Citizen participation in conflict and post-conflict situations

Glasius, M.E.

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In 2005 a new report series, the *Human Security Report*, broke the momentous news that the world was getting safer. First of all, the number of wars had declined by 40% between 1992 and 2003. Second, the number of combatants dying on the battle field (so-called ‘battle deaths’) had declined even more steeply.\(^1\) The first trend, of a diminishing number of wars, has not been maintained: as can be seen in the graph below, taken from the most recent *Human Security Report*, there has been a steep rise in the number of wars again in the period 2004-2008.\(^2\)

However, most of the criticism of the report was directed at the second message, concerning the declining number of battle deaths. Critics considered the focus on battle deaths out-dated, and claimed that the number of indirect casualties of war is in fact greater than ever. The discussion focused on the long war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

According to the International Rescue Committee, 5.4 million people had died in the DRC between 1998 and 2007, either as a direct result of the war or because of hunger, disease or exhaustion as an indirect result of the war.\(^3\) Another organisation, the Geneva Declaration Secretariat, has since calculated that as many as three quarters of victims of armed violence

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are in countries not officially at war. There are fierce debates about the reliability of the methods used and eventual figures in both of these reports. This is unsurprising: in places where people die as a result of violence or exhaustion, statisticians are not usually at hand to count them.

Nonetheless, beyond these debates, there is also a new consensus: there are generally far more civilian victims as a direct or indirect result of violent conflict than soldiers dying on the battlefield. Below I show the figures of the Human Security Report, which some consider still too conservative, relating to a number of African wars, to illustrate this.

![Figure 4.1 Battle-deaths versus total war deaths in selected sub-Saharan African conflicts](image)

It remains contentious whether the great number of civilian victims is a relatively new trend, or a recent discovery of an age-old reality, but the disproportional impact of violent conflict on non-combatants is now generally accepted.

At the same time these figures give a very partial view of the realities of violent conflict situations. As I said, counting civilian casualties may be difficult, but counting the dead is still easier than quantifying the ways in which people survive. The emphasis on deaths creates the mistaken impression that civilians are only victims of violent conflict, passively waiting to be overwhelmed by violence or exhaustion.

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6 *Human Security Report 2005*, fig. 4.1, 140.

7 For an excellent discussion on this controversy, see Adam Roberts, ‘Lives and Statistics: Are 90% of War Victims Civilians?’, *Survival* 52(3) 2010, 115-136.
I therefore want to discuss citizen participation in conflict, and make visible what civilians do when they are confronted with violence. I will from time to time use illustrations from graphic novels, i.e. literary comic books. This medium has been path-breaking in making visible what conflict means for citizens, as illustrated by this drawing by Joe Sacco, in which he explains why he came to the enclave of Gorazde during the Bosnian war: precisely to discover and show how people survived.

Here he says: ‘Why? Because you are still here. Not raped and scattered. Not entangled in the limbs of thousands of others at the bottom of a pit. Because Gorazde has lived and - how?’

I will proceed as follows: first I shall make a few remarks about the ways in which the interpretation of the concept of ‘security’ has changed in recent decades. I will explain why I think the concept of ‘human security’ should be central to research, advocacy and policy in relation to violent conflict. Next, I will examine the limitations of our current understanding of ‘human security’, and shift the focus to citizen participation in conflict situations. I will illustrate how citizens protect themselves, through strategies of avoidance, compliance, collective action, or taking up arms, and discuss the new questions for research and practice raised by these forms of citizen participation in conflict situations, which are only very

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recently being mapped. Finally I will discuss citizen participation beyond mere survival: the search for justice in conflict and post-conflict situations.

A shift in the concept of security
As noted above, recent debates on whether the world is becoming safer or more dangerous focused on casualties in the DRC. Whilst this discussion ostensibly concerned numbers and ways of counting, the underlying issue concerned the meaning of security, and whether hunger and disease - whether or not in the context of violent conflict - should also be considered as security threats.

It is now commonplace to point out that international discourses on the concept of ‘security’ have in the last twenty years shifted from an exclusive focus on state or national security to a much broader notion of on the one hand global, but on the other hand individual, human security. This return to the individual as the referent of security originates, to an unrecognized extent, with European peace movements. Two individuals, both connected to the history of IKV, deserve particular mention in this respect: Mient Jan Faber in the Netherlands and Mary Kaldor in the United Kingdom were leading figures in the anti-nuclear movement, which posed the question whether nuclear weapons on European soil would actually make Europe safer for its citizens, or the opposite. They mobilised millions of people on the basis that nuclear weapons were actually a threat to human security, even though that term was not yet in use.

Less known to a wider audience, but just as important for the mind shift in security thinking and incidentally also for the future of IKV, were their dialogues with East European dissidents. These initially strained and difficult exchanges led to the insight, which eventually had a lasting impact on both sides, that European disarmament and respect for human rights in Eastern Europe were not competing objectives, but both necessary elements of a peaceful transition in Europe.

The concept of ‘human security’ however came from a very different direction: the United Nations Development Program devoted its *Human Development Report* to it in 1994. It employed a broad concept of human security, with no less than seven elements: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. This made ‘human security’ difficult to distinguish from the other famous UNDP-concept, ‘human development’, and the launching of the new concept

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9 According to historian Emma Rothschild, this is not a late twentieth-century innovation, but at least in part a revival (albeit largely unconscious) of an earlier concept of security. Until the Napeolonic wars, political philosophers considered security as a state of being pursued by individuals. Emma Rothschild, ‘What Is Security?’, *Daedalus*, 124(3), 1995, 53-98.


appeared at least in part intended to generate more attention and funds for poverty alleviation in the name of security.\textsuperscript{12}

A few years later, Canada also adopted human security as a new guiding concept for its foreign policy. However, it employed a much narrower definition of human security: ‘freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, their safety, or even their lives’\textsuperscript{13} It related human security to the ‘freedom from fear’ element of President Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech.\textsuperscript{14}

Subsequently, Japan has also emerged as a promoter of human security, contributing not with a conceptual contribution of its own, but with financial support for a UN Commission on Human Security, chaired by former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata en Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen.\textsuperscript{15} This commission’s 2003 report \textit{Human Security Now} came with a definition that is clearer than that of UNDP, but broader than that of Canada: ‘to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment’. \textsuperscript{16} The report also argues that human security must be equally a matter of ‘protection and empowerment’. This report provides a suitable point of departure for a reflection on human security as a guiding concept for research, criticism and policy.

**Human security as guiding concept for research, criticism and policy**

**Research**

If one agrees with the Commission on Human Security that human security concerns ‘the vital core of all human lives’\textsuperscript{17}, this would include both ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’. The \textit{Human Security Now} report gives exactly equal attention to socio-economic aspects of human security and to physical security, but it does not begin to approach the two aspects more holistically. A research agenda centered on the concept of human security should be able to contribute to a better understanding of the relation between economic and physical human security threats. However, such connections are inevitably complex. Greed is not the main cause of war\textsuperscript{18}, poverty is not the main cause of terrorism.\textsuperscript{19} We are beginning to know that the subjective experience of inequality can be an important factor in mobilisation processes, which can be either violent or non-violent in nature; that the availability of easily harvested and traded ‘loot’ such as diamonds and coltan can play a role in the emergence and


\textsuperscript{14} President Franklin Roosevelt’s Annual Message (Four Freedoms) to Congress, 6 January 1941.

\textsuperscript{15} Japan also established a fund for a broad range of UN projects aimed at ‘concrete and sustainable benefits to vulnerable people and communities threatened in their survival, livelihood and dignity.


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Human Security Now}, 8.

\textsuperscript{18} As now also accepted by its initial main proponent, Paul Collier, see Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Dominic Rohner, ‘Beyond Greed and Grievance: feasibility and civil war’, \textit{Oxford Economic Papers} 61(1), 1-27.

persistence of violent conflict, and finally that a lack of work for young men can be an obstacle to lasting peace.\textsuperscript{20}

When we widen our angle of vision, we can imagine that trade barriers and export subsidies, trade in arms, intellectual property rights on basic medicines, migration and refugee policies, and the support given to multilateral organisations can all impact on human security in the world. However, as illustrated by the debates about war-related casualties I opened with, it is far from easy to compellingly demonstrate such causal connections at the macro-level. But a human security focus does enable a shift in research from the question ‘how does war begin’ to the more immediately relevant question ‘what threatens people in their security?’

\textit{Criticism}

European policy makers are ambiguous in their relation to the concept of human security. On the one hand, they sometimes react by claiming that ‘we are already doing it, we just don’t call it that’. On the other hand they also claim the concept is too utopian.\textsuperscript{21} It is precisely because the concept has been neither rejected nor unambiguously embraced by policy makers that it can be a bridge between actual policies and normative aspirations.\textsuperscript{22} The concept has not, as Johan Galtung feared in 2003\textsuperscript{23}, turned out to be pliable enough to be used as a legitimising label for existing foreign policies. In particular, human security has not been used by states to legitimate the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the contrary, it has been used by non-state actors to criticise those interventions, and particular the civilian casualties made by western armed forces.\textsuperscript{24} The concept of human security can serve as a critical mirror for policy\textsuperscript{25}, but it is still – and this is also an appeal to IKV Pax Christi – too little used in this way, despite its intuitive appeal to a broader audience. Now that a broad range of policy makers have come to rhetorically support the concept of human security, it is time to make clear that policies aimed at selectively demonising violent actors in poor countries do not suffice as ‘human security policies’.

Not everyone sees ‘human security’ as having such critical potential. Scholars like David Chandler and Antonio Franceschet\textsuperscript{26} consider it as belonging to a trend of \textit{securitisation}\textsuperscript{27}:

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getting alarm bells to ring by identifying new issues as threats to collective security. According to his view, not only policy documents, but also reports by Western thinktanks and NGOs have contributed to creating an image of ever-expanding ‘threats to security’ in which phenomena such as trade in arms and drugs, human trafficking and ethnic and religious radicalism are characterised as stemming from ungovernable conflict zones in the barbaric South, and threatening to ‘us’, citizens of decent countries. Such discourses, quite contrary to the universalist aspirations of the concept of ‘human security’, actually create a sharp distinction between ‘our world’ and ‘their world’. The critics are right to point at the dangers of a line of reasoning that suggests that security problems elsewhere in the world must be tackled because they may affect westerners. This would make human security from a universal norm into a justification of an unequal right to security.28

But their concern about such rhetorical devices does not make human security fundamentally unsuitable for critiquing policy. The concept lends itself equally well to highlighting the threats ‘we’ in the North pose to ‘their’ security. And this critical ‘we’ does not inevitably have to constitute a reference to American abuses in the framework of the war on terror. ‘We’ can equally refer to such as the Dutch businessmen Frans van Anraat or Guus Kouwenhoven, or to our pension funds, with shares in a reputable company such as Shell, which has been found responsible for life-threatening pollution in Nigeria.29

Policy

Finally, human security can serve as a guiding concept not just for research and for critiquing policy, but also as a guide for government policy. In the academic literature, human security is sometimes posited as a reversal of the relation of legitimacy between states and citizens. Edward Newman for instance claims that state legitimacy was traditionally founded on its control over territory, its autonomy, and the recognition of it by other states, and that human security on the contrary assumes that the state is there to protect people, and bases its legitimacy on such protection.30 I believe it is not a reversal but a return to the original basis of legitimate authority. I cite from the Plakkaat van Verlatinghe, the Dutch Act of Abjuration, signed on 26 July 1581, which constituted a declaration of independence by the Northern Netherlands:

‘Whereas God did not create the subjects for the sake of the Prince, to be subservient to him in all he orders, whether it be godly or ungodly, right or wrong, and to serve him as slaves, but rather the Prince for the sake of the subjects, without whom he is no Prince’31

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27 The concept is attributed to the Copenhagen School, and in particular to Ole Waever. It was first systematically applied in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap De Wilde, Security: A Framework for Analysis, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1998.

28 I have also been guilty of this type of reasoning, in particular within the context of an attempt to get human security adopted as a leading policy principle for the European Union. The report ‘A Human Security Doctrine for Europe’, published in 2004 by a European Study Group convened by Mary Kaldor, of which I was the coordinator, contains the following passage: ‘The whole point of a human security approach is that Europeans cannot be secure while others in the world live in severe insecurity. In failing states and conflict areas, the criminal economy expands and gets exported: the drug trade, human trafficking and the easy availability of small arms, and even the brutalisation of society are not contained within the conflict zone but felt beyond it, including in Europe.’


31 Plakkaat van Verlatinghe [Act of Abjuration], 26 July 1581, National Archives, the Hague, translation mine.
Nevertheless, the concept of human security, as interpreted by the Commission on Human Security, goes a step further. The responsibility for people’s safety is no longer exclusively placed with their own ‘prince’, but also with the international community. The ‘responsibility to protect’\(^{32}\) doctrine finishes that thought: if the state forsakes its responsibility towards its citizens, others have not the right, but the obligation to protect those citizens.

This doctrine has undoubtedly enabled a more interventionist approach to violent conflict. The interventions in Libya and Côte d’Ivoire, and the lack of intervention in Syria have revitalised the debate on humanitarian intervention, now also known as responsibility to protect. However, this time the debate has rendered few new insights. The discussion still focuses on whether or not there is a right or obligation to intervene. A greater focus on human security could shift the discussion to how to actually protect citizens.

But although the concept of human security helps us pose the question how to protect people, it does not answer the question. Hence, many consider the concept as ‘too vague’. I have tried to operationalise the concept by elaborating how our conception of four traditional tasks in war should be transformed in order to actually contribute to human security.\(^{33}\)

First of all, the idea of fighting against the enemy as soldiers should transform into ‘robust policing’ to protect people. Second, humanitarian emergency support which takes a top-down approach to thinking through what people need (the ‘food-and-blankets approach’) should transform into participatory, demand-oriented aid, even in crisis situations. Third, the spy who gathers secret information about the enemy should transform into an ‘information worker’ who makes mutual information exchange between local populations and international personnel into her core task. Finally, the bureaucrat, who from an air-conditioned office builds up a state system on behalf of the international community, should transform into someone who is at the disposal of the local population in its own attempts to put together workable governance institutions.

**Beyond the salvation paradigm: citizen participation in conflict**

Looking back on this article, I think that what I recommended does not go far enough. Although it aims for better connections to local processes, it still takes as its departure what Frédéric Mégret has called the ‘salvation paradigm’\(^{34}\): ‘we’ undertake missions to come and protect ‘them. There is an emerging literature\(^{35}\), fed by both academics and practitioners, that turns the salvation paradigm on its head. Bonwick, Mégret, Baines and Paddon, Barrs, South et al, and others take as their point of departure the reality that the international community is typically unable – or unwilling – to actually protect people.

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\(^{34}\) Frédéric Mégret, ‘Beyond the ‘Salvation’ Paradigm: Responsibility To Protect (Others) vs the Power of Protecting Oneself’, *Security Dialogue*, 40(6), 2009, 575-595.

\(^{35}\) See for instance Erin Baines and Emily Paddon, ‘This Is How We Survived’: Civilian agency and humanitarian protection’, *Security Dialogue*, 43(3), 2012, 231-247; Casey Barrs, Preparedness Support: Helping Brace Local Staff, Partners, and Beneficiaries for Violence, Cuny Center, Arlington, VA, 2010; Andrew Bonwick, ‘Who Really Protects Civilians?’, *Development in Practice*, 16(3/4), 2006, 270-277; Ashley South et al. Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, Humanitarian Practice Network, No.72, February 2012. I would like to thank Frédéric Mégret for drawing my attention to this literature.
This dramatic photograph from the multi-media project of Dix and Pollock\(^\text{36}\) shows how the United Nations left North East Sri Lanka, just as civilians became trapped in the brutal endgame between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan army.

Protection can fail for cynical realpolitical reasons, or because the protection of own personnel, even military personnel, is after all prioritised over the protection of others\(^\text{37}\), or simply because peace troops cannot always be in every village\(^\text{38}\), and violent acts can sometimes be committed faster than any intervention can protect them.\(^\text{39}\) Most authors focusing on self-protection do not claim that protective intervention from outside is unnecessary, but they take as their point of departure a mapping of what people do to protect themselves, only to consider afterwards to what extent international human security initiatives, armed or otherwise, can connect to these.

Taking inspiration from this literature, but also, as I already indicated, from the treatment of precisely this issue in various graphic novels, I will try to describe what people actually do when confronted with violent conflict. I shall discuss four types of strategies: avoidance, compliance, collective action, and taking up arms.

\(^{36}\) Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollock, *The Vanni*, http://www.thevanni.co.uk/intro/. This project is unusual because of its methodology. Whilst it is a work of fiction it is based on a triangulation of narratives from interviews with victims.

\(^{37}\) Bonwick, 2006, 274.


Avoidance

Avoiding threats very often takes the form of fleeing, sometimes very locally, sometimes thousands of kilometres away. In 2011 more than 26 million people had fled within their own country.40

Here we see different images from the Dix and Pollock project, that tries to visually capture civilian experiences during the bloody end of the Sri Lankan civil war. This family flees a number of times: first in a planned and orderly manner, by motorbike, later suddenly and in a panic, on foot into the water.

Other civilians are continually prepared for flight: they sleep in their clothes and always have a bag or suitcase ready. Or they may remain in their place, but avoid certain locations, routes or times. They hide money, food and other valuables. They avoid any contact or use of language that could have a political import, or act stupid to avoid suspicion.41

Above a segment from Guy Delisle’s novel about his stay in North Korea42, where his guide and translators rigorously avoid any politically deviant utterances.

Compliance

A second survival strategy is to comply with whatever armed parties are demanding.43 This can be the payment of ‘tax’ in terms of money or goods, sometimes to multiple parties. It can take the form of forced labour, such as carrying loads, cooking or doing laundry. It can also be compliance with sexual demands, which may vary from not physically resisting rape to actively seeking contact with higher level military persons as a protection from random sexual violence.

41 Baines and Paddon, 2012, 236-238; Barrs, 2010, 5-6; Bonwick, 2006, 274-275; South et al., 2012, 7.
Above we see the character of Lisa in the graphic novel *Rampokan Java* by Peter van Dongen. In the confrontation between the Dutch army and Indonesian independence fighters, this mixed-race orphan girl has sought security in a relationship with a major, but she is nonetheless harassed by a soldier, and flees.

Compliance can also consist in giving information to armed parties, even the betrayal of others. Sexual compliance and betrayal as survival strategies are difficult to stomach from the viewpoint of human security and human dignity, but they are unavoidably part of the set of strategies of self-protection people use in violent conflict.

**Collective action**

I have called the third strategy ‘collective action’. Some authors call it ‘resistance’, but whilst these strategies all draw on collective resilience, not all forms of it actually confront armed power.

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Above, again from Joe Sacco’s *Gorazde*, we see a footbridge underneath the main bridge, built by the people of Gorazde to protect themselves from sniper fire while crossing.\(^{46}\)

Collective action can comprise sharing information about dangers; collective avoidance strategies such as this bridge; but also the maintenance of schools, churches, transport or medical facilities; or simply coming together for recreation and conversation.

Below we see a cultural centre, also in Gorazde\(^{47}\), that remained open against all odds during the entire war.

\(^{46}\) *Gorazde*, 2007, 16, 48.

\(^{47}\) *Gorazde*, 2007, 74, 75.
Collective action can also take the form of collective negotiation with, or resistance against, armed parties, for instance relating to kidnappings or taxes, or inter-ethnic, or inter-religious or gender-related protection initiatives, as seen during the Egyptian uprising of 2011.

Taking up arms

Finally, citizens sometimes decide to take up arms.48 The anthropological literature, including the influential book by Paul Richards about Sierra Leone and the studies by Clapham and Boas & Dunn49, have improved our understanding of what motivates ordinary boys (and sometimes girls) to go and fight, and what gets them to stop fighting. In the Netherlands, two recent PhD dissertations have followed in this tradition, charting mobilization and demobilization processes at the level of individual soldiers. Saskia Baas and Magali Chelpi-Den Hamer50 each spoke to dozens of former fighters in Sudan and Ivory Coast respectively. They showed how in both contexts, immediate danger to their lives and that of their families was one of the main motivations to go and fight, but among other things personal grievances and forced recruitment also played a role.

Here too, the novels of Joe Sacco are as enlightening as any social science writing – but to a much wider audience – in portraying two very different mobilization mechanisms.

48 Bonwick, 2006, 275; South et al., 2012, 12, 15.
In his classic *Palestine* he relates the step-by-step process of recruitment of a Palestinian teenager during the first Intifida, from spraying graffiti and handing out leaflets, to being registered as a member of the organization, to making threats and committing violence against citizens seen as collaborators with the Israeli occupation.

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In these segments from *Gorazde* on the other hand, an armed group is suddenly and chaotically formed in response to an offensive.

**New questions for social scientists and practitioners**

Our emerging understanding of citizen strategies of self-protection during armed conflict, which I have categorised here as avoidance, compliance, collective action and taking up arms, gives rise to new questions for social scientists and practitioners. We barely know which strategies dominate under what circumstances, and what makes them more or less successful. Recent practitioner experiences suggest that the presence of courageous and enterprising ‘natural leaders’ are of crucial importance to the chances of survival in local communities. This is in itself unsurprising, but raises the question whether the insights and initiatives of such leaders can be transferred and scaled up.

In 2011, a staff member of the international NGO ‘Local to Global Protection’ was doing research on previous civilian self-protection practices in the border area between Sudan and South Sudan, when new hostilities broke out. He became involved in a spontaneous self-protection initiative. Around thirty youths who had been involved in earlier NGO projects began to travel with minimal financial support, on foot in teams of two, to exchange ideas between villages. These ideas included the use and supply of whistles and horns to warn of imminent attacks, hiding food caches in multiple places, collecting empty bags that could quickly be filled with basic supplies to prepare for a rapid flight. In his reporting on this initiative, that cost less than 30,000 dollars, the staff member claimed that it had more impact.

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53 Justin Corbett, *Protection in Sudan’s Nuba Mountains: Local achievements, international failures*, Local to Global Protection, February 2012.
on the safety of citizens rather than the UN force in the same provinces.54 While I am in no position to assess that claim, it is clear that such initiatives deserve much more attention, from policy-makers and NGOs, but especially from social scientists, who have more space to assess not only relative success but also failure of such initiatives.

The strategy of compliance raises very different questions, that come to the fore when a situation begins to de-escalate. These questions concern individual trauma and healing, but also have an important collective element: can citizens who are known to have complied with sexual demands, or betrayed fellow citizens, reintegrate in the community?

The last two categories, collective action and taking up arms, together raise the question whether we can generalise about the circumstances that give rise to unarmed resistance vs. the circumstances that give rise to taking up arms. Academic research in this field is still divided between violent conflict, studied by political scientists, and non-violent citizen participation, studied as ‘social movements’ by sociologists. Each field has separately investigated what causes mobilization, and under what circumstances mobilized groups, armed or not, are most likely to reach their aims.55

The different trajectories of the Arab revolts of 2011 demonstrates the importance of studying violent and non-violent resistance holistically. Is non-violence a choice by elite actors or by a broad movement? Under what circumstances is it a prudent or a courageous choice? Is the idea of ‘choice’ even appropriate? And finally, are there any indications that non-violence is gaining in popularity?

More research is also needed on the extent to which international actors can influence the choice and success of citizen survival strategies.56 And what kinds of actors? The aforementioned study on Sudan would suggest that we should no longer discuss the improvement of UN peacekeeping missions, but should close them down and replace them with civil society initiatives. I believe that there are circumstances in which there is no substitute for armed international protection. However, the forms such protection takes still require far-reaching transformation in order to really connect to local survival strategies: preferably of course to support non-violent collective action, but if necessary also to answer to the realities of avoidance, compliance and taking up arms.

**Beyond self-protection: transitional justice**

Finally I want to address what citizens do, in post-conflict situations but sometimes even in the midst of violent conflict, that goes beyond saving one’s bare life: asking, searching, demanding recognition of injustices. Such initiatives, and the institutions that flow from them, have in the last fifteen years come to be known as transitional justice.57 Transitional justice is

55 Even famous scholars who have investigated both violent and non-violent mobilisations, like Charles Tilly and more recently Donatella Della Porta, Mary Kaldor and Michel Wieviorka, tend to discuss these two paths angry civilians may take in separate publications.
an improbable construct. The idea of transition presupposes a linear trajectory from war or dictatorship or both to a peaceful democratic society.58 There are many definitions of justice, but I will use the one formulated by Kofi Annan to make the point: “accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs”59.

Even if a transition should smoothly and peacefully proceed in a democratic direction, the expectation that justice can be had for past wrongs during this process is ambitious to say the least. Nonetheless, transitional justice, like human security, is more than a hollow phrase. The new concept has created its own dynamics. From its emergence in the context of transformation from authoritarian to democratic regimes in Latin-America, where transitional justice often took the form of national trials and/or national truth committees, the concept has been stretched to cover what Rangelov and Teitel call “entrenched justice-seeking”60; the demand for justice is now heard long after as well as during armed conflict; in democratic and authoritarian settings; and across borders. The menu of transitional justice includes truth committees, criminal trials, traditional reconciliation rituals, official apologies, financial compensation, monuments, remembrances, and historical research.

However, menu is a misleading term. It creates a false impression that citizens harmed by violence have a free choice between different forms, and that their hunger for justice will be stilled after consuming one or several courses on the menu. There is usually no such free choice, and each justice mechanism has its weaknesses. Moreover, the kinds of violations of bodily and mental integrity that often accompany contemporary armed conflict are so traumatic for many victims that a dish on the menu of transitional justice is inadequate to fix the problem. Finally, the societies where transitional justice is most urgently needed are also likely to have been so torn apart by the recent conflict that there is no natural basis of legitimacy for any kind of justice institution. At the same time, the spread of the concept of transitional justice has caused victims to more often demand justice.

Yet I do not see the gap between the expectations raised by the idea of transitional justice and what truth commissions, criminal trials and other institutions can actually deliver exclusively as a problem, frustrating though it may be for victims. It is also a creative tension: from the interaction between inadequate institutions and societal actors, ever new forms of transitional justice emerge, although we should be aware of the power inequalities between different actors in such processes.61 Moreover, even or perhaps precisely when transitional justice institutions are experienced as inadequate, they can have the side effect of opening debates over sensitive issues that might otherwise have remained taboo, such as rape or the use of child soldiers.

Or the deliberate killing of hundreds of male citizens in a village. I am thinking here of the village of Rawagede in Java in 1947.62 Or standing by as thousands of boys and men were

61 Barbara Oomen, ‘Universale rechten, lokale gevechten: over de werking van het rechtspluralisme’ [Universal Rights; Local Fights], Oratie [Inaugural Speech], Universiteit van Amsterdam, 17 april 2009.
taken away to be killed in Srebrenica. Transitional justice is not only for citizens of far away lands. Dutch society has its own transitional justice taboos and traumas, such as the so-called ‘police actions’ in the former Dutch East Indies, and the responsibility for Srebrenica.

Conclusion

‘Citizen participation’ is not a lens through which violent conflict gets viewed either in academia or in policy practice. ‘Citizens’ and ‘participation’ belong to a vocabulary that goes with the internal governance of our own society, whereas violent conflict evokes associations with victims ‘we’ need to save and war criminals ‘we’ need to punish.

I have called this speech ‘Citizen participation in conflict- and post-conflict situations’ in other to destabilize these associations, and make the participation of citizens in conflicts, not only as victims but also as self-protectors and justice-seekers, more visible. I have tried to build some bridges between the research done by academics in this field and the work and the analysis done by organisations such as IKV Pax Christi.

I would now like to thank the Executive Board of the Free University, the Curatorial Panel of this Special Chair and the Board of the Inter-Church Peace Council for the confidence they have bestowed on me with this appointment. The partnership between the Special Chair and the organisation IKV Pax Christi is already bearing fruit in the shape of a PhD project.

I would also like to thank the team of the interdisciplinary LLM Law and Politics of International Security, Wolfgang Wagner and Wouter Werner, Geoff Gordon and Tarcisio Gazzini. It is serendipitous to find myself part of this circle of critical and broadminded thinkers who all investigate the relation between international law and politics. This too has already led to a joint PhD project, and others may follow.

This position has also come with new supervisors. I am not usually enthusiastic about having to deal with more university managers, but the Head of the Politics Department, Henk Overbeek en the Dean of the Social Science Faculty Anton Hemerijck, are an exception in this respect. I would like to thank my colleagues at the UvA for their support in general, and their comments on an earlier draft of this speech in particular. With special thanks to Anne Loeber for her suggestion of foregrounding the agency of citizens in conflict situations.

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I have spoken.