of authority is gained through this relationship to vulnerability and what might be lost as a result of it. Throughout, the chapter will engage with questions of vulnerability and how it might be conceptualized. Reading UN interventions with this lens offers important insights into the role of vulnerability in shaping the UN’s actions and its sense of its own authority. It is my contention that a gender perspective is necessary to understanding how vulnerability functions within UN language and practice, as well as what might be at stake for the UN in maintaining a limited understanding of vulnerability, one which associates vulnerability with civilians, ‘women and children’, but not with the organization itself.

Gender and vulnerability—understanding what is at stake

In the introduction to her book *Women in Dark Times*, Jacqueline Rose suggests that fear is a gendered experience. In a dangerous and often violent world, it is an inevitable feature of human life, yet it is an emotion that women are expected, even instructed, to feel in a way that men are not (Rose, 2014). Women face dangers on public streets, in their homes, in their workplaces; women live with an awareness that violence is always possible, always potentially waiting for them around a corner. This is, on one level, a response to an empirical reality: gender-based violence does target women in specific ways, making their lives dangerous in ways that men’s lives often are not. But men are not immune to violence, or to the social inequalities that place some individuals at greater risk than others. The tendency to identify women as uniquely vulnerable obscures this complexity, an act which Rose views as a form of projection, enabling an illusion that it is possible for some to wall themselves off from fear, to reject the vulnerability it signifies: ‘Let women be

fearful so men can feel brave and safe’ (Rose, 2014, p. 10). This has implications for the lives of individuals, but also for actions and events experienced at the collective level, and for the discourses that shape human institutions. The act of imagining a neat division between the fearful and the fearless, the vulnerable and the strong—a division dependent on gendered associations and meanings that underpin these categories—Rose recognizes as a means of sidestepping a problem at the heart of human life (Rose, 2014, p. 10). The world *is* frightening, and our species makes it more so through the violence we direct toward each other.

As gender narratives shift and are increasingly challenged and dismantled in both personal and political realms of human thought and action, it becomes increasingly difficult to deny the role of such narratives in shaping our relationships to vulnerability, as well as in shaping possibilities for addressing the problem of violence. The commitment to engage fully with these questions, however, is one that proves difficult to sustain in political and policy discussions. Writing in the mid-1970s about what she terms the project of sexual liberty, Dorothy Dinnerstein notes that ‘the stone walls that activism runs into have buried foundations’, and anyone ‘who has pushed in a practical way against the legal or economic or other institutional barriers blocking change in some specific part of our overall male-female situation—even quite modest, limited change—knows how sturdy these concrete societal barriers are, and how fiercely defended’ (Dinnerstein, 1976, p. 12). The problem, she argues, is not merely an external one—in the UN context, the questions of funding, government priorities, territorial fights between agencies or actors, and a general, pervasive sense of how things are done. These external barriers reflect and draw their persistence from internal ones. Questioning vulnerability in ways that push beyond its association with women and children, traditionally designated the weaker segments of the human population, raises troubling questions about the vulnerability of humanity as a whole, and the vulnerability of our institutions. To reformulate Rose’s assertion: if women are not uniquely, specially fearful, maybe nobody can feel entirely brave and safe. This is a psychological problem in which all people, regardless of gender, have a stake. While current manifestations of gender inequality are manifestly dangerous and destructive, the dismantling of known, familiar power relationships and the narratives that make these relationships feel meaningful presents another, more internal type of threat. In the work of pushing for gender equality, ‘our hearts *must* to some degree fail us, and

as a result our minds *must* to some degree go fuzzy' (Dinnerstein, 1976, p. 13, emphasis in original).

The effort to see clearly and work to change existing gender relations is, however, an essential part of the UN project of rooting out violence and creating a world in which human rights can flourish. Framed in revolutionary terms as a project of 'We the peoples' (United Nations, 1945, Preamble), the UN throughout its existence has been hemmed in by the political realities of the status quo—an international order made up of governments and prioritizing state power and interests. Despite its stated desire to put people at the centre of interventions, R2P has not attempted to challenge the centrality of states or the institutional boundaries of the UN, leaving governments fixed as both the primary actors and the primary stakeholders of intervention policy. Proponents of R2P have decided, understandably, that any immediate benefits of a change in intervention policy will have to be achieved within the existing state-based international order.

While recognizing the hard reality of these limitations, I argue that this cannot be the end of the discussion. Even constituted as an intergovernmental organization, the UN has room to radically shift its approaches to policy formation and engagement with local communities. A gender focus—one with the necessary resources, knowledge and commitment within the UN system—could provide a path out of entrenched ways of doing things, offering a roadmap for rethinking security policy, protection and the ways in which international interventions are mobilized. This is, from a government perspective, one of the dangers posed by the concept of gender. It is also, however, the concept's promise, and vital to the success of UN security efforts over the long term. Grappling with questions of vulnerability, the roles of men and women, and the gendered power dynamics at work in interventions is essential to the viability of R2P as a policy agenda.

Meanings of vulnerability

This section will discuss feminist academic approaches to understanding vulnerability, before moving on to consider the ways in which the concept of vulnerability is gendered in UN language. The feminist academic literature generally recognizes two broad views of the concept: vulnerability can be seen as a universal human characteristic, an inevitable condition associated with bodily and social needs, which make us dependent on others and susceptible to deprivation or violence

(Ahmed, 2014). Alternatively, vulnerability can be experienced in particular ways by individuals or groups of individuals (Fineman, 2008; Gilson, 2016; Mackenzie et al., 2014). Each of these views has its limitations. An emphasis on vulnerability as a universal human experience runs the risk of obscuring the different ways in which differently situated humans experience vulnerability. More particular forms of analysis have the advantage of accounting for difference but also create the potential for negative stereotyping of individuals or groups designated as vulnerable (Mackenzie et al., 2014). The distinction between universal and particular forms of vulnerability is a useful one in thinking about how vulnerability might operate in human lives, yet perhaps it is most politically fruitful to recognize that these categories are not mutually exclusive but rather overlap in ways that are vital to understanding the complexity of human identities and experiences.

Wendy Rogers, Catriona Mackenzie and Susan Dodds advocate for a taxonomy of vulnerability that recognizes three forms it may take: (1) inherent vulnerability, which is an unavoidable feature of the human condition; (2) situational vulnerability, which can change over time and is related to the particular situations of individuals or groups—e.g. a temporary displacement from one's home due to a natural disaster; and (3) pathogenic vulnerability, created by situations of abuse, violence, prejudice or oppression (Rogers et al., 2012; Mackenzie et al., 2014). Notably for the question of international intervention, they identify pathogenic vulnerability as potentially arising from misguided or poorly executed policy interventions intended to address inherent or situational vulnerabilities, which may unintentionally exacerbate these existing vulnerabilities and leave the intended beneficiaries worse off than they otherwise would have been (Rogers et al., 2012, p. 25). They additionally argue that vulnerability can be classified as dispositional or occurrent, the difference between a potential vulnerability and one that is actually occurring—we are all potentially vulnerable to the effects of extreme temperatures, but individuals living in camps with inadequate shelter face an immediate vulnerability that those with access to heating and cooling systems do not (Rogers et al., 2012, pp. 24–25). This perspective is important because of the flexibility it provides in thinking about the sources of vulnerability faced by diverse groups of people with diverse social and living conditions. It avoids the traps of universalism (an erasure of difference and inability to recognize the effects of social inequalities or power imbalances) and of particularism (the danger of stigmatizing some

individuals or groups as inordinately, unchangeably vulnerable), creating an opening for examining human vulnerability in all its complexity and difficulty.

Judith Butler, in thinking about the political implications of vulnerability, is also interested in moving between the universal and the particular, considering what is at stake in our ability or inability to recognize different versions of vulnerability. Butler views vulnerability as rooted in the body, which has undeniable needs that may go unmet, and which places us in a state of inevitable dependence on others (Butler, 2004, p. 31). The body may also be the target of violence, and she notes that disadvantaged groups, including women, contend with the ever-present possibility of violence, as well as in many cases facing actual violence. Thus ‘each of us is constituted politically in part by the social vulnerability of our bodies’ (Butler, 2004, p. 20). Vulnerability is in many ways tied to identity, a social condition that cannot be erased through appeals to a universal human experience. For Butler, the relevant question is who counts as human, and who is recognized as human (Butler, 2004, p. 20). She views experiences of vulnerability—loss, grief, violence—especially for those who lead lives of relative security, as opportunities for confronting the insecurities faced by others, moments of crucial decision-making. Unexpected experiences of vulnerability can become occasions for lashing out, resorting to violence and militarism, but they can also be moments to recontextualize and reconsider the violence we inflict on others (Butler, 2004, p. 29).

Crucial to avoiding pathological responses to experiences of vulnerability is the recognition that human control is not absolute. Failure to contend with the inevitability of such experiences limits the possibility for empathy and may lead to attempts at reassertion of control through violence, an attempt to appear ‘impermeable’ (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Such failure is also, in a sense, gendered, since men and masculinized institutions have more opportunity of displacing vulnerability and accompanying experiences of fear onto others through exercises of power or use of force—according to Rose, a skill ‘at which men (often) and nations (regularly) excel themselves’ (Rose, 2014, p. 10). Here can be seen the importance of maintaining a flexible concept of vulnerability, one that is capable of recognizing the particular forms it takes for certain individuals or groups yet does not deny that vulnerability is something we all must come to terms with, at both individual and societal levels. Denial of vulnerability runs the risk of dehumanization—both for those labeled inherently, particularly vulnerable and thus incapable of full

participation in political life, and for those who take on the role of the invulnerable, repudiating a capacity for fellow-feeling with those targeted by violence.

This is a concern of great importance for the UN project. The prevention of organized violence, the assertion of human rights and human dignity, and the creation of a more just world—objectives laid out in the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945)—are undermined by an unwillingness to grapple with the complexities of human vulnerability. In spite of this, and in spite of repeated use of the term ‘vulnerability’ in UN security texts, the organization has yet to give this concept the level of attention it deserves, instead relying on gendered associations with vulnerability in ways that uphold a dichotomy between active, masculine protectors and passive, feminine protected.

Feminine vulnerabilities in UN language

The language of UN Security Council resolutions and security-themed reports of the Secretary-General treats vulnerability not as a universal or an individual characteristic, but rather as one associated with ‘groups’ or ‘populations’. It is not a characteristic of all people or of individual people, but of certain types of people: civilians, refugees, the disabled, women and children. This language appears across several Security Council agendas—PoC, Children and Armed Conflict and WPS—as well as in several of the Secretary-General’s reports on R2P. That these diverse agendas recycle previously adopted language is unsurprising; as has been noted previously, in an intergovernmental body such as the Security Council it is often easier to reuse language that has already proved acceptable to member states than to incorporate and approve new language that brings with it a range of possible new interpretations and obligations placed on states. The reiteration of such language also contributes to its power, however, making it appear obvious or ‘natural’—the common sense way of understanding the diverse security crises faced by the UN. The recurring language of ‘women, children and other vulnerable groups’ in UN texts reiterates and legitimates a view of vulnerability as a passive state—a concept associated with femininity and not applicable to authoritative, ‘expert’ UN actors. This imagining of vulnerability makes a clear appeal to gendered ideas and assumptions and cannot be understood without attention to gender within the UN language.

Vulnerability likewise fills the security texts that serve as roadmaps for understanding UN interventions. Here also it is a concept strongly associated with ‘women and children’, with language recognizing that ‘women and children continue to bear the brunt of conflict’ (UN Secretary-General, 2018, S/2018/143, para. 11) and focusing on the ‘protection of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities’ (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 63). The focus on vulnerability is connected with the effort to address human needs. For example, the Secretary-General argues that an ‘integrated and people-focused UN protection approach is needed in South Sudan so as to enhance protection for the vulnerable, especially women and children’ (UN Secretary-General, 2018, S/2018/143, para. 18). Vulnerability is viewed as predominantly local and civilian in character.

The language around vulnerability also consistently frames it as a passive state, contrasted with the active role of interveners. Speaking in a 2017 Security Council meeting, a representative of France took note of the threats faced by UN peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel in carrying out their work, before shifting the characteristic of vulnerability to others in the next sentence: ‘The attacks, violence, harassment and looting to which the Blue Helmets and humanitarian actors fall victim are contrary to international humanitarian law. We salute the courage and dedication of those men and women in their tireless efforts to help the most vulnerable’ (UN Security Council, 2017, S/PV.7906, p. 15). Though UN personnel occupy the same dangerous places as the people they serve, they have tasks to carry out that mitigate their vulnerability. They are actors in the narrative and consequently are not the ‘most vulnerable’.

That ‘actor’ and ‘victim’ are not mutually exclusive categories is exemplified by women living through conflict or humanitarian crisis—they are actors in their own lives and communities, as well as being victims of violence. Speaking about the language of vulnerability, an international staff member of a UN Women country team notes the gap between how vulnerability is described in international forums and the reality she has encountered on the ground:

It comes down to...what we can do, whether it’s in proposals, in funding proposals, or in just guidance material. Because you have to say that women are the most vulnerable and at risk of violence, and...they need protection and safety and dignity. And it’s not at all language [UN Women] would normally use for anything else...it’s

kind of like you're having to use that language because that's the language of the humanitarian space.

[...]

It's hard because...we want to recognize maybe women are the most impacted, due to gender dimensions that are in society anywhere, and maybe get exacerbated in crisis. And, yes, there is often conflict-related sexual violence. But also...women are among the first responders, right? [...] Women's groups are the ones, the first to go out and distribute relief to the communities they work with. So, it's not that they're just vulnerable and don't know what to do, and they can't swim, or they have no information. They're acting and they're involved. (Interview, UN Women employee, 25 March 2018)

This view suggests that local women are important partners in international aid efforts, possessing knowledge and access that international actors are unlikely to match. Yet international staff are consistently viewed as the experts, at times implementing a one-size-fits-all approach to relief efforts that necessarily excludes local input:

There's something that gets activated when there's a crisis, and then you get a lot of surge staff that comes in. And...they have their global models of doing things, global systems. And then that means that only an international can do it...they don't train people to use these global systems or try to use local systems. They just come in and then use these global systems and then leave. (Interview, UN Women employee, 25 March 2018)

And this approach generally leaves local women out of the process altogether:

In most crises I've seen, maybe except for one or two, you don't even have government within...the clusters or the coordination system. And you very rarely have civil society there at all. And then you generally have very few women. You might have international women...but local women, it's very rare from what I've seen, let alone anyone local. Often it's a very international space. (Interview, UN Women employee, 25 March 2018)

Local populations, feminized and marked as vulnerable, are not treated as relevant to the process. In this approach to intervention, vulnerability is not, as Butler sees it, a potential source of knowledge—its own kind of expertise—but a state of passivity.

Vulnerable territories

An extreme manifestation of this passive construct of vulnerability can be found in the documents on UN intervention in the DRC. Here civilian populations and communities are identified as vulnerable, but the term is more frequently applied to physical areas or territories. The UN mission's protection mandate is repeatedly

framed as an effort to secure ‘vulnerable areas’²⁴—a perspective that is doubtless linked to the problems associated with the large amount of territory for which the mission is viewed as responsible. Speaking at a 2010 Security Council meeting, Roger Meece, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MONUSCO at the time, reported of the eastern part of the country:

Armed groups operate in many widely dispersed areas, not only in proximity to villages and towns but indeed often intermixed with the civilian population. In that vast area—larger than Afghanistan—it is not possible for MONUSCO to ensure full protection for all civilians. (UN Security Council, 2010, S/PV.6403, p. 3)

In that context, mission strategy has often been focused on securing specific places identified as most likely to experience widespread violence against civilians.

This language, however, further reinforces the UN conception of vulnerability as an inherent, inert characteristic, as well as potentially reflecting the tendency to conflate feminized people with land or territory. The (often sexual) violence faced by women in war has frequently been described using the metaphor of women’s bodies as a battlefield, and this metaphor is sometimes extended to political debates as well (see, for example, Hynes, 2004; Fleming, 2012). In wider cultural discourses, the natural physical environment is also often referred to using feminine names and pronouns—an ‘over-personification of nature...inseparable from our under-personification of women’ (Dinnerstein, 1976, p. 108). Whether land or women, the ‘vulnerable’ in this language are necessarily passive. The expanse of territory that must be secured is the responsibility of the government or, failing that, UN peacekeepers, with little possibility of differentiation between the places and people in question or recognition of the strategies that communities might have for their own survival.

An examination of the complexities of on-the-ground decision-making challenges the dichotomy in which the UN is seen as the active, capable intervener, while local people wait passively for help. The following section will address conflicting narratives about what happened when the UN bases in South Sudan opened their gates to civilians seeking shelter from violence, taking into account the

²⁴ See, for example, UN Secretary-General (2010, S/2010/512, para. 33), UN Secretary-General (2011, S/2011/20, paras. 2 and 41) UN Secretary-General (2014, S/2014/157, para. 38) and UN Secretary-General (2018, S/2018/174, para. 37).

often unspoken vulnerability faced by UN actors and political vulnerabilities of the UN mission and leadership.

Contested narratives of protective action

The ‘open the gates’ decision made by UN leadership in South Sudan is often cited as an example of the type of timely response to a threat of mass atrocities that R2P hopes to achieve. An examination of differing accounts of what happened, however, suggests a more complex picture and raises questions about the extent to which UN actors were in control of events. This section examines these accounts in light of the gendered framing of vulnerability in official UN language and argues that such language obscures the extent to which the UN itself is vulnerable to unforeseen events in conflict situations. This in turn raises questions about the type of authority, based in claims of capability and expertise, that is claimed by the UN in such circumstances.

The December 2013 crisis in South Sudan began with fighting between members of the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups within the presidential guard and quickly spread across the capital and across the country, targeting civilians and resulting in unprecedented numbers of people seeking refuge within UN bases and compounds. Several months after the initial flood of refugees arrived outside of UN bases, the Secretary-General reported the situation to the Security Council as follows:

44. When the fighting erupted in Juba and spread throughout the greater Upper Nile region, tens of thousands of civilians fled from areas where large numbers of killings were taking place, including to escape targeted attacks against particular communities, and arrived at UNMISS compounds in Juba, Bor, Akobo, Bentiu, Malakal and Melut to seek refuge. The Mission opened its gates and its military engineers, working with humanitarian partners, quickly prepared sites in the compounds for the protection of civilians, despite having minimum facilities to accommodate them. Since then, as many as 85,000 civilians have sought protection in eight UNMISS compounds across the country.

45. The influx of so many civilians into United Nations premises and their settlement there is an unprecedented development, one that has presented unique challenges and placed a huge strain on Mission resources. UNMISS has strived to ensure adequate security for the protection sites in its bases and has worked with humanitarian partners to provide sufficient assistance to displaced persons. With the arrival of additional uniformed capabilities pursuant to resolution

2132 (2013), the operational focus has gradually shifted beyond UNMISS bases. (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158)

This matter-of-fact tone, typical of reports of the Secretary-General, seems to acknowledge that the UN was taken by surprise, while at the same time justifying its lack of preparedness (the events were unprecedented, making them difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate) and downplaying the consequences (the mission sprang into action, mobilizing the expertise of military engineers and humanitarian partners to manage the situation). This account presents a version of events in which the situation was never entirely beyond the mission's control or its capacity to respond. Although the housing of so many civilians within the protection sites 'has presented unique challenges', the mission has 'worked to provide sufficient assistance to displaced persons' and has scaled up its capacity for provision of security. The mission portrayed in these two paragraphs is proactive and competent. Though it is facing challenges, there is no expression of doubt about its ability to manage them.

Descriptions provided by individuals present in South Sudan during those critical few days in December 2013 and the weeks that followed suggest a different interpretation of the UN's role in shaping and responding to events. A *Guardian* article from the time reports, 'In the space of seven desperate days, the UN base [in Juba] has been transformed from a logistics hub for an aid operation into a squalid sanctuary for more than 10,000 people' (Howden, 2013). Toby Lanzer, the head of UN humanitarian affairs in South Sudan, is quoted as saying, 'It would have been difficult one week ago to imagine that things would unravel to this extent' (Howden, 2013). In her book about her time as the Special Representative of the Security-General in charge of the mission, Hilde F. Johnson also describes the outbreak of violence as taking UNMISS by surprise, a nightmare that left leadership scrambling to understand what was happening and to react based on incomplete information as events moved quickly overnight.

At the crack of dawn on the 16th the sound of heavy fire resumed in full force. At 6.30 a.m. shooting broke out near the Nyakuron area. UN Security texted that fighting now appeared to be taking place not far from the western gate of the UNMISS Tonyping base, close to Bilpam, SPLA headquarters. It was spreading. This was also near the UNMISS Residence, where I was. At 7.20 a.m. the house shook from artillery fire. I could feel the impact, but I continued working the phones. (Johnson, 2016, p. 182).

Minutes later, Johnson states, she took a decision that altered the structure of the mission going forward and the nature of the ‘protection’ work in which it was involved.

We soon got reports from security that civilians were fleeing for their lives and assembling outside the UN. During the night, hundreds had gathered around the gates at UN House in the Jebel area and at Tonying near the airport. They seemed in a desperate state, at Jebel even starting to cut through the fences. At 7.30 a.m. I instructed that we open the gates at both locations and provide refuge. It was clear that people were fearing for their lives. Not long after this, I also had my first conversations with UN headquarters in New York, briefing them about the situation. (Johnson, 2016, p. 183).

This moment came to be known as the ‘open the gates’ policy, initially hailed as a success by advocates of R2P, who viewed it as standing in stark contrast to failures to protect in other moments of crisis. Faced with the choice between acting in the moment or abandoning civilians to the violence taking over the country, UN leadership chose to act. According to a civil society advocate for R2P, this was an instance in which ‘peacekeepers took very good decisions and very sensible decisions which saved lives’ (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017). Johnson’s narrative likewise identifies this as a moment when many lives were on the line: ‘It was my firm decision that leaving civilians to their fate outside the gates, where they were likely to be killed, was out of the question’ (Johnson, 2016, p. 187).

There is evidence to suggest, however, that Johnson’s account does not present a complete picture of the mission’s decision-making role. A 2016 report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), developed from information gathered through more than one hundred interviews with UN and humanitarian personnel in South Sudan, suggests that opening the gates was not a proactive decision made by mission leadership, but rather a response to the reality that the gates would be breached, one way or another. As civilians were rushing the gates at a UN base in Juba, ‘soldiers opened the gates even before the order from former Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hilde Johnson was released’ (Arensen, 2016, p. 19). The report quotes Toby Lanzer as follows:

[F]irst of all, there was no alternative in at least two ways. We never “opened the gates,” it was an attitude that if there are people under threat, under stress, jumping over the fence, which was what the vast majority were doing, we will welcome them and we will protect them. So opening the gates was an attitude that we would assume our responsibilities to protect civilians. (Arensen, 2016, p. 19)

Although the question of who took which decisions and when does not necessarily impact the outcome of these events, and while the IOM report does not dispute that allowing civilians to shelter within UN bases saved thousands of lives, the competing narratives suggest that there is more at stake for UN actors than the final outcome. Johnson's account acknowledges the extent to which events took leadership by surprise and required action on the part of mission leadership without any direction from Headquarters—an element that is missing from the Secretary-General's report—while still suggesting that UNMISS leadership was ultimately in control of the situation, in a position to decide whether or not to allow civilians within the UN gates. Lanzer's recounting of events undercuts this claim as well. The IOM report describes a mission overwhelmed by the scale and pace of the crisis, and one in which the decision-making hierarchy had broken down, requiring individuals in low-level positions to shape mission policy from moment to moment.

The Secretary-General later acknowledged the risks faced by mission personnel and local civilians: 'The UN policy of opening our gates as an emergency option to protect innocent civilians is correct, unprecedented and not without considerable risk – to UN staff, to our relations with communities and to those we are trying to shelter' (quoted in Arensen, 2016, p. 19). He did not acknowledge, however, the risks faced by the UN as a credible source of authority and provider of security within South Sudan. The decision to open the gates, in this view, was one that the UN was not practically but 'morally compelled to take' (Ban, 2014). The influence of R2P and its assumption about the capability of interveners can be seen in this performance of UN authority: in question is the UN's moral role in shaping events, not its ability to do so.

Vulnerability within the gates

The aftermath of the 'open the gates' moment does not support this implied confidence in the UN's ability to exercise authority and act as a guarantor of basic security for civilians. Following the initial arrival of civilians outside the UN bases in Juba, people continued to arrive in waves, seeking refuge both in Juba and in other locations around the country. Johnson reports that over 10,000 people arrived on 16 December, and by the next day the number of refugees had increased to 16,000 (Johnson, 2016, pp. 187–188). The overwhelming complexity and desperation of the situation can be seen in her account:

There were women with babies, elderly with walking sticks – barely managing to get to the camp; children clinging to their parents, crying; teenagers with fear in their eyes. Civilians with gunshot wounds were carried bleeding into the UN hospital. Women in despair had lost their husbands and children. Exhausted men in ragged uniforms were obliged to leave their firearms, fatigues and insignia behind as they entered the gate and became ex-combatants. (Johnson, 2016, pp. 187–188)

Mission personnel were faced with improvising systems of crowd control, emergency health care, sanitation, and distribution of water—a task that proved especially difficult, since the UN bases were not designed for such a large number of people (Johnson, 2016, p. 188) and humanitarian agencies were understaffed in advance of the holiday season (Arensen, 2016, p. 19). Initially it was assumed that civilians would leave the bases once the fighting subsided, but within the first few days it became clear that the scale of the violence was such that civilians sheltering in UN compounds would not be able to leave anytime soon—it was necessary to begin food distribution alongside water distribution (Johnson, 2016, p. 188).

Over time, the number of people sheltering at what came to be known as the protection of civilians sites grew substantially, and perceptions of the situation shifted from viewing it as a success story to one of unfolding protection failures. Rather than decreasing, the number of people within the UN fences increased, and by March 2017 over 220,000 were living in the protection sites (UN Security Council, 2017, S/PV.7906, p. 4). Living conditions within the sites were a problem from the start, with difficulties providing shelter, food and water, and health care. Preventing outbreaks of cholera and other health crises proved to be a particular problem due to ‘blistering heat, severe overcrowding and the lack of space for an adequate number of latrines’ (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 26). The situation required unprecedented levels of cooperation between UN peacekeeping personnel and humanitarian partner organizations, with peacekeepers providing security in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid (Johnson, 2016, p. 223; UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 45).

In the years since 2013, the existence of the protection of civilians sites has presented an ongoing challenge for the mission in South Sudan. Because the protection sites have very resource-intensive security requirements, peacekeepers have been unable to extend their protection mandate much beyond the boundaries of the UN compounds. As recently as February 2018, the Secretary-General estimated

that 50 percent of mission resources were devoted to managing and providing security for the protection sites (UN Secretary-General, 2018, S/2018/143, para. 13). In spite of this diversion of resources, internal security at the sites has proved difficult to maintain. The sites are plagued by ‘overcrowding and complex ethnic and intercommunal tensions between displaced communities’ (UN Secretary-General, 2015, S/2015/899, para. 41), as well as gang activities and smuggling (UN Security Council, 2018, S/PV.8192, p. 3). In addition to civilians, the sites have provided shelter to deserters from government security forces and potentially provided cover to some militants, presenting internal security threats to UN personnel, as well as civilians working and living within the sites, and creating external political problems, opening the UN to accusations of harbouring members of certain factions within the conflict (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 16; Johnson, 2016, p. 207). Sexual violence within the sites has also been a problem, and has included allegations of abuse committed by UNMISS police (UN Security Council, 2018, S/PV.8192, p. 11), as well as instances in which peacekeepers have failed to respond to attacks happening ‘in plain sight of UNMISS troops and UN police’ (UN Secretary-General, 2016, S/2016/924, para. 14). In spite of these acknowledged problems, in February 2018 the Secretary-General reported, ‘The physical protection provided in the protection of civilians sites is at the core of the UNMISS mandate and is being accomplished, notwithstanding many challenges’ (UN Secretary-General, 2018, S/2018/143, para. 14)—a claim which stands in surprising contrast to the specific reports of violent incidents.

The protection sites have proved vulnerable to attacks from the outside, as well as security problems within. An attack on an UNMISS base in Akobo only days after the decision to open the gates resulted in the deaths of two peacekeepers, a consultant for the International Labour Organization and nineteen civilians, and the wounding of one peacekeeper and at least another thirteen civilians (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 38). Alongside the civilians sheltering within its gates, the UN mission periodically finds itself ‘caught in the crossfire’, and to some extent dependent on the security forces of a hostile and unresponsive government (UN Secretary-General, 2014, S/2014/158, para. 39). The mission has made efforts to clear the sites of members of armed opposition groups but remains vulnerable to perceptions that the sites have become politicized and supportive of opposition to the government (UN Secretary-General, 2018, S/2018/143, para. 13).

What emerges from these reports is a picture of vulnerability on all sides. Civilians and mission personnel alike have found themselves coping with ad hoc arrangements that were not intended to be permanent but have become semi-permanent by necessity, susceptible to internal security problems and external attacks, and to some extent reliant on a government that is widely acknowledged to be incapable of meeting its own security obligations. Although mission personnel are undoubtedly better positioned than the refugees within their bases to shape events and address the problems they face, they remain severely limited in their ability to exercise control over their environment.

There are many debates to be had regarding how the mission has managed the sites, whether the violence that led to their creation could have been foreseen by UN leadership, and whether there should have been better contingency planning in place in advance of the ‘open the gates’ moment. I contend, however, that the sequence of events that made the sites necessary, and the scramble to create liveable conditions within them once they came into existence, highlights an on-the-ground reality that is to some extent an inevitable part of any intervention in a country plagued by armed conflict: events are at times unpredictable, and the people carrying out the interventions—no matter how well-resourced or well-trained—are at the mercy of unfolding circumstances in a way that mirrors the vulnerability of the people they are sent to protect.

This reality is often not reflected in the debates surrounding intervention that take place in New York, far from the on-the-ground circumstances with which UN peacekeepers, human rights observers and humanitarian personnel must cope. The international community is portrayed as expert and capable, ready to deploy its expertise to the territories of malicious or faltering governments when necessary, if only the political will can be generated. In contrast, Johnson’s narrative of the night preceding her decision to open the gates of UNMISS bases depicts a sense of confusion and isolation. She reports that she was not able to make contact with UN leadership in New York until the following morning, after the key decisions had already been taken. Instead she was dependent on local contacts with UN security, other mission personnel, and government officials, making the best decisions she could in the midst of fast-moving events and with imperfect information.

R2P and the risks of failure

The uncertainty and vulnerability facing UN personnel are also relevant to understanding what the UN and the international community term ‘failures to protect’—the instances when intervention is clearly necessary yet none materializes. R2P recognizes explicitly that this is a problem at the level of international diplomacy: too often, in the face of mass atrocities, the international community reacts ineffectively or not at all. What is less apparent in R2P texts is the problem of repeated failures within existing UN interventions, in the moments when ‘protection’ can be interpreted in its most limited form as physical protection from death or grave bodily harm. Even in these situations, it is often the case that UN ‘protectors’ fail to act, and UN leadership interprets such events in ways that reflect the organization’s limited engagement with questions of vulnerability. This section will discuss ‘failures to protect’ and how such failures can be understood in light of the UN approach to vulnerability.

One such example is the failure of UNMISS to respond to attacks on civilians, including UN and other humanitarian personnel, in Juba in 2016. The attacks occurred during an outbreak of violence between the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO)—the armed forces backing the country’s president and those backing the vice president—and on 11 July focused on the Terrain Hotel, known to be popular among the international staff of humanitarian organizations and located near UNMISS headquarters. The attacks began around 15:30, when soldiers forced their way into the hotel, and lasted for several hours (UN Secretary-General, 2016, S/2016/924, para. 11). The UN reports that by 19:00 the majority of civilians had been evacuated by the South Sudan National Security Service, although three women associated with international humanitarian organizations and sixteen local hotel staff members were left behind and not evacuated until 7:00 the following morning by a private security firm (UN Secretary-General, 2016, S/2016/924, para. 13; Patinkin, 2016). It is clear from multiple reports that UNMISS was aware of the attacks almost from the start, with residents of the hotel calling their contacts within the mission and national embassies and receiving assurances that help would be sent (Kelemen, 2016; Bearak, 2016). There is evidence that the mission’s Joint Operations Centre was notified of the attack by 15:37, yet peacekeepers located less

than a mile from the hotel did not respond (Patinkin, 2016). Referring to the national troop contingents within the UN mission, one witness interviewed by the Associated Press reported, 'Everyone refused to go. Ethiopia, China, Nepal. All refused to go' (Patinkin, 2016). One of the women left in the hotel overnight made contact by phone with UN security, but the security officer on duty 'was dismissive of her appeal for assistance and did not call her back when her phone credit expired' (UN Secretary-General, 2016, S/2016/924, para. 13).

During the attack on the Terrain Hotel, John Gatlaug Manguet, a South Sudanese journalist, was shot and killed by government forces in front of multiple witnesses, while civilians within the hotel were robbed and beaten, and at least seven women were gang raped (UNMISS/OHCHR, 2017, p. 17). Survivors reported being asked to choose, at gunpoint, between being raped and being killed (UNMISS/OHCHR, 2017, p. 19). During the same outbreak of violence, South Sudanese women sheltering at the protection of civilians sites were also raped by soldiers (Kelemen, 2016), and Human Rights Watch reports a litany of failures to respond by peacekeepers:

At the Thongpiny base, UNMISS peacekeepers took more than six hours to open their doors to civilians who had fled the violence on July 10. "We were many people hiding in the sewage canals outside to the base because they would not open the doors," said a 25-year-old woman resident of Thongpiny. "I was dirty but I was so afraid of the sound of the guns." The peacekeepers did not venture out of the bases to protect civilians under imminent threat even after the ceasefire. On July 17 peacekeepers guarding a POC site did not intervene when SPLA soldiers meters away abducted a woman. Although rapes took place in their line of sight, they did not increase patrols for several days. (Human Rights Watch, 2016)

The scale of the violence combined with peacekeepers' failure to act led to 'a crisis of faith in the mission' (Human Rights Watch, 2016) and highlighted 'the failure of the U.N. peacekeeping force to uphold its core mandate of protecting civilians, notably those just a few minutes' drive away' (Patinkin, 2016). Speaking about the July 2016 violence, an R2P advocate stated, 'I don't think that's a legal question of, like, we didn't understand our mandate. I think that's gross negligence' (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017).

Official UN assessments of the July 2016 events focus on practical ways of addressing the lack of response from UN peacekeepers. Finding that the mission showed a 'lack of preparedness, ineffective command and control and a risk-averse

or “inward-looking” posture’, a special investigation recommended improved contingency planning; scenario training including responses to sexual violence; enforcement of a ‘forward-looking posture’ with increased foot patrols including, when possible, female military and police, and civilian women’s protection officers; and increased accountability for soldiers, commanders and troop-contributing countries when there is a failure to respond (UN Secretary-General, 2016, S/2016/924). While all of these measures are important, such assessments stop short of an effort to fully understand what happens when extreme violence is greeted with inaction from the ‘protectors’. The reiterated division between the vulnerability of civilians and the assumed capability of international military contingents hides the very real vulnerabilities faced by peacekeepers—vulnerabilities that are unlikely to be overcome completely through improved training and more proactive approaches to protection.

Vulnerability, fear and the burdens of protection

A notable omission from official assessments is the extent to which the actions or inactions of peacekeepers may be determined by fear or uncertainty. Focusing on the vulnerability experienced by individual ‘protectors’, it is possible to see how the protection narrative itself sometimes works against action. Protectors face a particular set of risks, with the most immediate being threats to the physical safety of individual protectors. Speaking about protection failures in the context of South Sudan, an R2P advocate noted, ‘It’s not easy coming out of your base in a Jeep and driving to a hotel and not knowing what the hell you’re going to find when you go in there, and potentially having to confront armed soldiers, who may or may not shoot at you. That’s difficult’ (Interview, R2P advocate, 14 Feb. 2017). Peacekeepers in missions such as UNMISS face the uncertainties created by fast-moving events, unfamiliar locations and the complex political situations that underpin armed conflicts. Under such circumstances, the mandate to react decisively and effectively is a difficult one to achieve in practice. The difficulty may be mitigated by improved training, leadership and communication, but it cannot be erased entirely. The refusal in official UN assessments to acknowledge the overwhelming danger faced by peacekeepers reflects an inability to recognize vulnerability within the UN ranks. To allow that individual soldiers may be unwilling to die or suffer serious injury to uphold their protection mandate,

attempting to save strangers from a conflict in which they personally have no stake, is to risk the entire logic of such interventions. Yet this is likely to be the reality in many cases. UN leadership is likely to remain ill-equipped to address and prevent these ‘failures to protect’ when the very real risks faced by on-the-ground protectors remain invisible within official accounts of events, and the overarching protection narrative precludes recognition of this vulnerability.

In the context of international interventions, the expansion of the more traditional protection narrative in which men protect ‘their’ women and children is also likely to be a significant factor behind inaction. Judith Hicks Stiehm notes that protection entails burdens as well as privileges, arguing, ‘Perhaps the essential, the general thing about a protector is that he has dependents. Dependents represent both a burden and an expanded vulnerability. A successful attack on them is a demonstration of his failure’ (Stiehm, 1982, p. 372). This failure has the potential to result not only in loss of life or injury for both protected and protector alike, but also to amount to a loss of masculine identity for the soldiers involved. Feminists working to understand sexual violence as a tactic in combat have recognized systematic rape of women as a means of humiliating the men who are supposed to protect them, exposing enemy men as inadequate (Erickson Baaz and Stern, 2009, p. 500). In a UN peacekeeping context, the lines of association may be less clear. Peacekeepers are responsible for protecting civilians from sexual violence, among other crimes, but the people at risk are not ‘their’ people, and the larger mission objectives are not necessarily their objectives. In this context, where the vulnerabilities of peacekeepers themselves are silenced or overlooked, peacekeepers in protection roles may come to feel resentment of the ‘vulnerable’ people they are protecting. Given what is at stake, it may be tempting for peacekeepers to simply disassociate themselves from any responsibility to protect these civilians, avoiding the risks to their own physical safety and gendered sense of self.

A narrative in which vulnerability applies only to civilians, ‘women and children’, limits the picture of what is truly happening on the ground. Because the concept of vulnerability is used in such narrow ways within UN discourses, there is little room to recognize the difficulties faced by those in the role of protector or to address them effectively. And when vulnerability functions as a gendered mark of inadequacy, there is little possibility of moving in or out of states of vulnerability in a way that reflects the complexity of individuals’ experiences. Feminized civilians,

repeatedly imagined as women and children, are trapped within a label of vulnerability; masculinized protectors, meanwhile, are locked out of it. It cannot be suppressed altogether, though, and anxieties surrounding vulnerability in various forms exist as subtext in international intervention narratives.

UN institutional vulnerabilities

Although within the language of R2P the term ‘vulnerable’ is rarely used, it is constantly hovering between the lines. Beginning with the report of the ICISS in 2001, R2P is a call to the international community, and more specifically the UN Security Council, to take on the role of protector unequivocally, with a sense of moral clarity. While the 1990s language of humanitarian intervention was plagued by ambivalence—an inability to balance the clear necessity to act in response to events such as the Rwandan genocide against fear that powerful actors might use the humanitarian motive as a pretext to advance their own self-interests against the relatively powerless—the Commission hoped that new language of human protection might avoid the focus on conflicts between states, as well as the resulting paralysis at the moments when action was most needed (ICISS, 2001a; see also Chapter 1). Sovereignty, in this view, is a responsibility conferred on states as well as a right (ICISS, 2001a, p. 13). States, and the international community made up of states, must provide the protection owed by the powerful to the powerless, or risk losing any claim to legitimacy.

In fact this change in language, while to a certain extent successful at shifting the debate around the question of sovereignty, could not avoid reproducing the ambiguities below the surface of intervention narratives or alter the muddled logic of why such interventions are necessary and whom they benefit. Interventions are required to stop egregious acts of violence because the people most vulnerable to violence are unable to stop it themselves; they require a level of protection that, in the most extreme cases, only the international community, acting under the auspices of the UN, can provide. In this context, the language of protection and vulnerability constitutes an emotional appeal, one that calls up gender stories that have been told so often as to feel obvious, natural. Investment in the narrative is enlisted, in this case, not from the ‘vulnerable’—the ICISS report is not addressed to them—but from the policymakers filling the role of protectors, whose position of security is established through the implication that they have the power to make the world safe,

if only they decide to use it. This approach is replicated in the Secretary-General's reports on R2P. Here there is more overt recognition of gender than in the ICISS report, and the Secretary-General's reports adopt some of the language from more established protection agendas:²⁵ women and children are occasionally identified as the groups most in need, although it often goes without saying.

All of this combines to create a false sense of clarity. The obligation to act is obvious—these crimes 'shock the conscience of mankind' (ICISS, 2001a, p. 31) and '[cry] out for action' (ICISS, 2001a, p. 55)—and protectors have the moral satisfaction and sense of mastery that comes from having done what was necessary, and done it decisively. But the political implications of international intervention are more complicated than that, and the motivations behind these interventions are rarely if ever purely altruistic. The ICISS recognized that purity of purpose is too high a bar to meet in practice. The decisions of individual nations to intervene or not will inevitably involve a calculation of national interests alongside a sense of moral responsibility (ICISS, 2001a, p. 36). But the Commission did not consider similar questions about the motivations of international actors such as themselves.

Throughout its report the Commission shies away from a thorough investigation of questions of power. It argues that an ability to intervene when called upon is necessary to the legitimacy of the international community, best represented by the UN, but it does not question who benefits from that legitimacy and in what ways. At stake in the R2P narrative is not only, or even primarily, the welfare of people at risk of atrocity crimes. They are not the protagonists in the story of protection, and their suffering is not the central motivator for action. Instead it is the identity of the protectors—the UN and the wider international community—that is the focus of the justification for intervention and the call to action. To the extent that the international community is acknowledged to be vulnerable, it is vulnerable to the moral illegitimacy that will result from inaction. Protective action defends against this vulnerability, preserving the legitimacy of the UN as an institution and the international community as a moral authority on questions of human rights.

In this way, R2P is addressed to the wider project of the UN—to build peace, expand freedom and human rights, and rescue humanity from the plague of

²⁵ See, for example, UN Secretary-General (2005, A/65/877, para. 26), UN Secretary-General (2014, A/68/947, para. 35) and UN Secretary-General (2015, A/69/981 para. 15).

organized violence. Movement toward the achievement of these goals is vital to justifying the UN's existence, upholding its authority and its influence, and consequently R2P is haunted by the prospect of failure. It is essentially an effort to address the failures of the past and to prevent failures in the future. The ICISS openly acknowledges the dangers of failure (ICISS, 2001a, p. 11), while the Secretary-General's reports on R2P are less willing to contend with the possibility. Failure, for the UN, can be recognized only retrospectively, as something that may have happened in the past. The possibility for future failures can be hinted at only as the subtext of insistent refusals of that possibility: the UN 'must do better' (UN Secretary-General, 2017, A/71/1016, para. 43). It must not fail because if it does there is no one else to step into its place. The consequences would be intolerable, both for the people who are victims of the violence it aims to prevent and for the UN itself. The loss of authority, power and sense of purpose—and the very real possibility that such losses might occur—is unthinkable.

The language of vulnerability, not of the UN itself but of a subsection of the people it serves, is a means of holding the knowledge of such a possibility at bay. The projection of vulnerability onto others is useful in summoning the courage to act, to take political risks and face physical dangers, in an unstable world. It is, however, unsustainable, a distortion of human experience that hides the immediate dangers and vulnerabilities faced by those called to act as protectors and limits the possibility, at both the individual and the institutional levels, of acting effectively. While protection language serves as a means of bolstering the power and authority of protectors, such language simultaneously undermines the goal of focusing interventions on the needs of the protected. Protection makes a claim to serve as a defence against vulnerability, yet the continued vulnerability of the protected is necessary to upholding the position of the protectors. Ultimately protection narratives are addressed to the task of minimizing and obscuring the vulnerabilities of protectors rather than meeting the needs of the protected—making 'failures to protect' likely, if not inevitable. Even in cases such as the 'open the gates' decision, when timely action is taken, the severe limitations of the UN's capability to protect are evident. Yet the core distinction between the assumed capability of protectors and the assumed helplessness of the protected remains essentially unexamined and unchallenged. The narrative works to assure protectors of their own security and power, in contrast with the powerlessness of the people they are meant to protect.

I have argued that the durability of this distinction is based in the gendered content of R2P, the often implicit belief that men are naturally fitted for the role of protector to weaker women and children. While this idea of gender roles is not literally reflected in the divisions that underpin intervention narratives—both women and men fill the roles of international ‘protectors’ and local, ‘vulnerable’ civilians—such divisions are nevertheless gendered, reflecting versions of masculinity and femininity that lend meaning to the central narrative and form its core logic. Within this narrative the concept of vulnerability is limited to a feminized quality, from which masculine protectors can free themselves by displacing it onto others. This psychological trick is more effective in theory than in practice, however, and while policymakers drafting mission mandates may avoid a too-direct confrontation with their own vulnerabilities, the interveners on the ground are confronted with more immediate uncertainties and dangers. The goal of crafting effective interventions cannot be achieved while such dangers remain peripheral to official accounts of on-the-ground events.

Conclusion

The concept of vulnerability has potential to transform how questions of insecurity are addressed at the international level. Rhetorically, UN actors often recognize that, in an interconnected world, security problems are not confined by borders, and partnerships that transcend narrow national interests are required to effectively address such threats.²⁶ This appears to reflect a complex understanding of vulnerability, an acknowledgement that it is an inescapable aspect of human life and one that must be faced openly. In UN security texts, however, the concept of vulnerability shrinks to a formulaic, gendered construction that stigmatizes women as naturally helpless, erases the vulnerabilities experienced by masculine ‘protectors’, and limits the capacity of the international community to understand and respond effectively to complex manifestations of insecurity and violence.

This chapter has argued that a complex understanding of vulnerability and the ways in which experiences of insecurity are gendered is required at every level of international intervention, from the policy language that shapes interventions to the motivations of the individuals on the ground who are tasked with carrying out

²⁶ See, for example, United Nations (2004, p. vii) and UN Secretary-General (2005, A/59/2005, para. 80).

protection mandates. Recognizing vulnerability as a condition that afflicts only women and children (or, more vaguely, the feminized category of ‘civilians’) has negative implications for the ability of interveners to successfully address the security concerns facing those labelled as ‘vulnerable’. As a result, official assessments of UN ‘failures to protect’ present only a partial picture of the complex situations and barriers to protection faced by interveners on the ground. This limited understanding of vulnerability also excludes those in the role of protectors from acknowledgement of the vulnerability they face, whether it be physical, political or psychological. In its dependence on gendered language of protection, R2P reproduces these problems rather than addressing them. Displacing a sense of vulnerability onto a feminized ‘other’ leaves unchallenged the position of international ‘protectors’ capable of rescuing ‘vulnerable’ local civilians. Until UN security actors adopt a more comprehensive view of vulnerability—one which understands it as a human rather than a gendered condition, and which accounts for vulnerability in a variety of forms—interventions are likely to repeat the mistakes and failures of the past.

7. Conclusion

The Responsibility to Protect, on its surface, has very little to say about gender. Women explicitly appear in the report of the ICISS only as victims of rape, and the 2005 paragraphs on R2P adopted by the General Assembly as part of the World Summit outcome document say nothing about women or men, masculinity or femininity. Feminist critics have identified gender as a blind spot within R2P and proposed remedies including the alignment of R2P with the WPS agenda and its achievements in placing gender equality, women's participation in peacebuilding, and the ongoing epidemic of conflict-related sexual violence on the official agenda of the Security Council (Davies et al., 2015; Davies, 2016; Dharmapuri, 2013; Hewitt, 2016; Lito, 2013). While potentially fruitful when it comes to certain questions of implementation, and undoubtedly an important area of inquiry to pursue, this approach does not fully address a question that is at the core of the problem R2P seeks to address: Why, even in the most clear-cut and conscience-shocking cases, is it so difficult to mobilize an international response to atrocities? Why does the world so often continue to sit idle while atrocities unfold?

A former Canadian diplomat who served as Deputy Director of UNICEF and as the UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis is an outspoken critic of the UN on this front, and he speaks with the type of moral clarity that the framers of R2P seem to have been aiming for. Speaking in 2010 at a conference about the crisis in the DRC, he framed the issue in starkly gendered terms, suggesting that there has been no shortage of knowledge about the violence against women taking place in the Congo:

Anyone who cared, anyone who had reason to feel the nature of the injustice, could have responded. And the response was pusillanimous and inconsequential. And absolutely indicative of the way, even in the UN at the highest level, *men* can behave. Because sitting around that Security Council table, they were all men, representing largely male-dominated governments.

[...]

One wonders if it's surreal. You have a Security Council [...], time and time again they pass resolutions on the need to prevent violence against women in the Congo, and no one pays them the slightest attention. I mean, it is an exercise in such appalling international hypocrisy, it takes your breath away. They're simply not implemented. The resolutions are an expression, I'm sure, at the time,

of a heartfelt concern and intent, but when it comes to implementation it just doesn't happen. (Lewis, 2010)

Though R2P was not the subject of his talk, his analysis speaks to the central problem that R2P aims to address, the problem of moving from talk to action and making sure interventions happen when they are needed.

This thesis has examined R2P as one attempt to ensure such interventions, focusing on the role of protection language in shaping how interventions are constructed and legitimized in gendered terms. In doing so, I have aimed to look past the logistical concerns that are so often the focus of UN analysis of past and current failures—concerns that include allocating resources, overcoming political deadlock in decision-making bodies, building and applying the necessary expertise to solve problems, creating and maintaining effective leadership structures, and establishing appropriate forms of accountability when things go wrong. This is in no way intended to diminish the importance of such issues, or the complexity and serious difficulties in solving them. Instead, it is an acknowledgement that these issues are not the totality of the problem. An example provided by Lewis in his talk on the situation in the DRC contributes to a sense of something deeper at work in failures to respond. He describes conversations he had with MONUC officials, who tell him that they could be much more effective in fulfilling their protection mandate if the mission had more helicopters, which would allow them to quickly move troops into place when there are urgent protection concerns and to provide timely assistance to victims of violence in the aftermath. Yet the helicopters are not provided. Lewis comments: 'And the world chronicles the tragedy, without ever seeming able to confront it. What would it mean to get an extra thirty helicopters from somewhere?' Helicopters were easily found when they were needed to support the US invasion of Afghanistan. Why can they not also be found for the Congo? (Lewis, 2010).

Similar questions can be raised about a number of areas of UN work: Why has gender parity in the senior ranks of the UN Secretariat still not been achieved, when there is no shortage of qualified women candidates? Why do UN interventions so often seem to reflect international priorities and established 'best practices' above local needs, and particularly the needs of local women? Why have UN peacekeepers only recently begun to consult with local women about the timing and location of their patrols? Why, when the necessary troops and equipment are already deployed, do they often fail to respond to attacks on civilians happening not half a world away,

but two kilometres away, just outside their bases, or even, in some cases, inside the walls of UN compounds? These questions cannot be satisfactorily answered with reference to logistical difficulties alone. Even the type of political deadlock that R2P recognizes as one of the main barriers to timely and effective action does not provide a full explanation; UN member states have agreed, on paper at least, that gender equality is an important and a necessary part of all areas of UN work, including the Security Council mandate to uphold international peace and security, and protection of civilians is a well-established imperative for peacekeeping missions. Why, when these issues are recognized as central to UN claims of legitimacy, is there such deep-rooted inaction when it comes to implementation? This thesis argues that gendered narratives of protection are key to understanding this inaction.

Thesis argument

Analysing intervention narratives through a gender lens, and focusing on how gender operates within the protection language on which R2P is constructed, I have argued that the language of R2P contributes to power disparities between men and women, as well as between individuals and institutions associated with masculinity and those associated with femininity. The gendered language of protection undermines the R2P framers' aspiration to forge a new approach to international interventions, reproducing gendered logics of masculinized international authority and expertise contrasted with feminized local helplessness in the face of extreme violence—a distinction that maps onto the protector–protected dichotomy in which protectors are assumed to be capable and benevolent, while the protected are inherently vulnerable and dependent on others for security. These gendered categories are inseparable from protection narratives, providing them with meaning and a feeling of naturalness. As I argued in Chapter 3, the question of what is meant by 'protection' in specific UN contexts is a difficult one to answer. Because, as Young (2003) suggests, protection language calls up familiar stories about the roles of men and women at different levels of social life—in the traditional family, in national governments, and in the international arena—we feel that we already know what it means and assume it to be good. In this way, protection language works against the need for specificity, serves as valuable shorthand for a variety of UN activities, and provides these activities with a strong sense of

legitimacy, based in the idea that protection is a selfless act, done for the benefit of others.

An uncritical acceptance of protection language and the ideas of masculinity and femininity it reproduces has implications, however, for the effectiveness of individual interventions, as well as for the viability of the R2P project as a whole. Built on assumptions of permanent vulnerability for women, protection narratives prove largely ineffective at incorporating women's voices and perspectives when mobilizing and implementing interventions, and consequently work to limit the effectiveness of interventions by excluding important sources of knowledge about the needs of the populations intended to benefit from them. In Chapter 4, I examined how Security Council discussions around the issue of conflict-related sexual violence focus on women's vulnerability while also neglecting the direct inclusion of the voices of women who have been targets of violence, keeping at a distance the voices and perspectives that might challenge how the Security Council understands the problem and thus avoiding potentially transformative insights. In this light, the ongoing failure to achieve true gender parity within the senior ranks of the UN Secretariat and intergovernmental bodies appears not as an oversight or as a problem to be addressed with technocratic solutions, but rather as an arrangement necessary to the maintenance of current power hierarchies and the UN commitment to its own established ways of doing things. The disempowerment of women, and more generally those perceived as feminine, within protection narratives works to protect, not women, but rather existing power structures. In this way, it also works against the imperative for change that served as an early motivation in the development of R2P.

This prioritization of masculine international and state authority over the needs of local people was further elaborated in Chapter 5, which focused on the ways in which protection language works to reinforce militarized approaches to intervention, privileging the assumed knowledge and capability of 'protectors' in a way that depends on and reproduces militarized forms of masculinity. Despite the objective of R2P to refocus the intervention debate away from controversial and dangerous military interventions in all but the most extreme cases, interventions in the form of UN peacekeeping have arguably grown more militaristic in the years since the adoption of R2P. The Kimia II operation in the DRC provides an example of an intervention in which military objectives were prioritized over the security

needs of civilians, despite the strong mandate of the UN mission in the DRC to protect civilians by any means necessary. In the lead-up to the operation, the warnings from civil society actors about the potential for retaliatory violence against civilians were ignored, resulting in an operation in which UN troops were partnered with a national military notorious for its own human rights abuses and which led to exactly the types of attacks on civilians the civil society groups had predicted, including widespread sexual violence. Yet the presence of UN military peacekeepers was justified primarily by their mandated role in protecting civilians—a role that had little connection to their actual activities in supporting the military objectives of the Congolese government. In this context, protection language can be seen to legitimize military violence, regardless of whether it effectively provides protection for civilians and regardless of the dangers it poses to civilians.

All of this combines to form interventions in which international authority is predicated on assumed and unquestioned expertise and the abjection of feminized vulnerability. The distinction perpetuated by protection language, in which the powerful are not vulnerable and the vulnerable are understood to be powerless, requires interveners to subscribe to narratives in which they are in control of events, regardless of the reality of how events develop on the ground. Chapter 6 examined the example of competing narratives around the decision in South Sudan to ‘open the gates’, allowing civilians fleeing ethnically motivated violence to seek shelter within UN compounds. This event, viewed as a moment of success by many proponents of R2P, appears to have been an instance in which the protection narrative worked to mobilize action in the way R2P intends: confronted with a situation in which civilians were likely to be killed if the UN mission did not act, authorities ordered an opening of the gates and potentially saved thousands of lives. Yet accounts from witnesses suggest that the order to open the gates may have reflected recognition of the unfolding reality as civilians began to cut through fences, rather than a deliberate response. Far from shaping events, this decision may have served primarily as an effort to preserve an illusion of UN control over the situation.

This claim of capability on the part of interveners is further called into question by instances of ‘failure to protect’ in which those in the protector role—most often UN military peacekeepers—fail to respond to prevent or halt violence against civilians in their immediate areas of deployment. Such instances undermine the core commitment of R2P to mobilize timely and decisive responses to crimes

that systematically target civilians. In this context, I have argued, protection language works to obscure the experiences of the protectors, as well as those of the protected, by excluding from intervention narratives any vulnerability experienced by the interveners. In reality, UN peacekeepers are far from invulnerable, facing danger and uncertainty in unfamiliar places and in relation to conflicts in which they have no personal investment. By neglecting this reality, UN officials limit their ability to understand why failures to protect happen and to prevent them in the future.

Ultimately, I have argued, UN protection narratives effectively address the vulnerability not of the local civilians who are understood to be the protected, nor that of the personnel deployed to field missions, but of the UN itself. Although it is not framed in terms of vulnerability within UN language, the organization faces political vulnerability in the form of a possible crisis of legitimacy, should it fail to play an effective and influential role in relation to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Protection language speaks to this vulnerability by providing a ready-made feeling of legitimacy for the interventions to which it is attached. When civilians are being attacked in widespread, systematic ways, the claim that protection is an appropriate response appears obvious and is difficult to dispute. At the same time, the gender content of protection language is reassuring, suggesting that traditional hierarchies of power will not be disrupted—protection is an act of benevolence, undertaken by the powerful out of a moral sense of responsibility, and therefore works to bolster the protector's position of moral authority. In this context, the absence of a gender perspective from the language of R2P is not mere gender blindness, but rather is a feature of how the core narrative operates. The gender content of protection language is powerful, in part, because it is largely unspoken. Protection narratives are built around a deep-seated and profoundly gendered sense of the way things ought to be. Spoken aloud, this set of gendered assumptions—that 'good' men protect the weak, while 'good' women are characterized by weakness in need of protection—might provoke resistance. Left as subtext, it works against change, providing reassurance, familiarity and a sense of legitimacy to the interventions envisioned by R2P. In the midst of a policy agenda that at the outset appeared to have the potential to radically disrupt certain aspects of the normative framework around international intervention, this gendered subtext

works to ensure that existing forms of power within the international arena remain unchallenged.

Paradoxically, however, the protection language that proves so useful in shoring up the legitimacy of interventions also poses a threat to that legitimacy. Protection confers burdens as well as privileges on the protectors, and at the institutional level of the UN this takes the form of dangerously high expectations and the political risks associated with failures to protect. It is probably unrealistic to expect that UN military peacekeepers will be able to prevent all violence against civilians in the areas where they operate, much less live up to broader definitions of protection that emphasize promotion of human rights and the dismantling of structural inequalities. Yet this is often the expectation, and the possibility of failure is a difficult one to consider because the costs for civilians seeking UN protection are so high. The need is vast and very real, yet the capacity of UN actors to address it remains limited. Because it assumes that protectors have the necessary capability, protection language risks overpromising, and when protection fails the authority of the UN—predicated on its ability to meet the need for protection—is called into question. UN leadership has long recognized this problem, suggesting that the UN must ‘do better’ going forward. Yet the continued reliance on protection language, I have argued, works against the necessary reforms, obscuring the limitations of the protectors and excluding the voices and the knowledge of the protected.

Implications and areas for future research

The failures of implementation that characterize protection commitments, then, are gendered failures. My analysis of the gendered power dynamics at work within R2P suggests that such failures are likely to continue in the future. There are competing interests at work within any intervention, but protection narratives obscure this reality, suggesting that protectors can be relied upon to act in the best interests of the protected. There may be a sincere desire to do this among many who fill protector roles within the UN, yet how can they know what those interests are when international expertise is consistently privileged over local experience and knowledge, and local voices—particularly those of women—are excluded from the planning and implementation of interventions? When women are disempowered to speak on their own behalf, any intervention that seeks to meet their security needs will face significant barriers and will lack vital sources of information. Protection

language does not merely perpetuate this problem but relies on the disempowerment of women for its meaning: protective action is only justified when there is someone in need of protection. Women, defined in the language of the UN by their special vulnerability and special security needs, reliably fill that necessary symbolic role.

All of this suggests that R2P as a policy agenda is deeply flawed, and there is plenty of evidence, nearly two decades after the language of a responsibility to protect was first proposed in the ICISS report, that it has gone the way of so many other potentially radical efforts at change. This dynamic of change that comes too slowly, resisted by conservative governments and those seeking to maintain existing power structures, is likely to be familiar to anyone who has worked for reform within the UN. R2P has sought, and arguably failed, to avoid this pre-existing pattern, becoming yet another bureaucratic obligation that produces annual reports of the Secretary-General and is referenced in Security Council resolutions. Rather than substantively changing UN practice, it has been effectively incorporated into the usual ways that things are done. Some proponents of R2P view this as a mark of success, a demonstration that R2P language has taken hold and become a regular part of the UN agenda (Bellamy and Davies, 2019). This appears, however, to be far from the outcome the authors of the ICISS report hoped to achieve.

If the language of R2P has undermined its radical potential, though, the core project that it represents remains urgent and relevant. R2P remains important as one in a series of efforts to halt atrocity crimes—a project which goes back to the UN Charter, drafted in the aftermath of the Holocaust and pledging to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ (United Nations, 1945, Preamble). To the extent that R2P has failed in its effort to create the necessary change, there are likely to be future efforts directed toward solving the ongoing problem of atrocity crimes. Any future efforts must be shaped by a clear understanding of what went wrong with R2P, and I contend that a gender analysis is essential to this understanding. My analysis of the gendered impact of protection language suggests that any new effort must be sensitive to the gendered aspects of the narratives it creates.

In the meantime, there remains a small but dedicated group of academics and advocates who are committed to the success of R2P, and their efforts are valuable in keeping the issue of response to atrocity crimes on the international agenda, further elaborating the normative commitments of R2P, and identifying areas for the growth

or improvement of the R2P policy agenda.²⁷ R2P has proved to be an important development in clarifying the unequivocal responsibility of the international community to act when atrocity crimes are imminent or already underway. Through the 2005 World Summit outcome document, the UN member states have openly and officially pledged themselves to this principle and can now be measured against the normative commitment they have made. In light of that achievement, it is possible to envision future efforts that would build on the core principle of R2P while moving past the limitations imposed by its dependence on protection as the model for intervention.

Determining what such efforts might look like is beyond the scope of this project but would likely prove a fruitful area of future research. While the ICISS in 2001 engaged in a process of consultation, feminists have criticized this process for failing to be fully inclusive and especially for leaving out the perspectives of women (Bond and Sherret, 2006; Bellamy and Davies, 2019). A similar consultation process, carried out with strong commitments to gender equality and diversity of perspectives, and conducted independently of the priorities of any single agency or government, might produce valuable insights regarding how future work in this area should be structured. A research programme along these lines would have to begin by addressing methodological questions: How might a truly inclusive consultation process be assured, and who would be best-placed to organize such an effort? What would a feminist consultation process look like, and how might it differ from the usual UN approaches to information gathering? What ‘experts’ would need to be consulted, and what areas of ‘expertise’ would be considered relevant?

Another potential direction for future research might be a move away from the assumed centrality of states. The ICISS sought to craft a policy that would prove acceptable to UN member states within the limits of what was deemed politically possible at the time, an approach of pushing boundaries, but not too far. What might a similar effort produce if it were not limited from the outset by perceptions of what states would or would not agree to—if states were not viewed as the primary audience for any recommendations? How might the civil society networks that exist alongside the UN—focused on issues such as gender equality, disarmament,

²⁷ See, among others, the work of Adams (2016), Bellamy (2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014), Davies (2012, 2016, 2017), Gifkins (2012, 2016), Teitt (2009, 2011), Thakur (2002, 2013, 2016, 2018), Weiss (2004, 2006, 2014), and Welsh (2010, 2013).

migration, sustainable development, children's rights, aging, and a variety of other topics—be mobilized to apply political pressure at the national and local, as well as international, levels to bring states along on any proposed changes?

Finally, future research might usefully revisit the core decisions made by the framers of R2P: What forms of violence, and on what scale, should be considered 'atrocities' that would trigger an international responsibility to intervene? What forms should interventions take, and what type of decision-making process should be involved in setting the parameters of any specific intervention? Perhaps most relevantly to the findings of this thesis, in what language should future interventions be framed, and what implications would any linguistic choices have for shaping interventions and the power relationships they inevitably involve? Attention to gender and a feminist commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women is critical to fully answering any of these questions.

My findings suggest that any new effort to rework UN intervention policy would benefit from a commitment to international partnership above a model of patronage in which (predominantly Western) international experts play the role of rescuer to helpless local populations. A conscious commitment to gender equality would contribute to the partnership model by removing the gendered logic that makes power disparities between international and local actors feel natural and inevitable. Such an effort would also benefit from awareness of the deep-rooted barriers to achieving gender equality and, relatedly, the difficulty in achieving substantive change in the way the international community approaches intervention. This difficulty emerges in the questions raised in the opening section of this conclusion—why, when there are seemingly obvious and easily implemented solutions to certain gender-based forms of discrimination or violence, does the necessary change so often not happen? The answer lies in part, I believe, in the emotional and psychological appeal of familiar gender logics. Narratives such as those associated with protection language provide a reassuring sense of order to the world—a belief that even the worst problems are solvable by capable, well-intentioned protectors, if only they are willing to act. This belief is reflected in the impetus behind R2P: Gareth Evans, one of the co-chairs of the ICISS, identifies it as 'a belief that even the most horrible and intractable problems are soluble; that rational solutions for which there are good, principled arguments do eventually prevail; and that good people, good governments, and good governance will

eventually prevail over bad' (Evans, 2008b, p. 7). This type of optimism is appealing and forms an important part of the core UN project—the belief that a better world is always possible.

I contend that a more productive approach to intervention might require a form of double vision—keeping in view the promise of a better world and working toward it, while also grappling with the limitations and vulnerabilities on all sides. The task of moving past the existing gender logic behind intervention discourses requires a rethinking of identities and makes efforts at serious structural change feel dangerous and destabilizing. Such efforts are destabilizing, yet on balance the more dangerous option is to avoid them. This thesis, through a gender analysis of the language and impact of R2P, has documented the inadequacy of a protection-based model of intervention. Future efforts to end mass atrocities must face down the political and psychological risks of disrupting established gender norms. Such disruption is necessary to a clear-sighted analysis of how gender inequality contributes to and perpetuates forms of systematic violence that make up the internationally recognized atrocity crimes. It also creates space for the development of new intervention narratives, better suited to meeting the human needs of people across gender difference.

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